



Newsletter, September 2017

VENEZUELA

PRESSING PERSPECTIVES FROM THE SOUTH¹

Since March 2017—as politics has become increasingly polarised in Venezuela with the publication of interviews, collective pronouncements and statements by progressive intellectuals and political and social activists—the Latin American left has been immersed in a profound and highly passionate debate over the present, the past and the possible future of the Bolivarian process. The deep chasm that has opened between the participants in this discussion can be seen in messages circulating over social networks in recent months that discredit anyone who may disagree with a particular position. The purpose of this publication is thus to contribute to the creation of a space for debate that could help to overcome the defensive and largely sectarian logic that defines current discussions within the Latin American left. This implies mutual reflection over opinions and data that may be perceived as conflicting or mistaken, endeavouring to exchange relevant and productive knowledge—particularly to the benefit of the popular sectors of Venezuela—without attempting to coerce those who do not necessarily share one’s own ideas. This does not mean ignoring different approaches nor attempting to force a consensus, but clarifying the diverse perspectives and readings of the current crisis and initiating a new type of dialogue.

Daniel Chavez, Henán Ouviaña and Mabel Thwaites Rey

¹ Extract from *Venezuela: Pressing Perspectives from the South*, Transnational Institute (TNI) – Instituto de Estudios de América Latina y el Caribe de la Universidad de Buenos Aires (IEALC/UBA) – Grupo de Trabajo de CLACSO Alternativas Contrahegemónicas desde el Sur Global Amsterdam and Buenos Aires - August 2017



Regional and international actors and processes facing the current crisis in Venezuela

Edgardo Lander: For quite some time we have suffered from a strong dose of US political and economic interference throughout the length and breadth of Latin America. In the particular case of Venezuela, we must also consider the permanent intervention of paramilitary groups and Uribism from our neighbouring country. It is important to remember that Chávez had his first electoral victory under unfavourable political conditions, at the time of the fall of the Berlin Wall and the collapse of so-called ‘real socialism’. For many of us in the Latin American left this situation signalled a loss of horizons and an urgent need to build new emancipatory alternatives. In addition, almost all Latin American countries at that time had governments that could be described as right wing and neoliberal. In this global and regional context, one of the elements that made the survival of the counter-hegemonic process of Venezuela possible, despite the imperialist offensive, was the regional shift to leftist or progressive governments. Venezuela played an active role in the subsequent development of these governments, including the provision of political and financial support. Unlike the time when Chávez took office, a few years later we found several other governments that could be denominated ‘progressive’ in Brazil, in Ecuador, in Bolivia, in Argentina, in Uruguay, and for a brief period in Paraguay. In addition, new major regional organisations were created, such as the Union of South American Nations, which I think was a significant arena for the construction of an alternative regional political framework. This is where Venezuela played an important role, also offering financial support to Caribbean countries by means of oil sector subsidies. We went through a time when there was very intense and very rich mutual reinforcement of the processes of social change at the regional level, including the opening of new possibilities for trade relations and increased food imports to Venezuela from Argentina and Uruguay. However, when the crisis got worse, owing to the loss of essential support from oil, the economic crisis deepened in the context of some very important political changes that were appearing throughout the

continent, as several governments shifted to the right. In the past two years, there has been a coup in Brazil, the electoral defeat of Kirchnerism in Argentina, and the weakening of transformative capacity in the governments of Ecuador and Bolivia, among other changes. The current international context thus greatly weakens the capacity for solidarity and collective response as the way is paved for aggression or external pressure against emancipatory change in Venezuela.

