



Politics

Venezuelan president says revolution must “wake up”

Socialist President Nicolas Maduro responded to this month's devastating electoral defeat with calls on his supporters – everyone from mayors, ministers, to grassroots social movements – to help him “renovate” and “rectify” the Bolivarian Revolution. In power since 1998, the Revolution now faces a parliament dominated by neoliberal lawmakers..

Page 3

After election win, opposition unveils neoliberal agenda

Celebrating its sweeping win in this month's National Assembly election, the US-backed opposition finally made public its plans to legislate on behalf of the country's former ruling classes in the business and banking sectors, among others. The opposition also reiterated plans to release violent leaders of anti-government protests including Leopoldo Lopez.

Page 4



Discontent hands US-backed opposition sweeping electoral win

Candidates of the opposition's so-called Democratic Unity Roundtable (MUD) coalition swept this month's National Assembly elections, winning 112 of 167 seats and securing a two-thirds majority that permits major legislative impositions on the socialist government of President Nicolas Maduro. Overlooking their previous claims that election authorities in Venezuela were involved in “widespread fraud on behalf of the regime”, opposition spokesmen are now using the 7.7 million votes they secured – in comparison to the 5.6 million secured by candidates of the Bolivarian Revolution – as evidence that President Maduro will be “unable” to carry out his mandate through 2019. In response, Maduro has called on the country's democratic and socialist forces to help him “rescue” the Revolution. [Page 2](#)

Maduro meets with thousands in people's street parliament

T/ Lucas Koerner
P/ Agencies

Thousands gathered outside the Miraflores presidential palace last week as part of a people's street parliament organized in response the crushing defeat suffered by the socialist government in legislative elections.

Having taken a two-thirds majority in the country's National Assembly, the opposition is now in a position to roll back many of the gains of the Bolivarian Revolution, from repealing key revolutionary legislation to passing a neoliberal legislative agenda.

Outside Miraflores, those present called on President Nicolas Maduro to carry out the



legislative agenda of the grassroots movements.

In the course of the assembly, Maduro arrived to address the crowd in an unannounced appearance.

“We will get out of this quagmire where the economic war and our own errors have landed us – where bureaucracy and corruption have enveloped the revolutionary policies”, declared the socialist leader, assum-

ing personal responsibility for the electoral defeat.

Standing on the hood of a car and surrounded by thousands, Maduro issued a call for “critical and self-critical debate revolutionary”.

Concluding his speech, Maduro invited 200 social movement leaders nominated by the popular assembly to join him for a special meeting that evening in Miraflores to plan and debate revolutionary strategy.

Opposition coalition already showing cracks

T/ Telesur English
E/ COI
P/ Agencies

Venezuela's right-wing opposition is suffering infighting just days after winning a majority in legislative elections.

In the latest volley of vitriol aimed within the so-called Democratic Unity Roundtable (MUD) coalition, party leader of Democratic Action (AD) Henry Ramos accused former presidential candidate Henrique Capriles of running “his own campaign”.

“It would be unheard of for us to disrespect the demands of the people ... after they have given us their confidence” Ramos said, accusing Capriles of failing to uphold the coalition's political priorities.

Capriles first sparked controversy when he failed to appear at the MUD's initial press conference responding to the results of the National Assembly election.

Then he infuriated many on the right when he held his own news conference at the same time the MUD had called their own. The incident prompted the MUD to initially postpone their conference. When the official coalition talk began, Capriles' speech was suddenly pulled from the MUD's official YouTube stream, a move that grated on some Capriles supporters.

Since the election, Ramos has repeatedly called for opposition unity, though he himself has sparked his own public spats with other opposition personalities.

Earlier this week Ramos appeared to catch other MUD leaders off guard when he told CNN Spanish the coalition plans to gut the AN's broadcasting service, ANTV. Other MUD figures quickly moved to downplay his remarks.

The MUD has long been wracked by infighting, with individual personalities vying for dominance of the right-wing coalition of over two dozen parties.

