

No to the US-sponsored coup attempt in Venezuela!

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The struggle for power has entered a new stage in Venezuela. It is likely to be a decisive one. On Wednesday, January 23, Juan Guaidó, hitherto chairman of the right wing dominated parliament, declared himself interim president of the country at a mass rally of the opposition forces. Within a matter of minutes, Donald Trump and the US administration declared their support for this self-appointed president, recognising him as the sole legitimate representative of the country.

"I will continue to use the full weight of the economic and diplomatic power of the United States to press for the restoration of democracy in Venezuela", the US president read out in a prepared statement.

Clearly, this was not only an endorsement of the right wing opposition's struggle to oust President Nicolás Maduro and take political power, but also a call on the Venezuelan armed forces to rise against the Bolivarian regime and 'restore democracy' by a coup.

No wonder such illustrious democrats as the semi-fascist Brazilian President, Jair Bolsonaro, the neo-liberal Argentine President, Mauricio Macri, or the right wing conservative Colombian President, Iván Duque, joined in. Imperialist democracies like Canada, the head of the EU council, Donald Tusk, and its High Representative for Foreign Affairs, Federica Mogherini, quickly followed the US lead. Even though they did not succeed in blackmailing the Organisation of American States to follow suit, they did persuade 12 Latin American states to issue a statement that they did not recognise Maduro as Venezuela's president.

Some countries, Cuba, China, Turkey, Russia and Nicaragua, have rejected the right wing's drive for power, but clearly China, Russia and Turkey have done so for their own political, economic and geo-strategic interests. Coming from them, a rejection of 'interference in other countries' is a hypocritical and cynical farce.

No wonder these self-proclaimed defenders of national sovereignty will find little resonance amongst the masses of the world. More importantly, they will not do anything to help the Venezuelan masses, the workers and peasants of the country, to defend the gains they made in the first decade of the 'Bolivarian revolution'.

No less farcical are attempts by countries like Mexico and Spain to act as mediators between the Maduro government, the opposition and its imperialist backers. Only an idiot could believe that the Venezuelan opposition, having opened an all out struggle to oust Maduro and install a pro-US regime, let alone Trump himself, would call a halt to the coup in its decisive days. Only if they fail in their goal, might they try to use such mediators to open a 'transition' period, but only to gain at the negotiation table what they could not win on the streets.

At the moment, the decisive question for the opposition is not 'democracy?' but whether they can break the loyalty of the army to the regime. If Maduro loses the support of the generals, or if the High Command itself loses control of important sections of the army, this would lead to a more or less bloody overthrow of the president or else to a civil war. At that point, the US would clearly be prepared to intervene, either openly under pretexts like the 'defence?' of its embassy or US citizens, by military support of the opposition or by supporting intervention by its Brazilian or Colombian allies. The coming days are likely to be decisive in determining future developments.

Fight the right, but no illusions in Maduro!

By aiming to overthrow Maduro, the right is clearly trying to exploit the current economic, social and political crisis of the Bolivarian regime. In recent years, Venezuela has been hit by adverse international economic developments including declining oil prices and rising debts. The desperate measures of the government have made matters worse, allowing the 'Bolivarian?' bourgeoisie, bureaucrats and middlemen to enrich themselves whilst the masses have been impoverished.

Hyperinflation has rendered the national currency virtually worthless. It has deprived the masses of the means of paying for life's necessities, apart from the few with access to foreign currencies. It has left the shops empty. No wonder the right wing, pro-US opposition has been able to rally sections of the impoverished masses, although the Western, pro-coup media may well exaggerate such support.

When things began to go wrong, Maduro resorted to repression and rigging elections because no real democracy, based on councils of workers', poor people's and peasants' delegates, was created under Chavez and because the army was not replaced by a popular militia. This meant the masses themselves could take no action, the economic and moral foundations of their self-confidence were undermined and the opposition was able to gain mass support beyond the pampered middle classes.

