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Venezuela

# **"Maduro is undemocratic and Guaidó is a usurper"**

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## **Dani DomÍnguez interviews Gonzalo Gómez [1]**

"The people no longer want Maduro and no one has elected Guaidó ". This is the slogan of Marea's Socialista, confronted with the crisis in Venezuela. This political movement of Chavist origin argues for popular sovereignty against the total political polarization of the country between the "authoritarian" government of Maduro and the "puppet" presidency of Guaidó . We talk to Gonzalo Gómez Freire, a spokesman for Marea Socialista and co-founder of the independent media *Aporrea*.

### **Dani DomÍnguez: As socialists, you criticize both the government of Nicolás g Maduro and his opponent Juan Guaidó . What do you blame each one of them for?**

Gonzalo Gómez Freire: The Maduro government has destroyed the rights of the working class. It is very authoritarian, undemocratic. It is excessively corrupt. It compromises social and oil sovereignty and, despite an anti-imperialist discourse, what it seeks is to integrate into the world economy as a neo-bourgeoisie, by submitting to emerging imperialisms. It seriously violates the Constitution and has dismantled all that remained of the Bolivarian Revolution as a real process, of which it has kept only a manipulative language devoid of real content.

Guaidó is also a usurper, but he managed to manoeuvre by surfing on the immense malaise and genuine protest of the people. He proclaimed himself president, without respecting the Constitution, without being elected by anyone. He has managed to canalise huge mass mobilizations that are fed up with the Maduro government and want it to change, but the source of his project is in Washington and his decisions are not his own. He is at the service of a foreign interventionist operation of recolonization. Basically, it is a repetition of many elements of Carmona's coup against Chavez, but he has real popular support and seeks military support that has not yet appeared, although he is supported by the military and economic power of the United States. We reject Guaidó's "puppet presidency", but at the same time we say that Maduro cannot continue to rule against the people. We appeal to popular sovereignty.

### **Dani DomÍnguez: The media speak of a total polarization of Venezuelan society. Is this the case or are there intermediate positions?**

Gonzalo Gómez Freire: The polarization of political actors and social organizations seems to be almost total and that is how it looks. But the fact that the people are protesting against Maduro does not mean that they trust Guaidó. The people are waiting. I belong to a sector that does not submit to this polarization and that encourages the political and class autonomy of the workers and the people's movement to distance themselves from corrupt bureaucracy and exploiting capital. For example, within the Intersectorial de Trabajadores de Venezuela (ITV) – an articulating organ of the struggles of the working class, politically plural – we launched the battle (as Marea socialista, with other forces of the class struggle left) for ITV not to be officially involved in the march called by Guaidó on January 23rd. We proposed that ITV launch its own call on its own programme to help build the autonomy of the working class as an actor with its own voice, demanding popular sovereignty. We insisted that ITV remain committed to the programme of struggle that we had approved in the meetings. But a large part of the trade union leadership went to the march and very few stood out from the unilateral and unconstitutional actions of Guaidó. I am referring to the union leaders who protest and demand along with the workers, because those who are close to the Maduro government are essentially just one more apparatus of the state bureaucracy.

The media, both private and public, are not interested in presenting options for breaking with polarization because they are on one side or the other. Unlike *Aporrea*, for example, which is an alternative and popular means of

communication.

**Dani DomÍnguez : What does this intermediate position propose?**

Gonzalo Gómez Freire: I do not agree with describing it as "intermediary", it's just another position. And, on the other hand, in the spectrum that is not aligned with the polarization there is not just one attitude. Marea Socialista, together with the Civic Platform for the Defence of the Constitution, in which several of Chávez's ministers who have broken with the Maduro government-army-PSUV participate, advocates the exercise of popular sovereignty through a constitutional democratic solution with the mobilized people. We say: "the people do not want Maduro anymore and nobody elected Guaidó". We propose the re-legitimization of all powers and the holding of general elections; for this we call for an advisory referendum, provided for in Article 71 of the Constitution of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, so that the people can express themselves and decide, freely and sovereignly, on important issues for the country. It is necessary for 10 per cent of voters to ask for it. And whoever calls himself "president" cannot ignore this right because sovereignty belongs to the people and not to the president. There

