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Venezuelan official explains left wing losses to U.S. audience

by Scott Hiley

After a right wing victory in Venezuela's recent legislative elections, the Bolivarian Revolution is entering a critical moment, says Jesús Rodríguez Espinoza, Consul General of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela for Chicago.

At the same time, he adds, the recent right-wing victory offers an opportunity to "deepen" the Revolution by taking a self-critical look at current strategic and tactical orientation and strengthening mass outreach and "people power" at the local level.

Rodríguez joined People's World and the Communist Party USA in a December webinar for a national online presentation and discussion of the legislative elections held in Venezuela.

Presentation and discussion during the webinar ranged over the causes and implications of right wing's strong showing, as well as how progressive forces are organizing to resist the assault on Bolivarian institutions when the new National Assembly takes power on Jan. 5.

Rodríguez identified several causes for the electoral setback. Insufficient ideological and communication work and poor voter turnout among PSUV/'Chavista' forces were certainly contributing factors, he said, but the most significant cause was the international economic and ideo-

logical campaign waged against the Bolivarian Revolution.

The Venezuelan economy is currently in a state of deep crisis, with inflation at 62 percent and rising. Rock-bottom oil prices have hit the nation's petroleum-based economy especially hard, as have smuggling and black market currency trading.

Smugglers buy up goods in Venezuela, where government subsidies make necessary items avail-

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able to low-income households, then resell those goods at market prices in Brazil and Colombia.

The government of Venezuela also subsidizes importers of vital goods like food and medical supplies by giving them access to U.S. dollars at a highly favorable exchange rate. Profiteers falsify

Venezuelan economy is currently at 62 percent and rising.

import records to get dollars, then resell those dollars on the black market at a massive profit to Venezuelans anxious to move their assets to a steadier currency.

Some voters reacted to currency devaluation and shortages of goods by turning against the current PSUV majority. Tellingly, though, formerly scarce goods began reappearing on store shelves immediately after the opposition victory.

Mr. Rodriguez qualified smuggling and the creation of artificial shortages as an act of "economic war," a war fought in tandem with an international media campaign to discredit the Bolivarian Republic by portraying it as a dictatorship or failed state.

The irony, he noted, is that the very fact of an electoral loss by the ruling party demonstrates how unfounded those accusations are.

The implications of this setback for the Bolivarian forces are far-reaching. The MUD [Mesa de Unidad Democrática], a coalition of right-wing parties backed by the United States government and transnational corporate interests, now holds a two-thirds majority in the National Assembly.

They are almost certain to use that majority to attack the monumental gains in social welfare, economic justice, and popular sovereignty made in the 16 years since the election of Hugo Chavez and the adoption of the Bolivarian constitution.

Venezuela is a multi-party democracy whose Bolivarian Constitution contains a strong system of checks and balances to prevent any one branch of government from ruling unilaterally.

Overall vote totals show that the MUD garnered only slightly more votes in these elections than in the closely contested presidential election of 2013. It was not the growth of the right, but the disaffection of the left, that shifted power in the National Assembly.

For Mr. Rodriguez, these results point to the necessity of taking a critical look at both the mass ideological work and the economic decision-making of the Bolivarian Revolution.



Scott Hiley is a contributor to Peoplesworld.org

A Global Village of Alternatives assembles at climate summit

By Blake Deppe

Just a single train stop away from Paris, in this nearby suburb, the People's Climate Summit took place on Dec. 5 and 6. Rue Dombasle; Rue Pépin; Rue François Debergue; Place Jean-Juarés; Rue Victor Hugo.

These five streets were filled with forums, discussions, workshops, and a large, festive gathering of members of the environmental community - both local and worldwide - unlike any other.

Beginning from the entrance to the Metro station and wending its way throughout the town, people set up stands selling wholesome, healthy, and natural goods. It was collectively called the Global Village of Alternatives.

Various groups of people with homemade organic wines, which many were sampling as they lined up to purchase burgers made from organic, farm-raised, grass-fed lamb. Others sold gluten-free and vegan products. One couple sold all-natural juices. Another man, fruit and vegetables.

But those attending the Summit were not merely merchants. Others set up informational areas,

educating passersby on sustainable food and agriculture, shared gardening, environmental awareness, responsible consumption including recycling and waste reduction, grassroots energy and climate initiatives, and much more.

There were also many powerful displays, including Greenpeace activists clad in polar bear outfits, warning of the dangers posed to the Arctic and other ecosystems by offshore oil drilling.

At one street corner, an enormous Statue of Liberty spewed dark smoke from its raised torch - obvious commentary on pollution.

Kate McNeely, an artist and activist from New York, came to Montreuil to turn people on to the idea of climate ribbons; where people write the thing they love most, and which they fear might be lost due to climate change.

"We need a complete system change, and I believe civil society will make that change. I truly believe that gatherings like this village in Montreuil are the way forward."

We need a complete system change.

L.A. port truckers win again, misclassified as independent contractors

By Mark Gruenberg



The underpaid, exploited port truck drivers at the nation's largest cargo terminal, Los Angeles-Long Beach, have won another round in their long fight for fair pay, job protections and the right to organize.

That's because California state Labor Commissioner Julie Su ruled in December that one of the big port trucking firms at Los Angeles-Long Beach, Pacific 9, misclassified its 38 drivers as "independent contractors" under labor law. They should be "employees," she said.

Because they really are employees, Pacific 9 owes them \$7 million in back pay, Su ruled. It also must now pay workers comp, payroll taxes for Medicare and Social Security, and unemployment insurance for them - all costs it had avoided by misclassifying the truckers.