Ana Esther Ceceña: The US intervention to create the conditions for a radical change of course in the Venezuelan process—by joining, instigating, sponsoring, financing and advising local opposition groups—has been documented in many ways. Illegal or covert activities has been detected in Venezuela with the complicity and active collaboration of other Latin American regimes. Colombia, Mexico and Brazil have led the siege and encirclement of Venezuela in international forums such as the OAS—a sad story. However, it only highlights the rebelliousness of another coalition of countries in the region that has remained steadfast in defending the principles of non-intervention and people's self-determination. Moreover, a similar correlation can be seen in various other areas and at other levels. Increased tensions in Venezuela boil over into the surrounding region in different ways. Clearly, a war in Venezuela would tend to spill over quickly to other countries seeking social change (to Bolivia, in particular). It would also encourage disruption in countries that are still stuck in violent conflicts (Colombia, for example). The more strategic battleground is that of building ideals and communities that provide a place for dissident or confrontational narratives about the Venezuelan process. To be sure, the most significant and widespread positions in this area have come from the opposition, to a much greater extent from outside than inside. However, it cannot be stressed enough that several Latin American countries have demanded unequivocal non-intervention in Venezuela, and that some countries in other regions of the world, particularly Russia and China, have taken similar positions.

Isabel Rauber: In the current period of globalisation, the class interests of the oligarchic, commercial and financial powers operating in Venezuela are linked to the imperialist powers. That is, to the power of structured global capital, global neoliberalism. To make an attempt in today's world—and what I say about Venezuela goes for almost all popular processes—to depart from the established order and take an autonomous path, independent of the dominant power, is very complicated indeed: that road would inevitably entail a clash at the start or finish. The situation in Venezuela is a response to a chain of structural, entrenched processes, in which global, regional and national situations are woven together and sprout up under certain circumstances. Aside from the economic, geopolitical and geostrategic issues, there is a symbolic struggle at stake: it is a matter of stamping out anyone who dares consider that it may be possible to chart a different way of life to what now rules the planet, by any means necessary.

Zuleima Vergel: It is important to emphasise the solidarity of the peoples of the world. Social movements in every country, progressive personalities and leftist intellectuals have expressed their support for the Bolivarian Revolution and the Chavista process, so it's important to recognise that this process is not only for Venezuelans, but also has a bearing on the lives and hopes of millions of oppressed people around the world. As a social movement, we are part of various organisations such as the ALBA Movements and the Latin American Coordinating Committee of Rural Organisations-Via Campesina, forums for the voice of our people, and we have received a great show of solidarity from other

movements.

New Municipalism in Barcelona²

Pablo Sanchez

In 2015 in Barcelona, *Barcelona en comú* (BCNcomú) received 25 % of the popular vote, severely defeating the traditional social-democrat Party, PSOE. With the support of other left-wing groups, BCNcomú was able to form the municipal government. With 23 out of 41 elected representatives, Ada Colau was named mayor of Barcelona; for the first time the city had a woman as mayor. The new government was built with the idea of tackling social emergencies. The figures from the 2008-2015 period were astonishing. There were around 3,000 evictions per year within the city. The programme of BCNcomú was constructed around an emergency plan to tackle the social emergency, a plan that had to be applied ‘within the first months of government’. The programme states ‘We have to take back public and cooperative control of the economy. Public institutions should exert their authority over private companies that provide services affecting the public interest’. A very successful part of the programme has been the different subsidies to low-income families in the form of food aid to schoolchildren and other type of grants for children. This type of initiative, however, runs the risk of not tackling the root causes of the increasing inequality that the leaders of BCNcomú have set as a target to reduce. This positive policy can turn into its opposite if it is not combined with a more aggressive re-appropriation of wealth from the elite. So far, that aspect represents the weak link in Barcelona.

Solidarity with Protest Movement in Morocco

On 26 June, the first day of Eid celebrations, a popular march that was organized in the town of Hoceima, northern Morocco, was brutally repressed.



The people of the Rif region decided to organize the “Eid March” in order to demand the release of their sons and daughters imprisoned in the previous few weeks and to denounce the ongoing violence and intimidation that the state is using against their resistance through a wide campaign of jailing and kidnapping of their activists and

² Extract from an article published in *Transform!* March 2017.

leaders. The Moroccan ruling elites use all means of repression, imprisonment, kidnapping and deeply unjust policies against the activists of social movements in the Rif region as well as intimidation and harassment against the local population in order to halt their protests which are advancing socio-economic demands. Moreover, these elites launched a vilification campaign in order to delegitimize and criminalize the popular movement that has expanded to other towns and parts of Morocco³.

