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WSF Caracas: Shroud for Venezuela's social movements

Excerpt

Rafael Uzcategui

Spring, 2006

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In the last four years Venezuela has undergone a polarization induced by the top players vying for power: the old "punto fijista" bureaucracy (Fedecamaras, CTV, political parties) against the new Chavez bureaucracy that has supplanted the previous one. This antagonism, false as much as real vs. pretended exercise of power, sustained and amplified by the media, has benefited those who have cast themselves as legitimate voices of the sector of Venezuelan society they claim to represent.

Part of the demobilization of the social movements answers to this logic: having taken part in, and assumed blindly the political agenda imposed from above, postponing their own claims. Another chapter belongs to the expectations created by some of the social activists faced with a "progressive and left" government, spokesmen of a discourse that assumes the lan-

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guage of the movements but whose policies go in the opposite direction.

The former U.S. ambassador to Venezuela, John Maisto, told the press: "Chavez has to be evaluated by what he does, not by what he says." This explains why, in spite of diplomatic bruising, Venezuela makes her best deals with the most dynamic sectors of global capitalism, including the Big Brother from the North, which consumes over 60 percent of the energy exports leaving our ports. Here, we need to clarify that international geopolitics is radically different from that of the Cold War. As long as countries keep to their roles assigned by economic globalization, they can have the local politics they like best.

This is precisely the Venezuelan case not only on oil and energy matters counting on more than \$60 a barrel, the highest prices ever—but also in the most dynamic sectors of the world's economy: banks, finances and telecommunications. Also, remember that Caracas continues to be a punctual payer of its external debt and obeys without any flack, the obligations contracted with the IMF.

This is the context in which the World Social Forum will take place on these shores of the Caribbean: with demobilized local social movements and with no freedom of action, with a government that will finance it and even brags about it in advertisements and press conferences, at the beginning of a year of presidential elections and with the tribune of the WSF as the ideal starting point in the electoral campaign. The lack of operative social networks and infrastructure of citizens initiative, the event's logistics: room and board, transportation, will be provided by the Venezuelan army for the lesser delegations and by the Hilton hotel chain for those of higher strategic importance for the national executive, as has been the tradition in previous "revolutionary" councils in Caracas.

As a movement, Chavism—where the main spokespeople of the committee promoting the WSF in Caracas belong—in seven years has only recognized as players those who submit to the

leadership of Hugo Chavez, therefore his declarations regarding the realization of a pluralistic forum sound like demagogic speech for the peanut gallery. In this sense, this event will deepen the current dispersal of social elements and will not, in our opinion, change anything.

Because of this and in spite of all the difficulties of the lack of resources and infrastructure and the asymmetry, a group of us believe it's necessary to have an event parallel to the WSF (in the same city and during the same days) to insure that energy policy discussions, concentration of power, militarism, autonomy and new social movements, the model for the development of the mine industry and the environment, alternative communications and counter-power will take place, opening the possibility to spread other versions of what's happening in Venezuela. To this we add the degradation experienced by the WSF: it being controlled by Non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and sanitized social groups such as ATTAC and Greenpeace, as well as the manipulation by left political parties as platforms for propaganda. Besides, the Latin American situation opens up new agendas for discussion which we feel will not be sufficiently considered at the WSF: the fact that several South American governments are "left" and how their social policies have been incapable...of reducing poverty, promote structural changes, preserve the environment and safeguard the rights of minorities, since they limit themselves to capitalism with a human face. We think our event, the Alternative Social Forum (ASF) can be one of the many necessary spaces for gathering and dialog among different grass roots movements, in order to establish our claims and elaborate our agenda of events and mobilizations, without interference from anybody outside its own dynamic.