

Alternativa Popular Revolucionaria and the situation in Venezuela

Introduction

In 2020, in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, elections were held in Venezuela to renew the seats in the National Assembly. These elections took place in the midst of particularly difficult material conditions. On the one hand, the criminal coercive measures on Venezuelan international trade affected all areas of national life, generating an unprecedented deterioration in the living conditions of the working class. On the other hand, the loss of revolutionary quality of public policies openly contrasted with popular demands: salaries below five dollars a month, suspension of collective bargaining processes, hyperinflation of more than four digits, mega devaluation of the national currency, explosion of the migratory process for economic reasons, significant deterioration of public services, were only some of the elements that determined the life of workers, public employees and informal workers.

Paradoxically, popular protests declined in the midst of a growing authoritarian drift of the government, supported by a narrative of national unity to confront imperialist aggression. A dark chapter in the Bolivarian process was being lived through with the arrest and prosecution of workers' leaders, many of them with a long class-conscious tradition. The criminalization of dissidence robbed the libertarian aroma of the 1999 constituent process, something that had had precedents during these twenty years, but never of these dimensions.

This had a correlate in the relations between the parties of

the so-called Great Patriotic Pole (GPP). The United Socialist Party of Venezuela (PSUV), an organization created by Hugo Chávez, had always maintained a tense relationship with the remaining political parties of the GPP, which had almost always been resolved with bureaucratic agreements to preserve unity. However, since 2018, relations within the GPP had become especially tense, due to the growing demands of the bases of the political parties of this (alternative) alliance, for a return to the socialist, revolutionary and popular route of the Bolivarian process and, the abandonment of the class conciliation turn, as well as the halt to the growing dependence with the Russian and Chinese imperial policies. The lack of constructive dialogue accelerated the distancing and created the conditions for the emergence of two blocs within the Bolivarian process.

This does not deny the existence of a social movement that struggles to break away from polarization, nor the ephemeral existence of political options that call for the formation of a third pole. Certainly, there is a new political situation within the Chavist camp since 2020.

The new Venezuelan political situation demands a profound discussion of the Latin American and world left, which allows acting as factors of revolutionary unity that promote the retaking of the constituent path, the anti-capitalist route and distance themselves from neoliberalism with progressive discourse. This is not the time for discourses that justify neither class claudication nor ultra leftist adventurism.

Map of actors

Politics is usually made from subaltern interests, viscera or perfect ideas decontextualized from reality. For this reason, it is important to make an inventory of the tensions in the Bolivarian process in order to understand why the Popular Revolutionary Alternative (APR) arises and why it is considered the current progressive pole. Correlations of

forces and alignments have changed significantly during the last two years. Therefore, an updated review and assessment of the political actors is urgently needed to see the real possibilities of a resignation of the Bolivarian process or the terrible positioning of new neoliberal variants.

The right wing

In Venezuela, the right wing has gone from being political projects linked to the neo-liberal agenda, to become either simple operators of the dictates of the US empire and the European imperialist nations or, pragmatic sectors that survive on the handouts of the Venezuelan government waiting for a “new political situation” to emerge.

The right wing political parties have lost all connection with the mass movement and have a limited capacity of mobilization circumscribed to hundreds of highly ideologized, sectarian and confrontational militants.

The four right-wing blocs are led by Juan Guaido, Capriles Radonski, Henry Ramos Allup and María Corina Machado, they are structurally divided by the dark management of the financing obtained from the Lima Group and the assault on Venezuelan oil finances abroad.

The judicialization and placement of Ad Hoc directives by the Supreme Court of Justice has left the political parties Acción Democrática, Primero Justicia and Voluntad Popular in a situation of illegality that generates greater dispersion and inability to act in the field of political action.

