

Democratización



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Introduction

The issue of equal opportunities is brought forth once more to the discussion table of social sciences. The irruption of egalitarianism in the rhetoric of the enemies of the free market and democratic societies has cornered one of the constitutive principles of the ethos of capitalist societies under the blow of the exclusive neoliberal, that of equal opportunities.

The anti-capitalist narrative has tried to subtract progressive force from the term that indicates societies' obligation to guarantee freedoms and conditions that enable the development of citizens' potential, to reach the levels of well-being and progress that they are capable of achieving by themselves, with no limitations other than their attitudes, skills and regulations that prevent the trampling of third parties in that race towards prosperity.

By imposing the collective over the individual in this narrative, all initiative is subordinated to the achievement of the common good. Thus, education, a classic and effective mechanism of upward social mobility, is assigned the mission of ideologically

training the new generations in values that guarantee the approval of a political project with a vocation to perpetuate it in power.

One of these values is that of “egalitarianism”. More than a value, it would be the eternal promise that would settle the inequalities generated by the capitalist system.

Now, this rhetoric is not exclusive to orthodox socialisms. It has crossed those borders and has become entrenched in populist projects as one of its most effective insignia to gain the sympathy and support of the masses.

In these pages, we will analyze the Venezuelan case seeking to monitor the transition from what we could call a political model with a vocation for social welfare and a promoter of equal opportunities to a socialist political model with populist ingredients, which has led education to no longer be the most efficient mechanism for social advancement in Venezuela.

Equal opportunities. Different approaches

Non-Marxist sociology has developed the concept of equal opportunity very extensively. The conceptual development of this notion in the field of social sciences originated from the evident situation of inequality that the capitalist production system begot from its inception.

Inequality has been approached from different perspectives. Authors such as Weber¹ studied it from the point of view of the *status* that the person occupies in society; Parsons² approached

1 Max Weber, *Economy and Society* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1970).

2 Talcott Parsons, *Estructura y Proceso en las sociedades modernas* (Madrid: CSIC, 1966).

it from the *prestige*; Dahrendorf³, from the inequality generated by *power* and *authority*; and Lensky⁴, from the concept of *privilege*. For his part, Marx⁵ analyzes the issue as a consequence of the *ownership or not of the means of production*.

Regardless of the theoretical approach, what is clear is that the presence of inequality among men forces, either for economic, ethical or political reasons, to think about the necessary compensations to minimize or definitively eliminate the enormous gap between those who have and those who do not have means to procure a certain adequate standard of living.

Depending on the approach and the diagnosis on the causes of inequality, different solutions were rationalized and proposed. For example, orthodox Marxists propose that the solution passes through the extinction of what causes inequality, that is, eliminating the property regime of the means of production. In this way, property is socialized and wealth is administered by the State once it is seized by the historically oppressed class. Of course, this situation will continue until the arrival of communism when the State will disappear and equality between men is the norm and not the exception.

A more compensatory approach assumes that inequalities are collateral effects of a social and economic system that favors free will and free competition, where those with the best aptitudes and attitudes to be successful survive. From this approach, the fight against inequality is undertaken from the generation of equal opportunities so that everyone, regardless of their place on the social scale, can access wealth and well-being based on their

3 Ralf Dahrendorf, *Class and Class conflict in Industrial Society* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1957).

4 Gerhard Lenski, *Power and Privilege* (Princeton University Press, 1966).

5 Karl Marx, *18 Brumario* (Madrid: Alberto Corazón, 1976).

effort. That is to say that the place one occupies today does not determine which one they will occupy tomorrow.

Therefore, the inequality-equality binomial has occupied political thought and action. An important fact is that despite that the diagnoses are different and the alternative solutions are, thus, also different, there is an element in common, namely, the recognition of the existence of inequality and the need to reverse or minimize it.

We will focus, for now, on the Marxist point of view. It is evident that real socialism, inspired by Marxism-Leninism, rather than making inequality disappear, has generated other types of inequalities as perverse as those generated by the most radical capitalist liberalism. Historical evidence has shown that in these types of regimes a Parasitic Nomenclature of the State is created that uses the wealth generated by a population that is far removed from it.

So, behind a rhetoric that justifies the disappearance of social classes for the sake of equality among men hides a political model that is perpetuated over time, thanks to the curtailment of freedoms and dependence on a State that distributes poverty and feeds individuals' dependence on the government.

