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Venezuela: before the referendum

Defeat the institutional coup

On August 15 a referendum will decide whether the Venezuelan presidency of Hugo Chávez continues in office. If the YES vote wins (promoted by the Venezuelan right and US imperialism), Chávez will resign. But if the NO vote wins Chavaz will remain as President until the next election. Chávez argues that the referendum is "between Bush and me." The new constitution was introduced by the Chavaz government and allowed for a referendum (if enough signatures demanding it are collected), this has led to a situation where Chavaz may be defeated, thus a situation may develop where the coup leaders of April 2002 recover ground they lost. **The IWL-FI calls for a NO vote, in order to prevent a proimperialist "institutional coup".**

This position is the same as that of grassroot organisations and the left of Venezuela and Latin America. However this agreement cannot hide the fact that there are strong disagreements on the character of the Chavaz government, on the one hand, and what revolutionaries should do in relation to the government, on the other.

A revolutionary leader?

The definitions of Chávez made by most of these groups can be divided in two. The first defines Chavaz as the leader of a "revolutionary national anti-imperialist struggle" in their country and in Latin America. In Venezuela, as well as the "pure chavism", this position is that of the Simón Bolívar coordination, the April 13 movement and numerous union leaders and political organizations. Outside of Venezuela this opinion is also held by, the Communist Party of Brazil (PCdoB, part of the Lula government), the Free Native Current of Argentina (whose main leaders have just entered the government of Kirchner) and the sector that is expressed through the newspaper La Monde Diplomatique, particularly the Spanish edition. These sectors defend the idea of a "revolution by stages" and popular frontism or they limit the objectives of the struggle to "humanizing capitalism" (La Monde Diplomatique).

It is beyond the scope of this article to summarize the depth and length of a debate that has gone on for decades, that Leninism and Trotskysm have made against these positions. However, it is important to point out that this characterization collides with the reality: Chávez has not seriously challenged the fundamental basis of capitalist-imperialist domination in Venezuela. Something that, as we will see, is thoroughly taken advantage of by the coup leaders whose economic bases remain intact. For example, the Cisneros family (one of the main instigators behind the coup) retain several thousands of millions of dollars capital. Property which includes the main domestic media, those who agitate against Chávez. Neither has the

bourgeois political régime changed substantially. A clear illustration of this is the referendum which can force him to resign and see the right return to power. In general those who support Chavaz either do so totally or express slight criticism of his 'weaknesses'.

A new Perón?

Others compare Chavaz with the bourgeois nationalist leaders who, during a period of the 20th century faced US imperialism, such as the Mexican Lázaro Cárdenas, the Argentinean Juan Perón or the Guatemalan Jacobo Árbenz. Let us remember that these leaders lead movements and governments that took some important measures against imperialism and their allies, such as the nationalisation of the oil and land reform in Mexico or the nationalisation of important branches of the Argentinean economy. Simultaneously to put pressure on imperialism, they called for mass mobilisations which they retained tight control of. To achieve this support, they brought in economic concessions that improved living conditions. But even at their height, these leaders and movements had two limits. First, none of them advanced in the confrontation with imperialism, which they eventually abandoned. By their not breaking with the bourgeois system, imperialism was able to maintain solid political-economic support and, in many cases made the state to forcefully attack the workers and the masses. In second place by avoiding the division of the national armed forces, they prevented the organization and arming of the workers and the masses to face these attacks. Perón's attitude in front of the coup of 1955 (first to minimize its importance and then to flee to Paraguay), highlights Chávez 's position in 2002 with regards those who sought to overthrow him, "if you finish your coup and you must assume the consequences." The difference between the coup in Venezuela and Argentina was that in the Venezuelan case, the workers and the masses, in spite of Chávez, together were able to make a revolutionary mobilization that defeated the coup and returned Chávez to power.

This comparison is made, mostly by figures and currents coming from trotskyism, such as the Venezuelan union leader Stalin Pérez Borges, the UIT (International Union of Workers) or the one led by the Argentinean MAS (Movement To Socialism). As we saw, it is closer with reality than the previous definition. But it would be very wrong not to point out that the current World political and economic conditions reduce to zero the perspectives of a development of this type of process. Today there are no serious possibilities of improving the conditions of life of the workers and the masses without attacking the roots of the capitalist-imperialist system and to advance toward a workers and socialist revolution. It is this that explains that the anti-imperialist measures of Chávez are very much weaker than those taken by Cárdenas or Perón. For example, he respected the concessions that the PDVSA (state oil company) made, under the previous government, to foreign companies, he has continued paying the foreign debt on time and applies plans that accord with the demands of the IMF. The political consequences are that, with Chávez, the Venezuelan masses have not experienced any real improvement in their living conditions: low wages, high inflation, very high unemployment, etc.