Brazil: A national Crisis⁴

Ana C. Carvalhaes and José Correa Leite

The 2016 coup d'état against elected president Dilma Rousseff was not a fascist coup, with the physical destruction of the militant vanguard and the complete destruction of representative bourgeois-democratic institutions (although in Brazil these institutions are anti-democratic, because they are oligarchic and segregationist). The coup was not Bonapartist; in other words, it did not suspend the existing institutional order or attempt to destroy directly and immediately at the political level the class opposition (although it is now attempting to do so with political reforms). But that does not mean that there was no coup d'état or that it is not fundamental. What is at stake in the conflict among “those above”? The key element of the present framework, which aggravates the crisis and the divisions within the bourgeoisie itself, is the political crisis that is raging. The Brazilian crisis of this period has all the characteristics of a “national crisis” in the sense that Lenin gave to this term. A national crisis is a political crisis of domination, a crisis of the whole of social relations. It is no coincidence that, in parallel with the crisis in the Union's budget, states going bankrupt, barbaric revolts in places of detention and the no less barbaric repression of the rebels by the punitive state - bringing to light the brutal way in which a “hidden” part of the segregated society is treated. Nor is it a coincidence that we are seeing the strengthening of militias, of organized criminal groups, of territories that are “free” for trafficking. It is no coincidence that, with 14 million unemployed, social benefits cut through fiscal adjustment and bankrupt states, the statistics of urban violence are exploding and along with that increasing cases of massacres of black youth and the popularity of fascist solutions. It is not by chance that the denunciations of violence against women are increasing. In a national crisis like the one we are experiencing, the way in which classes relate to each other must be redefined, in depth and not superficially. This is the meaning of the fact that the Brazilian bourgeoisie has finished with Lulaism and has come to support an ultra-liberalism, aligning itself with what is taking place on the international scene.

Die Linke and the Forthcoming German Election⁵

DIE LINKE's electoral program adopted in June 2017 primarily focuses on the interests

3 Extract from a declaration from The Maghreb region, published by the *Bullet*, July 22, 2017

4 Extract from International Viewpoint <http://www.internationalviewpoint.org/spip.php?article5080>

of its core voters (good jobs, secure pensions, and a just social system) and connects these with the emancipatory concerns of feminist, anti-racist, and anti-militarist policies as well as the project of European and international solidarity. The latter concerns are particularly important to the young and more academic groups, which have recently turned towards the party. It is matter of forming a solidarity alliance between the lower and middle social layers of various milieus – an alliance that ranges from the long-term unemployed, temporary workers, and workers in the care, health, and education sectors to socially aware academics looking for comprehensive alternatives. First and foremost, it must reach as many of those people as possible whose personal situation is dire and who are deeply dissatisfied with the dominant politics. They are among those who have considerable concerns about the future and feel threatened by change. Secondly, it must address those who are still managing to get by, but are constantly stressed and overworked because they, for example, are faced with the task of fulfilling the very contradictory demands of wage labor and a family. Thirdly, the focus should be on the critical, well-educated skilled workers, who themselves dispose of far-reaching opportunities for social participation, but have the impression that fundamental changes are needed in order to solve the many pressing problems of the future. Merely returning to the old class struggle is not an option. Racism, gender relations, and social questions are inextricably linked. Differences should not be treated as side contradictions; interests must be actively combined. This is only possible if it is carried out with the people themselves, if the party is present in their everyday lives, organizes together with them in their neighborhoods and the workplace, and helps people to empower themselves. This basis can be used to reclaim the credibility of party politics upon which functioning parliamentary representation relies. Concretely, that means going out and forging real connections with the popular classes. DIE LINKE has managed to get a great deal off the ground in the last few years, such as organizing projects in socially disadvantaged neighborhoods, or “outreach-driven elections”, the party no longer waits for people to come to them, but visits individuals at home. Here the party DIE LINKE has a responsibility that the SPD and the Greens have (so far) not taken up: it must embody an alternative that breaks with the politics of “carrying on as normal.”