That egalitarian propaganda that fuels an illusion of a better future in the masses is then kept in impeccable and refined use. The arguments to justify the non-realization of equality revolve around two ideas that are always present in official speeches: a) equality will be achieved once the eternal process of "building socialism" is concluded; b) equality has not been achieved due to "attacks generated by the enemies of the revolution". This never fulfilled prophecy is what I have come to call rhetorical and utopian egalitarianism. It is a kind of promise eternally

unfulfilled, which has served as a spark to overthrow regimes and, once overthrown, to maintain the hope of those who have the least.

From another perspective, democracy as a political model has assumed a variety of positions on the issue. These range from radical liberalism to recent welfare positions.

The liberal tradition maintains that the issue of inequality is naturally inherent to the model of society based on the free market. In a world where free competition reigns, it is the survival of the fittest that determines inequality. In their sphere of freedom, individuals choose to compete or not. Those who compete contribute to individual and social progress. Those who do not compete, or who do not have the skills to do so, will become part of the natural hindrance of a system that did not deny them the freedom to compete.

Less radical positions hold that social equality in a market system is achieved when opportunities are open to all. So, together with the concept of social equality, the concept of equal opportunities is introduced, alluding to the freedom that society offers the individual to develop their full potential to be inserted in the economic circuit and achieve wealth and social well-being⁶.

From this point of view, the market society would guarantee individual development from the umbrella of freedom. Success would be based on individual action and the deregulation of everything that could impede the development of that potential. From this logic, everyone goes out to compete under the same conditions, with individual differences that will determine the

6 Carlota Solé, "El concepto de igualdad ante el mercado", *Revista española de investigaciones Sociológicas* I, no. 75 (1996): 21

success of some and the failure of others. Inequality would be the natural collateral effect of this dynamic of the exercise of freedom.

Faced with this classic vision, the populist formulas that have hit Latin American countries to a great extent lie at the other extreme. For regimes marked by populism, the issue of social equality is the center of political discourse. For Bobbio⁷, populist political formulas are those that consider the people as a homogeneous social group and as the exclusive depository of positive, specific and permanent values, being the main source of inspiration and constant object of reference by the leader. The populist discourse does not need political organizations as an intermediary, although they exist and are the organizational base of the charismatic leader.

Latin America as a whole was a breeding ground for the development of populism. Countries whose independence wars were forged by improvised armies under the command of Generals from the oligarchic classes, who, to attract landless peasants to their ranks, promised land, bread and work. The hope of owning land more than achieving independence was what configured a populist scheme of doing politics from the earliest moments of the nascent republics.

This political culture extended throughout the 19th century and well into the 20th century when the military dictatorships were overthrown and democratic regimes were established throughout the region. This change in the political model did not mean the disappearance of populism as a strategy to capture wills. On the contrary, it was exacerbated as a consequence of

7 Norberto Bobbio, *Liberalismo y Democracia* (México: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1996).

the need to captivate the masses to win their votes in the nascent electoral contests.

Populism, in addition to its rhetoric full of promises of social redemption, must be accompanied by a distribution mechanism to maintain the illusion of fulfillment of what was promised to the disinherited masses. The precarious public treasury is used for the distribution of gifts without demanding any compensation, beyond loyalty to the leader and the Party, linking impoverished majorities to the government via dependence.

Populist models tend to be of fragile sustainability since their governance resides in a distributive policy that does not encourage individual entrepreneurship or capital investment. This strategy, together with eventual expropriations to fulfill the promise of “giving exploiters a hard time”, create an environment of legal uncertainty that scares away any possibility of incoming national or foreign capital.

For populist regimes, social inequality is fought by distributing among those who do not have the wealth generated by the exploitation of natural resources that are in the hands of the State, by the imposition of exaggerated taxes on those who generate wealth or the confiscation of assets and properties to later be graciously distributed. The result is impoverished societies, with high levels of unemployment and poor public services. When these regimes cannot fulfill their promises due to lack of resources, they have to resort to repression to circumvent the claims and protests of a citizenry accustomed to receiving everything from the State.

Populism developed in the framework of societies with democratic regimes characterized by the peaceful alternation of power is another variant. This is the case of some Central American

countries that, even though are not efficient in generating wealth and maintaining good living conditions for the population, have been able to persist because the parties that have monopolized the sympathy of the great impoverished masses share the same populist political practices.

