

This week in Cuba October 6-12, 2019



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By Charles McKelvey

(1) National Assembly elects Miguel Díaz-Canel President of the Republic

The National Assembly of People's Power has elected Miguel Mario Díaz-Canel Bermúdez President of the Republic.

The post of President of the Republic was created by the 2019 Cuban Constitution, which was ratified by the people in popular referendum with 85% of vote on February 24. The new Constitution designates the President as the head of state, charged with the responsibility of directing the Council of Ministers, whose names, including that of the Prime Minister, the President submits to the National Assembly.

Díaz-Canel was born on April 20, 1960 in the central province of Santa Clara. As a child and youth, he was elected by his peers to posts of leadership in the mass organizations of primary school, secondary school, and university students. He graduated from the Central University of Villa Clara with a degree in electrical engineering, and later obtained a master's degree in management. He had different responsibilities in the Union of Communist Youth, including the Secretary of the Committee of the Union of Communist Youth of the Central University of Villa Clara. He began his professional career as a teacher in the Central University of Villa Clara, moving to a full-time position for the Communist Party of Cuba in 1994 as First Secretary of the Party in the province of Santa Clara. In 2003, he was transferred by the national leadership of the Party to serve as First Secretary of the Communist Party of Cuba in the province of Holguin. In 2009, he was elected by the National Assembly to the post of Minister of Superior Education. In 2012, he was elected Vice-President of the Council of Ministers, and promoted to the position of First Vice-President of the Council of State and Ministers in 2013. When Raúl Castro stepped down from the responsibility in 2018, Díaz-Canel was elected President of the Councils of Ministers and of State by the National Assembly of People's Power.

The Constitution of 2019 eliminates the position of President of the Councils of Ministers and of State, and it places the Council of Ministers under the direction of the President of the Republic and the Prime Minister, while placing the Council of State under the direction of the President of the National Assembly, who simultaneously serves as the President of the Council of State, which represents the National Assembly between its sessions. The Constitution of 2019 introduced these reforms in order to improve the efficiency of the state.

The Cuban Constitution establishes the National Assembly of People's Power (the Parliament) as the highest authority, such that the President, while serving as head of the Council of Ministers (the executive branch), must report to the legislative authority. The deputies of the National Assembly of People's Power are elected by the delegates of the 169 municipal assemblies of the nation, who in turn are elected by the voters in more than twelve thousand voting districts. In the elections for the municipal assemblies, in a secret vote, the voters choose one of two or more candidates that have emerged from a series of neighborhood nomination assemblies. Candidacy commissions composed representative of mass organizations of workers, neighborhoods, women, students, and farmers play a central role in discerning the result of the neighborhood nomination assemblies and in suggesting candidates to the delegates of the municipal assemblies in their elections to the national assembly, and in recommending candidates to the National Assembly in its election of the President of the Republic and other posts.

The Cuban electoral process was established by the Cuban Constitution of 1976. It is an institutionalization of the practices of "direct democracy" of the Cuban Revolution, which emerged in the 1960s. The Cuban structures of popular democracy have been conceived as alternatives to the structures of representative democracies that are common in capitalist societies.

On October 10, the National Assembly of People's Power also elected Salvador Valdés Mesa to the post of Vice-President of the Republic. He is from the central province of Camagüey, where he served as general secretary of the National Union of Workers of Agriculture, Animal Husbandry, and Forestry, as well as in other posts in the National Confederation of Workers and the Communist Party in the province. He has been a member of the Council of State since 2008.

(2) National Assembly elects its President, Vice-President, and Secretary as well as other members of the Council of State

In addition to electing the President and Vice-President of the Republic, the National Assembly of People's Power also elected on October 10 the President, Vice-President, and Secretary of the National Assembly, who simultaneously serve as President, Vice-President, and Secretary of the Council of State, which represents the National Assembly between its sessions. Estaban Lazo Hernández, who served as President of the eighth and ninth legislatures of the National Assembly, was elected President. María Mari

Machado was elected Vice-President. And Homero Acosta Alvarez, a lawyer who played an important and prominent role in the development of the 2019 Constitution, was elected secretary.

The National Assembly also elected the other eighteen members of the Council of State. Among them are: Teresa Amarelle, Secretary General of the Federation of Cuban Women; Ulises Guilarte de Nacimiento, Secretary General of the Federation of Cuban Workers; Yipsi Moreno, an outstanding and beloved athlete, now retired from athletic competition; Susely Morfa, First Secretary of the National Committee of the Union of Communist Youth; José Angel Fernández, President of the Federation of University Students; and Eduardo Torres Cuevas, President of the Academy of History of Cuba.

(3) Rebellion and conflict in Ecuador

Cuban television news during the week provided coverage of the rebellion in Ecuador, which continued into its second week. The rebellion began when labor unions convoked a national transportation stoppage in protest of the elimination of subsidies of diesel and gasoline, resulting from a neoliberal package agreement between the government and the International Monetary Fund. On Monday, as 20,000 indigenous people were moving toward the capital city of Quito, President Lenin Moreno relocated the executive branch of the government to Guayaquil. With tens of thousands of protestors heading toward Guayaquil, Moreno returned on Thursday to Quito. Jaime Vargas, President of the Confederation of Indigenous Nationalities of Ecuador (Conaje for its initials in Spanish), protested the abuses committed by the forces of security and demanded the immediate release of persons that had been “arbitrarily detained for exercising the constitutional right to resistance.” Cuban television retransmitted a video from the Venezuelan state’s international television network Telesur, showing videos of the armed forces and the police in conflict, as the army intervened to stop abusive conduct of the police toward the people. Former President Rafael Correa, in refuge in Brussels from politically motivated criminal persecution, declared that the crisis was a consequence of poor management of the economy. He called for resolution of the crisis through the holding of early elections.

The International Monetary Fund is notorious for imposing neoliberal agreements, that is, agreements which mandate the reduction of state protections for the national economy and of government social programs, ostensibly with the intention of reducing state fiscal deficits. Such measures, however, have the consequences of increasing the access of international corporations to the nation’s markets; reducing the value of the nation’s currency, thereby making its labor cheaper; and reducing restraints on international financial flows, thus increasing the possibilities for profit through financial speculation. In the case of the recent agreement between the IMF and the government of Ecuador, according to an article in the Cuban daily newspaper *Juventud Rebelde*, the four-billion-dollar loan package included suspension of state subsidies for diesel and gasoline; the reduction or elimination of tariffs on imported equipment, agricultural and industrial raw materials, and cell phones and computers, thus reducing protections for national industry and agriculture that are intended to promote the economic development of the country; and the reestablishment of temporary work with a salary reduction of twenty percent, thus making cheaper labor available.

When Rafael Correa assumed the Presidency of Ecuador on January 15, 2007, in addition to leading the nation in the establishment of a new constitution, Correa renegotiated external debt payments on the basis of the principle that the government would pay only debt that was legitimately contracted, with the result that social spending exceeded debt payments. Correa was prohibited by the new Constitution from serving a third term, so Lenin Moreno was the presidential candidate of Correa’s Nation Alliance party in 2017. Moreno won the elections without revealing his neoliberal orientation.



Radio Habana Cuba