

Chavistas open fire, injure eight protestors in Caracas

Peter Gelderloos

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On 7 October, masked gunmen opened fire on student protestors in Caracas, Venezuela, who were returning from a protest against President Hugo Chavez's proposed Constitutional reforms. Thousands of students marched on the Supreme Court protesting the reforms, which Chavez proposes to pass by referendum and critics say consolidate executive powers, giving the President control of the Central Bank, abolishing presidential term limits, expanding state of emergency powers, and creating new provinces to be governed by centrally appointed officials. These authoritarian changes are paired with populist measures like reducing the voting age and decreasing the hours of the maximum work day.

After the protest, as students were returning to the Venezuela Central University (UCV), they were attacked by an armed group of Chavistas with gas grenades, knives, clubs, stones, and pistols. Anti-authoritarian students who had participated in the protest, though they lacked firearms and all but improvised weapons, counterattacked and forced the "pistoleros" to take refuge in a university building. Shortly, a much larger group of armed Chavistas arrived on motorcycle to rescue the first group. In total, eight student protestors were injured.

Two of the those injured are members of Venezuela's Anarchist Black Cross (ABC), a prisoner support group that opposes Chavez's dictatorial rule. They and other libertarian opponents of the Chavez regime have experienced heavy repression. One week earlier, police dispersed a major protest against the Constitutional reforms with water cannons and tear gas.

Very few leftwing media outlets have reported the attacks on the protestors. The corporate media continuously portray Chavez in a negative light, mainly on the basis of his socialist reforms, and the US has attempted to organize at least one coup attempt against Chavez, who himself originally tried to come to power in a military coup; thus many opponents of US imperialism raise Chavez to the stature of a popular hero, glossing over his authoritarian credentials, and repression of opponents. While the Chavez regime does face strong opposition from the country's business leaders, it has also been targeted by protests from students, antiauthoritarian groups, and indigenous peoples inhabiting the heavily exploited coal-producing regions. Similar habits of uncritical support for opponents of the superpower led to reduced and delayed recognition of state repression and abuses with the Sandinistas in Nicaragua and the Castro regime in Cuba.

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