A third perspective is derived from democratic models with a social welfare approach. Its origins date back to the thrive of productivity with Taylorist and Fordist techniques and to the increasing automation of the industry. The increase in productivity in the United States meant the substantial improvement of wages, incorporating the mass of workers into consumption, with the well-known improvement of the quality of life.

Faced with the growth of wealth as a result of work, countless social demands in health, education and social services skyrocketed. In recent decades, citizens went from demanding the State only the protection of their freedoms, to demanding guarantees of greater social equality and the enjoyment of opportunities to improve the quality of life.

The distributive policy was based on social investment rather than direct subsidy. This is one of the differences with populism. State resources are invested to generate conditions of equality within a framework of freedoms that encourages private initiative and the potentially productive development of individuals.

By implementing universal social service insurance policies, opportunities are equalized, considerably reducing the causes that could originate labor and social conflicts due to the improvement of living conditions.

Of course, as in any society whose State must have sufficient resources to achieve certain universal standards of living, any

situation of economic crisis that reduces GDP and therefore the amount of government resources through taxes, will cause collapses of these services, altering social peace in claiming acquired rights interrupted or abruptly minimized.

In these cases, the solidity of the institutions to make the corresponding adjustments and the maturity of the citizens will be key elements to overcome the difficulties without generating major political cataclysms.

Pre-Chavista democracy: opening and exhaustion of a range of opportunities

After a long tradition of military governments, with a very brief experience of civil government in 1945, Venezuela arrived at a democratic political model as of 1958. A coalition of political parties, together with the support of sectors of the Armed Forces, managed to remove General Marcos Pérez Jiménez from power. Once the dictatorship fell, this coalition organized democratic elections within a framework of freedom, progress, and social investment that continued to grow during the first two decades of democratic government.

During this period, the employment rate increased due to the emergence of new industries created with the help and financial aid of the Venezuelan State. This resulted in the migration of the peasant population to cities and industrial regions, increasing the demand for housing, health and education.

Employment was boosted thanks to the construction of roads, houses and industries. In terms of health, the Venezuelan Institute of Social Security was created to care for the health of workers, their pensions for disability and retirement. Schools were also built throughout the country to answer the educational needs of

the majorities, a debt that was due since the independence war until the mid 20th century.

Resources derived from oil royalties underpinned social spending in the creation of universal services. For a political scientist like Juan Carlos Rey, more than the establishment of a Welfare State, what he calls a Populist Conciliation System was organized in the country, consisting of a complex system of negotiation and accommodation of heterogeneous interests, in which the mechanisms of a utilitarian nature were going to play a central role in generating support for the regime and, consequently, in maintaining it⁸.

Without detracting from such an interesting appreciation, we rather believe that it was a modest but effective economic policy of Social Welfare, implemented in the context of a populist political dynamic as a means to attract the support of mostly popular social sectors, but at the same time multi-class by the alliances with influential economic and intellectual elites, to gain access to power through democratic means.

In our opinion, important achievements were made in terms of social policy thanks to oil. The first 20 years of post-dictatorship democracy consolidated a robust middle class and a union sector that, although not totally independent from political parties, developed a protest action that guaranteed acceptable working conditions for the majority of workers.

Perhaps the greatest achievement was obtained in education. The school infrastructure that still persists today throughout the national territory was built then. In the most remote corners you could find schools and lyceums in the cities allowed the academic

8 Juan Carlos Rey, La democracia venezolana y la crisis del sistema populista de conciliación, *Revista de Estudios Políticos*, no. 54 (1991): 543.

continuity of that great mass of children who joined the school system in the early 60s. By 1958 there were little more than 850,000 students enrolled at all levels of the educational system, a figure that increased by 496% by 1978, reaching more than 4 million.

The Gran Mariscal de Ayacucho Foundation, created in 1975, sent thousands of Venezuelans to the best universities in the world to pursue undergraduate and graduate degrees. Those professionals then returned to invest their newfound knowledge in the country.

At the fall of the dictatorship in 1958 there were only three public colleges (Central University of Venezuela, Andes University and University of Zulia) and two private universities (Santa María University and Andrés Bello Catholic University). Twenty years later autonomous universities rose from three to five with the University of Carabobo and the University of Oriente. Private universities increased from two to fifteen and the new category of experimental universities under the Ministry of Education amounted to sixteen by 1999⁹.

