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Socialist Voice #38, March 16, 2004

Reclaiming Socialism: Contributions to the Discussion

By Derrick O’Keefe, Stuart Munckton

In Socialist Voice #29, we reported the January 31 speech by Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez in which he urged the international left to “reclaim socialism” from its failures or perversions over the past century. He called for widespread debate on how to achieve “democratic and humanist” socialism that is, at one and the same time, anti-imperialist and anti-capitalist. In this issue, we feature two important responses to that call.

The first appeared in the March 8, 2005 issue of Seven Oaks, a weekly web magazine of politics, culture and resistance published in Vancouver, Canada. The author is Derrick O’Keefe, an editor of Seven Oaks and a coordinating committee member of Stopwar.ca, a broad-based antiwar coalition in Vancouver.

The second article appeared in the March 9, 2005 issue of the radical Australian newspaper Green Left Weekly. It provides background to President Chavez’s call, and outlines subsequent remarks he made on the same subject. The author, Stuart Munckton, is the national coordinator of the Australian socialist youth organization Resistance, which is affiliated to the Socialist Alliance.

**BUILDING A DEMOCRATIC, HUMANIST SOCIALISM:
THE POLITICAL CHALLENGE OF THE 21ST CENTURY**

By Derrick O’Keefe

(Seven Oaks Magazine, March 8, 2005)

“We have to invent the new socialism for the 21st century. Capitalism is not a sustainable model of development.” Hugo Chavez, March 4, 2005

In recent months, Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez has begun to explicitly advocate for socialism, marking a significant development for both the Bolivarian Revolution in that country and for the broader international movement.

There is no doubt that the United States government understands the significance of the current direction of the process in Venezuela. An oil-rich country with a radical, anti-imperialist government which has received repeated, indisputable democratic mandates and now advocates for socialism, the government in Caracas poses the gravest ‘threat of a good example’ since the Cuban Revolution of 1959. As if taunting Uncle Sam for its historic failure to destroy and isolate Cuba completely, Chavez now flaunts his close friendship with Fidel Castro, inviting thousands of Cuban doctors to Venezuela, and sending oil at preferential prices to the energy-starved Caribbean island.

Little surprise that, with a newly emboldened Bolivarian government and an increasingly demoralized opposition, there have been repeated warnings of plots to assassinate the Venezuelan president. Chavez addressed the situation with a threat of his own, announcing on his *Alo Presidente* radio show that “the Venezuelan people will stop even one drop of oil from going to the U.S. if there is any attempt made on my life” (*Bloomberg*, March 5, 2005).

While flexing oil muscle in an effort to dissuade U.S. complicity in efforts to physically eliminate him, Chavez remained on the ideological offensive:

“I am convinced, and I think that this conviction will be for the rest of my life, that the path to a new, better and possible world, is not capitalism, the path is socialism.” (Alo Presidente, February 27, 2005)

The global movement for social justice must take seriously the continuing threats against the Bolivarian process in Venezuela. Much of the Left initially remained aloof from Chavez, variously denouncing him as a Bonapartist, reformist, or caudillo.

The reversal of the April 2002 coup against Chavez changed this sectarian approach for the better, but much work in building links of solidarity remains to be done. More than just defending Venezuela’s right to self-determination, though, progressives should also take seriously the challenge to ‘re-invent’ socialism.

The movement against corporate globalization has, rather proudly, avoided projecting any specific solutions to the ills of capitalism, eschewing the classic ‘meta-narrative’ of the Left, that capitalism would inevitably be replaced by socialism and communism on a world scale. Political pluralism became a watchword for the World Social Forum (WSF) and its leading convenors; certainly this could be understood as a healthy and understandable reaction to the evils perpetrated in the name of socialism throughout the 20th century.

But while Kampuchea’s killing fields, Russia’s gulags, and the repugnant bureaucratic privileges and internecine murders sullied the image of socialism, so too has social democracy — from the chauvinist betrayal marked by support for the carnage of World War I right up to Tony Blair’s imperial adventure in Iraq — systematically disappointed and betrayed the working people and progressives who fought for social change.

This record of failure left the Right triumphant and, buoyed by the fall of the Berlin Wall and “actually existing socialism,” on the offensive over the past 15 years, aggressively implementing neo-liberal ‘reforms’ globally, either through the WTO and economic blackmail, or through cruise missiles and ‘regime change.’ So the Bolivarian Revolution, together with other vibrant social movements in Latin America and global resistance to war and occupation in the Middle East, represents a welcome and overdue challenge to Empire.

Venezuela likely would have been the last place that the champions of capitalist hegemony expected to see their perspective begin to be seriously challenged. Through the 1970s and much of the 80s Venezuela was lauded as a stable democracy, in a continent marked by guerrilla insurgencies, coup d’etats and brutal right-wing dictatorships. The *ancien regime* in Caracas, in fact, began to shatter in 1989, the same year that the Berlin Wall came down. While that year’s Tienanmen Massacre is universally remembered, the Caracazo is largely unknown; in February, 1989, an uprising against neo-liberal austerity measures was drowned in blood, with hundreds killed by the Venezuelan police and army.

That experience accelerated the plans of a dissenting group of young army officers, and in 1992 Colonel Chavez led a failed military-civilian rebellion. Chavez’s televised statement of surrender in 1992 catapulted him to national prominence, and within six years he was swept to power in an electoral landslide.

As mentioned, Chavez and the Bolivarian Revolution were initially disparaged by much of the Left, and some worried about this ‘top-down’ leader’s influence on the World Social Forum. At this year’s gathering in Porto Alegre, though, Chavez was unquestionably the most popular figure, his presence revealing deep-going resentment of Lula’s moderate approach and collaboration with IMF dictates.

Chavez, in fact, had to intervene to quell a packed stadium’s chants of “Chavez si, Lula no!” Before that same crowd, the Venezuelan leader made his most overt ideological statement to date:

We must reclaim socialism as a thesis, a project and a path, but a new type of socialism, a humanist one, which puts humans and not machines or the state ahead of everything. That’s the debate we must promote around the world, and the WSF is a good place to do it.

Let’s hope this call is heeded, and that the debate begins in earnest. Defeating U.S. imperialism and developing viable alternatives to neo-liberalism depends on us meeting this key challenge for the 21st century.

VENEZUELA: PRESIDENT AGITATES FOR SOCIALIST REVOLUTION

By Stuart Munckton

(Green Left Weekly, March 9, 2005)

Speaking on his television program, *Hello President* on February 27, Venezuela’s popular pro-poor president, Hugo Chavez, explained:

“I am convinced, at this stage of my life — I am now 50 years old — after six years as a president, after nearly 30 years of political struggle ... after many readings, debates, discussions and many travels around the world, I am convinced, and I think that this conviction will be for the rest of my life, that the path to a new, better and possible world, is not capitalism, the path is socialism.”

The studio audience cheered.

These comments, like Chavez’s comments to tens of thousands of participants in the World Social Forum (WSF) in Brazil in January, are part of increasingly overt agitation for socialism by Chavez.

In his WSF speech, Chavez insisted that “capitalism could not be transcended from within capitalism itself, but through socialism”. This message, delivered by a political leader with enormous respect across the Latin American continent, is among the most radical calls put to a mass WSF audience.

Chavez, whose government has led a process known as the Bolivarian revolution aiming to eradicate poverty, made it clear in the WSF speech that he stood for “democratic socialism”, differentiating that from the model existing in the Soviet Union. He stated: “We must reclaim socialism ... but a new type of socialism, a humanist one, which puts humans and not machines or the state ahead of everything.”

On February 25, addressing the 4th International Conference on Social Debt in Caracas, Chavez re-emphasized the point. He declared “if not capitalism, then what? I have no doubt, it’s socialism”, according to Pascal Fletcher’s account for Reuters, which Fletcher titled: “Defying the US, Chavez embraces socialism”.

Then, two days later, came the *Hello President* program, where Chavez said: “I am convinced that the way to build a new and better world is not capitalism. Capitalism leads us straight to hell”.

In a March 1 article on the Hands Off Venezuela website that discussed the television program, Jorge Martin claims that Chavez has urged the start of an ideological discussion about socialism amongst those supporting the Bolivarian revolution, including Chavez’s own Movement for a Fifth Republic.

Chavez’s presidency is based on popular support and mobilization. Pro-Chavez forces have won nine national elections in the last six years, including a referendum on whether or not to recall Chavez from the presidency.