Bolivia: Threat against Pablo Solón

The election of Bolivia’s first indigenous president, Evo Morales and the MAS government, heralded great hope for advancing not just a more socially-just country, but a new international vision for a just society and a harmonious relationship with Nature rooted in the profound indigenous concept of ‘Buen Vivir’. Bolivia rightly became recognised on the international stage for its advocacy of Mother Earth rights and for its prophetic voice at UN climate summits and particularly for its hosting of the historic World Peoples Summit on Climate Change and the Rights of Mother Earth in 2010 in Cochabamba. It is with profound disappointment, then, that we hear that one of the key organisers of the historic Cochabamba climate summit, Pablo Solón, along with Rafael

⁵ Extract from an article by the Institute for Critical Thinking, *The State of Germany in the Run-Up to the 2017 Parliamentary Elections*, Rosa Luxemburg Stiftung, 2017

Archondo, is being threatened by the Bolivian government with criminal charges and potential jail sentences of up to four years. The accusations six years on that allege Solón “illegally appointed” Archondo and that Archondo committed the crime of “prolonging functions in the Permanent Mission of Bolivia to the UN” can only be seen as attempts to silence Solón for his vocal criticism of the government and the construction of two giant hydroelectric projects, El Bala and El Chepete in the Amazonian region.

These mega-dams, if built, also run completely against any vision of ‘Buen Vivir’. According to the government’s own commissioned studies, done by the Italian firm Geodata, they would inundate an area five times larger than Bolivia’s city of La Paz, displace more than 5000 indigenous peoples, and deforest more than 100,000 hectares. The evidence is also that they are not even economically viable given the current prices of electricity in Brazil. We also note that the accusations against Solón and Archondo are not isolated cases, but are part of a series of threatened and implemented legal actions against individuals as well as attempts to close organisations in Bolivia that have a proud record of advancing social and environmental justice. This attempt to silence dissent goes against the principles of Bolivia’s new constitution and is deeply troubling for the potential long-term success of Bolivia’s revolution. Participatory democracy depends on a rigorous and robust debate, while environmental justice can only happen if communities at the frontlines of extraction are supported and empowered rather than silenced and criminalised.

What Happened in Hamburg

Niels Jongerius

The majority of the tens of thousands of people who headed to Hamburg last June wanted to demand international solidarity and to condemn wars and border-walls. They had a sobering stay in Hamburg. Many had no experience with earlier protests against the G20 and the G8. Even before the riots that followed the 'Welcome to Hell' demonstration, civil liberties and constitutional rights were stripped away. Faced with a police strategy of intimidation and harassment, people found themselves in a city under siege. Support structures, journalists and lawyers, as well as activists themselves were targeted. Authorities worked to control the narrative, using the escalating violence as an excuse to put the city under siege. Activists were lucky to find themselves in a city with a long and proud tradition of solidarity. The people of Hamburg opened their doors, homes, gardens and churches when protestors looked for a place to sleep, shower or get medical treatment. Democratic space is shrinking almost everywhere. A wider pattern of repression is happening around the globe. More and more cities and countries see strategic campaigns to criminalize protests - including severe costs for individuals who dissent (jobs lost, arrests, emotional and physical intimidation) - curbs on freedom of speech, freedom of the press under pressure, as are the rights to peaceful assembly and protest. Hamburg was not an isolated case, but rather a litmus test for our fundamental freedoms.

Meanwhile on the Alter Planet ...

On our way to Bahia



The Brazilian Committee of the WSF invite the people, organizations, social movements, networks and platforms of movements in Brazil, Latin America and the World to join the construction of the next World Social Forum 2018 which will be held in Salvador, Bahia, from March 13 to 17, 2018. The edition of the WSF in Salvador-Bahia will be an important opportunity to meet the various experiences of resistance and proposals to face authoritarian thinking in Brazil and in the World.