This policy of social investment was being restricted to the extent that oil income was decreasing. As of the famous Black Friday of February 1983, when the Bolívar –a currency that until then was among the strongest in Latin America– was devalued, a prolonged economic crisis began that added up to a political crisis of legitimacy of the parties that until then had rotated power in Venezuela.

Generalized corruption, the loss of leadership of the major parties, the reduction in social spending, the increase in unemployment, inflation, the increase in crime and the progressive

9 Reinaldo Rojas, *Historia de la Universidad en Venezuela*, *Rhela* 7 (2005): 73-98.

deterioration of the quality of life, among other factors, paved the terrain for a good part of the population to favor the frustrated attempts of *coups d'état* led by Hugo Chávez and later vote him into the Presidency of the Republic in 1998.

An electoral campaign with a populist, vindicating and righteous language captivated just over 30% of voters who, in the face of scattered candidacies and a high percentage of abstention, led retired Lieutenant Colonel Hugo Chávez to the presidency of the republic. The promise to destroy the corrupt elites, to “fry the heads of the *adecos* in oil” and to “pay the social debt contracted by the poor”, began a honeymoon phase between Chávez and the poor that allowed him to survive the oil strike at the end of 2002, the events of April 11, 2002 and the 2004 recall.

Chávez deployed a series of populist policies that set off the alarms of the productive sectors of the country and of the political class displaced from power. However, with oil income recovered by the rise in prices, Chavismo was able to capitalize on the most impoverished sectors thanks to social programs in education, housing, health and various subsidies, only sustainable given what was generated by the commercialization of crude oil.

In the midst of the populist distribution of oil income, misguided economic policies were implemented that discouraged investment in productive areas and made capital migrate to other countries, leading to company closures. The expropriations of businesses, factories and productive lands, labor immobility, price controls and the prevalence of an increasingly threatening presidential discourse against private companies bred a climate of legal insecurity and growing disinvestment which led to a prolonged economic contraction.

The Chavista period: educating to progress or to reproduce poverty?

Following the death of Chávez and the rise of Nicolás Maduro through severely contested elections, the country's economic situation had not improved. On the contrary, the persistent fall in oil prices coupled with disinvestment in the oil industry, and the deepening of the populist policy of subsidies and handouts to maintain citizen control, deterred potential capital that could boost an economy that was sinking due to the weight of corruption, poor management, hyperinflation and the bleeding populism of the precarious national treasury.

By 2017, the minimum wage had shrunk behind those paid by Cuba and Haiti. By 2018, Venezuelans received just US \$15.96 a month as minimum wage, by then the lowest in the region. By January 2021, the minimum wage did not even exceed US \$1 a month. The ENCOVI survey carried out in 2019¹⁰ revealed poverty levels of around 80% of the population.

The GDP has been in free fall since 2016. The slowdown of the economy in that year represented 44.3% less than the GDP of 2013¹¹. According to figures from the Central Bank of Venezuela, the Venezuelan economy had contracted by 15% in 2018 for the fifth consecutive year. For 2021, a 2-digit decline is expected.

Inflation rates have been growing like a tsunami since 2017. This increase was greater than 50% per month, closing each year-end with a percentage greater than 160%. This huge inflationary

10 Anitza Freitez (Coord) *Espejo de la crisis humanitaria venezolana*. (ENCOVI 2018, UCAB, UCV, USB). <https://www.proyectoencovi.com/encovi-2019>.

11 Banco Central de Venezuela, *Indicadores económicos*, (2020) <http://www.bcv.org.ve/#>

wave made Venezuela one of the three countries with the highest rates in the world. For 2021, an inflation of 100,000% is expected.

Regarding unemployment rates, the World Bank indicates that the government declared that unemployment was at 14.02% in 2015. The closure of companies, expropriations and low productivity increased unemployment in 2018 by 33.3%. In 2019, The International Monetary Fund¹² projected that by 2021 Venezuela would have an unemployment rate of 52%. It should be noted that these figures do not include underemployment or temporary and informal workers who, according to government statistics, are employed.

As for public services, since 2017, water began to become scarce, blackouts became common and telephone communications service began to deteriorate. It is noteworthy that in March 2019 Venezuela experienced the longest blackout in its history. It lasted between five and seven continuous days, depending on the regions. The lack of maintenance and investment in new technologies meant that the failures in the hydroelectric plants did not take long. In terms of connectivity, the country is located in the last eleven countries in the world.