A key part of the Bolivarian revolution has been organizing the poor majority into institutions of power so they can directly control their lives. Chavez argued that the “tools for building socialism” were these popular organizations already constructed as part of the struggle to create “participatory democracy”.

The uprising in Venezuela is part of a continent-wide revolt against harsh neo-liberal policies pushed upon Latin America during the 1980s and 1990s by the institutions of imperialism, the

World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) in particular. The resulting wealth disparity in Venezuela was staggering. While the country is the fifth largest supplier of oil in the world, 80% of Venezuelans were living in poverty by 1998.

By then, only 20% of the state-run oil company's revenue was getting to the government, the rest remaining in the hands of a wealthy management clique, while foreign companies extracting Venezuelan oil paid extremely low royalties.

In 1989, the Venezuelan government, at the behest of the International Monetary Fund, increased the price of basic goods and services out of the reach of the poor.

This provoked a spontaneous uprising known as the *Caracazo*, which was brutally put down by the military, with some reports putting the death toll as high as 2000. Inspired by the bravery of the poor and repulsed by the use of the military to repress the people, thousands of young officers and soldiers led a rebellion to overthrow the government in 1992. The rebellion failed, and its leaders were jailed. But as the central leader, Chavez became a popular hero.

Riding a wave of anti-neo-liberal fury, Chavez swept the 1998 presidential elections on a platform of redistributing the nation's wealth. While it immediately encouraged self-organization of the people, Chavez's government didn't break decisively with the capitalist system. It did, however, introduce some good reforms.

In a series of laws passed in 2001, the government significantly increased royalties levied on foreign oil companies, made 100% of oil revenue go to the government and allowed for expropriation of large land-holdings to be redistributed to landless peasants, amongst other measures. Also, the rich were taxed for the first time and a program of building homes and public works for the poor implemented.

These measures provoke bitter opposition from the capitalist class. In April 2002, the business elite organized a US-backed military coup that briefly overthrew Chavez and installed the head of the Chamber of Commerce in power. The coup was overturned by a working-class uprising. In December 2002, the capitalists again tried to overthrow Chavez, this time by means of economic sabotage, with bosses shutting their factory doors and locking out their workers. In the oil industry, which the government depends on for 30% of its income, the pro-capitalist management clique locked-out the oil workers and sabotaged the industry — hoping to bring the country to its knees.

Instead the oil workers mobilized to take the company over and get it up and running under their control. Chavez sacked the entire upper management — bringing the company under true government control.

In the process of defending the government through these fights, Venezuela's people have become more organized, radicalized and confident in their ability to make a better, fairer society themselves. This means that the government is in a much stronger position to introduce measures that directly shift wealth to meet the needs of the majority, and out of the pockets of the capitalist class.

Funded by the oil wealth, the government launched a series of "missions" that have: brought free health care to the poor for the first time, eradicated illiteracy, lowered unemployment, created popular markets that sell cheap goods among other gains. The government also introduced a law that banned bosses from sacking workers, and Chavez has encouraged workers to take over factories if the boss tries to lay them off.

According to Martin, Chavez stated on *Hello President* that when first elected he was hoping to create "a third way, capitalism with a human face, trying to give the monster a mask". But he concluded: "this mask has fallen to the floor shattered by reality".

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How Revolutionary Socialists Opposed the Vietnam War

By Ian Angus

Ian Angus is Director of the Socialist History Project. This article is based on a talk he gave as part of a session on “Is Iraq the new Vietnam?” at an educational conference sponsored by the International Socialists in Ottawa, on February 5, 2005.

Until 1954, the area now organized as Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos was ruled by France and called Indochina. The League for the Independence of Vietnam, or Viet Minh, decisively defeated the French colonial power in 1954, but they were forced by the leaders of the Soviet Union and China to accept a compromise that divided their country into two parts, north and south.

This was supposed to be a temporary situation, leading to nationwide elections and unification in 1956. Instead, the United States threw its support behind a puppet South Vietnamese regime that refused to hold the 1956 elections, and that began to restore land and power to the landlords who had been ousted in the liberation war.

This led to widespread peasant uprisings and a renewal of guerrilla war in the southern part of Vietnam. The U.S. responded by sending combat troops, initially described as “advisors.” The first U.S. serviceman was killed in July 1959.

At about the same time, the peoples’ republic in the north of Vietnam began to aid the resistance in the south. In 1960, the various guerrilla groups united to form the National Liberation Front (NLF), which the imperialists dubbed “Viet Cong.”

Fifteen years later, thanks to the heroism and perseverance of the Vietnamese people and the massive mobilizations of an antiwar movement in the United States and around the world, U.S. imperialism suffered its first-ever military defeat.

The anti-Vietnam War movement was, in Fred Halstead’s words, “the most sustained and, except for Russia in 1905 and 1917, the most effective antiwar movement within any big power while the shooting was going on.” (Fred Halstead, *Out Now*, Pathfinder Press, 1978, p. 709)

This presentation focuses on the role played by revolutionary socialists, organized in the Socialist Workers Party and Young Socialist Alliance in the U.S. and in the League for Socialist Action and Young Socialists in Canada, in building and leading the antiwar movement. Of course we weren’t alone — indeed, the most important part of our strategy was to build a united movement including the broadest possible range of political views and currents — but no one can deny that the influence of the socialist movement was far greater than might have been expected from our limited numbers and resources.

Our commitment to the antiwar struggle was based on our political evaluation of the importance of the war. Here’s how we expressed that, in a resolution adopted by the Young Socialists/Ligue des Jeunes Socialistes in Canada in 1969:

“The war in Vietnam stands today as the central focus of the world confrontation between socialism and imperialism. The Vietnamese people have shown that the mighty imperialist military machine can be stopped in its tracks and thrown back by the struggle of a determined people. ... Defense of the Vietnamese revolution stands as the paramount duty of every revolutionary today. Since the Vietnamese are struggling and defeating our common enemy, imperialism, proletarian internationalism demands that we do everything we can to aid them. It is this fundamental understanding that motivates our consistent defense of the Vietnamese revolution.”

Because we had that political view, we threw ourselves into the antiwar movement heart and soul. Again and again, our newspapers made the case against the war and for an antiwar movement. Our members were central organizers of every demonstration—postering, leafleting, speaking, marching, marshalling, you name it. We were prominent public figures and day-to-day backroom organizers. If it needed doing, we did it, and we organized everyone we knew to do it as well.

In the mid-1960's the right-wing *Toronto Telegram* published a series of articles attacking the antiwar movement. The editors could think of no better way to smear the movement than to proclaim that it was organized and led by “Trotskyites.” It was a vicious, red-baiting attack—but it was also to some degree correct.

The Antiwar Movement is Born

In sharp contrast to the movement against the recent invasion of Iraq, the anti-Vietnam War movement did not emerge right away. I am not aware of any demonstrations against the Vietnam War in Canada or the United States prior to 1964, and there were no *large* protests before 1965. There were several reasons for that—the imperialist build-up in Vietnam was conducted secretly, with very little news coverage in North America; and the existing antiwar groups were weak and politically conservative. Socialist groups protested the war in Vietnam, but the demonstrations were small.

The first big antiwar demonstration was in Washington, DC, on April 17, 1965. 20,000 people took part in the largest demonstration of its kind in decades. By the end of the 1960's, we were seeing demonstrations of a half million or more people in the United States. It reached the point where even rabidly pro-war politicians like Richard Nixon had to pose as peace candidates in order to get elected. And by the early 1970's, it was clear that the combination of Vietnamese resistance and mass opposition at home had decisively defeated the United States.

My object tonight is not to offer a history of the antiwar movement, but rather to discuss some of the debates that confronted activists in Canada and the United States, the issues that ultimately determined the movement's course.

Three options

There were many issues and debates that confronted the diverse forces protesting the war, but they consistently reflected disagreements between three political viewpoints: reformism, ultraleftism, and revolutionary socialism.

The reformists, most notably the Communist Parties, sought to pressure the warmakers to pull back and accept a compromise settlement with the liberation movement. In the U.S. they focused their efforts on influencing the Democratic Party. They promoted “peace”, not antiwar, candidates in elections. They consistently argued for “moderation” so as not to alienate the powers that be, and argued for slogans like “Negotiate with the NLF”, thus implicitly accepting that the imperialists had a right hold the Vietnamese people hostage to a negotiation process.

In Canada, the Communist Party promoted the illusory vision of an “independent foreign policy” for Canada, rather than focusing their fire on the very real complicity of the Canadian government in the war. It supported proposals to send Canadian soldiers to Vietnam as “peacekeepers.”

