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# Latin America's pre-socialist Left

**T**he hot issues in Latin America today are the self-determination of nations and anti-imperialism. Both concepts are false, because they drag the working class into the trap of nationalism. Class struggle is not mentioned by any of the political leaders, and the Left is not mentioning it either, despite the fact that there is not any kind of homogeneity of interests within any nation; every nation has antagonistic interests between the rulers and the working class.

On a practical level, there is a lot of confusion going around in Latin America regarding leaders like Chávez, Castro and Morales. The so-called socialism of the 21st century is a new state-capitalist variation invented by the Venezuelan leaders and probably suggested by the Cuban leadership: just another way for the national bourgeoisies of some Latin American countries to get mass support for their interests. They are anti-Yanqui for now, but in reality, like Saddam Hussein, Hitler, or Stalin, they are not against capitalism — only against the privatization of the means of production.

One thing the Latin American Left is not able to see (probably because they do not have the proper principles to understand it) is that some of those so-called socialist leaders, such as the President of Chile and the President of Brazil, are ambiguous. One moment they are against domination by the U.S.'s rulers and the next they send troops to Haiti in order to collaborate with the invasions of that country; and at the same time as the Brazilian capitalist class is placing pressure on the President of Bolivia against the nationalization of natural resources, he is compromising with U.S. interests in Bolivia. The President of Paraguay, formerly a member of the Tupac Amaru guerrilleros, promised a lot of changes and benefits for the working class, and now he is collaborating with the USA, doing the opposite of everything he said and moving more toward the right than the left.

Fidel Castro, for his part, has been lauded as an immortal leader, together with Che Guevara, since his last visit to Argentina to promote the Mercosur [a trade agreement between Argentina, Brazil and Paraguay]. Even the Catholic Church is praying for him, now that he went through an emergency surgery! He is becoming the Messiah of Latin America, and if for any reason he dies, probably Hugo Chávez will continue his ideological work through the region.

On a more theoretical level, while some leftist groups may look like they are against capitalism, they too are not against state capitalism or the capitalist system as a whole, which can only be replaced by a new society. When they talk about glo-

balization, they do not understand that concept either, because globalization is only the wide spread of the capitalist mode of production, which is creating the proper conditions for a new society. They think that the spread of poverty, hunger and unemployment is caused by globalization only, but they do not say that it is a by-product of the capitalist system itself, and that all those consequences are very normal for capitalism. As for [neo]liberalism, that concept is totally incorrect, because liberalism does not exist anymore; today the state is participating more in the economy than in prior years.

## Meet the new boss...

The struggles (leftists say) are now being concentrated between imperialist countries and anti-imperialist countries, but the class struggle they place on a secondary level. Given, again, that there is not an equality of interests between the rulers and the workers of any nation, this is a false argument.

**I t has been said that, in places like Latin America, the ideas of Marx never actually were spread; what most leftists know now is Leninism, Stalinism and Trotskyism, which are all in essence the same ideas.**

The workers continue being exploited by the same ruling class that is trying to promote itself as their liberator. That is one of the big dangers of Lenin's concept of anti-imperialism: if the enemy is the United States, not only does this mean they do not differentiate between U.S. workers and the U.S. ruling class, but they also make alliances with the rulers of other countries such as China and Russia, or with the likes of Hamas and the Lebanese religious leaders.

A third issue, finally, is another idea we have inherited from the Bolsheviks and the Leninists — the concept of leadership. It has been said that, in places like Latin America, the ideas of Marx never actually were spread; what most leftists know now is Leninism, Stalinism and Trotskyism, which are in essence all the same ideas. Marxist-Leninists, former and current, have in general done great damage to the ideas of socialism and the Marxian vision of a new society without class, money or state. They have been a great help to the ruling class.

If Latin America's leftists placed all their emphasis on the class struggle and were able to recognize that capitalism is the root of all the problems in the world, they would be forced to see that Cuba, Venezuela, Bolivia and Chile are all capitalist countries and that there are not common interests between the rulers of those countries and the working class. They would be forced to negate themselves and their past, and to reject whatever they are supporting now. Like Leon Trotsky in his struggles with Stalin, Latin America's Left stands behind the ruling class: Trotsky never wanted to accept that the Soviet Union was a state-capitalist economy, either.