**Dani DomÍnguez : Is this crisis different from the others and does it impose change in Venezuela?**

Gonzalo Gómez Freire: It's the crisis of a betrayed revolution. With Chávez, there was a democratic process, progressive, and transformative, which accumulated many conquests for the people, despite the fact that many problems had begun to take shape during his term. Now we have a sad reality: imperialism and the traditional bourgeoisie are coming to collect the result of work done by a corrupt bureaucracy, a sort of "neo-lumpen-bourgeoisie" which wanted to appropriate the wealth of a country instead of continuing the revolutionary potential initiated with Chavez. We cannot compare the change that would come from the interventionist hands of the United States and the traditional capitalist sectors, with what was experienced in the best years of the Bolivarian revolution. We believe that, in order to hope for a favourable change for the people, an autonomous movement of the working class and popular sectors is indispensable. Obviously, the change represented by Guaidó and Trump is not favourable to us, nor is what Maduro represents. In order to contribute to a change in favour of the people, we call for the establishment of an autonomous force, by building an organization like Marea Socialista, as well as alliances that must be forged. We do not see magic solutions if there is no political actor who really identifies with the workers and the people.

**Dani DomÍnguez: What is the best possible scenario, and the worst?**

Gonzalo Gómez Freire: The best possible scenario is that the mobilized people claim their sovereign status and impose a consultation or new democratic elections with better guarantees. That the conflicting factors seek a negotiated solution, but not a compromise between the summits, before the people. Everything is better than a civil war or an invasion. But the price of peace cannot be to continue in misery, without democracy and without national sovereignty.

**Dani DomÍnguez : If new elections are called, would their results change from previous ones? Would the losing option accept the result?**

Gonzalo Gómez Freire: The previous elections, although we called for a vote, were unfair and lacked guarantees and transparency. The National Electoral Council must be renewed, not in the form of a division of positions between the political parties and the powers that are fighting each other, but with the open participation of citizens, in a form that should be debated. Neither the Maduro bureaucracy nor the Guaidó-Trump binomial can guarantee this. A democratic election would be preferable and probably acceptable, even though the configuration expressing the interests of the working class and popular sectors will not necessarily be built, because our organizations have been

degraded, subjected, have become clientelist ... and it will require a reconstruction of our social and political subject.

### **Dani DomÍnguez : How do you assess the position of the European Union?**

Gonzalo Gómez Freire: Generally, I think it ends up being useful for Trump's plans. I saw a statement by the Spanish government in which it declared that if Maduro did not organize new democratic elections, it could recognize Guaidó; and I do not think that is a democratic option, because it's our people who have to rule directly. I think that the European Union cannot take this responsibility, because Guaidó seeks to impose himself by unconstitutional means; no one elected him and he declared himself self-proclaimed during a demonstration, without prior decision of the National Assembly of which he had just taken over the presidency, even though this Assembly was declared "disobedient" by the Supreme Court of Justice.

I believe that, as governments, they must remain within the framework of the principle of non-intervention and respect for the sovereignty of peoples. We believe in international solidarity with the people of Venezuela, who resist and carry on their shoulders the shock of the crisis, which requires food aid and not the xenophobia of other countries, which seeks an echo denouncing the repression and which has the right to take part, without cheating, in the democratic decision concerning its destiny.

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[1] This article was published by the monthly magazine *La Marea* No. 4 of February 2019, which appears both in print and in digital form, edited by cooperative information workers of the Spanish state:

<https://www.lamarea.com/2019/02/08/maduro-es-antidemocratico-y-guaido-es-un-usurpador/>.