Two questions

Before looking at the political differences with Chávez, we find it necessary to respond to two questions. The first one is why does, in spite of the very limited nature of the confrontation, imperialism attack and seek to overthrow Chavez. It is because with the current economic conditions and world politics, when the USA requires sustained increased exploitation and robbery to maintain the profits of the multinationals, US imperialism cannot allow the smallest expression of independence. Less still in a continent like Latin America where there are big revolutionary movements of masses and in a country, such as

Venezuela, that contributes 25% of the petroleum that the USA consumes. As the journalist Gustavo Fernández pointed out: "Chávez undertook a vigorous plan with OPEC that collided completely with North American policy of "liberalization" of the world oil market which was nothing more than a euphemism to hide world control of energy production on the part of the transnational corporations. Equally, it collided with the national allies of these corporations who... have promoted the privatization of the main national oil industry (...) Although the oil laws of Chávez are timid, today they are the only way to oppose the anger of the north" (Why Does The Coup Of The Right Fail In Venezuela?).

The second is why, in spite of not seeing economic improvements, a wide sector of the Venezuelan masses continues supporting Chávez. It is necessary to point out that many of these sectors have received some small benefits. Particularly because 10,000 Cuban doctors and teachers have entered the country, to help in health and education in the poorest quarters, in Caracas and the big cities. Some land has also been distributed to the peasants. However, the central question is that the workers and the masses understand, with good class instinct, that a coup and a future pro-imperialist government will be much worse than Chávez. At the same time, the absence of an alternative revolutionary leadership, able to show a different road, helps to maintain the expectations in the current president.

For a revolutionary policy to answer the Venezuelan process

This last point takes us then to the second question: what policy should revolutionaries have in the current situation. The proposal of those that claim Chávez as a "revolutionary leader", that is to say, who continue following his policies, leads, sooner or later, to a terrible defeat of the masses, as history teaches us.

At the same time most of the trotskyist groups call for the defeat of the military or institutional coup and they make many correct criticisms and demands. But what none of these sectors say is that, at the same time it is necessary to prepare the overthrow of Chávez on the part of the working class and the people advance toward an authentic workers and socialist revolution. In this sense, they all end up capitulating to the chavist government.

When saying this, we merely return to the sources. That is to say, Lenin's position, and those of Trotsky and the Bolsheviks, between February 1917 and October 1917. Lenin explained how to act in front of a bourgeois government, in his case that of Kerensky that still had wide popular support, "not to have the most limited trust in the bourgeois government, to explain its character patiently and to build an alternative of class power that is against the present government and demand a government of the workers and the people."

That was the strategic perspective that guided all their to work in each concrete circumstance. In September of 1917, before the planned counter-revolutionary coup of General Kornilov Lenin summarized his proposal in the sentence "to shoot against Kornilov supported in the shade of Kerenski." What did this policy mean? In the first place, the widest united action with all those that are in favour of defeating the coup, including the government and the forces that supported them. In the Venezuelan case, today it is expressed in the call to vote NO in the referendum, just as in the 2002 it was the call to defeat the civic-military coup. In second place, a policy of demands on the government that it really attacks those behind the coup: the refusal to pay the foreign debt that expropriates their goods and that imprisons those who are responsible. In third

place, to impel the widest self organisation of the masses (taking advantage in this sense in new processes as the emergence of the new union confederation UNT), including the necessity of their arming, to face the coup. In third place, to impel the division of the bourgeois armed forces, in order to gain the middle sectors win the cogger sections to the mass movement.

Just as the Russian Revolution showed, a policy of this type was not only the best way to defeat the coup but the road to prepare the victory of the workers and socialist revolution. Let us learn those lessons and advance them in Venezuela.

We demand Chávez calls for a great Latin-American movement to oppose imperialism

We know that many Latin American comrades have expectations in Chávez to head a great continental anti-imperialist movement. We do not share those expectations, but we propose to those comrades that they demand Chávez attack two of the main tools of imperialist dominance: that he breaks with the pre-FTAA negotiations and with the IMF and he suspends payment of the external debt Venezuelan. At the same time that great Latin American movement is launched to fight for these points. Just as we already point out, we do not believe that he will do it, but if he does the IWL-FI and their parties, they will be in first line to impel that process.

