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Venezuela

Venezuelan socialists say: "We won't retreat in the face of threats"

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Marea Socialista is a socialist organization in Venezuela which was part of the Bolivarian revolution led by Hugo Chávez from the beginning. It joined the United Socialist Party of Venezuela (PSUV) when it was founded by Chávez in 2007, but left it last year in protest against its political direction under his successor as President, Nicolas Maduro.

On June 10, Marea's national headquarters were raided by police—a sign, say its members, of the Maduro government's increasing repression against the left. In this statement published at the Aporrea.org website and translated by Todd Chretien for socialistworker.org, the organization demands answers about the raid and calls on the government to respect rights of dissent and protest.

On Friday, June 10, at approximately 11 a.m., the national headquarters of the Marea Socialista (Socialist Tide in English, MS by its initials in Spanish) was raided. A squad of heavily armed CICPC police officials entered our premises. The raid was authorized in a judicial order signed by Judge Denisse Bocanegra Díaz related to Case No. 9 C S-1.329-16 in response to a request filed by the Public Ministry.

Without any real explanation, without informing us of the contents of the judicial complaint, and without reasons given for the display of force, the officials left 30 minutes after entering our offices without finding anything for which they were supposedly searching.

Based on the operation's disproportionate show of force and its lack of justification, MS considers it a serious violation of our political liberties, which have already been very limited in the country. Marea Socialista's National Working Group reminds the public that this isn't the first time pressure of this sort has been brought to bear against our organization. Retaliations, threats, violations of privacy, firings and restrictions of social and political rights of MS leaders and activists have been occurring over the last three years, increasingly over the past six months.

One of the most shameful examples involved five separate branches of the state obstructing MS in the process of attaining electoral status. While the National Electoral Commission rejected the name we requested, the Supreme Court delayed our appeal against the CNE's decision, and the Public Ministry, in a semi-feudal interpretation of the law, had the gall to decide that MS could not use the name "Socialist" because, according to the designated state attorney, we are not socialists (!?)—an argument that, besides being totalitarian, is ridiculous. As all this was taking place, the executive and president of the previous National Assembly launched an intense campaign of retaliation, disqualification and political persecution against us, using all the means of communication available to the state.

Word spread quickly about today's raid, prompting a call to MS leaders by the director of the CICPC, in which he first claimed that he was unaware of the operation and asked us (!?) for explanations. Then, in a subsequent call, he tried to explain that the raid was actually unrelated to MS. However, we reject this excuse for the following reasons:

1. The office that was raided has been the MS national headquarters for three years, it is identified with MS flags and placards, and public political activities are organized in this space, the majority of which are widely publicized and open to the whoever cares to participate. Moreover, besides organizational operations, all sorts of other activities take place at the office, including press conferences, seminars and workshops.

2. The raid was conducted under the authority of a judicial order requested by a prosecutor and signed by a judge. The police agents were identified in the order, and it was issued four days before it was executed. The scale of the

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operation, the overt show of force and the menacing deployment all had, in our opinion, the clear objective of intimidation and restricting the political rights of citizens established by the National Constitution.

3. As demonstrated above, this was not an isolated action. And it not only MS that is sufferingâ€”the raid forms part of the daily outrages committed against others who are only defending or claiming their rights. It marks the consolidation of an authoritarian trend that has been developing in the government and which is being translated into actions conducted by the security forces. This trend, in almost every case, is supported by sectors of the judiciary, officials of the Public Ministry, other branches of government, and media outlets under government control.

As we have stated in editorials, articles, opinion pieces, interviews, meetings and all the means available to us, the current declaration of a state of emergency represents a fresh blow to democracy. Indeed, it provides a context to the raid. The same is true of the approval of the Arco Minero decree [authorizing oil exploration by foreign firms in a special zone], which, besides promoting ecocide, represents a miserable surrender of sovereignty and resources to transnational corporations as well as illegal restrictions of social, labor, economic and political rights.

The disrespectful way citizens are forced to stand in humiliating queues for basic necessities is authoritarian. As are arbitrary rationing, cuts and suspensions of basic services, and the daily militarization of cities. As are the obstacles, maneuvers and tricks that interfere with the possibility of recalling elected officials, one of the most advanced political rights in our Constitution. As is the lack of access to food and health care suffered by the neediest people.

Faced with these outrages, Marea Socialista declares: As militants committed to the Bolivarian project, which is bastardized and manipulated by the current leadership of the Unified Socialist Party of Venezuela (PSUV) and the government, we will continue with our struggle. We denounce corruption and official impunity, unmasking the anti-democratic character of the measures put in place by this government. We will struggle to reconstruct the national project that has been demolished over the last three years by inefficiency, arrogance and cynicism.

We will continue to struggle for our ideas and our rights as well as those of the population as a whole, and we demand the unrestricted observance of the Constitution.

We will continue to organize in our headquarters, as we have done all along, and we will not back down against threats, pressure or retaliation.

We declare that the leadership of both the PSUV and the conservative Democratic Unity Roundtable [MUD, by its initials in Spanish] do not represent us, and we will continue on the path of building a new political force.

Finally, we demand that all those responsible for this raid provide a public clarification of the facts and clear Marea Socialista of any related charges.