

Last Chance for Venezuela's Revolution?

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The pulse of the revolution grows faint. Extreme measures are needed, since the extremely poor living conditions of most Venezuelans demand it. They are tired of the government taking half actions. Tired of the same super-rich oligarchy dominating the economy, which creates the horrendous inequality that overshadows Venezuelan society. If the revolution is not quickly pushed to the left, it will be strangled by the right.

For all the positive things Chavez has accomplished as President, he is in danger of becoming another Salvador Allende — a martyr whose death ushered in a right-wing dictatorship.

Chavez's base — the working class and poor — does not uncritically support him, as the western media sometimes depicts. Their support is conditional on Chavez pushing the revolution forward by raising their living standards and keeping the right wing at bay. The slower he goes, the less support he gets.

Chavez needs more than working people's support; he needs their active support in the streets and workplaces, directly participating in political life — a defining feature of all revolutions.

Revolutions do not have infinite amounts of time, since they are, by definition, rare periods where working people shed their apathy and participate directly in political affairs, a period of time that lasts until they either smash the power of the upper classes, or the upper classes can squash the revolution with a dictatorship.

The less active working people become, the more able is the right wing to make a power grab, since the rich believe that the workers will not rise up to stop them, as they've done before in Venezuela.

Indeed, the right wing all over Latin America is becoming bolder. They applauded when Chavez's base was not inspired enough to come out to vote in the last two big elections. This did not mean that the right wing's influence was growing (as the western media claims); rather, it was pure apathy. They applauded when the left-wing President of Honduras was overthrown by a U.S. sponsored coup. They cheered when Ecuador's President was almost killed in a coup attempt. The right wing in Bolivia is taking advantage of an increase in fuel prices to destabilize Evo Morales, whom they've tried to topple once already.

But Venezuela remains the most advanced revolutionary movement in Latin America. It is in danger of dying from the disease of apathy. Action is the best cure for apathy. Chavez was recently granted extra power by the national assembly — the enabling law — that

allows him to directly intervene in the Venezuelan economy to address a variety of social issues.

Venezuela's revolution will largely depend on how Chavez uses this power. If he quickens the tempo of the revolution by nationalizing sectors of the economy that will then begin to instantly produce for social need — housing, transport, banking, food, etc. — Chavez's base will enthusiastically respond, and the right-wing danger that currently threatens Venezuela will be pushed back into the gutters where it belongs.

Chavez must also use the enabling law to further empower the self-organization of working people through strengthened neighborhood community organizations, to neighborhood militias where the people themselves are armed and organized to protect their communities from violence and crime, and to workers control over industries.

If Chavez fails to use his new executive powers aggressively and effectively, the majority of working people will not respond, and their actions in the streets will continue to dwindle, allowing for a larger presence of the right wing.

The Latin American-wide revolution is in danger of falling back into a dark period, like the decades after Allende's death, when right-wing dictatorships dominated the continent with full support from the U.S. government.

The clock is ticking. Working people in Venezuela cannot constantly be revolutionary, since it takes enormous amounts of energy and effort. Chavez can stimulate their activity or subdue it, based on the actions he takes with the enabling law. The fate of the revolution hangs in the balance.

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