

No slowdown for Venezuela

By: John Haylett – March 16, 2013

Venezuela's two-time presidential loser Henrique Capriles remains bullish about his chances third time round, but the decision of Guillermo Zuloaga to sell his majority stake in the Globovision TV station suggests otherwise.

Globovision has been the most stridently anti-Chavez station in Venezuela ever since being intimately involved in the 2002 coup against Hugo Chavez's government.

Zuloaga, who fled the country for the US three years ago to duck charges of hoarding, explained that the company was no longer viable "because our earnings no longer cover our costs.

"We can't even raise salaries enough to compensate for inflation and devaluation. We are unviable politically because we are in a country that is totally polarised and on the opposite side of a government that wants to see us fail.

"And we are unviable in the legal sense, because our broadcasting licence is ending soon and there is no will to renew it."

There was no mention of the role of Venezuela's wealthy elite in polarising society by backing the coup and by continuing to spread the lie that violence had been precipitated by Chavez supporters opening fire on opposition marchers.

What would happen to a media group implicated in a coup against the government in Britain or the US is beyond doubt, but this has not prevented the US right from casting Zuloaga as a martyr for freedom.

Off-the-wall libertarian outfit the Cato Institute, which held a forum in 2009 on the assault on freedom of the press in Venezuela, has designated him a "true hero."

Anti-Cuban US Republican Congresswoman Ileana Ros-Lehtinen dismisses the regular approval of Venezuela's political direction by its voters, asserting that "elections for the sake of elections do not constitute a true democracy."

Ros-Lehtinen regards Barack Obama as soft on the Bolivarian revolution for authorising a low-level delegation to observe diplomatic niceties at Hugo Chavez's funeral, insisting that this minimal gesture to normality "undermine(d) the opposition."

The presidential candidate for the oligarchy in waiting needs no assistance from Obama to undermine his April 12 presidential election chances, having disgraced himself in recent pronouncements.

Capriles's declaration that "a mere bus driver shouldn't be president" will have surprised few people, confirming the anti-working class prejudice of the rich elite that considers itself born to rule.

However, his intemperate accusations that acting President Nicolas Maduro lied repeatedly about the late president's two-year struggle with cancer and was "using the

president's body to run a political campaign" enraged both Maduro and the Chavez family.

The late president's daughter Maria Gabriela Chavez called on the "sick opposition" to end its "dirty" game.

"I see the need to raise my voice against those playing with the pain of my family, my people and, above all, the memory of my father the giant," she wrote in an open letter read on TV by Information Minister Ernesto Villegas.

Clearly shaken, Capriles announced: "If any word of mine was misunderstood, if any word hurt the feelings of the president's relatives, forgive me," as he challenged Maduro to a debate.

In response, the acting president declared: "He can attack me all he wants, I don't care. I'm ready for it. If he apologises publicly to the family and the people, I would consider having one public debate or as many debates as the people want."

Maduro also took issue with an allegation that he had engaged in a homophobic attack against Capriles, who is 40 and single, when he invited his wife onto a campaign platform saying: "I do have a wife. I'm someone who likes women."

He denied any negative allusion to his challenger, noting that the opposition had failed to support LGBT rights being inscribed in the constitution.

"If I were gay I would assume it with pride in public and love who I love with my heart. No problem, because the worst homophobe is the person who discriminates against his own," Maduro added.

The revolutionary candidate had the last laugh about his working-class origins by driving a bus, followed by a huge crowd of supporters, to the offices of the National Electoral Council. His opponent sent a political aide.

Maduro had just returned from the Venezuelan Communist Party (PCV) 12th congress, where he held a meeting with the PCV political committee and addressed delegates who voted unanimously to endorse his candidacy.

He recognised the PCV's historical role warmly, including as the first political party to support Chavez in his initial presidential bid in 1998.

Touching on differences that arise from time to time between his United Socialist Party and the PCV, Maduro assured delegates that he welcomed "criticism and self-criticism as a Chavista and revolutionary method of constructing the nation."

The acting president argued that revolutionary unity was fundamental to consolidation of the Bolivarian project, stating: "All together we are Chavez. Divided we are nothing and could lose everything."

PCV general secretary Oscar Figuera gave Maduro a list of critical observations of the Bolivarian process for future action.

"With the help of our people and the popular and revolutionary organisations, Nicolas Maduro will be elected constitutional president on April 14," he declared to loud applause.