Information: forumsocialmundial@fsm2018.org or www.fsm2018.org

World Social Forum on Migration



WSF-M will take place in the fall of 2018 in Mexico City. In the context of a growing global disorder, more walls are being built than bridges, the WSF wants to discuss and propose concrete solutions aimed at the recognition of citizenship and the civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights of migrants, displaced persons, Refugees and stateless persons. Information: <http://fsmm2018.org>

For a walking World Social Forum in 2020?

Since the last World Social Forum in Montreal in 2016, it is clear that the ideas of the Social Forums, launched in 1999 and the protests of Seattle and which reached its apogee in 2005, has lost some influence. The Jai Jagat 2020 can be a great occasion to relaunch the dynamics around the WSF with all the partner organizations by offering them a new appointment in 2020: a walking World Social Forum. The Indian organization Ekta Parishad (*unity forum* in Hindi), known internationally now for its action in favor of landless people and its large walks across India, is currently preparing a huge march for 2020: Jai Jagat 2020 (<https://www.jaijagat2020.org/>)

People's Summit in Buenos Aires

Networks and trade union, human rights, territorial, students, women, political, peasants, social and anti-extractives organizations are calling on the peoples of the world to mobilize around the 11th Ministerial Conference of the WTO that will be held in Argentina, December 10-13, 2017. For that purpose, we are convening a Peoples Summit in Buenos Aires that contributes to the interaction and coordination of resistance against so called “free trade” --which only generates policies to plunder and exploit our peoples and nature—and make progress in discussing and giving visibility to alternatives to this system of production and trade. We are also working for and hoping that the struggle against the WTO will adopt a strong regional identity, thus contributing to the revival of our rich and valuable history of social and political organization against the multiple forms of capital-led domination in recent years. To confront this, the time is due to roll-out and set in motion our social, economic, feminist and environmental alternatives; we oppose and reject the “free” trade and investments protection agenda, whatever form it adopts.

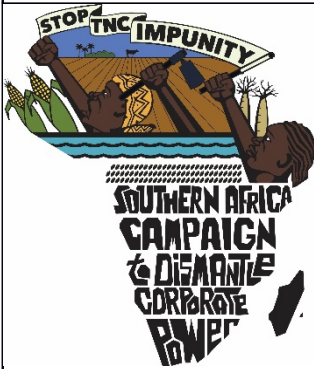
Further information: argentinamejorsintlc@gmail.com or go to our website: mejorsintlc.org

The WSF and Palestine⁶

In its first incarnations in South America, the Forum gave a special place to the Palestinian struggle. It was related to the fact that Palestine was occupied by a violent regime intimately related to US imperialism, the ‘master for world’. Opposing

⁶ Extract from a discussion hosted by the Palestinian NGO Forum, Ramallah, July 19, 2017

neoliberalism and the Empire inevitably meant to get on the move for and with Palestine. This sentiment of course had predated the Forum, however, it had another important platform with the Forum. There was another reason, for this 'special place'. Many activists had learned from the incredible movement that became the Intifada in the late 1980s. The movement partially broke up rigid and authoritarian traditions, inspired progressive milieux worldwide at a time when old projects were crumbling down, like the Berlin wall. The idea was transformed in many places where popular movements took the initiative, turned towards self-reliance and autonomy, and confronted the state with new strategies. After 1994, the Palestinian movement went into a difficult phase, but for social movements in the world, the Intifada somehow acquired a symbol beyond its own development. This explains why in almost every forum, the Palestinian struggle was prominent, with many activities, speakers and participating groups from the OPTs and the Palestinian diaspora. Various attempts to take control of this participation by interest groups or the Palestinian authority did not succeed in crushing the popular dimension, which led to popularize actions and campaigns such as BDS.



