

anarchist perspectives
on the protests in Venezuela

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Roarmag.com Editor's note: Yesterday we published some initial reflections (at <http://roarmag.org/2014/02/venezuela-protests-opposition-coup/>) on the Venezuelan protests which decried the anti-democratic intentions of the country's US-backed right-wing opposition from a left-libertarian perspective. We also highlighted some of the important social advances made by successive Socialist governments, while remaining critical of Chavismo as a political program and roundly condemning the police brutality against protesters. Today, we would like to share a short article by Rafael Uzcátegui for the Venezuelan autonomous-anarchist newspaper El Libertario (<http://periodicoellibertario.blogspot.com>), which highlights the violent repression of the protests by the Socialist government and criticizes its narrative of an anti-government "coup" being in the making.

The situation in Venezuela is complex and still in flux. The unfolding events therefore need to be assessed from multiple independent and critical perspectives that recognize both the violent means through which the US, international capital and the Venezuelan elite are trying to oust a democratically-elected government, as well as the reproductive patterns of state violence to which this Socialist government itself is now resorting. As we have written elsewhere, the Bolivarian Revolution is riven with internal contradictions, and it takes openness to seemingly contradictory perspectives to be able to recognize both its achievements and its limitations.

An anarchist perspective on the protests in Venezuela

By Rafael Uzcátegui on February 22, 2014

Lacking clear political content, the Venezuelan protests are at the same time capitalized upon by the right and violently repressed by the government.

On February 4th, 2014, students from the *Universidad Nacional Experimental del Táchira* (Experimental University of Táchira), located in the inland state of the country, protested the sexual assault of a fellow female classmate, which took place in the context of the city's increasing insecurity. The protest was repressed, and several students were detained. The next day, other universities around the country had their own protests requesting the release of these detainees, and these demonstrations were also repressed, with some of the activists incarcerated.

The wave of indignation had as context the economic crisis, the shortage of first necessity items and the crisis of basic public services, as well as the beginnings of the imposition of new economic austerity measures by President Nicolás Maduro. Two opposition politicians, Leopoldo López and María Corina Machado, tried to capitalize on the wave of discontent rallying for new protests under the slogan "The Way Out" and also tried to press for the resignation of president Maduro. Their message also reflected the rupture and divisions on the inside of opposing politicians and the desire to replace Henrique Capriles' leadership, who publicly rejected the protests. The *Mesa de la Unidad Democrática* (Democratic Unity Table) coalition, didn't support them either.

When the government suppressed the protests, it made them grow bigger and wider all over the country. On February 12th, 2014, people from 18 cities protested for the release of all of the detainees and in rejection of the government. In some cities of the interior, particularly punished by scarcity and lack of proper public services, the protests were massive. In Caracas, three people were murdered during the protests. The government

blames the protesters, but the biggest circulating newspaper in the country, *Últimas Noticias*, which receives the majority of its advertising budget from the government itself, revealed through photographs that the murderers were police officers. As a response to this, Nicolás Maduro stated on national television and radio broadcast that police enforcement had been “infiltrated by the right wing.”

The repression of the protesters draws not only on police and military enforcement agencies; it also incorporates the participation of militia groups to violently dissolve the protests. A member of PROVEA, a human rights NGO, was kidnapped, beaten and threatened with death by one of them on the west side of Caracas. President Maduro has publicly encouraged these groups, which he calls *colectivos* (collectives).

The Venezuelan government actually controls all of the major TV stations, and has threatened with sanctions radio stations and newspapers that transmit information about protests. Because of this, the privileged space for the distribution of information have been the social media networks, especially Twitter. The use of personal technological devices has allowed record-keeping through videos and photographs of ample aggressions of the repressive forces. Human rights organizations report detainees all over the country (many of them already released). The number has surpassed 400, and they have suffered torture, including reports of sexual assault, cruel, inhumane and degrading treatment. As this is being written 5 people have been murdered in the context of the protests.

In his speeches, Nicolás Maduro encourages the protesters opposing him to assume even more radical and violent positions. Without any ongoing criminal investigation, he automatically stated that everyone killed has been murdered by the protesters themselves, who he disqualifies with every possible adjective.

However, this belligerence seems not to be shared by all the *chavista* movement, because a lot of its base is currently withholding its active support, waiting to see what will come next. Maduro has only managed to rally public employees to the street protests he has called. In spite of the situation and due to the grave economic situation he faces, Nicolás Maduro continues to make economic adjustments, the most recent being a tax increase.