Discontent hands opposition sweeping electoral win

T/ Paul Dobson
P/ Agencies

Political tremors shook the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela after the country's National Electoral Council (CNE) announced that the US-backed opposition swept the 2015 National Assembly elections with 65% of the seats and 54.5% of the popular vote. While some polls indicated a narrow victory by the right-wing bloc was a possibility, none expected the neo-liberal opposition to win a two-thirds legislative majority.

Starting 5 January 2016, Venezuela's anti-socialist opposition will have 112 representatives (109 from the United Democratic Roundtable (MUD) and three from allied indigenous parties) in the National Assembly. The socialist bloc, on the other hand, won only 55 seats (53 from the United Socialist Party and 2 from the Communist Party). Those seated in this new National Assembly are expected to legislate through 2021.

As results came in close to midnight on the 6th December, the national picture quickly became clear, with Chavismo losing in some of its strongholds such as Catia and El Valle in Caracas, and Monagas, Barinas, and Vargas States. Celebrating went on into the early hours of the morning in opposition strongholds.



Pro-Government forces won majorities in just six of 24 states, mostly in the central plains which are predominantly rural and sparsely populated. The United Socialist Party of Venezuela (PSUV), founded by late President Hugo Chavez, reinforced its place as the largest revolutionary party – with 37% of the popular vote – well ahead of allies in the Communist Party (0.8%) and others such as Tupamaro and Redes.

Of the 112 opposition deputies, 33 belong to Primero Justicia Party, 25 to Accion Democratica, 21 to Un Nuevo Tiempo, and 14 to Voluntad Popular. Jailed opposition radical Leopoldo

Lopez is of Voluntad Popular, whereas opposition governor Henrique Capriles Radonski is of Primero Justicia.

Analysts from both sides have suggested that the MUD's 7.7 million votes (56.22% of votes) don't necessarily reflect a mass support for their political project, but rather a widespread discontent in the revolutionary ranks over the Maduro administration's inability to solve inflation, crime, inefficiency, corruption, and shortages, with a significant number of pro-government voters choosing the "protest vote" option of voting with the opposition.

Despite the great difficulties of recent years, the pro-government

socialist bloc won 5.6 million votes (40.9% of the popular vote).

"EXTRAORDINARY" PARTICIPATION

CNE President Tibisay Lucena characterized the 74.5% participation as "extraordinary", as once again Venezuelans demonstrated their democratic values and culture of political participation. In previous parliamentary elections in 2010, only 66.4% of the population participated.

Lucena also reiterated the "civic spirit" and the "perfect process" of voting day, which passed by without incident and in peace across the country.

Defense Minister, Vladimir Padrino Lopez, informed the nation that they had detected 78 minor electoral incidents, and that just seven people are now being processed by the police for crimes such as eating the ballot paper, attempting to enter an electoral center armed, or other.

"It has been an impeccable process", he explained, which has been carried out in "complete calm and peacefulness".

EXTENSIVE POWERS

The results mark a clear shift in the legislative power, which was previously dominated by a three-fifths majority of socialist lawmakers.

The extent of the win for the opposition alliance and their two-thirds majority means, according to the constitution, they now have the legal ability to: censure the Executive's naming of Vice-Presidents, Ministers, and Ambassadors; authorize exceptions to parliamentary immunity in the arrest and trial of deputies in accordance with the High Supreme Court; elect members of three other powers of State (Electoral - CNE, Judicial - High Supreme Court, Citizen - Ombudsman); reject international agreements proposed by the Executive; modify or revoke Organic Laws; and even call a constituent assembly to rewrite the constitution.

Venezuelan democracy considered "sophisticated and transparent"

T/ Paul Dobson
P/ Agencies

With more than 130 representatives from over 30 countries invited by Venezuela's National Electoral Council (CNE), the Mission of International Accompaniment for the National Assembly elections this month successfully concluded its mission in the Bolivarian Republic describing it as both "sophisticated" and "transparent".

On voting day, the mission verified "not only a people who were avid to participate, but also the calm respectful attitude both from the voting population as well as from the technical personnel and the citizens who were in charge of the voting booths".

"People coincided in showing order, respect, amiability,

and good manners", explained spokesperson Javiera Olivares, President of the Chilean College of Journalists.