A new right wing is emerging, dependent on the national executive, with representation in the parliament, which contributes to the confusion and discouragement of the bases of this sector. Maduro's government has managed to limit the political right wing to its minimum expression, which, suffocated, can only appeal to a resolution of the Venezuelan situation by means of a foreign imperialist invasion or a

lightning military operation. In this sense, the remnants of the Venezuelan right wing become a sector that is in the sights of options prone to military adventurism.

Of course, this does not rule out any model of political regrouping that reconnects the right wing with some real mobilization capacity, but this is not clearly seen in the immediate future.

The PSUV and the GPP

The PSUV has never been a political party in the classic terms. It has been more of a political machinery of the government, both in the Chávez and Maduro periods. Although it holds its congresses and elects its authorities by sui generis procedures, in reality the PSUV is an electoral machinery, for the organization of the governmental social agenda and control of the social movement.

However, the PSUV is the largest party in Venezuela with a very important popular social base, something that is lacking in these organizations. It has managed to build a social fabric around the premises of the initial Bolivarian social agenda and unity against US intervention. However, its militancy has developed a culture of postponing criticism of bureaucratization and neoliberal drift as long as the U.S. threat is maintained. This has led it to develop the foundations of a polyclassism that it did not have in its origins.

The PSUV has expressed the internal balances of the government, both in the past and in the present. Chávez's vision on the characteristics of the civil-military alliance determined its composition for years and, in the new period of Maduro's military-civic alliance, it has built new balances that left out actors that had no real influence behind them or did not share the class conciliation turn. The PSUV went from a structuring logic where the center was Chávez, to a model of

contingent correlations in the style of Latin American bureaucratic unionism.

Many of the political parties of the GPP have their origin in the Bolivarian process, either by previous ruptures or by organization during the Chavista period; however, others such as the Communist Party of Venezuela have a long tradition, since the first decades of the XX century, just as the experience of the MRT or the Tupamaros dates back to the eighties of the same century. The Partido Patria para Todos (PPT) comes from a rupture with the Causa R precisely around the support to Chávez, while parties such as that of Lina Ron or Nuevo Camino Revolucionario (NCR) were formed in the midst of the Bolivarian process. The functioning logic of these parties, much more organic, although not always more democratic, was far from the functioning of the PSUV. Consequently, the mechanisms of functioning and decision making of the GPP were never harmonized; however, unity was always maintained for ideological reasons and bureaucratic pragmatism.

While the PSUV is led fundamentally by public officials and militants linked to governmental dynamics, popular pressure from the grassroots for the rectification of the governmental course of the last six years occurs there to a lesser extent than in the PPT, PCV or Tupamaros; some believe that it is silenced through the development of undemocratic methods of debate. The intensity of the contradictions from below with respect to the political turn imposed by the current political leadership of the Bolivarian process, puts unequal pressure on the different parties of the GPP.

The dramatic situation of the world of labor is the result of the biggest hyperinflation known in the continent, which has led to the issuance of half a million and one million bolivar bills, as well as the incomparable devaluation of the national currency with respect to another historical moment of the Republic, which is expressed in the fact that today a dollar

costs more than two million bolivars. While this is happening, the monthly salary of a worker does not reach ten dollars, throwing millions of people into extreme poverty in just a few years. All this generates a dynamic of unprecedented questioning and distancing of the popular sectors from the current government administration. This pressure from below managed to be contained by the political leaderships of the PPT, PCV, Tupamaros, among others in the 2014-2018 period, but became unsustainable between 2018-2020. The agreement signed between the PCV and the PSUV in 2018 in which the government committed itself to stop and roll back the restorative measures it had implemented, proved impossible to materialize due to the restoration agenda advanced by the executive.

Therefore, the agreements on the distribution of positions for the 2020 National Assembly were insufficient to avoid a dislocation of these parties. The PCV, PPT, Tupamaros and other organizations within and outside the patriotic pole are getting closer to the formation of a social electoral alliance for the 2020 parliamentary elections that would express the aspirations of their bases. This generated the judicialization and intervention of the directives and representation of parties such as the PPT, Tupamaros and others, something that could not be done with the PCV.