The state apparatus reiterates repeatedly that it is facing a “coup”, that what happened in Venezuela on April 2002 will repeat itself. This version has managed to neutralize the international left-wing, which hasn’t even expressed its concern about the abuses and deaths in the protests.

The protests are being carried out in many parts of the country and are lacking in center and direction, having being called through social

channels the conflict resolution; paving the way for the military to ensure “governance” through a coup, either of trend of the *Chavismo*, or those who support the opposition. The bizarre image of a retired general of the Venezuelan Army, Angel Vivas Perdomo, on the roof of his house showing a weapon of war (in the attempt to arrest him after being accused of masterminding the traps located in a “*Guarimba*” that caused one death in Caracas); have caused a storm of rumors about the alleged “malaise” within the Armed Forces. Plus this, there is series of looting of shops in several places in the country with such coordination that sum too much suspicion.

The events are in full development: The picture of this moment can be completely different in the next 48 hours. We hope to continue to have internet to telling.

Original at <http://periodicoellibertario.blogspot.co.uk/>

time” and even “bailoterapias”. Some, become viral and are assumed by much of the movement. Many opponents accustomed to vertical Leninist organization of the analog era, permanently demands that protests “have addresses” and “common requirements”.

The government insists that it is facing a “coup”, some say “repeats the script in April 2002” and others argue that it would be a “rolling coup”. Nicolas Maduro called to confront the protesters on the street activating “Popular Commands antigolpe”. However, the two demonstrations called in recent days by the government in the streets of Caracas, doesn’t have the support and levels of call made by Hugo Chavez. While the middle and upper levels of government publicly expressed its support for the decisions of Maduro, the basis of *Chavismo* begins to resent the open crackdown on protesters, which has generated hundreds of images that flow through cell phones. Moreover, the president himself issued conflicting messages about the nature of the hypothetical threat that faces: Calling insistently celebrate carnivals, dancing in front of the cameras, (asking publicly in several opportunities); improve diplomatic relations with the United States, designating its representative to the International Monetary Fund, removing working credentials in Venezuela to CNN (which meant in fact the expulsion from the country), and within the 24 next hours, invite them to transmit again from the country.

Although International level, remains the informative media polarization about Venezuela, internally the country continue to suffer a major informative blackout. Nationwide television stations don’t report about the demonstrations, nor broadcast live messages of political opposition leaders, while their screens are taken over by statements from public officials. The government thought the conflict in analog terms, thinking that television concealment plus repression would be enough to silence the protests. Belatedly has initiated a crackdown on social networks, while Internet service, state-controlled, suffer irregular slowdowns and blockages in some of the most popular applications used by users such as Twitter and What’sApp.

The radicalization of the two main sides to the conflict, still doesn’t make dialogue a majority requirement to resolve the crisis. President Maduro called the realization of a “National Peace Conference”, but however, in parallel, his government (and himself), continue disqualifying as “right-wing fascist” the opponents, and its increasing the number of detainees throughout the country, which alleges torture, cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment during their detention. The number of people killed has increased, injured by gunfire, tear gas and buckshot, increases the spiral of violence and resentment on both sides, doesn’t leave political

media networks. Among the protesters themselves, there are many diverse opinions about the opposition political parties, so it’s possible to find many expressions of support and also rejection at the same time.

In the case of Caracas the middle class and college students are the primary actors in the demonstrations. On the other hand, in other states, many popular sectors have joined the protests. In Caracas the majority of the demands are political, including calls for the freedom of the detainees and the resignation of President Maduro, while in other cities social demands are incorporated, with protests against inflation, scarcity and lack of proper public services. Even though some protests have turned violent, and some protesters have fired guns at police and militia groups, the majority of the protests, especially outside of Caracas, remain peaceful.

The Revolutionary Independent Venezuelan Left (which includes anarchists and sectors that follow Trotsky, Marx, Lenin and Guevara) is not involved in this situation. We are simple spectators. Some of us are actively denouncing state repression and helping the victims of human rights violations.

Venezuela is a historically oil-driven country. It possesses low levels of political culture among its population, which explains why the opposition protesters have the same “content” problem as those supporting the government. But while the international left-wing continues to turn its back and support — without any criticism — the government’s version of “a coup”, it leaves thousands of protesters at the mercy of the most conservative discourse of the opposition parties, without any reference to anti-capitalists, revolutionaries and true social change that could influence them.

In this sense, Leopoldo López, the detained conservative opposition leader, tries to make himself the center of a dynamic movement that, up to the time of this writing, had gone beyond the political parties of the opposition and the government of Nicolás Maduro.

What will happen in the short term? I think nobody knows exactly, especially the protesters themselves. The events are developing minute by minute.

