

Venezuela's electoral dispute triggers regional crisis

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The Venezuelan National Electoral Council (CNE) controlled by President Nicolas Maduro blocked on Monday the registration of Corina Yoris as presidential candidate for the US-backed opposition in the elections programmed for July 28.

Yoris, an 80-year-old philosophy professor, was appointed at the last minute as the namesake representative for Maria Corina Machado, who was selected as candidate by the opposition Unitary Platform but remains disqualified by the courts.

On Tuesday, the CNE handed down an extension and allowed the coalition to register the former ambassador Edmundo González Urrutia as candidate. The Unitary Platform accepted this as a provisional decision “until we succeed in registering our unitary candidature.” Machado said she will continue campaigning for Yoris to be placed on the ticket, given a rule that the candidate can be changed up to 10 days before the vote, that is, July 18.

Machado and her party Vente Venezuela represent the most radical and fascist wing of the coalition. She has been one of the staunchest promoters of US-backed coup operations against Maduro, including socially devastating sanctions, appeals for a military coup, and even calls for a foreign military intervention.

Along with figures like Giorgia Meloni, Javier Milei, and Eduardo Bolsonaro, she is a signatory of the “Madrid Forum” charter launched by the fascist Spanish party VOX, and Machado advocates privatizing the state oil company PDVSA and other enterprises.

The fact that such a figure is organizing increasingly large rallies, including in deeply impoverished areas, and that polls show she would defeat Maduro does not reflect mass support for her right-wing politics, but rather popular willingness to accept anybody with a chance of defeating Maduro and changing the current unbearable social and economic conditions. The election of fascist Javier Milei against Peronism represented similar trends in Argentina.

The actions of the Maduro government lack all progressive content, however. It has been using the CNE merely as an instrument in the negotiations with US imperialism.

To divide the Unitary Platform, the CNE approved the candidacy of Manuel Rosales, governor of Zulia, and Enrique Márquez, a former electoral chief. It also approved the candidates for the traditional ruling parties before Hugo Chávez, the Social Democratic Action (AD) and Social Christian COPEI parties. Several other candidates of parties aligned with the Socialist United Party (PSUV) of Maduro were allowed to run. But as matters stand, it is widely expected that Maduro will win his third election.

The last-minute decision to let the Unitary Platform register a candidate serves to buy time. The Biden administration has declared that, unless the Unitary Platform is allowed to present its chosen

candidate, it will allow the US license to let Venezuela sell oil and gas expire on April 18. This would mean a reimposition of the full sanctions regime. For his part, Maduro hopes for a renewal before the time runs out for Yoris to be on the ticket or, for that matter, Machado.

The Maduro administration has also repressed any opposition from the left, with the CNE blocking the candidacy of Manuel Isidro Molina for the Communist Party and the Popular Alternative Movement (MPA) electoral coalition it leads. The Stalinist PCV leadership broke with Maduro in 2020, at a time when the government's rapprochement with Washington and the AD, COPEI and other opposition parties, was imperiling its own position and privileges within the government.

At the same time, the government's shameful appeals to Washington and its special economic zones, massive corporate tax benefits, privatizations, attacks on wage levels and social cuts, all while its partners in the Boli-bourgeoisie continue to get wealthy through corrupt contracts, have made it all but impossible to provide a “left” cover to the PSUV.

While the brutal economic sanctions imposed under US imperialism are chiefly responsible for the massive impoverishment of Venezuelan workers, Maduro's chief service to imperialism has been to impose a “shock therapy” that Argentine Milei could only dream of while suppressing the class struggle with the aid of the PCV and pseudo-left apologists.

After a limited “recovery” in 2022, the poverty rate estimated by the Andrés Bello Catholic University has again “stagnated.” Last year, 82.8 percent of households were poor or could not afford the basic basket of goods and services, while more than half face extreme poverty, meaning they can't afford staple foods. Since 2014, moreover, over 7 million Venezuelans have left the country.

Now the PSUV is seeking to remain in power for the Boli-bourgeoisie to reap the rewards from the super-exploitation of Venezuelan workers.

The Joe Biden administration has had a somewhat muted response to the electoral crisis, hoping to solidify access to Venezuelan oil to offset the effects of its war on Russia in Ukraine, and a potential broader war in the Middle East, as well as other geo-strategic considerations.

The clandestine visit, by former British prime minister Boris Johnson to Venezuela to persuade Maduro not to deepen its relations with Russia, was undoubtedly carried out with approval from the British and US governments. UK-based Shell and British Petroleum, moreover, are negotiating the development of gas fields with Caracas.