— Marcos Colomé

# ¡Viva la revolución!

Open your eyes and you won't believe the beauty of the world. Witness the world's smallest deer, the endangered pudu, hopping gracefully across the Valdivia. Listen to the rhythmic and loud tapings of the magellanic woodpecker. Watch the blue whales, the world's largest mammals, emerge just a stone's throw from the beach. Elsewhere, observe the giant river otters at play in the Amazon, or the stealthy leap of a jaguar chasing its prey. The Amazon itself courses seemingly forever through the planet's largest and most luxurious rainforest. Birds of the richest colors weave a tapestry above, their sounds descending below like a perpetual orchestra of melody and cacophony.

The waters of the Gulf of California maintain an impossible turquoise. The scurrying of the marine iguana on the Galápagos Islands, and so many other sights, sounds and smells, remind us of our place in the extraordinarily rich weaving of life, which for timeless eons provided for our material needs rather abundantly, as long as humans were able to cooperate together in sharing the fruits of this abundance with each other, and with the other creatures that adorned the planet.<sup>1</sup> Many humans came for sure to this breathtakingly stunning land southward from the Bering Land Bridge and possibly directly from Africa (if C.S. Gladwin's facts are correct in *The Gladwin Thesis*).<sup>2</sup>

Welcome home, we city dwellers might think as we first cast our eyes upon its beauty. One would think that it would go on providing for us for another few million years, and that it would always feel like home. With our eyes and ears we have been able to witness what appears a heavenly place. And yet, sadly, sights are deceiving. For the Amazon's rainforest is being destroyed at the rate of 9,000 square miles a year, and the Gulf of California, home of seriously depleted schools of sardines and anchovies, is being poisoned by industrial pollution, rendering bare the eelgrass beds that grew profusely only forty years ago, and killing off practically the entire population of shellfish that fed

1 *Vanishing Wildlife of Latin America*, Robert McClung, New York: William Morrow, 1981.

2 New York: McGraw-Hill Books, 1947.

humans and other creatures along the shore there only a decade ago (according to [worldwildlife.org](http://worldwildlife.org)).

As for humans themselves, they too have been torn from their natural realm, from a life of abundant gathering and hunting to a life of stupendous enslavement and immiseration.

Painful as it is to do, tear your eyes away from this old home, and set them upon the way of life of humans here in Latin America today. The Commission of Economics for Latin America informed the world in 1999 and again in 2002 that of the 420 million people living in this continent, 40 percent are poor, and 16 percent extremely poor. In rural areas, 55 percent are poor and 33 percent extremely poor.<sup>3</sup>

Such figures made lies of the Inter-American Convention on Indian Life's claims in the 1940s that economic development would reduce poverty, falsities upon which developmental theory and policy of the last sixty years were based.

## Causes of child labor and poverty

Most traditional capitalist analyses of these conditions decried the absence of any earning power of a majority of rural dwellers and so recommended rural development programs.<sup>4</sup> And yet the rural poor are the direct result of the commodification of production, an historical process that has turned peasants and tribal people into workers around the globe since the 1700s, effectively robbing them of land and of the means to secure a livelihood without employment, itself scarce in these parts compared with population size. "No profit, no production" is the golden rule of the era of employment and capital accumulation, and clearly this rule disproportionately affects the Southern Hemisphere's poor.

Despite Latin America's stunning ecological richness, people

3 "Biennial Report of the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean: Official Records of the Economic And Social Council, 11 May 2002–6 June 2004," New York: United Nations Publications, 2006

4 See, for example, the paper by Carlos Benito, "The Causes of Poverty in Latin America," Sonoma State University, 2000, retrieved from [www.sonoma.edu](http://www.sonoma.edu).

in the age of capitalism without sufficient money simply go hungry and starve. *The National Catholic Reporter* (according to NCRonline.org) reported a statistic compiled by the International Labor Organization (ILO), that 27.4 million children under the age of 14 in Latin America are working. In Venezuela, 32 percent of the population lives on less than two dollars a day; 41 percent in Peru; 44 percent in Honduras; 45 percent in El Salvador; 52.3 percent in Ecuador. Between 20 percent and 50 percent of the region's children have mothers who have not completed primary school.

