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Reforms take away what is gained through the struggle

El Libertario editorial collective

November 2007

Once again we must consider the dilemma of whether to participate or not in the electoral contest (referendum), this time with the difference that it is not a case of choosing a candidate but rather constitutional norms for the government of collective life. This situation requires careful reflection. If we heed current positions what we have is a ruling party that accepts en masse the reforms proposed by the Boss and increased embarrassingly in a premeditated manoeuvre by a servile National Assembly. The absurdities of the original constitutional reforms were so many that it set the scene for a comical fictitious debate which resulted in a plastering of equally aberrant additions. There is no serious debate of content and reasons, only discourses that are submissive to the tyrant, without any other sustaining logic than the desire to keep him in power. The rhetoric does not even justify some proposals without declining into nonsense and open contradictions. On the other hand the institutional opposition stumbles in the darkness, not knowing how to confront it, relying on discourses and spokesmen from the past. They have content themselves

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Retrieved on 2020-04-06 from libcom.org

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with showing through the media a small part of the absurdities that the Constitutional Reform contains- precisely those parts that threaten their own narrow interests- the radical rule changes of the political game and some of the resultant consequences, without any clear position or defining any sort of campaign in a concrete direction.

Thus, we suggest that faced with the alternatives of either voting for the rejection of the Constitutional Reform or abstaining, it is better to renounce participation in the Referendum and promote abstention. The timid questions that arise from the grass roots supporters of the Chavez regime clearly demonstrate the general level of analysis and understanding of the proposals, highlighting the infantilisation of the discourse promoted equally by the leaders of the militaristic pseudo-left in power and the rightwing and social democrat opposition. And so we can partially see the logic behind the rush to change what up until recently has been sold as the 'best constitution in the world'. The oil bonanza also allows the executive to increase its broad client network in readiness for the coming electoral showdown. In addition to all this is the clear opportunism by which, bypassing proper electoral norms, the Government conducts its 'Yes' campaign, forcing the support of public sector employees and everyone else who is dependant on public finance. It is not difficult to be reminded of the precariousness and lack of independence of the electoral process, as is illustrated by the trajectory of the last head of the CNE (National Electoral Council), Jorge Rodríguez, who is now executive Vice-President.

We believe that with or without voters the Reform will be passed. However through abstention and the absence of the electorate it is possible to make it illegitimate, even when it is legal. A very low number of voters in the coming poll would be a way of debilitating the regime from making any further moves, demonstrating that there is no 'revolution' in popular participation but rather a deepening of presidential personal-

ism. If you believe that this is unimportant because the Government will consolidate its power anyway (which will happen regardless), or because people prefer to be on the winning side even when its victory is deceitful or fraudulent, remember that there is always a space to negate the validity of the leadership due to its illegitimacy. An illegitimate Government, despite its maintaining itself in power, dissolves the tacit relationship of obedience that the population bestows upon it, removing, albeit partially, the collective acceptance of its activity, and thus the implementation of its mandates have to be based increasingly on the authoritarian exercise of power.

A significant abstention would mark the separation of the people, their aspirations and desires from those who hold State power, as it would similarly mark the separation of the discourse from the facts, breaking the voluntary servitude that makes it possible to govern. It would also highlight the failure of the State as an institution that manages collective life, at least in terms of the present militarist and individualist configuration. Of course the transition from the current situation to a clear and coherent horizon of social justice and liberty will not be achieved in a short period of time. The avoidance of short-cuts and a focussing on the reconstruction of belligerent and autonomous grass roots social movements is, without doubt, a long road, but it is also the most realist. A first step in this direction would be a complete understanding of what we are living and what confronts us in this country, a perspective that is both realist and utopian, which will not be found in the ballot boxes next December.

It is also relevant to consider the situation after the ineluctable ratification of the Reform. From January 2008 new powers granted by the National Assembly to the President, based in the approved constitution and through the mechanism of the Ley Habilitante (which gives Chavez the ability to pass laws without recourse to Congress) will be established. It will be necessary to take away efficiency from the offensive

prepared by the ruling party in order to have absolute power in his(Chavez's) hands over the nation. We underline the fact that Governmental and State actions to imprison public opinion in their own hands have already begun. This process implies a set of measures tending towards silencing dissidence, criminalizing protest, squashing any sort of opposition to the State and leading the country in an authoritarian manner ready to punish dissenting attitudes, calling for its disqualification through worn out epithets in order to lay the basis for punitive responses.

The State's economic boom is not exclusively subordinate to the price of a barrel of oil, but also through the expansive policy of public spending increased through neo-liberal policies and funded by taxation. In other words it is not simply a problem of income but also of expenditure and this implies an avalanche or snowball effect that is impossible to control. It is in this context that the authoritarian administration in the service of global energy capital is at risk. The plans of social support are financially backed up by the current surplus of funds, but if this ceased to be the case, due to the overwhelming financial liabilities of the state, it would be necessary to employ regressive policies that would negatively affect the population such as future devaluations, tax increases, cutbacks in the Misiones program and other measures aimed at maintaining spending levels. It is necessary to emphasize that despite the immense propaganda deployed, the social policies implemented by the 'Bolivarian revolution' have not significantly improved the quality of life of the population and have increased the social debt in terms of housing, urban security, health, education, employment and social security. These factors will generate social conflicts that will be suffocated by different repressive means according to each case.

Faced with this panorama, those of us who don't renounce liberty and social justice must prepare ourselves to confront a general increase of coercion and collective control. This must

be done without becoming paranoid; we know that we are not faced with the military government of Myanmar but rather an expression of neo-militarism as an efficient model for maintaining the despotic domination of Venezuelan society, in the service of, we repeat, the global energy market. All of this suggests that we must prepare, from taking measures for personal security to making ready for the escalation of repression that will be legitimized by the constitution that will be approved in December and that will consecrate the architecture of the totalitarian State. Moving beyond the conservative and reactionary elements of the media driven opposition, the social struggle must confront the governmental Leviathan developing new, creative and unexpected forms of organisation and resistance.