Mario Nuñez, from the Dominican Republic, applauded the behavior of the military in assuring the logistics and security of the voting centers "which was strictly according to the norms, where no type of interference was seen".

The international mission was conformed of representatives from countries as diverse as South Korea, China, Russia, Mali, Greece, Bulgaria, Norway, Sweden, Switzerland, France, Germany, UK, USA, Benin, South Africa, Chile, Nicaragua, Argentina, Bolivia, Ecuador, Colombia, Brazil, Honduras, Mexico, Peru, Paraguay, and Panama. In its midst



were journalists, politicians, historians, academics, leaders of social movements, and lawyers, but the majority were electoral technicians.

The mission also included sub-missions from the Union of South American Nations (UNASUR), the Common Market of the South (MERCOSUR), the Council of Latin American Electoral Experts (CEELA), the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC), the Boli-

varian Alliance of the Peoples of Our Americas (ALBA), the Mercosur Parliament (Parlasur), and the Latin American Parliament (Parlatino).

The mission witnessed the 24 audits which the CNE performed on all areas of the equipment, including telecommunications, software, the touch-screen system, the ink, fingerprint technology, and the important citizens audit which enables the public to tally elec-

tronic votes with their respective paper ballots at the close of voting in 53.3% of the booths.

"For an electoral institution to receive a contingent of international personalities and experts in a program of international electoral accompaniment shows the maturity of the electoral organs in the region and the accumulated and shared experience on the premise of equality and self-determination" explained CNE President Tibisay Lucena upon receiving the mission.

Venezuela has used electronic voting machines since 2004, and its electoral system has repeatedly been recognized as one of the most transparent and secure in the world. Efforts to include sectors of society which previously didn't vote have been successful, and the creation of new voting centers mean that there is now an average of one voting machine per 500 voters, one of the lowest levels in the world.

Venezuelan president calls election results “a slap in the face to wake us up”



T/ Paul Dobson
P/ Agencies

Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro this month called for “renovation” and “rectification” of the Bolivarian Revolution following the disastrous outcome of this month’s parliamentary elections, inviting the country’s socialist forces to “open a critically debate about our Revolution’s future”.

“It is time to make a more conscious, accelerated, continuous, strategic Revolution” Maduro explained.

“We must leave behind the bureaucracy and the corruption which tied the policies of the Revolution up in knots”, he proclaimed on December 6th, soon after hearing the official results of the 2015 National Assembly elections.

While abstention was the principal cause of defeat for socialist candidates, the US-backed opposition did achieve a sufficient increase in votes to push their coalition into a new super majority that is sure to make 2016 a difficult year for Venezuelan democracy.

According to the official results, the US-backed opposition achieved a two-thirds super majority (112 of 167) in the

National Assembly, with some 7.7 million vote, while the socialist bloc obtained only 55 seats – with the support of 5.6 million voters. This difference in votes has led some in the opposition to propose President Maduro “must” resign even though he was elected for the 2014 – 2019 period.

Gubernatorial elections are scheduled for 2016, though many now expect the opposition to call a recall referendum next year in ongoing attempts to oust President Maduro.

Speaking to the press, Maduro insisted that socialist forces “must reconstruct the revolutionary majority”.

“This will come in time”, he affirmed.

President Maduro advised the Venezuelan opposition to “administer the win well”, and congratulated the country on a successful electoral process carried out “in peace”.

REVOLUTIONARY RESPONSE

While congratulating the country for another fair and democratic election, President Maduro also described the results as “a slap in the face which will wake us up”, stating that the results were “circumstantial” and that the socialist

movement begun by late President Hugo Chavez “lost this battle, but not the war”.

President Maduro called on the 5.6 million voters who stood by socialist candidates to “not lose heart but rather take up new impetus”.

“It isn’t time to berate ourselves, it’s not time for betrayal, it’s time to create more Revolution... you fought like solders of Bolívar, and you are heroes of the nation”.