There were various ultraleft currents within the movement, ranging from those who promoted violent confrontations with police to those who would try to center antiwar protests around such slogans as “Victory to the NLF” and such chants as “Ho Ho Ho Chi Minh, the NLF is going to win.”

There were obvious differences between the reformists and the ultralefts, but what they had in common was a lack of confidence that the majority of the population could be mobilized to stop the war. So they focused on trying to get the ruling class to change its mind – either by convincing the imperialists with reasonable arguments, or by scaring them with revolutionary rhetoric. (Some of the ultraleft left groups didn’t believe that the antiwar movement could contribute in any way to a Vietnamese victory—they only participated in the antiwar movement in order to recruit to their organizations.)

The revolutionary socialists, by contrast, had a class struggle perspective. Our goal was to mobilize mass working class action in the United States and internationally. We were convinced that such mobilizations would attract the ranks of the armed forces – the working class in uniform – to an antiwar perspective. We did not seek to persuade or scare the imperialists, but to make it impossible for them to continue the war.

These three positions remained central to all the debates in the movement for the years from 1965 on. The movement repeatedly split over these issues. Initially, the class struggle approach was supported only by the revolutionary socialist movement. To most, the idea of winning over the majority of the working class seemed a utopian dream. But more and more people became convinced of this possibility, and in the end, it happened.

The debate over the three visions was worked out around three central questions in the United States:

- *On slogans*: “Withdraw Now” vs “Negotiate”
- *On program*: “Single Issue” vs “Multi-Issue”
- *On tactics*: “Mass Actions” vs “Vanguard Actions”

In Canada there was a fourth, related debate on whether we should focus our demands exclusively on the U.S., or expose and condemn Canada’s support for the war.

Withdraw Now or Negotiate

The slogan “Negotiate with the NLF”, which was supported by the Communist Party and others, had an obvious problem in political principle: it violated the Vietnamese right to self-determination. The Vietnamese might choose to negotiate, but it wasn’t appropriate for us to demand that they do so.

In contrast, “Withdraw now” said clearly that the U.S. had no right to be there; it also had strong appeal to people at home whose sons were fighting and dying. The slogan took various forms: it began as “Withdraw from Vietnam Now,” then evolved to “Bring the Troops Home Now,” and by the end of the sixties it was very simple and clear: “Out Now.”

By 1970, “withdraw the troops” now had majority support among working people in the United States. Nonetheless, the reformist wing of the movement was arguing for “Set the date to withdraw” as a more responsible demand.

Single Issue or Multi-Issue

The various coalitions and national coordinating committees repeatedly split over proposals to have the antiwar coalition campaign on issues other than the war, usually the draft, racism, and/or poverty. There were two central problems with this multi-issue proposal.

First, while everyone in the coalitions favored broad social change, there was no agreement on what changes were needed, or on how they should be brought about. Many were already in political organizations with specific views on just those questions.

Second, and more importantly, the most critical issue was to stop the U.S. war against Vietnam. “Broadening” the movement to include other issues would actually reduce its impact on the war, and limit our ability to win the majority to action on the Vietnam question.

This issue was debated again and again, but it was resolved in practice by the success of the antiwar movement and the complete failure of every attempt to build a multi-issue coalition.

Mass Action or Vanguard Action

When peaceful protest by half a million doesn’t budge Washington, what should the movement do next? For some, the answer was confrontation. “Shut down the government!” “Trash Chicago!” This meant actions by an elite, at most a few thousand at a time, that were easily outnumbered and outmaneuvered by the police. In the worst cases, these actions provided an excuse for brutal police attacks. They had no impact on the war. Worse, they demoralized most participants and gave credence to right-wing attacks on the right to legal protest. The message they sent to the population at large was that going to a protest was dangerous.

So what to do when peaceful protest by half a million doesn’t budge Washington, what next? The correct answer: after a big action, organize another big action.

Confronting Ottawa

The fourth debate was specific to Canada.

In 1965, as today, there were widespread illusions in Canada about this government's role in world affairs. Ottawa's posture as an "honest broker" and "peacemaker" in Vietnam or elsewhere in the world was widely believed. Some in the antiwar movement bought into that. They thought the movement should focus all its fire on the U.S., and that insofar as Canadian issues were raised, it should be in the form of urging the government to be a voice for peace, to act independently of the U.S., etc.

Like those in the U.S. who thought the movement should be reasonable and try to influence the Democratic Party, the reformist wing of the Canadian movement thought the goal should be to persuade Liberal politicians to be nice, and to avoid anything that might alienate them.

However, the fact was that the Canadian government had consistently acted as the U.S. representative on the International Control Commission, set up to "monitor" the 1954 Vietnam peace treaty. In addition, weapons and other war machinery were being manufactured in Canada for use by U.S. forces in Vietnam.

From the very beginning, the revolutionary socialist wing of the Canadian antiwar movement argued that it was essential to expose and condemn Canada's complicity in the war. "End Canada's Complicity," became a key demand in all of the demonstrations. That helped make the war and the antiwar movement relevant to Canadians. And it helped prevent the antiwar movement here from becoming a nationalist, anti-American campaign.

U.S. Troops: Enemies or Allies?

While the refusal of some to be drafted got a lot of publicity, draft resistance actually had very little impact on the course of the war, and was peripheral to the antiwar movement. The Marxist wing of the U.S. antiwar movement focused its attention on the majority of draftees who didn't leave. They viewed them as workers in uniform, and defended their rights, as citizens, to debate political issues and take part in protests.

Sentiment among the troops evolved in step with antiwar sentiment in the working-class communities to which they belonged. Antiwar coffee houses sprung up near military bases, and underground papers were passed around in barracks. Soldiers became frequent speakers at mass protests.

The impact of this movement on military morale cannot be overstated.

As early as mid-1969, an entire company of the 196th Light Infantry Brigade sat down on the battlefield, and a rifle company from the 1st Air Cavalry Division flatly refused—on television—to advance down a dangerous trail. Resistance among the ground troops grew into a massive and widespread "quasi-mutiny" by 1970 and 1971. Soldiers went on "search and avoid" missions, intentionally skirting clashes with the Vietnamese, and often holding three-day-long pot parties instead of fighting. By 1970, the U.S. Army had 65,643 deserters, roughly the equivalent of four infantry divisions.

In an article published in the *Armed Forces Journal* (June 7, 1971), Marine Colonel Robert D. Heintz Jr., wrote:

“By every conceivable indicator, our army that remains in Vietnam is in a state approaching collapse, with individual units avoiding or having refused combat, murdering their officers and noncommissioned officers.... Seditious, coupled with disaffection from within the ranks, and externally fomented with an audacity and intensity previously inconceivable, infest the Armed Services....”

This remarkable situation was the direct result of the massive growth of antiwar sentiment in the American working class, especially among Black workers. Between 1965 and 1970, many unions, and almost all organizations in the black community, moved from supporting the war (or, at best, grudging acceptance) to active opposition. Opposition to the war played an important role in the explosion of many Black ghettos in U.S. cities into rebellion during the sixties and early seventies.

Victory

In the end, the Vietnamese people won. The world's greatest imperialist power was defeated by the combination of heroic resistance in Vietnam, and an international movement that changed the political framework of the day, and American soldiers who refused to be cannon fodder. The workers at home actively opposed the war, and the workers in uniform were refusing to fight.

The Marxist left in the U.S. and Canada can be very proud of the role it played in that victory.

Vietnam, by 1975, was united and independent. The Vietnamese capitalists and landlords were driven from power. Their victory was a key factor in encouraging colonial revolts from Iran to Nicaragua. And it led to the Vietnam syndrome: for a quarter century the U.S. rulers were unable to launch a major military assault anywhere in the world.

Today, when imperialism is again trying to crush a third world country, the antiwar movement begins with a much more favorable relationship of forces, and with an arsenal of lessons on how such a fight can be won.

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Cuba Will Not Make Concessions or Betray Its Ideals

Felipe Pérez Roque

“We will build an even more just, more democratic, more free and more cultivated society. In brief, more socialist.”

The following statement was made by Felipe Pérez Roque, Cuba’s Minister of Foreign Affairs, to the United Nations Commission on Human Rights, in Geneva, March 16, 2005.

The Cuban press recently reported that for the first time in several years, no country was willing to submit Washington’s annual anti-Cuba resolution to this year’s Commission meeting.