The ILO coordinator for South America is quoted as saying that millions of children are working in agriculture, construction, fireworks manufacturing, mining, brick making, processing coca leaves, harvesting coffee, collecting garbage, domestic labor and the sex trade. Children may be seen in all Latin American cities selling candy, washing car windows and at times attempting to pick up clients to turn tricks. A poignant psychological question is, why do humans continue to support a global social system that has so failed their children? Poverty not only sends children to work, but also seriously lowers their chances of thriving. In Latin America, 28 out of 1,000 children die before the age of one; 34 out of 1,000 before they turn five. These rates are nine times those found in Sweden, and four times those of the United States.<sup>5</sup>

### Landlords in charge

The role of colonialism in the rise of Latin American capitalism was greatly responsible for the degree of abject poverty found there. It left landlords in charge of large amounts of land and raw materials. They gained enormous political and economic power and were not concerned with the hugely disparate distribution of income and property between their class and that of the peasants, workers and dispossessed indigenous people. In contradistinction, the bourgeoisie in the northern countries that were the first to industrialize wisely (in their long-term interest) promoted waves

5 *Who Gains From Free Trade: Export-Led Growth, Inequality and Poverty in Latin America*, Vos and Ganuza, Oxford: Routledge Studies in Development Economics, 2006.

of welfare reform in response to protests about working and living conditions and calls for revolution among the working class there.<sup>6</sup>

These are the conditions that underlie the desperate popular support for left-wing governments in Brazil, Bolivia, Argentina, Ecuador, Nicaragua, Uruguay and Venezuela (and almost in Mexico, Peru and Costa Rica), as well as for left-wing guerrilla movements fighting right-wing paramilitary states backed by the U.S., such as Colombia. Certainly, such populist governments have made headway in, for example, reducing abject poverty for eight million (out of 36) in Argentina or improving health care, education and subsidized food for the poor in Venezuela.

How - ever, the lessons for the worker in Latin America are those that still have not been learned in North America — capitalist reforms are limited in scope because of the basic law of capitalism: no profit, no production.

Beyond the historical traumatic influence of colonialism, beyond the political shade of government in power, the problems in Latin America derive from the same global economic system that affects workers in Asia, Africa and yes, even North America and Europe.

This system requires the private (and at times state) ownership of the means of producing wealth and the buying of the labor-power (employment) of members of the non-owning masses. Production is only carried out if it will be profitable to do so, that is, if values in excess of the costs of production (thus, in excess of the values being paid to workers) may be extracted from the productive process. It is a fundamentally cold economic system, one without regard for meeting the needs

6 *After Spanish Rule: Postcolonial Predicaments of the Americas*, Mark Thurner and Andres Guerrero, Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 2003.

of its population. In such a system, people are pitted against each other to make a living. Either they own property or capital with which to hire the dispossessed to generate a profit from agriculture or manufacture or a service, or they do not, in which case they may have to find a job, beg, or send their children out into the streets to hustle.

Most citizens of the United States suffer from a noxious short-sightedness, failing to understand their social and economic system as a global order that evolved at a different pace in different parts of the world, wreaking havoc every-

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where, but in even greater proportions in the Southern Hemisphere. They fail to comprehend how the evolution of the modern economic system was paved over the bodies of millions of indigenous peoples who died of a dozen western diseases when East met West,

over the bodies of slaves, and over the bodies of exploited men, women and children in places so remote that they may feign ignorance about them. Yet the reality and the truth are that every time American workers (and European workers and workers from all lands) vote for another few years of capitalism at election time, they are personally promoting the continued existence of a society that condemns fellow workers in the Third World to untold misery.

### Opposing capitalism

Behind the existence of our social system lies the political support of its people, often including that of its most oppressed. The mass of workers in Latin America, like the mass of their counterparts in the United States, take the illogic of capitalism for granted. They do not sufficiently query the existence of employment, of buying and selling, of food being produced for sale, of land being appropriated by landowners. At

least, any such querying has not yet been expressed in a mass movement to oppose it. Capitalism is by nature undemocratic. It relies on minority ownership, and on states to protect the legal rights (backed by force) of property owners.

