

Alonso Moleiro: “People are not foolish; they are conscious and want their country back”

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The journalist and political analyst maintains that despite the increase in repression and the closing of civic space in Venezuela, democratic society continues to resist and demand that their right to choose be respected.

–At the time of this interview, Vice President Delcy Rodríguez is presenting the Anti-Fascism Law project to the National Assembly. What impact could this legal initiative have on Venezuela's already deteriorated civic space?

It is concerning that the political statement surrounding the presentation of the law is entirely unilateral, with a complete blindness to what has occurred, an absolutely ideological, even religious, view of what has happened in recent years, where the government evades its total responsibility for the economic chaos and the structural causes that produced this collapse.

It is concerning because it is developing during an electoral campaign and seems like the gestation of a political vendetta. In Venezuela, there has been no open debate about what has

happened during this time with the repression and the investigations by independent experts and the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights. The government has ongoing cases in the International Criminal Court. How will it invert the burden of proof so as to wash its hands of the situation with such a proposal? It is worrisome that the possibility of having rational discussions with arguments in Venezuela is being weakened.

The only thing the government is doing is tightening its authoritarian framework and threatening beyond reason. This particular law seems dangerous to me, especially because of the way it was introduced: the Vice President herself goes to Parliament and is received with pomp, the topic of a commission from Nicolás Maduro is addressed, and Jorge Rodríguez gives an unprecedented preamble where he virtually absolves Chavismo of any responsibility for the national collapse.

A sort of punishment is suggested for those who protested against the current state of affairs, including the total scarcity of medicines and food, the state of absolute chaos, and the rampant crime at that time; in other words, the brutal Venezuela we have had to live in these years. The debate about protests and their limits must happen, but with fair play. In Venezuela, the institutional framework is broken, there is no political agreement, alternation is inhibited, and we are invited to vote just so nothing changes. This understandably frustrates people. To me, this law seems to express how public debate is being distorted.

Alonso Moleiro: "People are not foolish; they are conscious and want their country back"

-The Anti-Fascism Law has its precedent in the Anti-Hate Law, which has been used to persecute dissent. Waiting in line is the law that seeks to control non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and simultaneously, political and social leaders are being imprisoned, accused of being conspirators. How can we move forward amid this minefield?

The debate must be conducted with great intelligence and knowledge of language, carefully choosing the words used, ensuring that the arguments have an inclusive, connected criterion, where there is an invitation to criticism. One thing that is lost in Venezuela is what Rousseau called the general interest. In a democracy, the national interest was always invoked. If something was poorly done, they would say: "This is a contract detrimental to the interests of the Republic." That was an argument from when Venezuela was a Republic, not the madhouse it is now.

Since shared responsibility in governance is broken, there is little talk about the general interest, but we must discuss the impact certain decisions have had on the total destruction of the country. Maduro and Jorge Rodríguez have spent a good amount of time hiding things like economic figures and denying migration statistics. The government's attitude is completely irrational.

The only thing left here are massive and bloodless statements in an election. In Venezuela, what people are asking for is not another dictatorship, but the restoration of constitutional order and the right to political alternation. In

Venezuela, some achievements were taken from us; on January 23, 1958, political alternation was achieved. People voted for Chávez, Venezuela was Chavista, but it no longer is, and it wants to exercise that right. That is the whole problem in Venezuela.

We must proceed with caution. What is Maduro doing? He is trying to inhibit the majority's voice by attacking civil society, hence the NGO law that is being discussed. It is clear that the government halted that agenda due to the dialogue issue, signed some agreements, and is now disregarding them. We don't know what will happen in Venezuela. I don't know if we will end up like Nicaragua, but we are on that path.

–While the list of abuses is already endless, the Chavista regime's refusal to allow the candidacy of Professor Corina Yoris marks a milestone in the history of the regime's arbitrariness. How can we play in that electoral terrain?

Everything that comes from there will be vetoed; that's where we're heading. Hopefully, the population will consolidate the idea of doing things in one direction. One of the good things proposed is that there is an interest in voting. Let people interpret, and there will be a rush in the direction of a name, even if the name is not perfect.

The approach has to be bloodless; what the country is asking for is a right that is being denied to us. It's not asking to deny the right to Chavismo. Chavismo is on notice, which is understandable because the population's levels of anger are very high. But the crisis should be handled differently.

Alonso Moleiro: "People are not foolish; they are conscious and want their country back"

Sometimes bad things happen, so we can't rule out a major onslaught against civil society here. Hopefully, it's just a threat, but we're at a point where they could say that to stay in power, they have to mutilate part of the country and not be accountable for the rest. What was the dialogue for in the end? Wasn't it to solve the problem?