In practice, the GPP has disappeared as an organ of unity and coordination; its existence is limited to the formality of the PSUV leadership and the ad hoc representations of empty franchises.

The APR

The decision to form the Popular Revolutionary Alternative (APR) as a unitary electoral rehearsal without the PSUV, even beyond the parliamentary contest, catapults the crisis of the GPP. In spite of the judicialization of many parties, the Popular Revolutionary Alternative continues with candidates from various organizations, although expressed only with the

card of the PCV, but with the militant support of the bases of the intervened parties.

In elections as particular as those of 2020, carried out in the midst of the pandemic, the rise of international economic sanctions, the government's policy between two waters and the terrible material crisis of the working class, the motivation to go to vote was very low, although the number of voters who turned out was surprising, according to the final announcements made by the National Electoral Council. The results showed how the PSUV alliance prevailed, with more than 70%, while, in the street, the feeling was that the APR obtained more votes than what appeared in the final count.

The official block formed by the PSUV, Tupamaro (intervened), PPT (intervened), Somos Venezuela, Podemos, MEP (leadership resulting from a litigation), Alianza para el Cambio and ORA obtained 68% of the votes, while the old bourgeois parties of AD-COPEI now with directives close to the government obtained about 20% of the votes. The APR with the only valid PCV card obtained only one seat, around 3% of the votes, however, it managed to motivate the so called dissident revolutionary Chavism, an important part of it voted for the APR.

The precarious electoral result of the APR slowed down the unitary process and partially eclipsed the power of the grouping below that it had generated at the beginning. Since December 2020 and up to the date of writing this article, the APR did not recover the initiative and what was evident was a re-launching of the PCV, not always with unitary propaganda, but fundamentally referenced in its self-perception as a working class party.

However, PCV and PPT spokespersons like Oscar Figueras and "El Negro" Rafael Uzcategui, respectively, pointed out this week that in April the call for the APR Founding Congress, slated for July 2021, will be launched, at a time when the engines are just heating up for a new local and regional electoral

contest.

The call for the APR Founding Congress has the challenge of deciding whether it is a simple alliance of parties for electoral purposes, or whether it becomes a broad platform of the social movement, individuals, political parties, and political groups with activity beyond the limits of parliamentary democracy. Only in the latter case can it become a dynamizing factor of the revolutionary spirit of the Bolivarian process and the different factors of grassroots chavism.

The APR is the most progressive factor in the current circumstances of the country, so it is essential to participate widely in the debates of its founding congress, the tactical definitions and its strategy focused on the interests of the world of labor against capital. This requires breaking with the pamphlet definitions that, far from adding, alienate the most progressive sectors.

In my opinion, APR should open a debate on the decline of the world oil model and its impact on an alternative national economy, the ecological crisis and its expression in the national reality, the neoliberal offensive on education with very concrete expressions of neo-privatization and social stratification that we are experiencing in the world in 2020, the feminist and anti-patriarchal strategy, the migration issue and the necessary return of millions of nationals, which passes through the recovery of the national economy, among other agendas. The APR has to overcome ideological propaganda and get into anti-capitalist structural definitions contextualized in the reality of the third decade of the 21st century.

The Venezuelan left is aging, with a rebellious identity crisis and degrees of Alzheimer's disease. The call for this Founding Congress of the APR must serve to relaunch hope and socialist illusion and to resume the anti-capitalist path by

broad sectors of the social movement. The Bolivarian Revolution is not dead, the APR brings together the best of the insubmissive dreams of February 27, 1989.

The Social Movement

The tradition of an important part of the left considers the party (his party) as the synthesis of revolutionary truth and sees the social movement as the front of the masses. This has materialized in practices of co-optation and loss of autonomy of workers and the social movement in general.