In efforts to initiate a “great debate” in “all the revolutionary circles” about the failure of socialist candidates and the candidates’ popular coalitions organized across the country, President Maduro convened assemblies at three separate moments: first with the leaders of the revolutionary alliance - the Great Patriotic Pole (GPP); second in a series of popular assemblies across the country; and third with all of the Presidential Councils which group community and social leaders in key policy areas such as workers, peasants, women, and youth.

An Extraordinary Congress of the United Socialist Party of Venezuela (PSUV) was also held, at which the entire national leadership offered their res-

ignation to Maduro, President of the PSUV. Maduro also received the resignation of his entire cabinet as part of his drive to “renew” the Revolution.

“A new period of the Bolivarian Revolution must begin with new politics which come from the bases to convert this crisis into a stage which allows us to renew popular power, the Revolution, and create a radical, popular, socialist revolution”, Maduro said.

“We are going to be working with all of the GPP to unite criteria, to identify problems and activate solutions” he explained, whilst warning of the options facing the country.

“We are facing a political crisis which could result in two things: a fascist counterrevolution or a renewed revolution. Today the counterrevolution has won, but this is a class war between the parasitic bourgeois elite and the people”.

ECONOMIC WOES

President Maduro has been honest about the causes of the electoral defeat, citing economic weaknesses and media manipulation as the key elements, as his backers clamor for him to take decisive, deep, structural measures against the capitalist

manipulation and distortion of the economy.

“We can see the evidence, the great task of this Revolution is in the productive economy. The fundamental wound which explains this circumstantial electoral turnaround without a doubt is the human and political damage which the savage economic war has created in society”, he elaborated.

In the communicational, and following an opposition campaign based on social networking and internet publicity rather than street actions or public events, Maduro also warned that “we must be truthful, we must renew our discourse because we have become stagnant, talking to just the converted with pamphlets and flyers. If we manage this, I swear to you that we will recuperate this electoral defeat”.

SOCIAL ADVANCES UNDER THREAT

Following fears that a rightist majority in the National Assembly will revoke a series of laws which protect the working class and most vulnerable in society, President Maduro reassured the nation that “I won’t give up, I will fight with you all and for you all”.

Speaking to the nation, Maduro also warned that it may now be difficult for the Executive to finish social projects without the funding approved by the Assembly, particularly in terms of housing and pensions.

In relation to opposition plans to pass an Amnesty Law which will force the release of opposition leaders imprisoned for their role in the street violence of 2014, Maduro warned that “I will not accept any Amnesty Law... those who murder the People will be tried and punished”.

The President also left clear statements regarding workers’ rights, following comments from opposition spokespersons about plans to revoke the Organic Labor Law. In the days following the elections, he passed a Presidential Decree guaranteeing labor immobility for three years as well as announcing that the National Assembly’s TV station will pass over to worker-control following aggressions from the newly elected rightist Deputies.

“In the face of aggression, more Revolution”, affirmed President Maduro, calling on “all who stand with the Bolivarian Revolution to prepare for times of struggle, sacrifice, and new victories”.

“Our struggle must succeed”, he concluded.

Opinion

T/ Paul Dobson
P/ Agencies

Following their overwhelming electoral victory this month in Venezuela's 2015 National Assembly election, the right wing alliance known as the Democratic Unity Roundtable (MUD) – which brings together more than 30 anti-socialist political parties – finally presented its parliamentary proposals to the nation.

Clearly responding to class interests, the MUD expressed support for bourgeois federations that have been pressuring for a reversal of the revolutionary policies launched by former President Hugo Chavez and his Foreign Minister turned President, Nicolas Maduro. Whilst opposition voters celebrated their win across the country, the MUD's national leadership called for unity in what has often been a highly divided bloc.

“Today is a day of celebration” explained MUD General Secretary, Jesus Torrealba, “but it is also a day of reflection in our ranks and amongst our leaders”.

“We have been divided for years”, he explained, “and now the time has come to demonstrate that we have learnt from our many mistakes. When we divide ourselves we sink and we all lose. It is urgent that we all leave our own agendas behind us, and focus on our new opportunity”.

“Yesterday was an electoral tsunami, an immense vote of confidence”, he added, “but it's not the same thing to unite to resist as it is to unite to rule”.