Many of the indigenous peoples of Latin America are quite aware of this tide of bourgeois culture encroaching into every corner of the globe, including their homelands. It is not new to them, and many bravely fought against it in the past. For example, the Brazilian Diaguaita resisted the advances of Incas and refused to adhere to the latter's caste system. Similarly the Argentinian Calchaqui successfully thwarted the invasion of Spanish colonists from Chile into their immediate homelands. Today, that struggle continues.

The indigenous movement in Latin America has had no choice but to demand rights from a position of weakness rather than of strength. According to the "Indigenous People's Letter to the Presidents of Latin America and the Caribbean" submitted in 2005, the Chilean indigenous peoples, such as the Aymara, Quechuas and Likanantay, have urged governments to adhere more seriously to their declared commitment to overcome poverty. The letter further urged them to improve the "acknowledgment and enjoyment of our rights to superficial and subterranean water sources, the acknowledgment of our rights over mining fields existing in our ancestral land and the right to have a share in profits resulting from their exploitation. And also the right and safety to move from one place to another within our ancestral territory, without the fear of death and injury to our physical integrity, which implies the demilitarization of the border and the deactivation of mines currently seeded on our ancestral territory."

### **Indigenous class struggle**

Latin American indigenous peoples' struggles for rights to land and its subterranean resources have thus faced the same problems as those of Native Americans in the Northern Hemisphere. Such problems suggest that they too have entered into the same class struggle with the ruling class as have workers, albeit with the

difference that they are hoping to be accorded ancestral rights that the capitalist class is unwilling to acknowledge, at least not without a legal and at times armed fight. The class struggle is fought on both sides.

The United States has frequently reneged on promises made to the American Indians or to a paradigm of world justice that indigenous rights activists and anti-globalists have insisted upon. For example, the U.S. has refused to sign up for the International Criminal Court, the Kyoto protocol, the Anti-Biological Weapons Convention, the international ban on land mines, and countless other UN initiatives aimed at fostering global peace and harmony.

Protecting the interests of U.S. capital investment and development abroad has always come first. This historical reality has again and again come brutally face to face with native and human rights activism that continues to advocate that such rights be accorded by major capitalist governmental players.

Socialists, however, take from this historical lesson that what must be achieved first is a global order of common ownership of the means of production, which will by definition accord all humans the democratic control of their land. Continuing to support rights in a society based supremely upon private property and minority ownership of the means of production will do nothing to remove from the ruling class its power to play god with humans and nature. However, supporting a worldwide socialist revolution to immediately end the rule of nation-states and commodity production will put all humans, including indigenous peoples, in a position of power, no longer having to urge those who presently hold the reins of power to accord them "rights."

In a larger, more global sense, Latin America presently faces a most serious ecological disaster with possibly planetary implications. The permanent loss of dozens of plant species a day (most found in the Latin American rainforests) is a crime of inexpressible proportions — not only from the perspective of the loss of life that took ages to evolve, not only from the perspective of the slow dismantling

of a delicate ecosystem that operates effectively and self-sufficiently as a holistic entity, but even from the perspective of a loss to human science — what medicines may have been lost every day?

Beyond such a development that the loss of plants and animal species represents, tens of millions of humans in Latin America live in sickening squalor. For how long must an economic system persist that fails to provide children with shoes and food, that sends them sometimes to prostitute for money to feed themselves and their families? For how long must humans support a mode of production based on the drive for profits that sends humans off their land, depriving them of livelihood even when they do become wage workers?

### **The future is community**

What is required in Latin America is a permanent solution to these terrible problems, a grassroots movement organized without leaders, having a single goal in mind — the institution of a society in which the means of producing wealth — the land, the factories, the offices, the infrastructure, and so on — are owned by the entire community (not the state) and democratically controlled by that community.

