

New Left-Wing Governments in Venezuela, Bolivia, Ecuador: A First Balance-Sheet

Eric Toussaint



- Bolivia, Ecuador and Venezuela stand today at the center of the resistance to the global neoliberal offensive.



- **The beginning of the left-wing experience in the three countries**
- **New democratic constitutions** voted by Constituent Assemblies in Venezuela, Bolivia and Ecuador;
- **Improved civil and political liberties** and economic, social and cultural rights;



- Beginning of a return to state control of big companies (PDVSA), natural resources (water, oil and natural gas in Bolivia) and essential services (production/distribution of electricity, and telecommunications in Venezuela);



- Emergence of **ALBA** (the Bolivarian Alternative of the Americas) and the development of trade and barter agreements between Venezuela, Cuba, Bolivia and Nicaragua



- Creation of **Petrocaribe** to enable non oil-exporting countries of the Caribbean to buy Venezuelan oil at 40% below world market prices;
- **Bolivia's** withdrawal from the **ICSID** (the World Bank's International Centre for Settlement of Investment Disputes);
- **Expulsion from Ecuador** of the **World Bank** permanent representative;



- Announcement that Ecuador will close the **US base in Manta** in 2009;



Popular mobilisation

- These three experiences would not be possible without powerful popular mobilisation :
- Venezuela : February 1989 Caracazo, mass mobilization against the putsch of April 2002.
- Bolivia: April 2000 (water war), October 2003 (gas war) followed by the overthrow of the president Gonzalez de Lozada.
- Ecuador: overthrow of 4 right wing presidents: Abdalá Bucaram in February 1997, Jamil Mahuad in January 2000, Gustavo Noboa in January 2003 and Lucio Gutiérrez in April 2005.



The reaction of the US and the local capitalist classes (1)

- **Venezuelan bourgeoisie supported by US and Spanish governments tried to overthrow Chavez in April 2002;**
- **Lock-out from December 2002 to January 2003 in Venezuela;**
- **At least 90% of the media are under control of the capitalist class and they harass the government in Venezuela, Ecuador and Bolivia. Until recently, there was no public TV or radio channel in Ecuador.**



The reaction of the US and the local capitalist classes (2)

- Washington and several European governments are destabilising the governments of Bolivia, Venezuela and Ecuador by backing capitalist sectors in these countries that seek secession of some wealthy territories: the white social elite in Santa Cruz (Bolivia), Guayaquil (Ecuador) and Zulia (Venezuela).
- This strategy of tension could spread especially in Bolivia and Ecuador. Most Western media portray secession attempts by the richest territories as an exercise of people's democratic rights, even though they are led by minority groups opposed to social reforms.



The reaction of the US and the local capitalist classes (3)

- Washington uses its allies in the region -- President Alvaro Uribe of Colombia and President Alan Garcia of Peru -- against Hugo Chavez and Rafael Correa. Colombian paramilitary forces linked to Uribe are operating in Venezuelan territory. Washington accuses Chavez of supporting the FARC.
- Washington prepares other scenarios: military coup, assassination of Chavez ...



The reaction of US and multinational corporations

- EXXON vs. PDVSA through ICSID (WB's tribunal on investments)
- Oxy Petroleum against Petroecuador
- Telecom Italia / Telefonica against Bolivia



- The difference with center-left governments in L.A. (Brazil, Uruguay, Chile, Argentina)



- Clear difference between Chavez /Morales/
Correa

and

- Lula (Brazil)/ Tabaré Vasquez (Uruguay)/
Christina Kirchner (Arg.) / Bachelet (Chile)

The first 3 ones are in direct conflict with the
national capitalist class and Washington



I. Lula and C. Kirchner are supporting the continental and national project of their bourgeoisie

- Let's take the example of the

Bank of the South



Ecuador and the audit of the debt

- The creation of the CAIC (Commission for auditing integrally the public debt)



The new constitutions

- The possibility to demand the recall of an elected representative (including the president of the republic)
- In Venezuela, 20% of voters could ask for a referendum to remove an elected representative at mid term of mandate.



- The causes and the meaning of the recent defeat of Hugo Chavez in the referendum on constitutional reform (2 Dec. 2007)

A new wave of 'caudillismo'?



Moving towards '21st century socialism' (Chavez)

- Merely rhetoric or a real process to be launch soon?
- The answer is not simple