In the case of Venezuela, this tradition has prevented, among other factors, the construction of a powerful and revolutionary coordination of the social movements, without a peasant confederation or a classist workers' central. Experience points to the construction of a strong autonomous social movement in permanent dialogue with political representations, but not subordinated to their logic of negotiation and cooptation.

The Bolivarian Socialist Workers Central (CSBT) has become a huge bureaucratic apparatus of containment and control of the struggles, in the antipodes of what would be an epicenter of combat and work against the logic of capital in the world of work.

However, nothing is black and white. Just as within the CSBT minority and cornered class currents continue to exist, on the streets important insurgent currents are emerging. The communal movement, especially in Lara, is an example of this, as is the incipient grassroots teachers' movement. Leftist feminists are beginning to show an autonomous path of the anti-patriarchal movement, as is communal work in the big cities.

Currently, a movement is surreptitiously developing that escapes the apparatuses of government control, developing dynamics of solidarity and resistance that suggest the

emergence of a powerful social movement in the medium term.

Only a part of this emerging social movement is currently linked to the APR, so its actual articulation with this new structure is uncertain. It will certainly depend on the extent and styles of work on which bridges between one and the other are built.

The vast majority of the current social movement is left-wing, as the right-wing student movement has been hit hard by the migration dynamics of recent years.

FANB

The National Bolivarian Armed Forces today constitute the hegemonic organized sector of the Bolivarian process. There is no governmental issue in which the military presence is not decisive. This constitutes an unquestionable force for containing and preventing attempts at imperialist military aggression, despite the fact that the Bolivarian military strategy of resistance has not managed to break with the logic of the headquarters or enter into a constituent decision-making process. The maintenance of the classic hierarchical structure feeds the authoritarian view on dissent and criticism.

On the other hand, the military discourse that justifies the alliance with China and Russia as part of the process of containing imperialism becomes a loss of sovereignty and delays the radicalization of the process, since the Armed Forces do not develop a strategy of resistance based on popular armament and the dissolution of headquarters in neighborhoods and communities.

While the middle commanders and the military bases suffer the ravages of the current material situation, the hierarchical and disciplinary structure more linked to the benefits of bureaucracy becomes, in turn, an element to guarantee the unity of command.

The growing protagonism of the military and the turn to military-civilian alliance, feeds the corporate view of politics and becomes an element that seems to be determining in the coming months and years. The fundamental contradiction in this field is determined by the popular origin of the military commanders and the rapid possibilities of social ascension that derive from the exercise of power, in a state like the Venezuelan one that continues to be bourgeois.

However, the politicization of the Armed Forces is a qualitative leap historically speaking, which forces any political initiative to have a line of dialogue and work with the military sector.

The critical ex-officials

The bourgeois press and sectors of the international left have given an exaggerated visibility to the dissidence of former high officials of the Bolivarian government, given their almost zero incidence in the social and superstructural areas. As is well known, with the coming to power of Nicolás Maduro after the death of Hugo Chávez, there was the displacement of a sector of high-ranking officials who had become familiar faces due to the rotation they had had in multiple high-level positions.

Some of them represented the initial unitary spirit of the revolutionary process, while others were part of the list of officials who played a conservative role at different times. Some of them joined the voices of questioning and demonizing the debate that took place in 2009 at the Miranda International Center on the lights and shadows of the Bolivarian process and against hyper leadership and now present themselves as champions of critical thinking. Others, on the other hand, who in these days of criticizing the bureaucratization of the Bolivarian process, are part of the dissent of former government officials clearly committed to the initial Bolivarian project. The vast majority are honest

and ethically unquestionable, openly differentiated from those who are now critics because they have lost their connection to the business of the state, especially the oil sector.

However, the truth is that these former officials have little or no capacity to connect with the concrete social movement. Therefore, their actions have limited incidence on building alternative correlations of forces unless there is a rapprochement with the APR process; in fact, some of them called a vote for the APR in December 2020.