Southern Africa Permanent Peoples' Tribunal on Transnational Corporations

The Tribunal was the 2nd Session of the Southern Africa Permanent Peoples' Tribunal on Transnational Corporations and is one component of the Southern Africa Campaign to Dismantle Corporate Power. It took place in Johannesburg, in the Old Women's Jail at Constitutional Hill. Over two days 7 communities and movements from Mozambique, Zambia, Malawi, Tanzania, Madagascar and Mauritius gave testimony, through presentations, which they had developed over several months. They talked of their struggles against not only TNC's but also the entire architecture of impunity which enables corporations to loot and plunder with total disregard for human rights, the most basic of which is the right to a decent life. The Tribunal formed part of the Southern Africa People's Solidarity Network's annual Peoples' Summit, taking place parallel to the SADC Heads of State Summit, and the same issues of corporate power were echoed in assemblies of unemployment, women and extractivism. The Call for claiming the Right to Say No! was reflected in all the cases, resisting the corporate destruction of livelihood. The affected communities also shared their strategies of survival and alternatives. But it was not only extractivism and land struggles that were the focus of the Tribunal's proceedings. One of the most significant contemporary struggles, which has only recently begun receiving the amount of attention it deserves, is that of tax havens and illicit financial flows. The Centre for Alternative Research and Studies of Mauritius presented on how the government of Mauritius with its web of global Double Taxation Treaties is making it ridiculously simple for Transnational Corporation's to hide their profits with total anonymity, thereby avoiding wages and

taxes in the countries of operation,
More info: www.aidec.org.za

Via Campesina VII International Conference: Women's Assembly Declaration⁷

We are building a feminism out of our peasant and popular identity as a tool for our organizations and in the social emancipation process for men and women. The feminism that we propose recognizes our cultural diversity and the very different conditions that we face in each region, country and place. We are building it from the daily struggles, which women across the planet fight. Struggles for our autonomy, social transformation, the defense and protection of peasant agriculture, and food sovereignty. From this, new men and women will emerge with new gender relationships based on equality, respect, cooperation and mutual recognition. This feminism is transformative, rebellious and autonomous. We are building it collectively through reflection and concrete actions against the capital and the patriarchy. It stands in solidarity with the struggles of all women and all those peoples who fight. This feminism must also be nourished with feminist training for us and for all our organizations. Our movements must guarantee spaces solely for women in which together we can strengthen our autonomy.

Intercoll is an open space for the development and confrontation of social and citizen movements. It is managed by individuals linked to those movements, and by anyone who is involved in social struggles and mobilizations. Intercoll aims to contribute to the gradual emergence of a new "international collective intellectual" from the reflection of movements and networks of research and public education. Intercoll aims to create an international and multicultural space. The website operates in six languages.

<http://intercoll.net/?lang=en>

Food for Thought

Need for a Vision⁸

⁷ The full declaration is to be found at: <https://viacampesina.org/en/vii-international-conference-womens-assembly-declaration/>

Walden Bello

Our failure to move from a critique of neoliberal capitalism to a powerful alternative model — like socialism provided to so many marginalized classes, peoples, and nations in the 20th century — is part of the problem. The theoretical building blocks of an alternative economic model are there, the product of the work of so many progressives over the last 50 years. This includes the rich work that has been done around sustainable development, de-growth, and de-globalization. The task is to integrate them not only into an intellectually coherent model, but also into an inspiring narrative that combines vision, theory, program, and action, and one that rests firmly on the values of justice, equity, and environmental sustainability. Of course, the work towards this goal will be long and hard. However, we must not only be convinced that it's necessary but also confident that it's possible to come up with an alternative that will rally most of the people behind us. Ideas matter. To borrow the old biblical saying, "Without vision, the people perish." These are some of the central challenges confronting trade activists. We cannot leave the field to a neoliberalism that has failed or to an extremism that has appropriated some of our analysis and married them to hideous, reactionary values. A progressive future is not guaranteed. We must work to bring it about, and we will.

8 Extract from an intervention by Walden in Foreign Policy In Focus July 19, 2017:
<http://fpif.org/its-not-only-necessary-to-develop-an-alternative-to-globalization-its-entirely-possible/>