Excellencies:

The Commission on Human Rights – despite the efforts by those who honestly believe in its importance and wage a battle to return it to the spirit of respect and cooperation of its founders – has lost legitimacy. It is not credible. It allows the impunity of the powerful. It is handcuffed. In it, there are plenty of lies, double standards and empty speeches by those who, while enjoying their wealth, squander and pollute, look the other way and pretend not to see how millions of human beings endure the violation of the right to life, the right to peace, the right to development, the right to eat, to learn, to work; in brief, the right to live in dignity.

We all knew that the Commission on Human Rights was victim to the political manipulation of its work because the Government of the United States and its allies have used the Commission as if it were their private property – and have turned it into some sort of inquisition tribunal to condemn the countries of the South and, particularly, those who actively oppose their strategy of neocolonial domination.

But in the course of the last year, two events took place that change the nature of the debate that we will hold these days.

The first was the European Union’s refusal to co-sponsor and vote in favor of the draft resolution that proposed to investigate the massive, flagrant and systematic human rights violations still committed today against over 500 prisoners at the naval base that the United States keeps, against the will of the Cuban people, in the Harbor of Guantánamo. The European Union, that always objected to no-motion actions, was willing this time to present it in order to even prevent any investigations whatsoever against its ally. In terms of hypocrisy and double standards, it was the straw that broke the camel’s back. What will it do this year, after the dissemination of the heinous pictures of tortures at the prison of Abu Ghraib?

The second event was the release of the report presented by the High-Level Group on Threats, Challenges and Change, set up at the initiative of the UN Secretary-General. It categorically states that “the Commission cannot be credible if it is seen to be maintaining double standards in addressing human rights concerns.” Should we then wait for the representatives of the United States and its allies to come up with self-criticisms at this plenary session and undertake to work

with us, Third World countries, to rescue the Commission on Human Rights from disrepute and confrontation?

Mr. Chairman:

The guarantee of the enjoyment of human rights today depends on whether you live in a developed country or not – and it also depends on the social class that you belong to. Therefore, there will be no real enjoyment of human rights for all as long as we fail to achieve social justice in the relations among countries and within countries themselves.

For a small group of nations represented here – the United States and other developed allies – the right to peace has already been achieved. They will always be the attackers and never the ones under attack. Their peace rests on their military power. They have also achieved economic development, based on the pillage of the wealth of the other poor countries that were former colonies, which suffer and bleed to death for those to squander. However, in those developed countries, incredible as it may seem, the unemployed, the immigrants and the impoverished do not enjoy the rights that are most certainly guaranteed for the rich.

Can a poor person in the United States be elected Senator? No, they cannot. The campaign costs, on average, some US\$ 8 million. Do the children of the rich go to the unjust and illegal war in Iraq? No, they do not go. None of the 1,500 American youths killed in that war was the son of a millionaire or a Secretary. The poor die there defending the vested interests of a minority.

If you live in an underdeveloped country the situation is worse, because the overwhelming majority, poor and hopeless as it is, cannot exercise their rights. As a country, there is no entitlement to peace. It can be attacked under the accusation of being terrorist, of being an “outpost of tyranny” or under the pretext that it is going to be “liberated.” It is bombed and invaded to “liberate it.”

Nor can the over 130 countries in the Third World exercise the right to development. Beyond their efforts, the economic system imposed on the world prevents this. They have no access to markets, to new technologies; they are handcuffed by a burdensome debt that has already been paid off more than once. They just have the right to be dependent countries. They are led to believe that their poverty is the result of their mistakes.

In these countries, the poor and the indigent, who account for the majority, do not even have the right to life. For that reason, every year we see the death of 11 million children under five years of age, a portion of which could be spared with barely a vaccine or oral rehydration solutions – and also the death of 600,000 poor women at childbirth. They have no right to learn to read and write. It would be dangerous for the owners. They are kept in ignorance to keep them docile. That is why this Commission should be ashamed of the nearly 1 billion illiterate people in the world. That is why in Latin America, 20 million children endure ruthless exploitation as they work on the streets instead of going to school.

The Cuban people strongly believe in freedom, democracy and human rights. It took them a lot to achieve them and they are aware of its price. It is a people in power. That is the difference.

There cannot be democracy without social justice. There is no possible freedom if not based on the enjoyment of education and culture. Ignorance is the cumbersome shackle squeezing the poor. Being cultivated is the only way to be free! – that is the sacred tenet that we Cubans learned from the Apostle of our independence.

There is no real enjoyment of human rights if there is no equality and equity. The poor and the rich will never have the same rights in real life, proclaimed and recognized as these may be on paper.

That is what we Cubans learned long ago and for that reason we built a different country. And we are just beginning. We have done so despite the aggressions, the blockade, the terrorist attacks, the lies and the plots to assassinate Fidel. We know that the Empire is chagrined by this. We are a dangerous example: we are a symbol that only in a just and friendly society; that is, socialist, can there be enjoyment of all rights for all citizens.

Therefore, the Government of the United States attempts to condemn us here at the Commission on Human Rights. It is afraid of our example. It is strong at the military level but weak on the moral front. And morality, not weapons, is the shield of the peoples.

Perhaps this year, President Bush will find some Latin American country – of the few docile ones that are left – to present the notorious resolution against Cuba. Or perhaps it will return to an Eastern European government like the Czech, which enjoys as nobody else its condition of satellite of Washington and Trojan Horse within the European Union. Or perhaps it will be presented by the very Government of the United States, which is now blackmailing, threatening and counting endorsements to know if Cuba's condemnation can be achieved.

Everybody in this hall knows that there is no reason to present a resolution against Cuba at this Commission. In Cuba, there is not a single – and there has not been ever in 46 years of Revolution – an extrajudicial execution or a missing person, not even one! Let anyone come up with the name of a Cuban mother who is still looking for the remains of her murdered son or daughter! Or a grandmother searching for her grandchild handed over to another family following the parents' murder! Let anyone here come up with the name of a reporter killed in Cuba – and 20 of them were murdered in Latin America only in 2004! Let anyone come up with the name of a prisoner vexed by his keepers, a prisoner ordered down on his knees, prey to terror, in front of a dog trained to kill!

Excellencies:

President Bush has a plan for Cuba, but we Cubans have a plan of a different sort. We Cubans have a clear idea about our course. And nobody will move us away from it. We will build an even more just, more democratic, more free and more cultivated society. In brief, more socialist.

And we will do so although President Bush threatens us with aggressions, to return to colonized Cuba, to oust Cubans from their homes, their land and their schools to turn them over to the former Batista-style owners who would come back from the United States. We will do so despite his plan to privatize health and turn our doctors into unemployed beings; we will do so despite the plan to privatize education and make it accessible only to the elite, as it was in the past; we

will do so despite the plan to auction off our wealth and the heritage of all the people to US transnational corporations. Despite the plan to remove the rewards from our retirees and pensioners to force them back on a job, according to the so-called Plan of Assistance to a Free Cuba.

The Cuban people are entitled to defend themselves from aggression and they will. And I must say it clearly: in Cuba, we will not allow the establishment of organizations and mercenary parties financed by and at the service of the US Government. We will not allow newspapers and TV networks funded by the US Government to uphold its policies of blockade and its lies among ourselves. In Cuba, the press, the radio and the TV are owned by the people and serve and will serve their interests.

We will not cooperate with the Representative of the High Commissioner or with the spurious resolution behind her. Why is not such a prestigious lawyer appointed Special Representative of the High Commissioner to the Guantánamo Naval Base? Why is she not asked to investigate the flagrant violations of the rights of five courageous and pure Cuban youths imprisoned in the United States and their families? Because it cannot be done. Because it is about the human rights violations committed by the United States and they are untouchable. It can be done against small Cuba but not against the United States.

But Cuba will not give up on its fight, Excellencies. Nor will it surrender. Nor will it make concessions or betray its ideals.

And we will see if a free, cultivated and united people can be defeated! We will see if they can overthrow a government of the people, whose leaders walk among them with the moral authority derived from the total absence of corruption and the full dedication to their duties!

We will see if they can deceive everybody all the time!

Excellencies:

The Commission on Human Rights before us today is illustrative of the unjust and unequal world in which we live. There is no longer nothing left in it from the friendly and respectful spirit that brought its founders together after the victory over fascism.

Therefore, the Cuban delegation will cease to insist that we must transform the Commission. What we have to change is the world, go to the roots. A Commission on Human Rights without selectivity, politicization, double standards, blackmail and hypocrisy will only be possible in a different world.