The deterioration of education had already been foretold from the middle of the second decade of the year 2000. After an explosion of enrollment in all educational levels from the year 2003 by educational missions and the announcement of a supposed early victory in the field of literacy of adults, it is verified that, since 2007, school enrollment has dropped considerably. The most serious decline was in the initial grades where, according to

12 Fondo Monetario Internacional, *Perspectivas Económicas Regionales, REO* (Octubre 2020). En <https://www.imf.org/es/Publications/REO/WH/Issues/2020/10/13/regional-economic-outlook-western-hemisphere>

the figures provided by the Venezuelan Educational Memory, an average of 3 million students remained outside the classrooms by 2018¹³.

The change to online education due to the effects of the pandemic brought with it a decrease of approximately 4,967,660 students at all educational levels, according to figures provided by the Annual Venezuelan Educational Memory Bulletin published in January 2021. Furthermore, there is the gap between those who have access to technology and connectivity and those who do not, which has considerably widened inequality. The same has to do with educational quality, a matter pending evaluation when the pandemic ends.

Chávez's populist measures in education since 2002 were sustained thanks to high oil prices. His interest was to show enrollment statistics as if they were trophies of the revolution. It was about emulating Cuban propaganda as the most inclusive country in the region, while efforts to ideologize the school were repeatedly frustrated by the rejection of civil society to the different curricular proposals, more focused on training revolutionary militants than to educate quality students.

The stridency in terms of educational achievements was decreasing to the extent that huge budgetary resources were no longer available. Along with insufficient resources, the pandemic exacerbated the educational crisis that had dragged on since 2006. Not only in terms of the progressive decline in school attendance, since now the gap between those who have, or not, access to remote education is widening due to the lack of signal, equipment

13 Memoria Educativa Venezolana, Indicadores de escolaridad del sistema educativo escolar venezolano. Enero 2020 a Enero de 2021. *Boletín Memoria Educativa Venezolana* (2021). En: <http://saber.ucv.ve/handle/10872/20937>

or teachers trained in online education. Not to mention the high rates of teacher and faculty resignations for receiving paltry salaries that do not exceed US \$4 a month at best.

As for autonomous universities, the situation is just as dire. Budget suffocation has reached limit levels. These institutions today do not have the resources to even replace light bulbs. Teachers earn less than US \$10 a month and many have become part of the diaspora. This decapitalization of teachers and researchers has impacted scientific productivity in Venezuela. By 1998, Venezuela generated 4.8% of the scientific articles produced in Latin America and the Caribbean¹⁴. By 2020, this figure dropped to less than 0.3%¹⁵.

In 20 years of socialism in the 21st century, the Venezuelan middle class has become impoverished. Education, despite the peaks in enrollment growth and the creation of new universities, has not contributed to developing mechanisms for social advancement. It is pertinent to remember the words of a minister of education who in 2014 stated: “We are not lifting people out of poverty so that they join the middle class and aspire to become like the *scrawny*”^{16, 17}. These words clearly outline the intention of education in revolution which is not the achievement of prosperity.

14 Tulio Ramírez y Audy Salcedo, Inversión y productividad científica en Venezuela. ¿Una relación inversamente proporcional? *Revista de Pedagogía* 37, no. 101 (2016): 147-174.

15 Tulio Ramírez, La universidad autónoma venezolana y su lucha por sobrevivir al socialismo del Siglo XXI. Cinco propuestas para su rescate, *Revista Universidades* 71, no. 83 (2020): 53 a 72. ISSN: 2007-53-40.

16 Common term used to identify members the opposition, considered elites by the government.

17 “No es que vamos a sacar a la gente de la pobreza para que se conviertan en clase media y aspiren ser escuálidos”. Héctor Rodríguez, Statements at the MMPE (2014). En: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y7jb4koFi1M>

Once the pandemic is over, the generalized poverty situation will very likely continue to stimulate the diaspora of teachers of all educational levels, as well as the resignations of these professionals to undertake higher-paid jobs. The government will face this situation with the populist strategy of offering teaching positions to supporters who do not have the qualifications or the skills to teach. This will deprofessionalize the teaching career, which would further decline the already questioned academic quality of our students, from primary education to university.

Brief comment to conclude

Populist propaganda is based on the promise of “downward” egalitarianism. If, according to Chávez, “being rich is bad”, then simple logic would lead to conclude that being poor is good. This isolated phrase announced to Venezuelans the orientation of the revolution in economic and social matters. Their revolutionary logic intends egalitarian social programs not to get people out of poverty, but to instead establish themselves in it.