The emigrants

Perhaps the sector that is least valued when it comes to analysis and that could be decisive in the turn of events is that of the emigrants, those hundreds of thousands of nationals who have been forced to leave the country as a result of the economic situation and deteriorating material living conditions. While the opposition speaks of six million and the government of two million, the truth is that there is almost no household in the country that does not count among its members several who have left, especially the young.

Venezuela does not have a culture of seeing its children leave in search of survival, something that is rarely achieved, triggering anguish and anger against the factors that are considered to be the triggers of this situation.

Some return defeated, to plan a new departure, the vast majority survive outside in conditions worse than those of the working class in these countries. Even the Latin American left has not developed a broad campaign of solidarity and accompaniment to the Venezuelan migration, which contributes to its right wing. The discourse of traitors to those who leave in search of wages that allow them to cover their basic needs has impacted at different levels the regional left that doesn't quite understand what is happening in Venezuela.

In a country of approximately 32 million inhabitants and six

million homes, to speak of an average number of four million migrants implies referring to a direct impact on the imaginary and political consciousness of more than half of the country's families.

Since the Bolivarian process, no discourse has been constructed that takes into account a revolutionary perspective of the phenomenon. Migration can become the fertile ground for the construction of a right-wing discourse and a social base for authoritarian projects in the short term. Therefore, it is urgent not only to open a debate on the subject, but the development of a permanent campaign of the Latin American left to monitor the respect for rights and the labor insertion of Venezuelan migrants in the different countries; these young people need to achieve class consciousness from the connection with their struggles and not only through discourse.

The depolarized and depoliticized sectors

What has grown since the crisis that opened in 2014 with the fall in oil prices, the paralysis of the revolutionary perspective of the process and the restoration cycle, is depoliticization. Millions of nationals are beginning to see, as in the late 1980s and 1990s, politics as a problem rather than a solution. The subterranean return to anti-politics translates into a silent depolarization, something that can erupt at any moment, guiding change in any direction.

Anti-politics has many faces, from formally assuming some narrative to survive, to boredom and refuge in new forms of competition from below. Depoliticization that acts as an "every man for himself" that threatens to eclipse what has been advanced in the last two decades in social solidarity.

In a country where the social movement is very weak and fragmented, where the left is superstructural and has not merged with the mass movement, depoliticization becomes the

prelude to the collective search for new caudillisms, even located at the antipodes of what the current leadership has been.

To break with this new depoliticization of the left, we must rebuild ourselves as organizations not only from the militant logic, but fundamentally from the social movement. It is not a matter of a re-edition of the movement, but of developing the proposal according to which each militant is part of a continuous social practice, not as an enclave, but as an active part. This implies overcoming the old archetypes of the party and the logic of mass fronts, something that is harder to decide than to do.

The ultra-left

The ultra-left is terribly minority, super structural, and with limited capacity for self-management. The radical left, which came from a strong diaspora in the 1980s and 1990s of the 20th century, was unable to take advantage of the revolutionary situation opened up in 1998 to build organization, social fabric, press and alternative media.

The influence of the ultra-left in trade unions and unions is very weak, practically non-existent in the indigenous and peasant movement and only learning from the ecological and feminist movement.

With the exception of aporrea.org (2002-2021), otrasvoceseneducacion.org (2016-2021) and [insisto-resisto](http://insisto-resisto.org) (2021), there are no websites with the capacity to generate their own content and express a concrete movement. Even these experiments are very limited in their radius of influence.

Marea Socialista, PSL and LUCHAS, among other ultra-leftist factors, are very weak and fractured. Other lefts in the popular Guevarist or national tradition are in the same condition.

The position of the ultra-left in the APR will be key to break out of their isolation and fractionalization, but it is not yet clear what the position of most of them will be. Only LUCHAS has publicly expressed its intention to be part of the APR.

