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The 10 Victories of President Maduro in 2016

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In early 2016, Venezuela's authorities had very difficult problems to solve. Namely, 1) the neoliberal opposition had won the legislative elections of 2015 and controlled the National Assembly, 2) the price of oil, the main export of Venezuela, had fallen to its lowest point in decades, and 3) US President Barack Obama had signed an executive order that declared Venezuela to be an "unusual and extraordinary threat to the US national security and foreign policy".

That is, in three decisive areas (political, economic and geopolitical), the Bolivarian revolution seemed to be playing defensively. Meanwhile, the counter-revolution, both internal and external, seemed to have power at its fingertips.

Furthermore, *Chavismo* had been under attack from the media since Hugo Chávez arrived to power in 1999. The negative propaganda had intensified since April 2013 and reached unseen levels after the election of President Nicolás Maduro.

This permanent aggression by the media created and propagated such a level of disinformation about Venezuela that it even confused many friends of the Bolivarian Revolution. In particular because, in this "post-truth era", lies, intellectual fraud and deceit aren't sanctioned with any sort of negative consequence, not even in terms of credibility or image. Anything goes, everything that's useful to achieve an end is valid in this era of post-factual relativism, and sometimes not even the most objective facts or pieces of data are enough to disprove false statements. Denunciations against this strategy are ridiculed by media as "conspiracy theories", and an obsolete element of an "old narrative" that has no basis.

As I was saying, all odds seemed to be against the President of Venezuela in early 2016. The head of the National Assembly, opposition member Henry Ramos Allup even dared to say, emboldened by the parliamentary majority they had achieved, that he would oust Maduro "in less than six months". He was undoubtedly inspired by the institutional coup that had ousted President Dilma Rousseff in Brazil, and hoped to achieve a victory in a recall referendum.

That was the state of affairs when President Maduro, in a masterful series of moves that nobody had predicted—and that were perfectly legal according to the Constitution—surprised everyone. He renewed the members of the Supreme Court of Justice (SCJ), whose Constitutional Court has the last word when it comes to interpreting the Constitution.

And then the opposition made two huge mistakes:

They decided to ignore the warnings of the SCJ and carry out a session with three deputies from Amazonas state, whose appointment was under cautionary suspension due to irregularities in their election. Of course, the SCJ blocked this act of disobedience and declared the National Assembly to be in contempt due to the presence of three “irregularly elected” deputies and therefore stripped all validity from decisions made by the organism until this situation is solved. So not only did the assembly fail to legislate to control the government but it annulled itself, wasting the power it held. That was Maduro’s first victory in 2016.

In their obsessive effort to overthrow the President, the anti-Chavista opposition also decided to ignore the legal requirements to launch a revocatory referendum in 2016. And therefore, they failed again. And that was Maduro’s second victory.

Even so, there was a phase, in March and April, where everything got terribly complicated. Because the usual attacks by the enemies of the Bolivarian revolution were joined by another destabilizing factor: a huge drought, the second biggest since 1950, and extreme heat caused by El Niño. In Venezuela, 70% of electricity is generated by hydroelectric plants, and the main hydroelectric central comes from the Guri dam. When the amount of rain decreased, the water levels of this dam dropped to next to minimum.

The counter-revolution sought to take advantage of this situation and sabotage electricity to enrage the people and create chaos and protests. This was even more dangerous because the lack of rain also caused drinking water shortages.

But once again, President Maduro acted swiftly and took dramatic measures: he decreed that millions of incandescent light bulbs had to be replaced by energy saving light bulbs, that old air conditioning systems had to be replaced by new, energy saving ones, he ordered public administration to work half time, and he decreed a special plan of national savings of electricity and water consumption.

Thanks to these bold measures, the president managed to avoid energetic collapse, and obtained one of his most popular victories in 2016.

