

The Venezuelan pseudo-left and the debacle of Chavismo

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After 17 years of rule by Hugo Chavez's Socialist Party of Venezuela (PSUV), the country's economy is unraveling. The vast majority of the Venezuelan population faces scarcities of food, medical care, consumer goods, and electricity, while poverty has doubled to 80 percent since 2013. Food riots and spontaneous protests in working class neighborhoods take place on a daily basis, and the Chavista government of President Nicholas Maduro has responded by imposing a state of emergency.

While the jostling between the PSUV and the right-wing opposition Democratic Unity Roundtable (MUD) for state power has produced the possibility of a coup or martial law, these two bourgeois parties are not the only elements whose actions will determine the future of the country. The Venezuelan working class, denied the basic necessities of life, is increasingly coming into conflict with both the government and the official opposition.

But the period of PSUV rule has shown how disastrous it is for workers to forfeit their political independence to a section of the ruling class that falsely labels itself as "socialist." What is most urgently required by the Venezuelan working class today is a political program of class struggle, independent of and in opposition to both sections of the bourgeoisie who base their support or opposition to the government on the false claim that the PSUV, Chavez, and Maduro represent socialism.

At precisely this juncture, a series of groups that have for years served as "left" props for the Chavez-Maduro administration are engaging in an operation to prevent the working class from breaking politically with Chavismo. Composed of sections of the upper-middle class which are tied materially to the PSUV bureaucracy and the purse strings of state power, the Venezuelan pseudo-left and its international allies have a material interest in defending the bourgeois government from the working class.

The web site *VenezuelAnalysis*, an international consortium of PSUV apologists, published a May 20 article by Jorge Martin of the International Marxist Tendency titled "Venezuela—A Last Warning." The IMT, led by the British

ex-radical Alan Woods, has long served as a "left" advisor to the PSUV and has claimed since Chavez took power in 1999 that his so-called Bolivarian revolution represented socialism.

The author begins by acknowledging that Venezuela is in the throes of "a very serious crisis." "The reactionary opposition," he writes, is carrying out "an attempt to capitalize on the severe economic problems the country is facing" by "trying to create a situation of chaos and violence" aimed at removing Maduro from power.

Undoubtedly the right-wing opposition, composed of CIA assets and corporate CEOs, believes it is better poised than the PSUV to impose the diktats of Wall Street and US imperialism. But what is the cause of the "severe economic problems the country is facing"?

Martin presents a list of ways in which "private capitalists" and the "private sector" have manipulated the economy through currency speculation and the black market for consumer goods. He notes that "this unsustainable economic dislocation" has been "aimed at hitting the working masses in order to undermine their support for the revolution." He adds that "one of the main reasons for this unsustainable economic dislocation is therefore the 'natural' rebellion of the capitalist producers against any attempt to regulate the normal workings of the 'free market.'"

Martin's argument is based on a fundamental contradiction: How is Chavismo revolutionary if after nearly two decades of PSUV rule, "private capitalists" exercise such control over the Venezuelan economy that they can plunge the working class into such desperation?

According to Martin, blame for the current crisis does not lie with the nationalist and pro-capitalist program of the PSUV. Rather, the party has served as the "revolutionary" organ through which "the late president Chavez and the revolutionary masses pushed each other forward."

Instead, Martin suggests that the Venezuelan working class is to blame for the PSUV's increasingly tenuous grasp on state power. The working class today "is tired and worn out"

and consists of “an important layer of the masses who previously supported the revolution” but no longer do. “There is a danger that any appeals to the masses to mobilize against the threat of counter-revolution could fall on deaf ears.”

A similar argument is advanced by the Venezuelan pseudo-left group Marea Socialista (MS). In an April 15 interview posted on *Jacobin*, MS leader Cesar Romero characterized the period of Chavez’s rule “as a positive one because there was a lot of investment and a substantial increase in the quality of life for most Venezuelans.” Disregarding the hunger and desperation facing the working class today, Romero added: “Concrete examples of this are the drastic reduction of extreme poverty and the fact that 98 percent of the population is now able to eat three times a day and have a balanced diet.”

“However,” Romero said, “the assessment is not only positive. We must understand that there were some revolutionary changes during this time, but there was never a socialist revolution.” This is because of “mistakes” committed by the PSUV, namely its inability to “promote consistent anti-capitalist politics.”

MS and the IMT reject the use of class as a category for social analysis, and the terms they employ—“private capitalist,” “revolutionary changes,” “anti-capitalist politics,” and the “push” of the masses—are attempts to paper over the contradictions inherent in their defense of the PSUV. It is not a “mistake” for a government that defends capitalist property relations to fail to adopt a socialist program, nor can the “push” of the “revolutionary masses” on a bourgeois party serve as a substitute for a revolutionary socialist movement of the working class.

Both Marea Socialista and the IMT conclude that the working class has no independent role to play and must subordinate itself to a layer of petty-bourgeois functionaries in and around the PSUV and the trade unions. Romero of Marea Socialista states that “together with other critical sectors of Chavismo,” the task of the left is “to aspire to become part of the government” in order to provoke “new cycles of popular mobilization [that] have arisen, mostly around environmental issues, racism, LGBT rights, etc. These issues have an anti-capitalist character because they are focused on the government.”

Martin says, “There is also a layer of the advanced activists who are very angry and have been radicalized” in recent months, and that this layer must be pushed to pressure the PSUV in order to establish “a national democratic plan of production to satisfy the needs of the majority.” According to Martin, “if the Bolivarian leadership were to take firm and decisive action to address the problem of scarcity, this would rekindle a wave of revolutionary

enthusiasm.”

Marea Socialista and the IMT are not the first to substitute the independent revolutionary role of the working class for one or another so-called progressive section of the national bourgeoisie. Such prognoses, advanced by MS and the IMT’s Pabloite predecessors for several decades, are antithetical to socialism. The disorientation fostered by this middle-class program has disarmed workers and youth, laying the foundation for the conditions of corruption, crime, poverty, and hyper-exploitation that characterize the region today.

The first months of 2016 mark a turning point in Latin American history. The failure of the bourgeois nationalist “left” governments in Venezuela, Brazil, Argentina, Ecuador, Bolivia, and Cuba prove that the contradictions of the world capitalist economy cannot be overcome through left-talking governments dedicated to the maintenance of the nation state system and private property.

The illusions that millions of workers and youth once held in Chavez and his counterparts are being shattered under the weight of political events. Powerful sections of the Latin American bourgeoisie are taking advantage of the lack of stability to carry out a rightward shift aimed at presenting the continent as a gift to Wall Street and US imperialism. At precisely this juncture, attempts by the pseudo-left to resuscitate Chavismo and tie the working class to the national bourgeoisie must be rejected.

A program of socialist internationalism, independent of and in opposition to the national bourgeoisie and all its apologists, must be advanced. What is needed is the founding of sections of the International Committee of the Fourth International in Venezuela and across Latin America.



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