Together with the after effects of the world financial crisis, this cruelly exposed the utopia of the 'Bolivarian revolution?', a strategy based on the belief that it was possible to reconcile the interests of Venezuelan big capital, the privileged life of the urban middle classes, with improved living standards and cultural conditions for the workers, the peasants and the poor via social programmes.

Already, under Chavez, this utopian 'socialist?' project was running into its own contradictions, under Maduro the regime became one of permanent crisis. In turn, it had increasingly to base its own power on the military and the state bureaucracy, thereby undermining its own social base even more. In political terms, its dictatorial aspect become more and more overt and it turned against the left Bolivarian opposition, combining a bonapartist presidency with pseudo-democratic forms like the self-selected 'constituent assembly?.'

While it is clear that the Bolivarian government and Maduro have proved unable to lead Venezuela out of the current crisis, it would be wrong, and one-sided, to only blame their incompetence and corruption for the current crisis. The coup attempt is part of a reactionary roll back in the whole of Latin America, where the US and important sections of the national bourgeoisies have declared war on all reformist or left-populist governments.

Success for Guaidó's coup would not benefit the poor or the masses at all. It would just install another right wing regime to re-establish the power of the US multinationals and the traditional oligarchy. It would not solve any of the social issues and certainly it would not challenge the country's dependence on the world market and imperialism.

It might strengthen the US as against its Russian and Chinese rivals, who have gained something of a

foothold in Venezuela, and it would further isolate the Cuban regime. This is, of course, the White House's very intention. Certainly, any regime established by a successful coup will not be 'democratic'. Rather it will do all it can to destroy all the gains, economic, social and organisational, that the masses gained under Chavez and which have not yet been withdrawn by Maduro.

Therefore, the working class, the peasants, the poor in Venezuela should not give any support to the coup. They must fight it, but without any illusions in Maduro and his policy. Indeed, they need to withdraw any political support for his disastrous programme.

Instead, they need to demand immediate measures to enable them to defy a US intervention, or the army, if it goes over to supporting the right. They need to demand the arming of the workers, the peasants and the poor who want to prevent a US-sponsored coup!

They also need to demand measures, and take steps themselves, to address the scarcity of essential supplies of food, fuel and medical supplies, to deal with the burning question of hunger, caused largely by US sanctions and hoarding of goods. This can only be done by confiscation of the private capitalists in this sphere and by creating direct links between town and countryside.

Clearly such steps could not only help to defy the coup-attempt, they could also help to address the political and economic crisis; the need for a revolutionary alternative to the Bolivarian leadership, the 'Bolibourgeoisie' and the bureaucracy. Venezuela does not suffer from 'too much socialism', but from a lack of socialist measures. Only by decisive action in this field can the crisis be addressed, an emergency plan under control of the workers and masses be imposed, and a workers' and peasants' government be established.

International solidarity

Given the interference of the US and its allies, the working class and the left internationally must not stand aside. They need to mobilise against support for the counterrevolution in Venezuela by the imperialists and by other reactionary regimes.

They need to organise protests against the coup and solidarity action. They must rally the entire working class movement under the slogans 'Hands off Venezuela! Down with the US-sponsored coup!'

They need to demand the total cancellation of Venezuela's foreign debt and oppose any recognition of the "interim president" or aid to the rightist opposition!

The importance of the development in Venezuela for the international working class movement must not be underestimated. Whilst not giving any political support for Maduro and his regime, it needs to recognise that an overthrow of this regime by the right wing opposition would be a defeat not only for a corrupt, 'left'-bonapartist regime, but for the working class and popular masses. It would mark another victory for the extreme right, neo-liberalism and US-imperialism and it would surely be a big step towards further such attempts in countries like Bolivia or Cuba.

A victory of the forces of reaction would not only oust Maduro. It would be a coup against the working class and popular masses, aiming to preclude any solution of the Venezuelan crisis in their own favour.

The catastrophe of 'Bolivarianism' proves the need to turn to a real revolutionary perspective, involving the expropriation of the big capitalists, the replacement of the standing army by a working people's militia, and a planned economy under the management of the workers. It needs, in short, the perspective of permanent revolution, which includes that revolution's spread to all the countries of the region and beyond.

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