

Venezuela: Grassroots Challenges Facing the Bolivarian Process

Interview

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An important debate has opened up among the left, both within Venezuela and internationally, as a result of the recent turmoil in the country.

*In an attempt to bring the views of grassroots Venezuelan militants to an English-speaking audience, Green Left Weekly's **Federico Fuentes** interviewed **Stalin Perez Borges**.*

A life-long union and socialist activist, Perez Borges is today a member of the United League of Chavista Socialists (LUCHAS), a radical current within the United Socialist Party of Venezuela (PSUV).

LUCHAS was formed by a group of former leaders and activists of Marea Socialista (Socialist Tide), including many of its trade union militants. The decision to form LUCHAS came after Marea Socialista resolved to leave the PSUV and began taking an increasingly hostile approach to the Bolivarian process.

Perez Borges is also on the consultative council of the Bolivarian Socialist Central of Workers (CSBT), Venezuela's largest trade union confederation.

What are the fundamental explanations for the current situation in Venezuela today? Is this the end of the Bolivarian process?

No, I don't believe that this is the end of the Bolivarian process. We are, however, passing through one of its most difficult moments, as today it seems very likely that the right could return to power.

The popular sectors, as the social subject of the process, have in its immense majority remained faithful and true to the political project that [former president Hugo] Chavez began to build following his eruption onto the Venezuelan political scene. And even in the midst of this crisis, Bolivarian Chavismo continues to have a strong social base.

Much more difficult than the situation we face today were the 48 hours the right was in power, when they carried out a coup in April 2002. That moment had its April 13: the day in which the people came out onto the streets and together with the core of the armed forces toppled the dictatorship and rescued Chavez.

We are faced with the need to find or quickly give birth to another event like April 13, 2002.



On April 11, 2002 the Venezuelan right, with the help of media power, created a tense situation to pit Venezuelans against each other, leading to a coup for 48 hours against President Hugo Chavez.

(Source: teleSUR)

We are in a situation of uncertainty, given the multiple problems we face. The impacts of bureaucracy, corruption and improvisation are big. We are feeling the effects of these evils and the fact that after more than 10 years since Chavez declared the government and Bolivarian process to be anti-imperialist and socialist, we have not been able to transcend capitalism.

We are suffering the perverse effects of bureaucracy, corruption, improvisation, all within a framework of capitalism.

And from the actions of those capitalists who never agreed with the Chavista project and that today, like never before, are conspiring to bring down the government of Nicolas Maduro.

The old capitalists are desperate to recuperate control over the state to have control over the distribution of the oil rent; control that they lost with Chavez's victory in 1998.

The old capitalists have been driven crazy and in these last three years more so, because this rent has been reduced due to the fall in oil prices.

In distributing this rent, the government continues to privilege spending in social programs that were developed when oil prices were much higher. Meanwhile, another slice is lost in corruption and another part goes to the so-called "Bolibourgeoisie" [new capitalists who claim to support the process].

The local capitalists have the support of the rest of the capitalists in the continent, and especially that of US imperialism. The US government, together with other countries that have a special interest in Venezuela, are financing the campaign to bring down the Maduro government.

The US government is obsessed with getting rid of the Maduro government, no matter what it takes.

If they are successful, they will deal a final blow to the process of change that began more than a decade ago in South America and that began to be reversed with the coups in Honduras and Paraguay, the electoral defeat of **Cristina Kirchner** in Argentina and the parliamentary coup by **Michel Temer** in Brazil.

Just like its lackey capitalists in Venezuela who want to recover control over the oil rent, the US wants to recover control over its backyard. They are twins when it comes to their shared interest in getting rid of Maduro and will be like Siamese twins in terms of their interests when forming a new government if they hypothetically defeat the Maduro government and Chavista project.

So this explosive cocktail of, on the one hand bureaucracy, corruption, improvisation,

capitalism, and on the other, the war being waged by the capitalists who continue to sabotage the economy, explains the discontent that exists within a large section of the population and which the government is paying for, as it is viewed as the sole culprit for the situation.