And it must repay the 38 drivers for the past costs they incurred when Pac 9 forced them to pay for "unlawful deductions like permits, license fees, fuel, road taxes, inspections, parking, registration, truck (rental) payments, truck insurance and even port entry fees," Su's agency ruled. She also ordered Pac 9 to pay drivers for truck repairs and maintenance. And as "employees," the drivers have the right to organize, too. The Los Angeles-Long Beach port truckers are one of many national groups of un-

derpaid, exploited workers, many misclassified as "independent contractors," who have taken to the streets in the last two years to demand living wages and workers' rights. Others include retail, Walmart, warehouse and fast food workers and home health care aides.

Su called driver misclassification routine in the port trucking industry. Her agency is still mulling over cases involving other trucking companies.

Those other drivers haul cargo, after it is unloaded from freighters at Los Angeles-Long Beach, to the warehouses in California's "Inland Empire." If the drivers are "independent contractors," they must pay for their own gas, tires, insurance and repairs - and for both the employer and employee shares of Medicare and Social Security payroll taxes. And Pac9 now forces them to rent their trucks, too, at \$125 weekly, because the drivers' own older trucks don't meet state emissions standards.

As a result, such a typical truck driver often took home a net paycheck of about \$20 weekly.

The warehouse workers are also exploited: They're long-term "permatemps," also misclassified as "independent contractors" by the subcontractors who run the warehouses for the big retailers - Walmart, Target and the like - who actually import the goods.

Pacific 9 owes port truck drivers \$7 million in back pay.

Tamir Rice's family mourns after non-indictment of police officers

Special to Peoplesworld.org

After over a year of waiting for a grand jury decision regarding the shooting of Tamir Rice by police officers Timothy Loehmann and Frank Garmback, the grand jury has decided not to indict either officer.

The Rice family released the following statement shortly after the grand jury released their decision:

"My family and I are in pain and devastated by the non-indictment of officers Timothy Loehmann and Frank Garmback for the murder of our beloved Tamir. After this investigation-which took over a year to unfold-and Prosecutor McGinty's mishandling of this case, we no longer trust the local criminal-justice system, which we view as corrupt.

"Prosecutor McGinty deliberately sabotaged the case, never advocating for my son, and acting instead like the police officers' defense attorney. In a time in which a non-indictment for two police officers who have killed an unarmed black child is business as usual, we mourn for Tamir, and for all of the black people who have been killed by the police without justice. In our view, this process demonstrates that race is still an extremely troubling and serious problem in our country and the criminal-justice system.

"I don't want my child to have died for nothing and I refuse to let his legacy or his name be ignored. We will continue to fight for justice for him, and for all families who must live with the pain that we live with.

"As the video shows, Officer Loehmann shot my son in less than a second. All I wanted was someone to be held accountable. But this entire process was a charade.

Teatro de La Habana honores Alicia Alonso

Toni Piñera

Alicia Alonso, desde la altura de sus 95 años, asistió a la reapertura del coliseo de Prado, donde el Ballet Nacional de Cuba saludó un nuevo aniversario de la Revolución con la Gala del Primero de Enero.

Con el Ballet Nacional de Cuba, siempre joven, y un auditorio lleno de símbolos asistimos a la primera función del Gran Teatro de La Habana Alicia Alonso, expresó Julián González, ministro de Cultura durante la ceremonia, que estuvo presidida por el General de Ejército Raúl Castro, Presidente de los Consejos de Estado y de Ministros.

La emblemática institución habanera abrió anchas sus puertas totalmente renovada, ante un auditorio colmado de importantes personalidades políticas, culturales y sociales, amigos de diversos puntos del mundo y el personal que de una forma u otra participó en la restauración del teatro.

Tríptico clásico, que reunió el primer acto de Giselle (Coreografía: Alicia Alonso, sobre la original de Jean Coralli y Jules Perrot), el segundo de El lago de los cisnes (Coreografía: Alicia Alonso, sobre la original de Lev Ivanov.

Música: Piotr Ilich Chaikovski) y el tercero de Coppélia (Coreografía: Alicia Alonso sobre la original de Arthur Saint-Léon y la versión de Marius Petipa), constituyó el programa con que se celebraba también el cumpleaños 57 de la Revolución Cubana.

Anette Delgado, Dani Hernández, Sadaise Arencibia, Alfredo Ibáñez, Viengsay Valdés y Víctor Estévez, respectivamente, así como los solistas y cuerpo de baile, acompañados por la orquesta del GTH Alicia Alonso, dirigida por el maestro Giovani Duarte, tuvieron a su cargo esta inolvidable Gala.

En ella se rindió un merecido homenaje no solo a una de las más personales bailarinas de los escenarios de la humanidad, sino a una mujer identificada con los destinos de un pueblo, gloria de Cuba, y anfitriona, por demás, porque con su nombre se inauguraba un nuevo tiempo en la institución habanera. Alicia Alonso saludó y reverenció a su pueblo que la colmó de largas ovaciones y flores.

En el programa de mano diseñado para el acontecimiento, la insigne bailarina y directora del BNC expresaba, antes, en palabras: "Mi agradecimiento al Consejo de Estado de Cuba, y a mi pueblo, que ha recibido con alegría la noticia de que ahora existe el Gran Teatro de La Habana Alicia Alonso.

En estos momentos vienen a mi memoria los artistas que anteriormente actuaron en este teatro y la generosidad que significa escoger el nombre de uno de ellos para designarlo. Ser yo la escogida es una acción tan bella y generosa, que es algo que me sobrepasa. Solo acierto a decir: ¡Gracias, muchas gracias!

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