

Venezuela: Defying rumours, Chavez launches election campaign, program for socialism

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Despite much speculation in the international media regarding the health of Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez, a mass gathering of supporters accompanied him on June 11 as he registered his candidature for the October 7 presidential elections.

Chavez used the opportunity to address the issue of recent tests he had undergone after his cancer treatment. "Everything came out absolutely fine, I feel very well" said Chavez, Venezuela Analysis reported the next day.

Responding to claims by World Bank president Robert Zoellick just three days before that "Chavez's days are numbered", Venezuela Analysis reported Chavez said: "I think the one that has its days numbered is global capitalism, of which the World Bank is a part."

The corporate media have focused on what investigative journalist Eva Golinger described as "necrophiliac storytelling about the Venezuelan President". But Chavez said that in the election, "the life of the country is at stake, not any old thing is at stake here, it's the future of the country".

Since being first elected in 1998, Chavez's government has led a process known as the "Bolivarian revolution". It has redistributed the nation's wealth to the poor majority, promoted participatory democracy, begun a process of land reform and re-nationalised strategic industries.

In 2006, Chavez was re-elected with a record 63% of the vote on a platform of deepening the revolution to build "socialism of the 21st century".

This difficult process has faced obstacles, and on June 11 Chavez presented a radical election program with the aim of receiving a new mandate to push ahead towards socialism.

In his preface to the document spelling out the program, Chavez described it as "a program for transition towards socialism and for radicalising participatory and protagonistic democracy".

The program, which is being widely disseminated and discussed among the public, proposes five key objectives.

The first is consolidating Venezuela's political, economic, social and cultural independence. This requires: preserving sovereignty over Venezuela's natural resources and its wealth; developing the country's scientific and technological capacities; and strengthening "national and Latin American identity, starting from the Bolivarian principle that 'the Homeland is

America'."

This objective, the document says, also requires deepening the alliance between the people and the military to defend the country from outside aggression.

Together with consolidating national independence, the program proposes as its second objective the construction of 21st century socialism.

Chavez wrote: "We should not fool ourselves: the socio-economic formation that continues to prevail in Venezuela is of a capitalist and rent-taking character ...

"Socialism has only begun to implant its own internal dynamic among us."

That is why "this is a program precisely to refine and deepen [socialism]; to move towards a radical suppression of the logic of capital that needs to be accomplished step by step, but without slowing down the rhythm of advancement towards socialism".

The key to building socialism, said Chavez, is "a popular power capable of dismantling the patterns of oppression, exploitation and domination that persist within Venezuelan society."

"This requires completely pulverising the bourgeois state form we have inherited, which continues to reproduce itself via its old and nefarious practices, and continuing to invent new forms of political power."

In place of the old state, the introduction to the program promotes a new state based on "the consolidation and expansion of popular power".

Central to this new state would be the existing communes and communal councils that have emerged as forms of community self-government, and the social missions, through which communities have organised themselves to meet their education, health and other basic needs.

The third and fourth objectives locate the Venezuelan revolution within the international context.

Chavez said the world is submerged in a "structural crisis" of capitalism "which could become terminal", but Latin America continues to live through "a change of eras that is characterised by a real and genuine change in power relations to the benefit of the great majorities".

The program proposes the promotion of greater Latin American unity aimed at transforming the region into a peace zone. In the international arena, it proposes contributing to building a new multipolar world based on peace and equilibrium among nations.

The final objective, notes the introduction, is the "necessity of constructing an ecosocialist productive economic model, based on a harmonious relationship between humans and nature, that guarantees the use and rational and optimal exploitation of natural resources, while respecting the processes and cycles of nature".

The 39-page document then goes on to list a wide range of specific measures and policies aimed at turning these objectives into reality.

“In presenting this program,” wrote Chavez, “I do so convinced that only with the protagonist participation of the people, with the broadest possible discussion among the popular bases, we can perfect it, unleashing all of its creative and liberating potential.”

With less than 100 days until the elections, polls give Chavez an advantage of 16%-25% over his main rival, the unity candidate of the right-wing opposition, Henrique Capriles Radonsky.

The October 7 poll looks likely to provide the Venezuelan revolution with another crushing mandate to push forward its radical agenda.

Conscious of this, the US government and its loyal right-wing opposition inside Venezuela will undoubtedly be doing everything in its power to deal blows not just to Chavez, but to a revolutionary movement united behind an anti-capitalist program.

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