

Socialism from Below

Stephen Lendman

Chavez wants to build a humanistic democratic society based on solidarity and respect for political, economic, social and cultural, human and civil rights, but not the top-down bureaucratic kind that doomed the Soviet Union and Eastern European states. He said he wants to build a "new socialism of the 21st century....based in solidarity, fraternity, love, justice, liberty and equality" as opposed to the neoliberal new world order model based on predatory capitalism exploiting ordinary people for power and profit that's incompatible with democracy. US Deputy Secretary of State John Negroponte expressed Washington's concern about the challenge to its hegemony in his Senate Foreign Relations Committee confirmation hearing saying Chavez's "behavior is threatening to democracies in the region (because he exports a form of) radical populism." He didn't mention how glorious it is.

He also never explained Venezuelans voted for it and love it and so do people throughout the region wanting what Venezuelans now have. Since first taking office in February, 1999, Chavez radically transformed the country from one of power and privilege to a participatory democracy governed by principles of political, economic and social equity and justice. He now wants to advance his social democratic agenda well into the new century, and his landslide electoral victory empowers him more than ever to do it. Like a true democrat, he intends to serve his people and deliver what they asked for.

Chavez began his new term with the formation of a new unity party called the United Socialist Party of Venezuela (PSUV) to "construct socialism from below," built "from the base" in communities, patrols, battalions, squadrons, neighborhoods "to carry out the battle of ideas for the socialist project (to) build Venezuelan socialism." He wants it to be an "original Venezuelan model" to become the most democratic in Venezuela's history and include a coalition of many smaller parties along with his former Movement for the Fifth Republic (MVR) party that completed its work and "must now pass into history."

In December, 23 parties joined with the MVR to reelect Chavez, including three major ones that can add strength and credibility to the PSUV—For Social Democracy (PODEMOS), Homeland For All (PPT), and the Communist Party of Venezuela (PCV). The inclusion of all or most allied parties in the new PSUV will be a step toward building a foundational unity to address the agenda ahead - building 21st century socialism using state revenues to benefit people in new and innovative ways. Chavez wants to reform the constitution, eliminate a two-term presidential limit, and institute new progressive changes giving more power to people at the grassroots the way democracy should work.

He also wants to transform the country's economic model believing it's "fundamental (to do) if we wish to build a true socialism (therefore) we must socialize the economy (including the land and create) a new productive model." He wants all proposed changes submitted to popular referendum so Venezuelans decide on them, not politicians. That's how it should be in a participatory democracy from the bottom up Chavez says must "transcend the local framework (to achieve) "a sort of regional federation of Communal Councils."

There are 16,000 of them already organized across the country dealing with local issues, each with 200–400 families, and that number is expected to grow to 21,000 by year end 2007. "They are the key to peoples' power," Chavez stressed, and he sees them as the embryo of a new state driven by the PSUV.

Communal Councils are central to Chavez's plan for people empowerment. They were created in April, 2006 with the passage of the Communal Council Law. Once fully in

place and operational, they'll represent true participatory democracy unimaginable in the US now governed from the top down by authoritarian rule allowing no deviation from established policies.

Councils work the opposite way. They're to deal with all community issues in local umbrella groups addressing matters of health, education, agriculture, housing and all other functions handled up to now by Social Missions and Urban Land Committees. They represent grass-roots democracy in action giving them muscle and meaning and are administered by the Intergovernmental Fund for Decentralization that will distribute \$5 billion to them in 2007 or more than triple the \$1.5 billion allocated in 2006. Additionally, Chavez hopes \$7 billion more will be put in the Venezuelan National Development Fund for industrial development use.

But the US corporate media never lets up either as evidenced on January 24 by *New York Times* correspondent Simon Romero's report from Caracas. He referred to the Councils as a plan to construct "socialist cities.... to be settled in part by cramped city dwellers in Caracas and Maracaibo." He added : "Some of Mr Chavez's critics compare the project to (1970s Cambodian Khmer Rouge leader) Pol Pot's emptying of Phnom Penh in his bloody effort to remake Cambodian society in the 1970s."

Romero's anti-Chavez polemic went further with inferences of authoritarianism, anti-semitism, equating him with (Libyan strongman) Muammar el-Qaddafi and accusing him of masking an opposition to liberal democracy beneath the facade of his "socialist ramblings" with a climactic final outrageous comment that most Venezuelans voted for Chavez "because (they) wanted a dictatorship."

This kind of slander actually gets printed in the so-called "newspaper of record" with "All The News That's Fit To Print" that has muscle and clout. Its reports get instant recognition and echoing throughout America's dominant media eager to pick up on and trumpet the most outlandish misinformation and distortions from the most influential publication on the planet. The NYT and entire corporate media in both Venezuela and America play fast and loose with facts they never report unless they conform to their ideological view supporting power and privilege with the public being damned.

What they ignore about Chavez stands what they do on its head. It's his vision of participatory democracy rooted throughout the country in communities that the NYT portrays as potentially bloody communist takeover and population purging with implications of Pol Pot's Cambodian nightmare regime three decades ago. This is typical Times yellow journalism in its quasi-official state ministry of information and propaganda role meaning all of its reports should be viewed with grave suspicion or just dismissed.

So should Time Magazine's with its strident attack articles using language like "The Venezuelan strongman lurches even closer to one-party....one-man rule roiling democratic waters" (and Chavez is) "Stifling Dissent in Venezuela" also asking "Is Chavez Becoming Castro?" The articles refer to Chavez's nationalization plans, his new "enabling law" authority, and his government plan to control the Central Bank replacing a private banking cartel doing it for profit the way it works detrimentally in the US and West. Time's writers skip over inconvenient facts including how Chavez serves his people in full conformity to Venezuelan law unlike how Washington boys are bought, paid for and in office for the privileged alone including for the directors of Time's parent company, media giant Time Warner.

Another corporate press mainstay, the *Washington Post*, took its best shots too in a January 27 editorial claiming "democracy is dead, dying or in danger" in Venezuela because "Hugo Chavez began his (new) term this month with a flurry of authoritarianism, (including wanting) to rule by decree." It continued saying Chavez "hopes to convert (Nicaragua and Ecuador) into satellite leaders in a Venezuelan-led

'socialist' bloc (along with) Bolivia's Evo Morales and....Fidel Castro....already in Mr. Chavez's orbit (and) thanks to Venezuela's petrodollars, Cuba's 'totalitarian' system may survive Mr. Castro's demise." With this kind of "journalism," the Post writer may be up for the Presidential Medal of Freedom, the US's highest civilian award for exceptional meritorious service surely including black propaganda for the state.

The above examples and countless more pass for what's called journalism in a country claiming dedication to press freedom but failing where it counts - reporting the truth. There's precious little of it about Hugo Chavez because he represents the greatest of all threats to US dominance - a good example that's infectious and spreading to growing numbers in the region no longer wanting democracy, American-style that's a one-way kind for the privileged alone.

Expect lots more hostile rhetoric ahead as Chavez advances new socially democratic plans and programs sure to be denounced in a collective drum beat of distortion and misinformation. They won't report the National Assembly democratically voted Chavez limited enabling law power for a fixed period after weeks of debate. They won't explain a fading US democracy with George Bush on his own "executive order" authority giving himself permanent "Unitary Executive power" to suspend the Constitution and declare martial law any time he alone decides a "national emergency" warrants it. They won't say Congress and the courts allowed him to do it. They won't ever let on that Chavez governs as a social democrat while George Bush rules by virtual "strongman" decree with no check or balancing restraint on him. Why would they when they won't ever tell the truth.
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