

This week in Cuba January 19 to January 25, 2020



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By Charles McKelvey

In today's "This week in Cuba," we review, first, the results of the May 18 elections in Cuba for provincial governors and lieutenant governors; secondly, the designation of city mayors in Cuba by municipal assemblies of popular power; and thirdly, the Cuban view that the USA is trying to fracture Latin America unity to impose its interests.

(1) The results of the May 18 elections for provincial governors and lieutenant governors

The January 20 issue of the newspaper Granma reported the results of the elections in Cuba for governors and lieutenant governors, which were held on Saturday, May 18. Of the fifteen governors, eleven are men, and four are women. Of the fifteen lieutenant governors, twelve are women, and three are men. The median age for the governors is 52; for the lieutenant governors, 48. They worked in a variety of fields of employment prior to entering provincial government. Several began their careers as administrators in such sectors as the tobacco industry, construction, food processing, the fishing industry,

and telecommunications. Among the governors and lieutenant governors were citizens who had previously worked, prior to entering provincial government, as a general family doctor in a rural zone, a family doctor in a small town clinic, a psychotherapist in a special school, a municipal judge, an accountant in a tourist company, a human resources specialist in an agricultural complex, a professor of mathematics in a municipal school, a professor of natural science in a technical school, a chair of the humanities department in a secondary school, an administrator in primary and secondary schools, a physical education teacher, and a primary school teacher. Many had held responsibilities in the mass organizations of secondary school and university students as well as in the Union of Communist Youth. Several had previously served as presidents or vice-presidents in the previous provincial assemblies, now replaced by the offices of governor and lieutenant governor and the provincial councils of popular power.

The governors and lieutenant governors in the fifteen provinces are elected by the delegates of the municipal assemblies in the province, based upon the proposals of the President of the Republic. The delegates of the municipal assemblies previously were elected by the people in more than twelve thousand voting districts across the island.

(2) The designation of city mayors in Cuba by municipal assemblies of popular power

The designation of 168 city mayors by the 168 municipal assemblies of popular power, based on the proposals of the presidents of the mass assemblies, occurred on Saturday, January 25. The delegates of the municipal assemblies have been elected in 12,363 voting districts throughout the country, in which voters in secret ballots choose one of two or more candidates that have been placed on the ballots as a result of a series of nomination assemblies in the voting district. Once constituted, the municipal assemblies elect their presidents, on the basis of proposals by the municipal electoral commissions that have interviewed the delegates. The electoral commissions are formed by representatives of mass organization of workers, women, students, farmers, and neighborhoods.

In each of the 168 municipal assemblies of popular power, the president of the municipal assembly proposes a citizen for the post of mayor, who is designated mayor, if the proposal is supported by a majority of delegates of the municipal assembly.

The municipal mayors preside over the municipal councils of administration and direct the administrative and executive activities of the state at the local level. The municipal councils of administration are responsible for satisfying needs with respect to the economy, health, social assistance, education, culture, sport, and recreation within the municipality. The municipal council of administration is, in effect, the executive branch of city government, and it reports to the municipal assembly, through the mayor.

The municipal organs have autonomy, as is reflected in the local election and designation of key offices at the municipal level. They are expected to act with autonomy. They are to look for local solutions to economic problems, taking advantage of local resources. As Cuban President Miguel Díaz-Canel has said, local officeholders are called not to comply with assigned tasks, but to lead. At the same time, autonomy is practiced within the context of the Constitution and the national plan for social and economic development.

The city mayor is a new post created by the Cuban Constitution of 2019, one of several changes in the administrative structure of the state, established with the intention of improving the capacity of the state to respond to the needs of the people. The Cuban Constitution of 2019 was approved in referendum on February 24 by 86% of the voters, with voter participation of 90% of resident citizens.

(3) Cuba sees the USA as trying to fracture Latin America unity to impose its interest

In an article in the January 22, 2020 issue of the daily newspaper Granma, Enrique Moreno reports on the new strategy of the United States to divide the Caribbean. He notes that last year, U.S. President Donald Trump met in Florida with representatives of governments of selected nations, with the intention of

obtaining regional cooperation with respect to the U.S. agenda for Venezuela. Now, on Tuesday, January 21, U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo arrived in Jamaica to meet with Prime Minister Andrew Holness and other leaders of that nation. The meeting was criticized, Moreno reports, by the Prime Minister of Barbados Mia Mottley, who also is President of the Caribbean Community. She suggested that a meeting of the U.S. Secretary of State with a member of the Caribbean Community while other members of the Community are not present, constitutes an attempt by the United States to divide the Caribbean. Moreno suggests that perhaps the agenda of the meeting is to solicit Caribbean votes for a possible action against Venezuela by the Organization of American States.

In a spontaneous interchange with members of the international press during his visit to the central province of Sancti Spiritus, Cuban President Miguel Díaz-Canel also interpreted Pompeo's tour of Latin America and the Caribbean as an effort to divide the region and to enlist the support of some Latin American and Caribbean States for the U.S. project with respect to Venezuela and Cuba. These efforts are failing, he said; Cuba has learned to resist.

Enrique Moreno observes that the United States during the past year has promoted the Group of Lima and the Organization of American States as forums for attempts to legitimate the unconventional war against Venezuela and other countries that do not submit to U.S. plans. And he notes that the United States through various maneuvers stimulated the departure in 2018 of Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Paraguay, and Peru from the Union of South American nations (UNASUR), and Ecuador last year. The USA further has attained the abandonment by Ecuador and Bolivia of the Bolivarian Alliance for the Peoples of Our America—Commercial Treaty of the Peoples (ALBA-TCP); as well as the recent departure of Brazil from the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC).

These regional associations are important mechanisms established by the Latin American and Caribbean states in the period of 2001 to 2010, in the context of the new political reality in Latin America, in which anti-imperialist and anti-neocolonial governments were brought to power by popular movements in several key nations. They sought to establish national sovereignty and control of natural resources through, among other strategies, regional unity and economic cooperation. The Trump administration is taking aggressive action to break this unity.

In a similar vein, Elson Concepción Pérez, in a January 23 Granma article, asserts that the USA seeks to fracture the unity of Latin America, which is indispensable for the common good. Central American countries like Guatemala and Honduras, he writes, "live in a true economic crisis," and therefore they have been easy prey for the United States, compelled to cede to the pressures of the United States to apply neoliberal measures, and obliged to accept the "council" of the powerful nation of the North to break relations with Venezuela.

The governments of the region that accommodate to U.S. interests adopt anti-popular economic measures, and some engage in the repression of popular protests. Inasmuch as the peoples of the region in the past have mobilized in opposition to military dictatorships and to neoliberal economic policies, there is a good probability that the restoration project of U.S. imperialism in alliance with the Latin American oligarchy will not be able to sustain itself in the long run. It will never attain political stability, and therefore, it is not a viable project.

This is Charles McKelvey. We will be back next Sunday with "This week in Cuba," reviewing the news emerging during the week from revolutionary Cuba.

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