Cuba does not consider that to be a dream, but a cause well worth fighting for. That is why it fights and it will continue to do so.

Thank you.

Socialist Voice #41, March 28, 2004

Venezuela's Bolivarian Revolution: A Debate

By John Riddell, Paul Kellogg

The February 16, 2005 issue of Socialist Worker, newspaper of the International Socialists in Canada, featured an article by Paul Kellogg, entitled "Chavez Praises Socialism, Denounces Capitalism."

The March 23 issue featured a response by Socialist Voice co-editor John Riddell, entitled "Why Socialists Defend the Bolivarian Revolution."

Both articles are published below.

FERMENT IN VENEZUELA: CHAVEZ PRAISES SOCIALISM, DENOUNCES CAPITALISM

By Paul Kellogg, editor, *Socialist Worker*

[Socialist Worker, February 16, 2005]

One of the highlights of the World Social Forum was the speech by Venezuelan president, Hugo Chavez, to 30,000 enthusiastic supporters packed into the Gigantinho indoor stadium in Porto Alegre, Brazil.

Many in the crowd chanted "Lula nao, Chavez si" (Lula no, Chavez yes) showing their displeasure with the neo-liberal turn of Lula's Workers' Party (PT) government in Brazil. They were looking for a more left-wing message from Chavez. They got it.

"It is impossible, within the framework of the capitalist system, to solve the grave problems of poverty of the majority of the world's population ... we must transcend capitalism.

"But we cannot resort to state capitalism, which would be the same perversion of the Soviet Union. We must reclaim socialism as a thesis, a project, and a path, but a new type of socialism, a humanist one which puts humans and not machines or the state ahead of everything."

A name that was anathema for years was quoted favourably. Chavez cited the writings of Leon Trotsky as a guide to understanding the course of the Venezuelan revolution.

No wonder George W. Bush and other western leaders hate Chavez so thoroughly. For a president of one of the world's largest oil producers to be denouncing capitalism, promoting a non-Stalinist version of socialism, and treating Trotsky with respect, is to make enemies in corporate offices all over the world.

Bush has already tried on several occasions to destabilize or overthrow Chavez. We now know that the CIA was fully aware in 2002 that a coup attempt against him was in the works, but did

nothing. Bush hoped that the coup would succeed and that a US-friendly regime would take Chavez' place.

In the event, of course, an uprising in the barrios of the urban poor forced the coup leaders to retreat, and reinstated Chavez into office.

There is no question that there will be attempts to destabilize the Venezuelan government in the future.

It is the duty of all on the left in Canada and the west to pay close attention to events in Venezuela, and build solidarity with the people of that country against any attempt to destabilize the regime from the outside.

But it is important also to be clear about the contradictions in Chavez politics and orientation.

Some of these were revealed in the same speech at the WSF.

He did not just praise socialism. He also praised Russian president, Vladimir Putin — the butcher of Chechnya. “Today’s Russia is not Yeltsin’s ... there is a good president, Mr. Putin at the wheel.” He had kind words for China — the regime which crushed a student uprising in blood in 1989, and which today is presiding over economic growth driven by super exploitation of a peasantry driven off the countryside and into the new industries in the cities.

Oil is the secret to this praise of two repressive regimes.

The key to the Venezuelan economy is the state-run oil firm PDVSA, and Chavez is very keen to diversify its export base and therefore be less reliant on the US. China is keen to be a consumer of Venezuelan oil and Russia is keen to be a partner to help Venezuela exploit its vast oil reserves.

Chavez was also unwilling to join in the audience’s criticisms of Lula.

“I like Lula, I appreciate him, and he is a good man, of a great heart. He is a brother, a comrade and I send him a hug, my love and affection.”

The reason for this softness on Lula was made clear February 13, when Lula and Chavez signed 20 agreements in oil and energy projects, as well as a major agreement on defence.

This included a potential \$470 million arms deal with Brazil, to allow Chavez to buy Tucano fighter jets, a huge waste of money desperately needed by the Venezuelan poor.

Seeing the two sides of Chavez, then, is extremely important. On the one hand, he is only in power because of a massive radicalization which is sweeping his nation, and whole other swathes of Latin America.

But Chavez himself — while giving voice to the very radical sentiments at the base of society — is not fundamentally “looking down” to workers and the poor in order to deepen the social transformation. Rather he is “looking up” to forming strategic alliances with other states, including Russia, China and Brazil — all states with capitalist interests who are positioning themselves to take advantage of US economic decline.

The key to the development of the Venezuelan movement will not be in state to state alliances, but in deepening the social content of what is being called the Bolivarian revolution.

There are signs that this is happening.

For the first time since coming into office in 1998, Chavez has nationalized a company — the Venepal paper factory. This nationalization came as a result of two workers' occupations of the factory, and a mass march to the capital Caracas, demanding that the government intervene.

Also for the first time, the Chavez government has extended its important land reform program to taking over privately owned land, the 13,000 hectare El Charcote cattle ranch owned by Britain's Vestey Group. This is an important development given the intense rural poverty in the Venezuelan countryside, side by side with massive and often idle estates owned by absentee landlords.

But this land seizure only came after hundreds of land seizures on a smaller scale undertaken by the rural poor themselves — land seizures met with brutal opposition by the landed rich, who have killed dozens.

We know from experience that this process of self-mobilization from below is the key to social transformation in Venezuela and elsewhere.

Chavez needs to be defended from imperialist threats.

But we have to understand that Chavez' radicalism is a reflection of deep processes going on in the Venezuelan masses, and that the key to the future lies with the self-organization of those masses, and the development of a radical left that sees workers and peasant action from below as the key to a revolution, not putting faith in radical leaders at the top of society.

WHY SOCIALISTS DEFEND THE BOLIVARIAN REVOLUTION

By John Riddell, Co-editor, *Socialist Voice*

[Socialist Worker, March 23, 2005]

In the February 16 issue of *Socialist Worker*, Paul Kellogg calls on socialists in Canada to “pay close attention to events in Venezuela, and build solidarity with the people of that country.” *Socialist Voice* agrees completely — his article is a welcome addition to discussion on the Canadian left of events in Venezuela.

The working people of Venezuela, led by the Bolivarian movement of President Hugo Chávez, are engaged in the first major revolutionary upsurge the world has seen in fifteen years. Their progress has outraged the war-makers in Washington and other imperialist capitals, and is fueling a deepening resistance throughout Latin America to capitalist exploitation.

Unfortunately, while Kellogg welcomes developments in Venezuela, much of his article is devoted to inappropriate criticism of the Bolivarian leadership. We cannot agree with his rejection of Venezuela's efforts to defend itself with arms and alliances, or with his focus on contradictions in Hugo Chávez's fast-evolving political views.

Kellogg criticizes Venezuela's purchase of 24 Brazilian-made fighter airplanes for US\$170 million, for example, as "a huge waste of money desperately needed by the Venezuelan poor." We disagree: socialists must actively champion Venezuela's right to self-defense, including acquiring the most modern weapons available.

The failure of right-wing forces inside Venezuela to overthrow the Bolivarian revolution is leading Washington to prepare a military attack. It is using the brutally repressive and heavily armed government of Colombia as its agent. Colombian forces have already made incursions across the Venezuelan border.

Venezuela's poor need political power and the physical means to defend themselves. The Chávez government has proposed the formation of popular armed militias to help defend the revolution, and recent arms purchases, including 100,000 AK-47s, provide the material means to carry through on this pledge. No wonder Washington is alarmed!

Kellogg also criticizes Chávez for orienting to "strategic alliances" with Russia, China, Brazil and other states, rather than "'looking down' to the workers and the poor in order to deepen the social transformation." Once again, the issue is self-defense. Without trade deals with other countries, social transformation in Venezuela would be cut short by economic collapse. Venezuela's foreign policy aims to ally with other semi-colonial countries in opposition to imperialist globalization. To this end, Venezuela has proposed the Bolivarian Agreement for the Americas (ALBA), a plan to forge ties among Latin American peoples on a foundation of equality, solidarity, and the well-being of the dispossessed.

So far, only Cuba has signed on to this plan. The Venezuelans' close ties with revolutionary Cuba are one alliance of theirs that can properly be called "strategic."

All these initiatives have solid precedents in the foreign policy of the early Soviet republic.

When Kellogg criticizes Chávez for not "looking down" to the workers and poor to advance the revolution, he ignores the fact that, alone among the governments in Latin America that claim to be anti-imperialist, the Bolivarians have consistently relied on and mobilized the masses of working people to defend their government and implement its program.