Those reading this journal in the Northern Hemisphere are not off the hook, either. We all live in a global capitalist economy. Those voting for the continuation of a system based on employment of the many by the few and on producing only what is profitable to sell are personally providing their political consent during each election for the continuation of a global system that drastically fails to meet our needs, with Latin America a prime example of how dire that failure may get in the Third World. But helping to build a movement for common ownership and democratic control in the more advanced industrial countries will ensure that political consent for the continuation of that system is removed, and that effective and permanent solutions to the problems of world poverty, wherever it may raise its ugly head, are implemented once and for all.

*¡Viva la Revolución!*

— Dr. Who



Source: <[http://www.geocities.com/flatbush\\_skp/marxlist.html](http://www.geocities.com/flatbush_skp/marxlist.html)>.

## Looking for socialism in all the wrong places

Whatever happened to those military dudes with flashy sunglasses who, when it came to economics, seemed to have hat sizes that were far too big for their brains? The general effect of the military dictatorships installed during the 70s and 80s was to deflect the economies of Latin America from their efforts to industrialize by exiting from the trap of being “natural” exporters of agricultural commodities (a strategy known as Import Substitution Industrialization). The generals, on the advice of Washington, reverted to a “free trade” régime and in the process became profligate borrowers. Their good friends in the international banking “community” used “often aggressive tactics in pressuring Latin American governments to borrow,” so that the region’s “total foreign debt increased from 1970 to 1980 by more than 1,000 per cent.” The fall in commodity prices that resulted from a world recession in the 1980s meant that the democratically elected governments that replaced the military dictatorships found themselves in the position of having less money with which to pay back swollen debt loads<sup>1</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> “Latin America, history of,” *Encyclopædia Britannica*. *Encyclopædia Britannica* 2007 Deluxe Edition. Chicago: *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 2007. (All references to the *EB* are to this edition.)

The same bankers who had opened the spigots so freely for two decades then had the gall to turn around and lecture Latin American capitalists on the virtues of abstemiousness and belt-tightening. The resulting “Washington Consensus” was a virtual festival of economic Puritanism. It is hardly any wonder that popular opinion in Latin America should have turned so vehemently against the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, and now there is even a “leftward drift” to pay for it. Although a UN Development Program survey reported in 2002 that support for democracy had fallen four points from 61 per cent in 1996, this cannot reflect any predilection on the part of either workers or capitalists, since neither class has had any trouble identifying military madness as a principal source of its headaches.<sup>2</sup>

Latin America’s left turn thus does not appear to be temporary, for in setting up the generals, the U.S. itself killed the Monroe Doctrine. When the régime of U.S. Supreme Court-appointed strongman George W. Bush sought to oust the Chávez government in 2002, it was surprised to discover that the attempted “kissingerization” procedure which had worked so well in Chile 29 years before caused barely a

<sup>2</sup> “Year in Review 2005 A Leftist Surge in Latin America,” *EB*.

ripple this time in Venezuela.

All of which makes this left turn a little different. *The Economist* seems to have pulled down the Iron Lady from her pedestal and traded her in for an Old Maid: its writers fan themselves furiously at the mention of Hugo Chávez; their ideas on populism, their politely venomous words to the wise in Bolivia and their heavy-handed lampooning of Lula in Brazil all smack of catty remarks rather than cagey analysis. Perhaps they miss their reliable old generals and their neoliberal economics (reduction of trade barriers, privatization of state companies, encouragement of foreign as well as domestic private investment and lessening of regulation generally).<sup>3</sup> *The Economist* thinks we are witnessing another “populist experiment” at the end of which real wages will again be “lower than they were at the beginning.” But the magazine’s little box, in which “countries develop through a mixture of the right policies and the right institutions,” affords readers no glimpse of the social movements that want to turn capitalism to good account and eliminate the extreme “income inequality” and poverty historically suffered by Latin American workers and peasants.<sup>4</sup>

From *The Economist’s* standpoint, the real action will happen when “high-profile” investors (usually multinationals) see the truant states in court — notably, the ICSID (International Centre for the Settlement of Investment Disputes), “the arbitral arm of the World Bank”: “Thanks in part to a wave of left-leaning government policies in South America, Latin American arbitration is experiencing a boom-let ... Of the 105 pending cases in ICSID, 57 involve Latin American nations, and the majority of those involve Argentina, whose economy collapsed in 2001.”<sup>5</sup>

### Argentine makeover

From the standpoint of almost anyone else, however, quite a different reality is

<sup>3</sup> “Latin America, history of,” *EB*.