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Frame 1:

Some history

The current Venezuelan process was initiated with the "caracazo", in February of 1989, a workers and populars insurrection against government of Carlos Andrés Pérez that created a crisis in all the domestic institutions and it was repressed with difficulty, even generating divisions in the armed forces. In this crisis a sector of officials that broke with the government of Pérez and grouped around Chávez, when with the intention of giving answer to this situation, he lead a tentative sudden military coup in 1992. He became a prisoner, and began to win prestige among the workers and popular sectors because he appeared opposed of the "system". Carlos Andrés Pérez resigned in 1993, as a result of new popular mobilizations. The following elections were won by the veteran bourgeois leader, Rafael Boiler. In second place, it was the engineers' unión leader Andrés Velásquez. In 1994, by popular demand, Boiler liberated Chávez, who began to form his own political current. In December of 1998, the electoral coalition of Chávez won the presidential elections and took office of the following year.

The government of Chávez

The politics of chavism can be analyzed in three aspects. In relation to the economy, it has continued paying the foreign debt on time, it applies the demands of the IMF and it has not seriously opposed the interests of any national or imperialist strong bourgeois sector. It threw out the laws on oil, the land and Fishing that, but in spite of the bourgeois criticism this act did not mean any important transformation of economy.

Concerning oil it maintained PDVSA as government enterprise, but it never intended to close the opening that allowed the entrance of the multinationals in the exploitation of the Venezuelan oil. Institutionally, they modified the Constitution that damaged the old employer parties (COPEI and ADECO), but all the changes introduced stayed clearly inside the framework of the State and of the bourgeoisie régime.

It is in the plane of the foreign policy where Chávez has been shown more independent of the US imperialism. Although that independence has been expressed more in "expressions" that in a permanent political action: it criticized Bush's Antiterrorist Law, allied with Fidel Castro, it visited Sadam Hussein, when he was still president from Iraq and to the Lybian leader Anuar Gadafi. It also defended the inviolability of the Venezuelan air space on the part of American military airplanes, even during the war of Iraq. It made approaches to Lula (Brazil) and Kirchner (Argentina), proposing to them an alternative "bolivariana", but it found on the part of those governments a much stronger concern in not making expressions that would alarm imperialism, that to pose of nationalist to the Chávez.

Lula and Kirchner, send troops to Haiti to replace the US troops when it needs them in Iraq, this even makes that some sectors of the left see more Chávez positively for the difference that they have on how to treat imperialism. But here it is necessary to clarify that the fact that Lula is a talibán of neoliberalismo does not make of Chávez a resolute anti-imperialist combatant. Although it does show the level of submission of governments such as Lula. But we have to ask the question: why did Chavez wait to call on the latin-American people, as Bolívar did?

Today in Latin-American the masses, and in particular of South America, live or lived ascents and several revolutionary processes that oppose imperialism and their neoliberal plans, as in Bolivia, Peru, Argentina, Ecuador. In such a situation that a clear call by a government of an important country attacked imperialism with a call for revolutionary unity against imperialism, by not paying the debt, by breaking with the IMF, to expel imperialism so that it stops stealing our wealth it would have a wide response. But for that Chávez would threaten to awake a process that could overflow the limits of the system. And for that reason he is unable to do it and it ends up remaining dependant on the governments "friends" that have just demonstrated who they serve.

The coup of 2002

In spite of these deep limitations, the US imperialism decided to support and to support the Venezuelans bourgeois sectors coup leaders, April 11 the 2002. To make the coup an contrarrevolutionary alliance included the old president Pedro Carmona Estanga, leader of the Federation of the employer Chambers, the high hierarchy of the Church, the owners of the big media, high official military, political leaders of the old employer parties, the top layers of the bureaucracy of the government oil company (PDVSA) and to most of the yellow sectors in the old union bureaucracy.