Kellogg is very critical of contradictions in Chávez's political views, including his favorable statements about Russia's Putin and others. But Chávez did not begin as a Marxist, and the Marxist current in Venezuela is very weak. He is a genuine leader thrown forward by the struggle and is learning as he goes.

The aims of the Bolivarian movement are completely at odds with the likes of political figures like Putin. We don't know how Chávez and the Bolivarian movement will evolve politically in the long term, but the direction they're moving in right now is one that socialists should support.

Kellogg concludes with a call for development of a radical left in Venezuela that will rely on "worker and peasant action from below" rather than "putting faith in radical leaders at the top of society." This artificially counterposes the development of the mass movement to the development of revolutionary leadership, which in Venezuela today is developing in and through the Bolivarian movement.

Are Venezuelan workers wrong to trust in the Bolivarians? Many socialist groups in Canada call for some new, more “radical” Venezuelan movement — and deny support to the Bolivarians in electoral confrontations with reaction.

Such views find no echo in the Venezuelan workers’ movement. The Bolivarians are pressing ahead with major reforms and refusing to back down in the face of imperialist threats. They have more than earned the support they enjoy from the Venezuelan people.

All the experience of the past century shows that revolutionary, anti-capitalist movements never conform to the prevailing views of Marxists of what they ought to look like. For that reason, we welcome Paul Kellogg’s advice to “pay close attention to events in Venezuela.” With all our wisdom, we may yet have things to learn.

Socialist Voice #42, March 30, 2004

Let's Talk About Cuban Democracy

An interview with the President of Cuba's National Assembly of Popular Power, Ricardo Alarcón

(This interview originally appeared in the March 2005 issue of the Cuban Magazine Bohemia. It was translated into English by Maria Montelibre, and made available to us by Walter Lippmann, moderator of the CubaNews email group.

By Liset García

In a few days Cubans will be at the polls again. A good number of citizens that are already used to this practice, and others who, at 16, will make use of this right for the first time in their lives, perhaps will be able to understand why the Island is the constant target of accusations about its political and electoral systems.

The Island's reality has been so distorted around the world, that the rumor has run around that voting is not one of the rights Cubans have. The authorized opinion of Ricardo Alarcón de Quezada, President of the National Assembly of People's Power, whom we have been talking with several times about democracy and its many aspects, reflects, analyzes and expands about that popular issue.

In today's world, so complex and under unipolar rule, what can we understand as democracy?

Currently, in the world, what's considered to be democracy is really a fraud. Hegemonic countries, those with the financial power, the main beneficiaries of globalization, use increasingly empty rhetoric. Absence of democracy predominates.

The essential features of neo-liberalism as a ruler of society means letting capital advance without obstacles, which means reducing the role of the State, as well as its ruling function. It is then very difficult for democratic institutions to continue, even those who originated as part of the capitalist bourgeois system, because they have an increasingly lesser role. And this situation develops at international level. There is news evidencing this every day.

Not long ago it was announced in the U.S., as if they were announcing rain, that more than one thousand employees had been fired due to one of those mega-mergers happening there every day. The news did not point out at any time that there was any type of talk with the workers or the unions. You can read every day about decisions which are deeply affecting the people, and there is no reference that they have participated in the decision making process. They were not even informed beforehand.

There is also talk about free trade agreements between countries. Now they are talking about a Central American Free Trade Agreement. In those countries, the issue has not been discussed, not even in parliaments. When those governments accept the agreements under U.S. pressure, they will be approved and will become law.

In the mid-nineties, a treaty called the Multilateral Investment Agreement was almost approved. It was something savage, like a world's ALCA. According to the text, who was published later, investors have all the power. They did not have any obstacle. It was even possible to sue those governments trying to obstruct the flow of capital. That meant that democracy, as we have understood it for centuries, was turned around. Those negotiations were done in complete secrecy, until the French ONG found it and publish it in the internet. Some members of parliaments around the world starting complaining about it and they opposed it.

Everybody remembers in Cuba the worker's parliament at the beginning of the special period, when the crisis was at its worst. Discussions with the people about problems in the Cuban society were opened up. That is supposed to be real democracy. What's happening around the world is the complete opposite.

That's why people are becoming more and more disenchanted with democratic institutions and political parties, besides abstentionist positions. People do not become involved because they do not believe, they realize that it makes little sense.

Is there any solution for this crisis of democracy in the whole world?

The solution is to democratize international relations, and every country has to rescue its basic democratic principles, expressed in the practice of authority by the peoples. Nations must have decision making power. They cannot be subjected to the will of a foreign power.

Can you define the essential differences between the way the Cuban people elect their representatives and the way of – let's say – the rest of the more classic representative democracies throughout the world?

There are tendencies and differences among countries. In my opinion there are several essential problems, that's why representative democracy has been criticized. One of them is reducing the democratic practice, people's involvement, to just voting.

A famous phrase by Rousseau, talking about the oldest parliamentary system in the world, the British one, sums it up: The English – he would ironically say – believe that they are free men, but they are free only on election day, when they vote for their representatives.

All the U.S. electoral propaganda talks only about elections. That is what democracy is for them. However, throughout history, the concept of democracy is not only reduced to voting, but the practice of authority, government by the people themselves or through their representatives.

The elections in Iraq, in Afghanistan, what were they all about? A macabre show. It does not matter that those countries were occupied, that there was torture, fraud and lies. Some of them voted, and because of that they consider that a democracy.

The second problem was defined by Rousseau as a farce, a fiction novel. It is delegating authority to someone, which is its essence, that's why it is called representative democracy. The representative assumes power in the name of the others. But that can be done only with social justice. Rousseau said that if there is no equality among men, there is no representation. The

exploiter cannot represent the exploited. That's why he believed that democracy was utopia. That was not discovered by Marxism, it is prior to the French Revolution.

In the XX Century already, Hans Kelsen from Austria explained how the so-called modern representative democracy is only a fiction. The representative is not obligated to act in the name of the people he represents. He cannot be their spokesperson. That's why a social revolution is necessary. In lay terms that means that there cannot be democracy with massive unemployment, with most of the people under the poverty level, with illiteracy, with landowners. Justice comes first. We did that in Cuba. When we started the system of representative democracy in 1976, we had already done away with those scourges, because there were big social changes.

But more was achieved. Neighbors proposed the candidates directly, and they elected whoever they wanted, and they decided with their vote, who will be delegate. Candidates came from the people's ranks, the elected person had to give account to the people, and that person could be recalled at any time.

Besides, the involvement of the electors is maintained, as it happened in the Workers' Parliament, in the discussions of the Party's Call to Congress, as it is done during the electoral process. Everybody is involved in one way or another, from the manufacture of electors' registries, or people at home preparing children to watch the polls or to be part of the electoral tables, or those who have been nominated as candidates. Hundreds of thousands of people participate.

In the United States, for example, a detailed investigation not long ago discovered that thousands of people did not even know where they could go to vote. According to that country's rhetoric, the low percentage of voters is something positive. They say that they have free elections, therefore, they are free not to vote. This points out to the falsity of that society, because if it were a true democracy, people would feel motivated to participate in government.

Greece was exactly the opposite. They would meet in a public square to make a decision. They felt motivated to that, because they were going to discuss issues they were interested in.

In Cuba, people participate in the nomination process, in the accounting process, because that's when neighbors examine neighborhoods problems with the delegate. And, of course, our system is not perfect, and our delegates do not have a magic wand.

Democracy is also measured with presidential or parliamentary elections.

That's right. But the most serious specialists have always questioned whether the presidential system is more democratic. England has classic democracy, and they never elect the king or the First Minister. The representatives are the ones who elect the President. For a really democratic presidential system, the electors themselves should elect and recall. All the people would have to vote again. In some polls, the President has a 90% rejection, and they have to wait until his mandate is over, because there is no recall.

In the parliamentary system, such as Cuba, that is possible. Besides, it creates mechanisms obligating the government to respond to representatives. When there is a dynamic relation with the electors, it is easier for them to govern through their representatives.

That is, those who elect controls those who are elected. In the Presidential system, electors are eliminated from that process, reducing their function to just one day, voting for their president.

In any Cuban community people nominates and elects candidates and delegates, who become part of the municipal government, once they are elected. Those who have been elected have to give an account about their work. But also, the people can recall them at any time. Up to 50% of the Peoples' Power and the National Assembly must be neighborhood delegates.

