

Worrying signs from Venezuela to Ecuador - Latin America loses precious time

Sunday 14 November 2010, by [FERRARI Sergio](#), [TOUSSAINT Éric](#) (Date first published: 10 November 2010).

In spite of a generally favourable situation given the existence of progressive governments and dynamic social movements, worrying signs can be perceived in Latin America. The recent attempted coup in Ecuador on 30 September 2010, and the election results in Venezuela four days earlier, are signals that call for a correct interpretation, as Eric Toussaint is quick to point out. An activist of social change and another world order, president of the Belgian-based Committee for the Abolition of the Third World Debt (CADTM), and a member of the World Social Forum International Council, Eric Toussaint is also an insightful analyst of the Latin-American scene.

“An in-depth analysis of the current situation in Latin America is cause for no little concern, because I feel it is degenerating”, says Eric Toussaint. Several recent events account for the Belgian historian’s position. He cites them here with his customary logic and analytical precision.

Ecuador and Venezuela

The most recent event was the police rebellion against Ecuador’s president Rafael Correa at the end of September 2010. “It was really an attempted coup initiated by the police and part of the army, with the support of the main opposition party led by former president Lucio Gutiérrez.”

Even though the attempt failed, largely because of very poor organization, it exposed significant political weaknesses in the government. The major flaw according to Eric Toussaint (who was advisor to President Correa on Ecuador’s external debt a few years back), “was the lack of collective protest against the coup”. Though there was some mobilization while Correa was “sequestered” by the rebels in the hospital where he received treatment, “in the country’s capital, Quito, protesters totalled only 5 to 10,000, i.e. much fewer than for the attempted coup against Hugo Chávez in 2002, when hundreds of thousands were in the streets.”

“We have already pointed out to Correa (not just myself but some of his advisors and other critically supportive left-wing people) that he is wrong to ignore major popular movements such as the powerful indigenous organizations, on the grounds that they have a corporatist and not a general vision of society.”

This distance between the government and social players is also the consequence of various mobilizations over the last three years, such as those involving indigenous people, the teachers’ trade union and the academic community in its call for greater autonomy.

While it is clear that Correa’s popularity ratings increased after the coup - now showing at over 70% - such surveys do not necessarily reflect “a real capacity to mobilize people to stand up for the current process”.

The second worrying signal, according to the Belgian analyst, is to be found in the latest elections in

Venezuela, which marked the second “defeat” (“and I insist on the quotation marks,” says Toussaint) of the Chavist movement out of the 10 elections in which it has been involved since 1998.

Though President Hugo Chávez’ coalition accounts for 98 of the 165 representatives – and still has a majority in parliament – “in real terms it amounts to 50% of voters, a figure that is far lower than the 60% of voters who supported Chávez in 2006”. [1]

“Grassroot support has entered a stage of disappointment. Votes have shifted and fewer people turn out for elections,” he claims.

“Precious time lost”

For the president of CADTM, from the given facts to general conclusions there is but a short conceptual step. “We have been repeating this for two years now: the progressive governments of Latin America are losing precious time.”

ALBA (the Bolivarian Alliance for the Peoples of our America) has not moved forward or been implemented. There is no Bank of ALBA nor any programme to integrate the economies of countries that belong to ALBA, Toussaint explains. What is implemented are major bilateral agreements such as between Cuba and Venezuela about exchanging oil for medical care and physicians, the trade agreement between Venezuela and Bolivia, or the Venezuelan policy of selling oil below market price to the countries that belong to PETROCARIBE.

The Bank of the South – which could be a major financial instrument in the region – “has been left in its draft condition since 2007, waiting for at least four parliaments in the seven participating countries to ratify the project. Meanwhile things hang in the balance.” There are many reasons for this. Fundamentally, a lack of interest, “as is the case in Brazil, which has its own Development Bank, the BNDES, a portfolio of heavy loans that are used to support investments and contracts with major Brazilian transnational corporations. Brazil perceives the Bank of the South project as competition for its own institution, and consequently does not further its progression.”

Latin America seems to be going through a democratic springtime threatened by growing clouds. More specifically because of the “risk of accumulating frustrations. These processes and experiments, these strategic programmes and alternatives that are not yet implemented – such as ALBA and the Bank of the South – can lead to fresh frustration”.

“The events in Ecuador at the end of September, the latest elections in Venezuela, the huge popular expectations that have been shelved in Brazil over the past eight years, the coup in Honduras last year, the election of the right-wing candidate Sebastián Piñera to the Chilean presidency, are signals that cannot fail to raise concern,” he concludes.

Eric Toussaint interviewed by Sergio Ferrari

P.S.

* Translated by Christine Pagnouille and Judith Harris.