<sup>4</sup> “The return of populism; Latin America. (Peering behind Latin America’s leftward drift),” *The Economist* (US) 379.8473 (April 15, 2006): 40US.

<sup>5</sup> Carlyn Kolker, “Arbitration boom: the rise of left-leaning governments in Latin America has corporate clients heading to ADR forums,” *American Lawyer* 28.10 (Oct 2006): 111(2).

unfolding. The upshot of it all is that “most of South America now has left or center-left governments,” according to *Weekly News Update on the Americas*.<sup>6</sup> The most hopeful interpreters of this trend are naturally to be found on the Left, which congenitally wants history to finally become a morality play and end happily. One of the most hopeful — an article about “people’s power” in Argentina, in *Green Left Weekly*, 2/2/02 — is worth excerpting for the broad conclusions it draws from sparse data:

The political crisis in Argentina has meant that people have formed their own organs of democracy and have created, potentially, a new type of rule for Argentina — the rule of the exploited instead of the IMF stooges.

Popular assemblies have been formed in all major cities, more than 50 in the Greater Buenos Aires area alone, and accounts indicate that they have been growing.

The assemblies have begun adopting anti-government demands. An example is the Assembly for San Cristol and Boedo, whose demands include: punish the police murderers who killed demonstrators last month; the release of political prisoners; abolition of VAT on basic goods; taxation of the rich; and benefits for the unemployed. It also demands: work for all, with sharing of work between the employed and the unemployed without any reduction in wages; dissolution of the supreme court; nationalisation of the banks and the privatised firms, to be controlled by the workers; no payment of foreign debt; and a popular constituent assembly.

The broadness of the participants in the assemblies — workers, unemployed people, professionals, shopkeepers — and the anti-government, anti-capitalist demands many are adopting indicates that they have a potentially revolutionary implication, as an alternative form of power based on the working class and its allies.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>6</sup> “South America: Summit Process Stalls,” *Weekly News Update on the Americas*, 1 January 2007; retrieved 27 April 2007 from <<http://ww4report.com/node/2981>>.

<sup>7</sup> “Argentina: People’s Power v. the IMF,” Rohan Pearce; retrieved 27 April 2007 from <<http://www.greenleft.org.au/2002/481/28791>>.

But perhaps more interesting is the direction events have taken in Argentina since the meltdown of 2001: the rise of what one writer calls “the new resistance,” the “recovered factory” movement, which only a couple of years ago included more than 200 businesses whose employees had successfully taken control of workplaces abandoned by their owners (who were only obeying the logic of the axiom, “No profit, no production”). The Empire (capitalism) is now striking back, with “threats of eviction, kidnappings, police violence, terror by hired gangs, direct opposition from local politicians and apathy on the part of Argentina’s current president, Nestor Kirchner.”

The author, Yeidy Rosa, applauds the way in which the working class of Argentina has risen to what it might have fatalistically regarded as an insurmountable challenge: As workers struggle to gain legal status for their cooperatives and full expropriation of the factories within a court system designed to protect private property, a network of solidarity has formed strong links despite the state’s repressive apparatus. A laboratory of democracy within the factories and their surrounding communities has emerged, where a concrete alternative to corporate capitalism has redefined success as the creation of work and social inclusion, rather than a measurement of profits.<sup>8</sup>

She regards these recovered factories as a challenge to “norms of legitimate ownership and private property” made possible through the workers’ “refusal to allow their workplace to be taken from them.” As of 2005, about 15,000 Argentine workers were running 185 recovered factories;<sup>9</sup> six other countries — Brazil, Ecuador, Peru, Paraguay, Uruguay and Venezuela, plus the Caribbean — added another 100 factories to this number, with a solid core of 100 recovered firms operating in the province of Buenos Aires

<sup>8</sup> “The New Resistance in Argentina,” Yeidy Rosa, *Nonviolent Activist* (magazine of the War Resisters League), June 2005; retrieved 27 April 2007 from <<http://ww4report.com/node/756>>.

