

Chávez' death: Neither in mourning nor celebration, time for social struggles to become autonomous!

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When an illness becomes serious, when medical attention becomes a vehicle for myopic, politically motivated decisions and when a patient becomes drunk with power, it can only end this way. The strongman has died, and in so doing, he has initiated a substantial shift in the Venezuelan political landscape.

What used to be the regime's greatest strength has suddenly turned into its defining weakness: it was all Chávez, and, without him, the only solution is to fabricate an absolute commitment to his memory and his plans for succession. The government's true fragility can now be seen, a government which tried to demonstrate its "popular, socialist" character via a grotesque personality cult, a practice that has now been reduced to the empty invocation of spirits. The deceased himself is to blame for this outcome as the secrecy around his illness was propelled by the same motivations as the extreme centralisation of power around him, while the lack of ideological coherence amongst his followers has left them scrapping for crumbs. The high-level "rojo-rojito" [chavista red] bureaucrats and the upper echelons of the military are best placed to benefit, as they negotiate impunity for their various misdemeanours and corruptions.

For the right-wing and social democratic opposition, the new situation finds them unable to overcome their losses of the presidential elections of October 7 and the regionals of December 16, offering a "yuppy populism" which promises voters that they will maintain and fine-tune the clientelist tools of governmental power which were so useful to Chavez. This accommodation assumes the belief that a fortuitous metastasis has brought them within reach of the power that their greed, mistakes, laziness and incompetence had kept them away from, power they will wield with similar stupidity and greed as the Chavista bolibourgeoisie.

The backdrop to this load of petty opportunism – from both the Gran Polo Patriótico [the Chavista coalition] and the Mesa de Unidad Democrática [the opposition coalition] – is Venezuela, a country that faces its own problems: out of control inflation, rising unemployment and precarious jobs, the devaluation of the currency, shocking personal insecurity, crises in electricity and water provision, education and health systems in decline, a housing shortage, obsolete – or incomplete – public works, a demagogic approach which pays attention to only the most extreme

scarcities experienced by the most desperate people... a whole host of other problems which are equally disastrous.

These issues are not the central concern of the two gangs in competition for Miraflores [the President palace/seat] and the oil booty. Our collective response must be to not relent to their blackmail: support at the ballot box in exchange for 'solutions' that either never materialise or are ludicrously inadequate. Now is the time to overpower the rotten powers that be and build – from below – a real democracy of equality, social justice and freedom. We must unleash the generalised anger caused by our suffering, and convert it into autonomous social struggles, self-managed and extensive. We must spell out for the politicians in power that we don't need them, neither as intermediaries nor as gracious givers of what we ourselves can construct – united and from the base – without any need for “clean hands” or “red berets”.

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