

# Venezuela at the crossroads: International media prepare a coup

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All the fuss over the incident provoked at the Ibero-American Summit in Santiago, Chile by Franco's Bourbon godson is nothing more than a smokescreen designed to divert attention from attempts to destabilize the democratic and constitutional government of Venezuela and at the same time, a part of this attempt.

The Venezuelan opposition media (nearly all of it) and the international media are seeking, in effect, to psychologically prepare a coup creating the false impression that Hugo Chavez is alone, isolated, with no other support than a few cronies who are as weak as he is. In this campaign the key moment will be the referendum on the constitution, as the right opposition, if the "NO" camp gets around 40 percent, tries to argue that in fact the majority is due to fraud, to drag a vacillating sector of the middle classes behind the oligarchy and, above all, to win support in the more conservative sectors of the armed forces, already prepared by the statements of the former Chavista Defence Minister, General Raul Baduel.

Popular power, the municipal councils, the handover of nearly 2 million hectares to peasants, are, from the point of view of the capitalists and, simply, rich Venezuelans who are racist and regard dark skinned workers as inferiors - intolerable actions. Not to speak of the multinationals, which, while still earning large sums, fear expropriation.

There has been no lack of "theorising" that 21<sup>st</sup> century socialism would be undertaken in Venezuela with the support of the transnationals, using the most modern means of electronic control and with the active participation, in its leadership, of people like Baduel, supposedly "scientific". But the class struggle, without which the most basic foundations of socialism cannot be created, requires a leap in the political consciousness and the decision-making capacity of the workers (in the broadest sense of that word). It always passes through the construction of power at the base, which drives to the right to the big capitalists, like those leading multinationals, and the conservatives in the state apparatus, namely the Baduels, in the armed forces, and many governors and apparatchiks, in the civilian field.

This class struggle divides and subdivides all sectors: there are right-wing putschists, and there are others, more realistic, who fear that the failure of their adventure will radicalise further a regime where there is still space to be exploited, and there are sectors of the political centre which, under the pressure of events, move to the right, which will use them. The rule in a revolution, therefore, remains that of Georges Danton: audacity, ever more audacity. An alliance between the centre (Baduel) and the left (Chavez) would be fatal, however, because the centre is now the right and alliance with it is tantamount to capitulation, as was the case with Juan Domingo Peron in 1955 when he capitulated to General Eduardo Lonardi, head of the coup but not a fascist, who soon afterwards was overthrown by the gorillas, who had until then used him as a front man.

Fidel Castro warns Chavez that it is dangerous to continue with his practice of the "bath of multitudes" mingling with the people who applaud him. Assassination is a very real possibility, especially because nobody doubts that Chavez will win the next referendum, as he has overwhelmingly won all previous elections (and, we must add, he will be powerfully aided by the

repudiation of the arrogant Bourbon fascistoid that Franco educated and by the neocolonialism of the Spanish bourgeoisie).

But the real danger, more than assassination, is the “Badel effect” in the senior ranks of the Venezuelan armed forces, and the influence of Chavez in the lower ranks is crucial. Indeed, if there have been no pronouncements by other military leaders, as often happens in pre-coup periods, it is because there is a strong popular vigilance over the army, with the armed forces divided horizontally and vertically (between opponents and Chavistas, and between legalists and putschists), because a coup will automatically align Venezuela with the United States, and many military personnel are conservative but not agents of imperialism, and because many potential putschists fear the possibility of a clash which will involve Chavista civilian militias (i.e., a kind of Spain in 1936, but in Latin America today).

Unfortunately, the government of Chavez, which is paternalistic, hinders the autonomy of the bodies of popular power and, as it is top-down, does not want to break the discipline of the armed forces by calling on them to disobey any suspicious orders or to wound the prestige of the same by calling for stronger and better armed civilian militias. It continues imperturbably with its election campaign, which of course is necessary, although relatively of less importance, as if the fight was just a normal election.

No doubt Chavez, who is a soldier, wily and combative, will mobilize the military intelligence services and must also be using Cuban intelligence. But the only real protection is preventive popular mobilization, which will also influence within the armed forces and put the low ranking cadres and officers on a state of alert, thereby impeding the action of imperialism (which can only buy a few senior officers) and blind adherence to vertical discipline.

Another powerful protection is the urgent mobilization of the peoples of Latin America against imperialist arrogance and in support of Venezuela, Bolivia, Cuba and Ecuador. Both could be facilitated by a call from President Chavez.

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