These programs have been financed with resources from third parties, whether private or from the national treasury. This establishes a difference with social welfare policies that promote or guarantee equal opportunities from an investment financed by the whole society through taxes or profits generated by State companies, but never based on outburst and confiscation of the proceeds generated by the private initiative. This is the great difference between populism and a democratic, responsible political model with political control by society through the institutions of the State.

It is precisely because of the lack of this control and the prevailing impunity that waste and embezzlement reign in

populist regimes. In them, the institutions of control tend to be in the hands of the Nomenclature, benefiting from the sweetness of power and turning a blind eye to prevailing corruption.

The need to maintain power at all costs, once all the wealth has been squandered, equates ideological and dictatorial regimes such as Cuba's or North Korea's with their populist variants with rootless democratic garb, such as Venezuela's and Nicaragua's.

In every case, the mission assigned to education is to sediment in the conscience of new generations the support necessary to perpetuate these political models, not to ensure that citizens can get out of a generalized poverty inherent to a political system that is proven inefficient in terms of economy and impoverishing regarding social life.

Conclusion

We dedicate our twelfth issue to reflecting on five areas of culture in Venezuela: humor, education, art, anthropology and social media. As we expressed before, it has been an approximation with which we do not pretend to reach a conclusive analysis. It is the photograph of a moment that we hope will transcend, because it describes the impetus and perseverance of those who, from different spaces, contribute to the liberation of our country.

In the five articles included in this issue, we find complex diagnoses, deep reflections and responsible hope, one that is based on two pillars: first, in the full awareness of those who understand that the goal of their efforts is worthwhile in itself and, second, sustained work that does not allow itself to be defeated by the ups and downs of the conjunctures and advances firmly overcoming the immediate culture —what José Ignacio Cabrujas called the *culture of operations* and today we could update it as a *culture of missions*— which at times has conspired against Venezuelan noblest ventures.

After editing this issue, some questions arise and open up new horizons for study and reflection. When reading the authors, we wonder how this authoritarian, complex and painful episode will affect —in Ortegian terms— the *psyche* of our country; how it will influence our "original impetus"; how our humor, our affections, our traditions will be marked; how will our goodness or eternal disposition to enjoy ourselves be transformed, or not.

Exploring the depth of our wounds and the way in which they have affected our Venezuelan soul is not a mere intellectual fact.

It is an exercise that can help to understand the difficulties of the present moment and to warn of future challenges. From now on, understanding “now” as a constant present, we can acknowledge that this reality that we are living –or surviving– will condition our culture and our political dynamics.

Recently, we have noticed signs that worry us, but we will not refer to all of them. We will only stop at one in particular. We have seen that uncertainty, fatigue and terror have led us to go from an “every man for himself” situation to a “dog-eat-dog” situation. A wave of intolerance among those of us who pursue the same goals of freedom is flooding the limited deliberative space that remains and seriously limiting encounters between people who have the right to think differently. As is characteristic of the 21st century, this trend is mainly manifested in social media, especially on Twitter, where we see forceful and irrevocable judgments of 280 characters and responses loaded with contempt for the opinion of others. Paradoxically, we also frequently see that those who subscribe to this dynamic then demand that political actors and society be willing to dialogue and conciliate. It is a contradiction that we are called to overcome.

We think –and propose– that a possible antidote to cure this tendency is personal encounter. Discovering the other, banishing stereotypes, transcending digital means, boasting good intentions, saying things by looking at each other, preparing arguments to better explain oneself, working to convince... it is an arduous and exhausting task. We believe that at this time it is necessary to rebuild the human bridges that have been blown up by the dictatorship's violence. And to do so, mere will is not enough, and can actually be reduced to dangerous voluntarism if divorced from the reality of things. It is a difficult task that requires political pedagogy and personal virtue. Perhaps going

back to what our democracy was can help us find our own paths. We are not orphans, and recognizing where we come from can shed some light on the future ahead of us.

The reality we are experiencing confirms the need to delve into the wounds that these decades of revolution have left in our soul as a people and to study how they have affected our culture and our political dynamics. This edition is a first approximation. It is up to us to find space and time to advance in that purpose.

Caracas, April 19, 2021

Paola Bautista de Alemán

Editor