The working class

The situation of the working class is dramatic, because it has not been able to build an autonomous pole of reference. Currently, the working class is in the worst situation since the struggles of the 1930s, without class organizations and with an increasingly closed institutional structure. The authoritarian practices of judicialization and repression of class-conscious unionism that are implemented by the Ministry of Labor hinder the efforts of autonomous organization. Despite the destruction of real wages and the worst imaginable working conditions, the labor movement has not yet entered the political arena.

However, scams, isolated attempts (oil workers, health care, teachers, iron zone), a continuous movement of underground organizing, could reverse this situation. The struggle for a minimum wage of \$300 per month, the right to autonomous unionization, collective bargaining, the forum, and freedom of association could contribute to the activation of the labor movement. However, a combination of fear and resignation to the survival situation makes this task difficult.

The political error of an important part of the Latin American left

While this is happening, support for the Bolivarian government is falling. Factors on the anti-capitalist left that until recently supported the Bolivarian revolution are beginning to distance themselves and connect with the new forms of resistance. Importantly, many of these sympathizers find the APR a link for political work, and thus support for the

Bolivarian revolutionary process is maintained.

However, there is still an uncritical left that has decided to go along with what the government does, without taking into account its impact on the world of labor. This left, unconnected to what is happening in Venezuela, could contribute much more if it maintained support for elucidation and a critique of the growing shadows of government action. Even so, it could contribute to the construction of a Latin American revolutionary front to question the coercive measures of U.S. imperialism, European imperialisms and the Lima Group, which would follow the path of accompanying the anti-capitalist deepening of the Venezuelan revolutionary process.

The work of the APR at the international level becomes fundamental in this sense and this demands an international policy of the APR that takes into account the plurality of leftists that accompany this initiative. A greater breadth in the unity of action will allow the APR to be strengthened nationally and internationally as a driving factor in the Bolivarian revolutionary process. There, the greatest challenge is for the PCV, which must build a broad logic of convergence and defeat the ghosts of sectarianism.

The People's Revolutionary Alternative (APR) in the post-electoral scenario and the convening of its Founding Congress

The APR has a great responsibility and possibility to become a revolutionary, anti-capitalist, plural option of a new kind. But given the correlation of forces that we expressed in the actors' analysis, this cannot be an organization against madurism and its clauses, but to push chavismo as a whole towards revolutionary radicalization. In this sense, it must have the capacity to overcome the temptation of visceral politics and recover the strategic horizon. The APR can generate a revolutionary depolarization of the Venezuelan political situation.

However, for the PSUV this depolarization rupture is not convenient and it will try to put all obstacles in its way. This reality "sung in advance" cannot lead the APR to focus on the mere confrontation with Madurism, forgetting the unitary construction in the territories. The central task of the APR is to work for the unity of the Bolivarian camp. Unity not romantic, but in pursuit of a truly anti-capitalist agenda.

Therefore, the struggle against imperialist sanctions and the economic blockade must be central to the recomposition of unity. However, this does not mean giving an inch on the criticism against the bureaucratization, class conciliation and authoritarianism against the popular and revolutionary sectors that the government is currently carrying out. But it does mean building organizations, mechanisms and logics of class independence. This is by no means an easy task, in the current conjuncture of the class struggle.

Returning to the path of autonomous organization of the social movement and the anti-capitalist left

The central task of the APR is to accumulate forces, in a correlation of forces as complex as the one we are describing. It is not possible to accumulate forces with conciliation, but neither is it possible with sterile confrontation. Each struggle, each scenario must be built with a clear proposal, but also with a sustained construction in each territory.

To conclude, it is necessary to insist on the task of transforming each anti-capitalist militant into an architect of new experiences of popular, community, worker, feminist and ecological organization. This means rebuilding the political culture of the Venezuelan left.

The APR cannot be a sum of letters, slogans or personalities, but the convergence of the organization of anti-capitalist resistances in the current situation. If it succeeds, the future of the Bolivarian revolution will be saved.

A challenge that can only be understood and realized in the anticapitalist key of the 21st century.