Right-wing parties are making use of this, together with the discontent created by the violent actions of the fascist gangs they have trained up, and the criminal neighbourhood gangs that they pay to create situations of violence and deaths in certain cities and regions in the country, principally in municipalities where opposition mayors govern.

All this is then greatly magnified through social networks, the endless media outlets (newspapers, TV channels, radio stations) they continue to own and international news agencies.

What position have the trade unions and social organisations that support the Bolivarian process taken in the current situation?

The majority of trade unions and social organisations are in the hands of sympathisers and militants of the left and Chavismo. The workers and popular sectors support these leaderships because in their majority they have been consistent fighters within their specific sector.

But it is a fact that the grassroots have been hit hard by the situation that I have referred to. That is, they are victims of the political, economic and social crisis, a big crisis, that has penetrated into peoples' morale and that — what for me is the saddest and most dangerous aspect — has become a crisis of perspective.

One senses that among a big portion of worker comrades there is scepticism towards continuing to believe what the government says, and the youth see no immediate future for themselves, which is why a large number of them have emigrated to other countries, to the point where even in Australia there is now a significant number of Venezuelans.

Nevertheless, Chavismo continues to maintain a respectable level of support among workers and popular sectors, which can be seen in the mobilisations it has carried out.

It also counts upon a militia, made up of a very large group of volunteer reservists who maintain their morale.

What is your view on the proposed Constituent Assembly?

I will confess that, prior to May 1, when the president spoke of it as a possible way forward, it did not strike me as a coherent and appropriate proposal for the moment, when the correlation of forces is not so favourable for Chavismo.

However, since May 1, reflecting on the dimension that the crisis has taken, and above all, the escalating spiral of violence, I now see this proposal as something more like a challenge that could help halt the violence that seems to be imposing itself, and open a path to improving the current economic situation.

The reality, which is there for everyone to see, is that the right is not seeking to frighten or pressure the government into negotiations, rather it is fighting on the military terrain, with weapons, snipers and armed gangs, to militarily defeat the government.

That is why we think it is naive that people could be alarmed by the fact that security forces have tried to put an end to the violence generated by these groups.

It is in this context that the proposal for a Constituent Assembly takes shape and could provide a way out of the economic situation the country finds itself in.



Thousands were expected to join the government's call for march in support of peace and the Constituent Assembly process in Venezuela. (Photo: AVN via teleSUR)

And this is the sentiment I have noticed in many workers' assemblies, and one that many comrades from various workplaces have relayed to me.

Together with other comrades from LUCHAS, we have put ourselves forward as candidates for the Constituent Assembly. We don't know if we will be elected.

Once we are confirmed as candidates, we will campaign hard with our proposals for what the Constituent Assembly should do. We will campaign to be elected as new faces, people capable of proposing the changes that the country needs, which we believe need to be democratic, revolutionary and socialist measures.

These are the only measures that can get us out of the crisis.

We hope that it is not the same old faces, those already in positions of power, who end up being elected; otherwise we will just have more of the same.

What position do you think socialist and internationalist organisations should take towards the situation in Venezuela?

Revolutionaries in Venezuela and in all parts of the world have to look at reality and tell the truth to the working people of Venezuela.

And we all have to learn from this process, no matter what happens next. It is a unique process. Books are of little use, it is something that has been built and written in class struggle, in which we always have to be clear on who are our irreconcilable enemies and who we should never fight side by side with.

We also have to know that bureaucracies, sooner or later, are fatal to revolutionary processes. That is why, since the start, we have raised the slogan: Neither capital nor bureaucracy.

We are celebrating the fact that we have been able to draft up a statement together with other organisations across the world, among those, the Socialist Alliance in Australia, which makes it clear that the way out of the crisis that the Venezuelan process finds itself in has to be democratic, revolutionary and socialist.

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