Chávez did not face the coup militarily, and even less did it called to the popular resistance. This it was seen clearly when it went to who they overthrew it and it declared": they Finish their coup and assume the consequences." The certain thing is that it was overthrown and detainee. Who defeated the coup was the insurrection of masses of April 13, a superior and more organized action than the "caracazo" that, with great courage, it fought to the new power and pulverized it. With the defeat of the coup, the Venezuelan revolutionary process entered into a different and superior phase, with a growing in the armed forces and the bourgeois institutions. In these conditions, the

bourgeoisie and imperialism considered that in that critical moment, the turn of Chávez to the power represented the "lesser of the evils" and the only one that with the possibility to control the advance of the movement of masses.

Sleeping with the enemy

After this the policy of Chávez was absolutely conciliatory with the coup leaders, to the point that he did not take any measure against the plotters. The only prisoner was Pedro Carmona who then escaped to the embassy of Colombia. The other civil and military leaders did not suffer any punishment. Neither there were actions taken against the companies of those countries that inspired it and supported it, as the USA y Spain. In this sense, Chávez declared": I won't do with them that they did with me."

It is not an accident, then that the employer-imperialist conspiracy continued, although now for other means. In December of 2002, the employer attempted a kind of a lock-out looking to paralyze the industry and the trade and, in particular, oil production. But it suffered a new defeat, since the masses organized in the workers and popular neighborhoods and inside the industries, after a hard fight that took several months, they broke the lock-out. The end of this process for imperialism was democratic pressure that had the direct collabouration of Lula with the authority of the "left" and a friend of Chávez, it called to a group of countries to look for a negotiated end between the government and Venezuelan opposition based in democratic institutions. The name of this group was "Friends of Venezuela" even when they were part the governments of USA and Spain.

For that reason, the opponents again defeated the coup leaders, who looked for a more institutional road, such as the referendum, a mechanism bought in by the new constitution. At the same time, those responsible for several deaths during the two conflict, such as the mayor of Caracas, were free to continue articulating their pro-imperialist policies which means they continued in the hands of the octopi and oil continues supplying the USA and the foreign debt continues being on time pay.

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Frame 2:

The domestic owners

The investigative journalist Simón Jesus Urbina, points out that 31 big economic groups, associated with imperialism, control most of the national economy. Except PDVSA, they are owners of practically everything: banks, land, industries, communications, etc. Among all, they have a capital of 151 thousand million dollars. Amongst them, are many of those that impelled the coup of April of the 2002. Chávez has left them alone. They are:

- 1) Group Pilar: 10 thousand million dollars.**
- 2) Gustavo and Ricardo Cisneros: 9 thousand million dollars.**
- 3) Oswaldo Cisneros: 8 thousand million dollars.**
- 4) José Álvarez Stelling: 8 thousand million dollars.**
- 5) Family Wollmer 8 thousand million dollars.**

- 6) **Family Delfino: 7 thousand million dollars.**
- 7) **Miguel Ángel Capriles: 6 thousand million dollars.**
- 8) **Armando of Weapons: 6 thousand million dollars.**
- 9) **Salomón Cohen: 6 thousand million dollars.**
- 10) **Family Pizzorini: 5 thousand million dollars.**
- 11) **Hans Neumann: 5 thousand million dollars.**
- 12) **Central Group Madeirense: 5 thousand million dollars.**
- 13) **Family Dimasse: 5 thousand million dollars.**
- 14) **Nelson Mezehane: 5 thousand million dollars.**
- 15) **Julio Soda Rodríguez: 5 thousand million dollars.**
- 16) **Group Phelps: 5 thousand million dollars.**
- 17) **Beto Finol: 4 thousand five hundred million dollars.**
- 18) **Sixto Martínez: 4 thousand million dollars.**
- 19) **Damilia Domínguez: 4 thousand million dollars.**
- 20) **Family Veluntini: 3 thousand five hundred million dollars.**
- 21) **Humberto Petricca: 3 thousand five hundred million dollars.**
- 22) **Family Mendoza: 3 thousand million dollars.**
- 23) **Andrés Kills: 3 thousand million dollars.**
- 24) **Luis Ángel Pérez: 3 thousand million dollars.**
- 25) **Celestino Díaz: 3 thousand million dollars.**
- 26) **Iván Darío Maldonado: 3 thousand million dollars.**
- 27) **Nelson Levy: 3 thousand million dollars.**
- 28) **Family Ulivi: 3 thousand million dollars.**
- 29) **Pablo Cevallos Eraso: 3 thousand million dollars.**
- 30) **Family Berrizbeitía: 3 thousand million dollars.**
- 31) **Family Pérez Dupuy: 3 thousand million dollars.**