Another important problem, probably the biggest that the government had to face, partly caused by the economic war on the revolution, was the shortage in food distribution. Before Chávez became president in 1999, 65% of Venezuelans were poor and only 35% had a high quality of life. That means that only 3 out of 10 Venezuelans regularly ate meat, chicken, coffee, corn, milk, sugar and other basic goods. But Chávez wanted everyone to be properly nourished, and in the last 17 years, food consumption grew by 80%. This required a massive investment to increase national food production, but it didn’t grow enough to satisfy the growing demand.

Demand grew, and also speculation. And due to the structural limitations to produce enough, prices hiked vertiginously, while the black market, or *bachaqueo*, expanded. The government set ceilings on prices of essential goods. Many people bought those cheap, government-subsidized products and sold them for higher prices. Or smuggled them across the border to Colombia or Brazil, where they sold them for double or triple the price. Therefore, Venezuela lost its dollar reserves (which were already scarce due to the drop in oil prices) to the bloodsuckers that stole basic goods from those in need to get rich. Such madness had to stop.

Once again, Maduro decided to act with a firm hand. First of all, he changed the philosophy of social welfare. and he corrected a very important mistake that Venezuela had been making for years. Instead of subsidizing products, the government had to subsidize people. So that those who were truly in need had access to cheaper products. Everybody else pays the market price. This eliminates speculation and smuggling.

And he also announced a change in the economic model of the country: from a “rentist model” to a “productive model”, and defined 15 key sectors to restart the economy of the private, public and communal sector.

One of the practical implementations of these two measures is the creation of Local Committees of Supply and Production (CLAPs), a new form of popular organization. The representatives of organized communities deliver bags full of low-cost food to each home. Many of these foods are produced by the new national industry. In the upcoming months,, CLAPs should feed around four million families.

Another victory was the government's record in social expenditure: 71,4% of the budget was allocated there. That's a world record. No other state in the world dedicates that much resources to the wellbeing of its people.

In healthcare, for example, the number of hospitals grew 3.5 times since 1999. And investment in the new model of humanitarian, free-for-all healthcare grew ten times.

The *Barrio Adentro* Mission, aimed at caring for the health of those who live in the poorest urban areas of the country, has been received almost 800 million visits and saved 1,400,000 lives. Free medical universities have trained 27,000 new doctors, and other 30,000 will graduate in 2017. Eight states have achieved a 100% coverage with the Barrio Adentro Mission (the goal had been set at six). In 2016, the percentage of retired people who earn a pension (regardless of whether they were able to pay for retirement deductions during their active years) reached 90%—a new record for South America.

Spectacular results were achieved by the Housing Mission, which builds accessible homes for disadvantaged families. Only in 2016, this Mission delivered 359,000 homes for the humble. (While a developed country like France made 109,000 in 2015). Since the beginning of his administration in 2013, a million and a half houses have been made for Venezuelan families. This achievement isn't even mentioned by hegemonic media.

Last but not least, we must recall some of the brilliant victories that Venezuela obtained in the geopolitical arena. For example, it prevented the Organization of American States, which is dominated by Washington, from condemning Caracas by invoking the Democratic Charter against Venezuela.

It also reaped success at the XVII Summit of the Non Aligned Movement that was held in September 2016 in the country, with the attendance of many heads of state and of government representatives from 120 countries who expressed their solidarity with Venezuela.

The main victory of President Maduro in this area was the unprecedented deal between OPEC and non-OPEC countries to coordinate a reduction in exports of oil. To achieve this, Maduro carried out many international tours.

This historic agreement, signed in November 2016, immediately stopped the drop in oil prices, which had been plummeting since mid-2014, when the price was at 100 dollars a barrel, to 24 dollars in January. Thanks to the agreement, the price hiked to 45 dollars by the end of December 2016.

In the longest and hardest year, in which many thought he would fall, President Maduro, overcame all obstacles and proved his exceptional ability as a statesman. And as a trustworthy leader of the Bolivarian revolution.