This is an everyday issue. We must strive to tell things as they are, resist that cartelized vision that Chavismo proposes. There are still areas where things can be done; it's important to be aware of that. Dignified journalism can still be practiced.

-Despite censorship and self-censorship? Open media outlets blacklist opposition figures and echo Chavista propaganda.

It's a very complex situation, with many economic difficulties, limitations on reading, government blockades, and all kinds of censorship. Mass media outlets are already subdued, except for small spaces where things can be said. On social media and websites, very interesting efforts are being made, with many foreign media outlets having Venezuelan journalists who are doing well. I think we need to focus on ensuring that information circulates and there is clarity in understanding what is happening. Why have we reached this point, what does this country want?

I believe that Chavismo is a historically very compromised project, very wounded, it has lost popular faith, it's hanging on by a thread, it has been losing virtues, and now it's a violent,

distrustful, explosive movement because it has lost the majority.

Yes, I do believe there are still spaces for a certain level of debate, and there are areas within Chavista society where there might be people willing to listen. If we go to an election, it's because we're seeking a solution. Important things have been done here, collaborative journalism, alliances, and very important issues are being investigated regarding critical matters. There are difficulties in spreading information, certainly, but the network exists. I think those channels need to continue to be developed very carefully.

–Do you see in people the willingness to continue maintaining those spaces, or is a certain conformity already being imposed, “settling” to avoid reprisals and focus on a future as distant as it is uncertain?

A part of the country is like that. If the government continues to tighten its grip, another part will reach that point too. That's what dictatorships are about. But there are many people who don't go along with that. There are people who do journalism and the work that needs to be done, understanding that we are not in the Venezuela of democracy, when you could say things with guarantees.

In civil society, there are vibrant, active areas, but of course, the repressive environment could worsen that situation. There is still a lot of activism, commitment; look at the 600K network raised by María Corina Machado, that's a political expression of discontent. It's not about politicizing the discussion be-

Alonso Moleiro: "People are not foolish; they are conscious and want their country back"

cause even people who stay and start a business honestly demonstrate a way of resisting.

– You were asking: What was the purpose of the dialogue in the end? How would you respond to that question?

All those negotiations are highly compromised because the government seems to be disregarding the content of what was agreed upon. I hope there's some kind of channel, but just look at how Maduro responds to Presidents Gustavo Petro, Luiz Inácio Lula Da Silva, and Gabriel Boric, as well as other left-wing leaders, as if he doesn't care at all. However, I believe those spaces must be maintained.

What Venezuela needs to achieve and is demanding is a fair election, with a "Plan República" working for the entire country, with a national vision of the consultation, where the opposition has the right to win and administer power, and for Chavismo to stop mocking the contents of the Constitution or burying its head in the sand, which is what it has been doing for a while. This society has a sufficient level of complexity to face the problem. This is not the society of the Gómez era, and this is also a different world, but we are indeed in a complex situation.

–The experts point out that the Chavista regime has transitioned from being a competitive authoritarian regime to a hegemonic one with totalitarian traits. How can one resist the onslaught of a government that seeks to control everything?

Resistance is a daily fact, extrapolitical, that everyone maintains, keeping society functioning as part of a fabric. Teachers, professionals, all activities, in some way, resist. What do they resist around? That is a debate that must be had. Whether it makes sense or not, the viability of a project, pushing your ideas and roots, your family in this country.

Chavismo faces a country that mostly opposes it and a civil society that still has strengths, which has demonstrated surprising order and civility. The primaries were a way to self-manage the discontent peacefully and express it with total transparency, despite all the sabotage. They were a demonstration that, almost without a campaign, María Corina Machado has that mandate without making a big act but going from town to town.

People are not foolish; they are conscious and want their country back. The idea of Venezuela must endure. I don't know what will happen next year, I don't know how hope will be, I think Maduro has the first option to retain power, but I believe there is a country that has a chance, that needs to express itself in a certain direction, and that also needs to maintain the level of information, awareness, patience, firmness, and wisdom.

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Now, where will we be in two years? Hard to say. If Maduro has the power to do as he pleases, there's little we can do to stop it. Chavismo forgets that here, they are the ones armed, it has always been like this. Those guns are theirs and then they talk about fascism.

Here, there's no republican pact, there's a de facto situation like in Iran, where you go to vote and choose a president who has limits because he's caged in a theocracy. Just like here, where you choose governors and nothing more. That has to change. As long as one has a head to think and a tongue to speak, they have to do it.