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## **Express summary of Venezuela's situation for curious people and/or the poorly informed**

El Libertario editorial collective

February 2014

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On February 4<sup>th</sup>, 2014, students from the Universidad Nacional Experimental del Tachira (Experimental University of Táchira), located on an inland state of the country, protested due to the sexual assault of a fellow female classmate in lieu of the current insecurity situation of the city. 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, being at the same time repressed and some of them incarcerated. The wave of indignation had the context of the economic crisis, the shortage of first necessity items and the crisis of basics public services, as well as the beginning of the enforcement of an economic plan on behalf of the President Nicolas Maduro.

Two opposing politicians, Leopoldo Lopez, and Maria Corina Machado, tried to capitalize on the wave of discontent rallying for new protests under the slogan “The Way Out” and try to pressure 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 Democratica (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 12<sup>th</sup>, 2014, people from 18 cities protested for the release of all of the detainees and in rejection of the government. In some cities, inland, 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, Ultimas Noticias (Latest News), who receives the biggest advertising budget from the government, reveals through photographs, that the murderers were police officers. As a response to this, Nicolas Maduro stated on National television and radio broadcast that police enforcement had been “infiltrated by the right wing”.

Repression against protesters not only uses police and military enforcement agencies, it incorporates the participation of militia groups to violently dissolve the protests. A member of PROVEA, a human rights NGO, was kidnapped, beaten and threatened to 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 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 has been the social media networks, specially twitter. The use of personal technological devices has allowed the record keeping

through videos and photographs of ample aggressions of the repression forces.

Human rights organizations report detainees all over the country (many of them already released), the number has surpassed 400, and they have suffered tortures, including reports of sexual assault, cruel treatment, inhumane and degrading. As this is being written 5 people have been murdered in the context of the protests.

In his speeches, Nicolas Maduro, stimulates the protesters that are against him to assume even more radical and violent positions. Without any criminalistic investigation, he automatically stated that each deceased person has been murdered by the same protesters, whom he disqualifies permanently with all of the possible adjectives.

However, this belligerence seems not to be shared by all the Chavista movement, because a lot of it's bases are waiting for what happens next, without any expressions of support. Maduro has only managed to rally public employees to the street protests he has done. In spite of the situation and due to the grave economic situation he faces, Nicolas Maduro continues to make economic adjustments, being the most recent, the increase of the tax unit.

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 done in many parts around the country and are lacking in center and direction, having being called through social media networks. In the protesters themselves, there are many diverse opinions about opposing political parties, by which it is possible to find so many expressions of support and rejection at the same time.

In the case of Caracas they are starred specially by middle class sectors and college students. On the other hand, in other states, other popular sectors have joined the protests. In Caracas the

majority of the petitions are political, freedom for the detainees y the resignations of the president, while in other cities social demands are incorporated, such as inflation, scarcity and lack of proper public services. Even though some protests have turned violent, and some protesters have used fire guns against police and militia groups, the majority of the protests, specially outside of Caracas, remain peaceful.

The Revolutionary Independent Venezuelan Left (anarchists, sectors that follow Trotsky, Marx, Lenin and Guevara) don't have any incidence in this situation and we are simple spectators. Some of us are simply 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 amongst its population, explaining why the opposing protesters have the same "content" problem as the bases of support for the government. But while the international left wing continues to give its back, and support without any criticism the government's version of "the coup", it leave thousands of protesters to the mercy of the most conservative of opposition's political parties, without any reference to anti-capitalists, revolutionaries and true social change that could influence them.

In this sense, the detention of Leopoldo Lopez, conservative opposition leader, tries to make his own figure the center of a dynamic movement, that up until this moment, that this is been written, had surpassed the political parties of the opposition and the government of Nicolas Maduro.

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