

Chávez wins majority but right-wing gains ground

ON 26 September Venezuela elected a new National Assembly (parliament). The elections, which coincided with elections to the Latin American parliament, took place in a deeply polarised political environment where there is little room for other alternatives aside from the Chávez government and its supporters or the right wing opposition coalition (Mesa de Unidad- MUD).

Socialismo Revolucionario,
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The results represent a setback for Chávez and are a warning to the working class and the poor. For the first time, excluding the referendum on constitutional amendments, in an election since Chávez was elected, the opposition won a majority with 51% of the vote compared to 49% for the PSUV (Chávez's United Socialist Party of Venezuela) and its allies.

SR has consistently defended the positive reforms of the Chávez regime and at the same time argued for the need to defeat capitalism and replace it with democratic socialist planning of the economy.

SR has also opposed the corrupt, bureaucratic top-down methods used by the regime. In this election we argued for the need to defeat the pro-capitalist, reactionary right-wing opposition alliance and urged support for those PSUV candidates who were not corrupt and are prepared to defend workers' interests.

During the election campaign both the PSUV and MUD used populism and manipulation to try to win support. The changed electoral process was also an important feature of the campaign.

The MUD opposition launched an 'anti-communist' offensive and opportunistically capitalised on the weaknesses of the government. Meanwhile the PSUV stretched their forces to try to recover the lost confidence of many sectors of society - a product of the government's economic and political policies in the last two years.

SR has warned of this threat to the struggle in Venezuela during recent years unlike some others who have attempted to 'prettify' the character of the processes in Venezuela and brushed over weaknesses in the 'Bolivarian' movement (see 'Revolutionary Socialists and the Venezuelan Revolution' www.socialist-world.net).

Results

IN THESE parliamentary elections the PSUV won 49% of the national vote - 5.2 million votes. The opposition alliance, MUD, won 51% of



Chávez's opponents celebrate winning 51% of the popular vote.



A faltering economy, bureaucracy and corruption, combined with poor delivery of public services, have dented support for Chávez's United Socialist Party (PSUV) and boosted the opposition right wing. photo Paul Mattsson

THE PSUV aspired to maintain their two-thirds majority in the National Assembly (110 of the 165 seats). This would allow them to pass any legislation or constitutional changes they wanted to without the need to negotiate with the opposition. The objective of the opposition was to win a minimum of 56 seats and therefore force the government to negotiate over legislation.

Of the 165 members elected, including three indigenous members, 98 were elected from the PSUV-PCV (Venezuelan Communist Party) electoral alliance (one from the PCV), and 65 were elected from the opposition MUD alliance plus two from the PPT (Patria Para Todos).

Of the 24 states, the PSUV won in 18 and MUD in six. In the Latin American parliament the PSUV won seven seats, MUD five, with one seat reserved for the indigenous member.

The PPT left the Chávez/PSUV electoral alliance in a right-wing split with the slogan 'Neither Chavista nor Opposition'. They stood candidates all over the country in alliance with various small social movements, parties and individuals. The Unidad Socialista de Izquierda (Socialist Left Unity - USI), which claims to be Trotskyist and whose main leader is trade unionist Orlando Chirino, was one of the PPT alliances.

the vote representing 5.4 million votes. While these figures represent a reflection of the political situation today in Venezuela they are not the entire story and the process is not fully exhausted or a victory of the right-wing secured.

The PSUV consolidated themselves as the leading political party in the country. However, this won't be enough for them to advance their reformist politics and achieve 'socialism' via the parliament.

At the same time the support received for MUD from the middle class and upper middle class and some small sectors of the working class and poor is not solid. Rather it represents a vote to punish the government's policies.

MUD itself is also an unstable alliance of several right-wing parties which can fragment and split. However, this election represents a threat and illustrates the process of disappointment and disillusionment which is developing. This makes the need for the adoption of genuine socialist policies and measures even more urgent to prevent the right-wing strengthening its position further.

Electoral reform

THE RIGHT-wing would have emerged even stronger in the National Assembly but for a change in the election system.

The 2009 electoral law reform modified the composition of the electoral districts and increased the number of seats in less popu-

lated areas. This meant that the rural states elect 47% of the National Assembly compared to 53% in the urban areas. The opposition won a greater number of seats in the more populated zones than in the rural or less populated areas. While of the 98 elected PSUV members, 21 were from urban zones and 77 from the rural zones.

The right wing have mounted an international and national campaign saying that they obtained the majority of the 'popular vote' and were denied a corresponding number of seats in the National Assembly. This is hypocrisy by the right-wing. They forget to explain that changes to the electoral system are nothing new in Venezuela.

After 26 September

THE ELECTORAL results confirm our analysis of the last four years; that a socialist revolution can't be achieved with social reforms and policies made within the capitalist system.

The politics of 'Chavismo', which "fights for 21st century socialism" without undertaking a fundamental transformation of society does not only fail to overthrow capitalism but is partly responsible for the failure of revolutionary movements of the poor and working class in Venezuela.

SR defends positive reforms which benefit the masses but they cannot be maintained under capitalism. To defend them and introduce further measures to transform the lives of

the masses it is necessary to break with capitalism.

Without real democratic workers' and community control of the process bureaucratisation and corruption has grown stronger and allowed the counter-revolutionary forces to re-group and reorganise.

Nevertheless not everything is lost, the world capitalist crisis is evidence that capitalism is incapable of resolving its own inherent problems. The global crisis has not only opened up a new stage in neoliberal attacks on the working class, but has generated mass opposition to governmental policies and reforms and new mass movements of the working class in many countries.

Chavismo vs Opposition

THE PSUV needs to look at rebuilding its falling popularity of the last two years. Popular measures such as the 'living well' card will not be enough. This card offers, via an agreement with China, low priced electrical goods to be bought by the poor with credit.

There are high levels of doubt and pessimism regarding the government's handling of the economy and the recession. The accumulation of debts by the poor through this credit system will not offer a lasting solution to their problems and will only create deeper problems in the future.

Equally MUD has a difficult task. As a coalition many of the parties have their own agendas. To maintain their unity in order to face the government in the National Assembly will be a challenge. Also, the absence of a unified leader to challenge Chávez will make it difficult for them - especially in the lead up to the 2012 presidential elections.

The current situation in Venezuela will open up a new period of political confrontation in which the working class can overcome its weaknesses and the polarisation that has led to some of the revolutionary left taking up ultra-left or opportunist positions.

We call on all honest revolutionary socialist democratic forces to come forward and join the struggle for a real democratic socialist programme to take the masses forward and defeat the threat of counter-revolution.

the committee for a workersinternational

THE COMMITTEE for a Workers' International (CWI) is the socialist international organisation to which the Socialist Party is affiliated. The CWI is organised in 40 countries and works to unite the working class and oppressed peoples against global capitalism and to fight for a socialist world. For more details including CWI publications write to: CWI, PO Box 3688, London E11 1YE. email cwi@worldsoc.co.uk.

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Vincent Kolo, chinaworker.info



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Rukhsana Manzoor, Socialist Movement Pakistan (CWI Pakistan)