Torrealba's MUD coalition won a super majority in large part due to abstention of pro-socialist voters following over two years of ongoing economic woes. While pretending to represent a new mandate for opposition policies, Torrealba also recognized that “we won a majority on a platform of change in a context of great challenges for the government – and this is why we received so much support”.

“There is discontent, yes, but we don't and can not underestimate President Maduro” he said.

LEGISLATIVE PROPOSALS

After an electoral campaign covered in mystery and a hid-



Opposition celebrates electoral win, prepares neoliberal agenda

ing-away of candidates and proposals, the MUD finally announced their legislative agenda to the nation following their victory.

Amongst their proposals are the privatization of basic services such as water and electricity; the removal of taxes on capital, investment, and imports; the reversing of the nationalization of firms and land; the decentralization of services and policing; the prohibition of jail sentences for board members of firms which fall into disrepute; the elimination of subsidized food outlets such as Mercal; the dollarization of wages; the strengthening of the private sectors in housing, policing, and education; the eradication of currency controls; the guaranteeing of private property rights; and a General Amnesty Law.

The last of these proposals looks to provide amnesty to such violent figures as Leopoldo Lopez and Antonio Ledezma

who are currently imprisoned for their roles in the guarimba street protests of 2014, as well as such figures who have fled the country after being investigated for corruption such as politician Manuel Rosales and banker Eligio Cedeño.

“This historic victory is a real hope for those who have been unfairly persecuted, locked away, disqualified, or exiled. We are committed to returning to them their right as free citizens” stated Torrealba.

“To those who had to leave the country, soon you will remember how good it feels to be where you were born and you will be welcomed back”, he added.

The MUD also made public their intentions to revoke such laws as the Organic Labor Law which guarantees workers' rights, and the Law of Fair Prices, which establishes maximum profit margins and prison sentences for economic crimes such as price speculation, smuggling, and hoarding.

Other parliamentary proposals include using their two-thirds majority to interpellate such figures as: the Food, Health, and Finance Ministers; the Presidents of subsidized food outlets PDVAL and MERCAL; the President of the currency controlling body CENCOEX; the President of the public health network IVSS; the Attorney General; police chiefs; the resident of the Central Bank; the Ombudsman; and the President of the State oil firm PDVSA.

LEGISLATING FOR THE BOUGEOISIE

Following the opposition victory, various federations of property owners, businessmen, and bosses offered their proposals to their political representatives in order to put an end to worker- and peasant-friendly policies of the Bolivarian Revolution, in power for some 17 years.

FEDECAMARAS, who was largely responsible for the

failed 2002 coup d'état, called on the MUD to “revise” the Law of Fair Prices, eliminate currency controls, and “revise” the Organic Labor Law, whilst industry chiefs (CONINDUSTRIA) requested that the MUD “legislate in defense of the rights to private property”.

Commerce leaders (CONSECOMERCIO) called for a “more flexible regulation of the sector”, whilst FEDENAGA, which brings together large land owners, requested that the MUD “revise the Land Law” which prohibits large land ownership and legalizes expropriation of unproductive land.

In response, President Maduro and socialists across the country have expressed their intent to organize and mobilize in defense of the Revolution's social gains.

RECALL REFERENDUM

Following such a landslide victory, many in the US-backed opposition are pushing for the country to hold a recall referendum and oust President Maduro, elected for the 2015 to 2019 period. According to the Venezuelan constitution, all publically elected functionaries may be recalled from office at the half-way point of their terms, following the collection of signatures and a popular referendum.

In 2004, the opposition failed in its attempts to recall President Chavez following his electoral victory after the activation of the constitutional method. If such a course is chosen by the MUD, the election would be due in 2016. With gubernatorial elections already expected for next year, the opposition may chose to focus on mobilizing anti-Maduro efforts instead of campaigning for regional leaders in a context in which they currently only control 3 of 23 governorships.

“I don't see the Government reaching its natural finishing point, which would be the next presidential elections in 2019”, stated prominent opposition leader Henry Ramon Allup in provocative yet revealing comments.

Expected to preside over the opposition-controlled National Assembly, Allup affirmed “I just don't see Maduro in office through 2019”.