Milei gives refuge to Venezuelan far-right

Acting at the behest of US imperialism, the governments of Uruguay, Costa Rica, Ecuador, Guatemala, Paraguay and Peru issued a statement to protest the decision to block the Platform chosen candidates.

The governments of Presidents Lula da Silva of Brazil and Gustavo Petro of Colombia, usually friendly toward Maduro, joined in to demand Caracas to allow the candidacy of Corina Yoris. In response, Venezuelan Foreign Minister Yvan Gil said Colombia was acting “by the need to please the wishes of the US Department of State.”

Significantly, in December, Lula worked closely with Washington to confront Maduro’s threats to invade and take disputed territories of Guyana, a former British colony located between Venezuela and Brazil. Then, the fascistic President Javier Milei allowed six associates of Machado facing arrest warrants to take refuge in the Argentine embassy in Caracas on Tuesday.

Last week, the Venezuelan intelligence agency SEBIN arrested the chairwoman and vice-chair of Machado’s party Vente Venezuela and issued arrest warrants against seven of her associates, including several who had been mentioned as possible replacements for Machado. This follows the arrest of six regional campaign managers for the opposition and dozens of others, including military personnel.

Government prosecutors claim that these figures have been involved in various plots to de-stabilize the government, carry out a coup, and assassinate the president.

Maduro said that two armed individuals who allegedly confessed belonging to Vente Venezuela, which he described as a “far-right fascist party,” were arrested on Monday a few feet away from where he was speaking on a stage in Caracas.

The Argentine presidency has denounced the cutting of the water supply and electricity from its embassy in Caracas and warned against “any deliberate action that endangers the safety of Argentine diplomatic personnel and Venezuelan citizens under their protection.”

The Milei government then announced that it was sending two gendarmes (military police) to the embassy and ambassador’s residence in Caracas. Also, during an interview with CNN on Tuesday, Milei said that Venezuela had been reduced to “carnage,” while Israel had not committed any “excess” in Gaza.

He then went on a rampage against regional presidents. Regarding Colombian President Petro, Milei said “not much can be expected from someone who was a murderer, a terrorist, a communist,” referring to his past in the M-19 guerrillas during the 1980s. Finally, the Argentine president said about his Mexican counterpart, “That an ignoramus like López Obrador speaks ill of me is an honor to me.”

These actions follow the visit by CIA director William Burns to Buenos Aires on March 20, confirming that the Argentine regime is becoming a hub for anti-democratic conspiracies at the behest of US imperialism, just like in the 1970s.

After the interview, Petro withdrew his ambassador in Buenos Aires and expelled all Argentine diplomats from Colombia.

The near rupture of diplomatic relations between the second and third largest countries in South America, however, cannot be explained by mere verbal insults.

The diplomatic flare-up in Latin America can only be understood as a birthing pain in the eruption of a world war. It reflects the maneuvers of factions of the ruling class between and within countries in response to the breakup of the post-WWII order and the drive by the US-NATO axis to recolonize and redivide the world, which currently takes the form of economic and military conflict with Russia, Iran and China.

Like all forms of bourgeois third-world regionalism—Pan-Arabism, Pan-Africanism, etc.—the pretensions of “Bolivarianism” to achieve Latin American unity on a capitalist basis as a counterweight to imperialism have reached their final dead-end.

Moreover, while some like Maduro cover their underlying class interests in “pro-worker” demagoguery, all factions are competing for a larger piece of the pie from the exploitation of the working class, while their pseudo-left apologists sweep the floor for the crumbs.

Already with the eruption of the NATO war in Ukraine against Russia, as explained by Eduardo Parati in last year’s WSWs May Day Rally, “Latin America is being transformed into a stage of ever more intense diplomatic, economic, and military disputes.” The speech continued:

Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro’s oscillations between denunciations of the US sanctions regime imposed on the country and seeking a rapprochement with a US government that continues to seek his overthrow expresses in a most direct form the crisis confronting the bourgeois governments in every Latin American country.

With the ruling elites seeking to make workers pay through social attacks for the deepening geopolitical and economic crises, the same contradictions dragging the region and the world to war will feed new revolutionary struggles of the working class against imperialist oppression and the capitalist profit system.

To fight war and the threat of fascism, a Trotskyist leadership must be built armed with a program to unite workers across Latin America, the United States and internationally to overthrow capitalism. A fundamental step consists in drawing the necessary lessons from the betrayal of the mass social upheavals in the past quarter century behind promises of “socialism” and “anti-imperialism” under Hugo Chavez and other “pink tide” bourgeois nationalist movements.



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