And the provincial presidents, of the National Assembly and the Chief of States must be elected by their organizations, by their own members. The Cabinet of the Government is also approved by those delegates and representatives in the name of the people who elected them, and they give an account of their functions.

The participation of the parties in the elections has also been subject of argument and questioning.

That is another problem of the current representative democracy: Partyocracy. The party decides who the candidates are. Those represented do not make that decision, but an institution. That never happened in Greece. Not even George Washington, who, in farewell speech to the U.S. people, he warned them about the dangers of dividing the country into parties. He had been President and did not belong to any.

In Cuba, the bankruptcy of partyocracy was total with the coup of March 10, 1952, when they were powerless in front of Batista. The credibility about those parties then was lost forever, who had no summons power. With the triumph of the Revolution, from that institutional loss of prestige another idea of Republic is born, much more authentically democratic, with a Party that, as Marti's, did not intervene in the elections, because its goals are not electoral/ Cuban History is very rich in that sense.

Considering that electoral history, from the Assembly of Representatives of the patriots of the XIX Century, what features of our current electoral model have been inherited from those Cubans?

On each war stage, the mambises approved the constitutions, elected their representative bodies and governments, enacted laws, the Republic of Cuba-in-Arms existed – including in liberated land – it had democratic institutions and did not have electoral parties. Later, during Marti's times, we also had a non-electoral party. Its function was to unify the patriotic movement, but it was not responsible for electing the delegates in the representative Assemblies and the government in the free territory. They even had to give account.

Already at that time Cuba contributed. Nowhere in the so-called democratic world, civil and political rights to all were recognized. Of course, we are not even talking about women who even on the XIX Century were not considered citizens. Even ex-slaves had those rights, when in the rest of the world, there were income, education, and age requirements, restricting participation. So that whites and wealthy people were the ones with civil rights. At that point the international struggle tried to open those possibilities. Even today these demands continue in some countries.

In Cuba there were Blacks as leaders of the Freedom Army and in the Government of the Republic in 1868, something unusual. In the United States, a century later, in 1965, a law was passed about the right of Blacks to vote.

All Cubans are born with the right to vote, as well as the free, universal, and automatic registration in the electoral registries, and that comes down from the times of the Republic of Arms. Those possibilities were lost with the U.S. intervention, imposing income, age, and education requirements in order to vote. That explains why only even percent of the population voted in those first elections of 1900. They built an elitist society.

At the time of the mambises, everybody could participate. This is proven by the fact that Ana Betancourt spoke in the Assembly of Guáimaro defending women rights, when women were far from being considered equal to men.

Now delegates are elected by the people, and continue relating to them. The people continue participating in several ways in the practice of power, beyond elections day.

Cuba is accused of selecting a democratic model comparable to the one in the ex-Soviet Union and the rest of nations in Eastern Europe. What are the differences?

Those countries had different electoral models, and none of them had nothing to do with ours. Some of those nations had several parties, the Communist Party among them, and they did nominate candidates.

Citizen participation and Cuban civil society and the political systems of the country have been targeted for years by the enemies of the Island. Can you explain the fundamental rights in that participation?

A substantial aspect in our system is to guarantee people's involvement more and more.

Fundamental decisions are discussed here at the social level. It is a norm that there is no law that is not discussed with those involved. The Law of Foreign Investment was discussed by all the workers, as well as the Cooperative Tax Law, which was discussed by the farm workers several times. Those legal bodies were changed on the basis of proposals made.

In Cuba the great majority of workers are organized into unions. Unions are always picking up their members' opinions.

That is, they participate. And not only during the electoral process such as this one, where all social organizations support and sustain neighborhood meetings so that neighbors nominate candidates, later in the elections in many electoral colleges where tens of thousands of citizens will work. Besides, there are other tens of thousands of candidates who are workers, housewives, farm workers, intellectuals, just people. The Municipal Assembly of People's Power and the civil society are represented in their organizations, which nominates candidates for president and vice president, from the elected delegates.

But there is a process of discussion about laws within all organizations.

These organizations discuss, analyze and nominate pre candidates for provincial delegates and representatives in the general elections. Those nominated are also tens of thousands, who will become candidates, if the basic delegates meeting in municipal assemblies so decide.

What we have is not perfect, but compared to the fiction of bourgeois representative democracy, our model is a shining sun.

In 1992 there were changes introduced to the Constitution of the Republic and of the electoral system, making it possible the election of representatives for the National Assembly and Peoples' Power directly by the people. Could you comment the elements which sustained that reform?

Knowing that all human work can be perfected, and that it can and must be adjusted to develop it and improve it, the objective at that time was to strengthen the representative system. The electoral system was changed. In my opinion, the system we had before was not less democratic.

Our municipal assemblies are the most democratic organizations I have ever seen, because all of their members came directly from the people, nominated by the voters, and not by a machine. And those delegates, electing on a second step the provincial delegates and representatives for that territory seems to me to be perfectly acceptable.

The new way means a step forward. From that date on, the Municipal Assembly elects its candidate and submits that candidate to the people. If we had stopped there, it was a democratic system already. In some countries, those are very indirect elections which are not questioned. Generally, senates are elected like that. And in some countries, senators are appointed and even hereditary.

Since 1992, that decision about the Municipal Assembly has been approved by the voters. That is, the system and representations are strengthened. Receiving the approval of the people directly is, no doubt, strengthening.

What other aspects should be considered, in order to perfect the Cuban electoral system and the Peoples' Power?

There is always room for improvement. When we talk about participation, about choosing candidates, about elections. Each one of those words can be conjugated with more or less rigor, love, sense of dignity and commitment.

We must aspire to a nominating process with increasingly deeper foundations, where people can express their opinions better about those who have been nominated, so that when the time comes to elect a candidate or another, they can well be distinguished. As long as this country becomes more educated, presumably those decisions will be made at a higher level, ending in better candidates. It will also be important that the meetings to give account are less formal and give room for collective reflection and a more educated and complete analysis.

The key to everything is dissatisfaction. We must not rest on what we have accomplished. We must always propose more. Social development programs would not make sense if we think we achieved the goal. Same things with our political system. The conclusion we must make is like

someone asking, what is the horizon good for, if you can never reach it? It is good for going forward.

Socialist Voice #43 March 31, 2004

Capitalism Is Savagery

By Hugo Chávez

[Translated by Daniel Morduchowicz, Zmag]

Ignacio Ramonet, in his introduction, mentioned that I am a new kind of leader. I accept this, especially coming from a bright mind such as Ignacio's, but I am inspired by many old leaders.

Some very old like for example Jesus Christ, one of the greatest revolutionaries, anti-imperialists fighters in the history of the world, the true Christ, the Redeemer of the Poor. ... Simon Bolivar, a guy that crisscrossed these lands, filling people with hope, and helping them become liberated.

Or that Argentine doctor, who crisscrossed our continent on a motorcycle, arriving in Central America to witness the gringo invasion of Guatemala in 1955, one of so many abuses that North American Imperialism perpetrated on this continent.

Or that old guy with a beard, Fidel Castro... Abreu Lima, Artigas, San Martin, O'Higgins, Emiliano Zapata, Pancho Villa, Sandino, Morazan, Tupac Amaru, from all those old guys one draws inspiration.

Old guys that took up a commitment and now, from my heart, I understand them, because we have taken up a strong commitment. They have all returned.

Today we are millions.

One of these old guys, he was being ripped into pieces, pulled by horses from each arm and leg – Empires have always been brutal, there are no good or bad Empires, they are all aberrant, brutal, perverse, no matter what they wear or how they speak. When he felt he was about to die, he shouted "I die today but some day I'll return and I'll be millions". Atahualpa has returned and he is millions, Tupac Amaru has returned and he is millions, Bolivar has returned and he is millions, Sucre, Zapata, and here we are, they have returned with us. In this filled up Gigantinho Stadium.

As I said two years ago here in Porto Alegre, in the third WSF, the World Social Forum is the most important political event in the world.

We have come to learn and to grasp knowledge, to soak ourselves in the passion that abounds here. We keep searching, because as every test run, the Venezuelan process needs to be monitored and improved; it is an experiment open to all the wonderful experiences happening in the world.

The World Social Forum, in these five years, has become a solid platform for debate, discussions, a solid, wide, varied, rich platform where the greater part of the excluded, those without a voice in the corridors of power, come here to express themselves and to raise their protests, here they come to sing, to say who they are, what they want, they come to recite their poems, their songs, their hope of finding consensus.