For more alternative information about Venezuela, we recommend:

<http://periodicoellibertario.blogspot.com>

<http://www.derechos.org.ve>

<http://laclase.info>

Express Update of the Venezuelan situation (February 25, 2014)

An english translation of a new update (25 February) from El Libertario about the wave of protests against the Maduro government in Venezuela.

Rafael Uzcátegui (El Libertario newspaper)

February 21st, we wrote a summary of events for those who are on the outside, oversaturated with information about Venezuela, we needed a chronology of events. It has been just 4 days of this story, but there are many new elements that an update is necessary to suggest, that any picture of the Venezuelan reality will change in the next few hours.

The first element that stands out is that the manifestations of government critics have continued to the time of this writing, and doesn't seem to stop in the coming days. Venezuelan culture was characterized by the effort to promote short-term results, no permanence in time, so that the sum of each new day of protest politics, contradict itself this immediacy of "doing" in the country. That is why President Maduro uses as one of its strategies encourage its rapid wear, increasing two more days to holiday carnival that will start on 27th of February, the day when happens the 25th anniversary of the popular uprising of "*El Caracazo*" when even tens were killed with total impunity.

A second novelty, as suggested in our previous paper, is that Caracas has ceased to be the epicenter of the national mobilization. On Saturday February 22 both those pro-government and the opposition, made called to march in the city of Caracas, both with large attendance. However, in at least 12 cities of province, some dissident demonstrations were proportionally, as massive as those that were performed in the capital. In the case of the city of San Cristobal, capital of Tachira (border with Colombia); the intensity of the protests and conflicts where were including students, middle class people, and others from popular and rural areas; has led to the militarization of the city being controlled remotely from Caracas. The state governor Jose Vielma Mora, of the ruling party PSUV, publicly criticized the crackdown and called for the release of detainees, and so far, this one has been the first public criticism from a member of the government, of one decision of Nicolas Maduro.

As of this writing, there had been the death of: 15 people in demonstrations or protests related events, 8 of them whose responsibility points to police, military and paramilitary officers, 2 of them victims of "traps" the opposition mounted protests called "*guarimba*", and the rest by dark events around the demonstrations that should be investigated and clarified (for

example, a winding of a 17 years old boy). The reports of the newspaper Ultimas Noticias, supported by pictures and videos circulated on social networks, have forced the Attorney detain officials of the Bolivarian National Guard (GNB) and the Bolivarian National Intelligence Service (SEBIN) to investigate the perpetrating of facts. However, high spokesmen of the National Executive, as the Minister of Communication Delcy Rodriguez and President Maduro continue blaming of all deaths to the opposition. Deserves separate chapter president of the National Assembly Diosdado Cabello, who through his daily program "Pounding with the Hammer", broadcast on state television, makes delusional statements about the causes of the murders.

The "*Guarimba*" is a strategy that opposition sectors initiated by the end of year 2002. It consists of making a protest, in a place considered "safe", (usually in the vicinity of the homes of the protesters); closing the route with barricades and burned trash or rubbers. The "*Guarimba*" has several features that differentiate it from other events. One is its symbiotic relationship with the coup and the "oil strike" of 2002, so it is loaded from an insurrectional content, prone to physical confrontation with the security agencies. Second, as a result of the above, repeatedly has been criminalized by the government, thereby being an exclusionary strategy: While pro-government people could join a peaceful demonstration by common requirements, hardly they ever do a "*guarimba*". Third, generate a broad rejection within opposition groups themselves, as demonstrated by the mobilization in Caracas February 22, where there were many banners of rejection to "*guarimbas*" as to the actions of paramilitary groups. As President Nicolas Maduro has stimulated repression to publicly congratulate the performance of GNB, not recognizing state responsibility with fatalities, and institutionally legitimized the actions of paramilitary groups by encouraging the "Popular Commands against coup" has generated a hotbed of indignation that has allowed the emergence of the "*guarimbas*" with some foci in Caracas and cities throughout the country. However, a look at all types of mobilization, that remain on the street in all cities of the country; corroborates that this remains a largely peaceful demonstration.

The delivery of the conservative opposition leader Leopoldo Lopez, on February 18th, was a real "performance" to catapult your image as "new leader" of the Venezuelan opposition and be the center of the national protest movement. Their delivery was performed with a mass concentration at the border between the municipality of Libertador and Chacao, in Caracas. However, until today the dynamics of crowds in the street remains decentralized networks, with multiple centers. There are number of calls through the social networks like "*pancartazos*", "Do national prayers at the same