I don't feel like a President, being President is a mere circumstance. I'm fulfilling a role as many fulfill a role in any team. I'm only fulfilling a role, but I'm a peasant, I'm a soldier, I'm a man committed to this project of an alternative world which is better and possible, necessary to save the Earth. I am one more militant of the revolutionary cause.

I have been a Maoist since I entered military school, I read Che Guevara, I read Bolivar and his speeches and letters, becoming a Bolivarian Maoist, a mixture of all that.

Mao says that it is imperative, for every revolutionary, to determine very clearly who are your friends and who are your enemies.

In Latin America this is particularly important.

I'm convinced that only through the path of revolution we will be able to come out of this historical conundrum in which we have been stuck for many centuries.

The South, according to Mario Benedetti (the Uruguayan Writer) also exists. There are many revolutionaries in North America and in Europe, but although I could be wrong, I think that the South is where there is a greater conscience about the need for urgent, rapid and profound change in the World.

In 1950 we had the Summit at Bandung, where the movement of non-aligned countries was born, giving birth to the concept of the conscience of the South.

But then, with the collapse of the Soviet Union, the fall of the Berlin Wall, as Stiglitz says the "happy 90's" were upon us, we were all apparently so happy, the end of history, the technological age, and so the conscience of the south was frozen, and, as an avalanche, the proposal from the Washington consensus arrived, neocolonialism, dressed around a dubious thesis, neoliberalism, and all those IMF policies injected with particular venom in Latin America.

Today, at the WSF, no other space more appropriate, it is opportune to say that to save the world one of the first things we need is the conscience of the south.

Re-launch the conscience of the south...it is possible that many in the north don't know this, but the future of the north depends on the south, because if we do not do what we must, if we truly do not make a better world real, if we fail, behind the marines' bayonets, behind the murderous bombs from Mr. Bush, if there is not enough strength, conscience, and organization in the south to resist the neo-imperialist attacks, if the Bush doctrine were to impose itself the world would be destroyed.

Even before the polar caps melt and entire countries became submerged under the waters, the planet would see hundreds of violent rebellions. People are not going to take peacefully the imposition of the neo-liberal model, preferring to die fighting than of hunger.

The whip of counter-revolution

Trotsky said that every revolution needs the whip of a counterrevolution, and the counterrevolution whipped us hard, with economic, media and social sabotage, terrorism, bombs, violence, blood and death, coup d'etat, institutional manipulation, international pressure, they tried to convert Venezuela into a subservient country, trying to install a transnational power

above our laws, our institutions and our constitution. But the Venezuelan people demonstrated to the oligarchy that they will never surrender.

We resisted, we defended ourselves, and then went on the counteroffensive. As a result in 2003, for the first time, Venezuela recuperated its oil company, which had always been in the hands of the Venezuelan oligarchy and the North American Empire.

We were now directing almost 4 billion dollars to social investment, education, health, micro credits, housing, directed to the poorest. The neo-liberals say we are throwing money away... but they were giving it away to the gringos, or shared it amongst themselves in their juicy business deals.

We have called everybody to study, grandmothers, children, many of them living in misery, so we created a system to give half a million grants of 100 dollars each per month. Almost 600 million per year that before was stolen from us and now is redistributed to empower the poor so they can defeat their own poverty.

Today we also have the Missions, for example Barrio Adentro. It is a national crusade involving everybody, civilians, military, old, young, communities, the national and local governments, grassroots community organizations, helped by Revolutionary Cuba. Today there are almost 25 thousand Cuban doctors and dentists living among the poorest, plus Venezuelan male and female nurses. 50 million cases were seen during 2004 – that's double the Venezuelan population. Before, the money to pay for all this left the country.

Capitalism is savagery

Before, education was privatized. That's the neo-liberal, imperialist plan, health systems were privatized, that cannot be, it's a fundamental human right. Health, education, water, energy, public services, that cannot be given to the voracity of private capital, that denies those rights to the people, that's the road to savagery, capitalism is savagery.

Every day I'm more convinced, less capitalism and more socialism.

We need to transcend capitalism, but capitalism cannot be transcended from within. Capitalism needs to be transcended via socialism, with equality and justice, that's the path to transcend the capitalist power.

I'm also convinced that it's possible to do it in democracy ... but watch it, what type of democracy ... not the one Mr. Superman wants to impose.

Tactics

Although I admire Che Guevara very much, his thesis was not viable. His guerrilla unit, perhaps 100 men in a mountain, that may have been valid in Cuba, but the conditions elsewhere were different, and that's why Che died in Bolivia, a Quixotic figure.

History showed that his thesis of one, two, three Vietnams did not work.

Today, the situation does not involve guerrilla cells, that can be surrounded by the Rangers or the Marines in a mountain, as they did to Che Guevara, they were only maybe 50 men against 500,

now we are millions, how are they going to surround us ... Careful, we might be the ones doing the surrounding...not yet, little by little.

Empires sometimes do not get surrounded, they rot from inside, and then they tumble down and get destroyed as the Roman Empire and every Empire from Europe in the past centuries. Some day the rottenness that it carries inside will end up destroying the US Empire.

And the great people of Martin Luther King will be free, the great U.S. people, our brothers.

We are not yet declaring victory, but reality shows that the process is ongoing, although we have to nurture it every day. That's one of my sermons to my compañeros and compañeras every day. And as Che said, we need revolutionary efficacy, fighting bureaucratism and corruption.

2004 brought us the great political victory. It was said that I was doing everything possible to avoid the referendum. The neo-liberals said I was afraid of the people. All lies. I never did anything to avoid it. But the opposition had to abide by the constitutional requisites, collecting their signatures within the allotted time, as our institutions mandate. It could not be the OAS or the U.S. Government presenting the signatures with witnesses. We won on August 15 with 60% of the vote, much more than five years ago. Then, in the regional elections of 10-31 we won in most of the 24 provinces up for grabs, a great advance in the social inclusion model. An advance in the political stage, a strengthening of our institutions, the judicial power.

In 2003 and 2004, we saw the strengthening of the Venezuelan economy. Manufacturing, agriculture are all growing. For the first time in a long time we can say that we don't have to import rice, we are self sufficient in corn, and we will continue to rescue our agriculture, helping us attain food sovereignty. In the war against the latifundios, we recognize the example of the MST. They have been an example to us and to the rest of the peasants all over the continent.

In 2004 we entered Mercosur (South American Common Market). I am critical of its profile, but still we decided to join. Five years ago I was criticized for being in Canada in the Americas Summit. But I was the only one there opposing the FTAA, because it is nothing but a colonialist project. We want to create an alternative integrationist model, which we call Bolivarian alternative or ALBA. This project progresses, one would want it to be faster, but there are realities and moments, timing.

The sun rose on January 1st, 2005 and the FTAA has gone to hell. Where is the FTAA, Mr.? The FTAA is dead. There are little FTAA's, but the North American Empire did not have the strength, in spite of so much pressure and blackmail, to impose on this continent the imperialist and neocolonial model that the FTAA represented. I do not want to overestimate the weakness of our adversary. It would be a fatal error. But nevertheless I think it is convenient to objectively recognize its weaknesses. Because if one believes that the adversary is unbeatable, well, it is unbeatable.

History has Vietnam, the Iraqi people resisting the attack and invasion, Revolutionary Cuba forty years later still resisting. Bolivarian Venezuela resisting for already 6 years. North American Imperialism is not invincible. Of course it is important to know that, because there are people

around with good intentions who think that it is invincible and we cannot even hit it with rose petals, the Empire can get angry and react.

Goliath is not invincible. That makes it more dangerous, because as it begins to be aware of its weaknesses, it begins to resort to brute force. The assault on Venezuela, utilizing brute force, is a sign of weakness, ideological weakness.

This is not the same Latin America of even five years ago. I cannot, out of respect for you, comment on the internal situation of any other country. There in Venezuela, particularly the first two years, many of my partisans criticized me, asking me to go faster, that we had to be more radical. I did not consider it to be the right moment, because processes have stages. Compañeros, there are stages in the processes, there are rhythms that have to do with more than just the internal situation in every country, they have to do with the International situation. And even if some of you make noise, I will say it: I like Lula, I appreciate him, he is a good man, with a big heart, a brother, a compañero, and I'm sure that Lula and the people of Brazil, with Nestor Kirchner and the Argentine people, with Tabarez Vazquez and the Uruguayan people, we will open the path towards the dream of a United Latin America, different, possible.

A big hug, I love you all very much, a big hug to everybody, Many, many thanks.