<sup>9</sup> “Workers’ self-management,” retrieved 20 April 2007 from <[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Workers%27\\_self-management](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Workers%27_self-management)>.

under the control of 5,000 workers and 60 more in the process of being “recovered.” Workers representing more than 263 self-managing firms in eight countries met in Caracas in October 2005 to cement a working alliance, and the government of Venezuela has promised to grant credits to recovered Argentine factories.<sup>10</sup>

If the point of “recovering” enterprises, however, is to prove that capitalism could work if only investors and entrepreneurs would put people ahead of profits (which of course self-managing workers presumably would), it will only be a matter of time before the logic of the marketplace reasserts itself. The Left has never grasped that the institutions of capitalism are impervious to morally-based thinking: it is not possible to moralize capitalism. The needs of profit necessarily come before the needs of human beings (capitalists included); everyone simply has to learn how to cope with that, and if they cannot, they will be scrapped.

While recovered enterprises thus present a fascinating historical study, their very closeness to the guts of capitalist production gives them an unstable and probably not very hopeful prognosis. In three other cases — Bolivia, Brazil and Venezuela — the working class has for the most part not followed the Argentinian example and challenged any of capitalism’s structural assumptions. In a fourth case, that of the Zapatistas in Mexico, a movement does not exist whose actual institutions can mount such a challenge — but they have managed nonetheless to construct a working model of revolution grounded in a flawless explanation of capitalism and what makes it a bad system.

Let us consider each of these four cases, in reverse order of their importance to the media.

## Mexico in search of the Left

If the Zapatistas prove nothing else, they show that Marxism is eminently translatable into the (Mexican) vernacular, as we find it in their “Sixth Declaration of the Selva Lacondona.”<sup>11</sup> Nor is it the

<sup>10</sup> “Venezuela otorgará créditos a fábricas recuperadas argentinas,” *Diario Hoy*, 21 April 2007; retrieved 21 April 2007 from <[http://www.diariohoy.net/vx/verNoticia\\_2007/html/200568/](http://www.diariohoy.net/vx/verNoticia_2007/html/200568/)>.

<sup>11</sup> Originally published in Spanish by the Zapatista

sort of corrupted Leninist sophistry we typically find in statements by liberation movements. The problem is rather that their Declaration is the good old-fashioned social-democratic kind. Having established that the nature and causes of the underlying social and economic problems faced by the “autonomous rebel zapatista municipalities” can be found in the system of production for profit that pervades human social life at all levels, the Declaration goes on to lay down minimum demands:

We are also going to go about raising a struggle in order to demand that we make a new Constitution, new laws which take into account the demands of the Mexican people, which are: housing, land, work, food, health, education, information, culture, independence, democracy, justice, liberty and peace. The EZLN [Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional] will establish a policy of alliances with non-electoral organizations and movements which define themselves, in theory and practice, as being of the left...

The way to actualizing their model will thus lead them into the smothering embrace of the Left, where they will end up like every other effort to put a human face on a system that doesn't even have a place where a face ought to be. And while they do lay down some fairly strict criteria for making these alliances, one must also remember Robert Michels's dictum that organization breeds oligarchy, and good intentions do not last. The EZLN promises:

Not to make agreements from above to be imposed below, but to make accords to go together to listen and to organize outrage. Not to raise movements which are later negotiated behind the backs of those who made them, but to always take into account the opinions of those participating. Not to seek gifts, positions, advantages, public positions, from the Power or those who aspire to it, but to go beyond the election calendar. Not to try to resolve from above the problems of our Nation, but to build from below and for below an alternative to neoliberal destruction, an alternative of the left for Mexico.

To their credit, they have already drawn the conclusion that the Left in power is a bunch of square tires: they invite only the “unregistered political and social organiza-

tions of the left, and those persons who lay claim to the left and who do not belong to registered political parties” to join forces with them.

### People's power in Bolivia

In the end, ironically, it is probably the very success of the Mexican establishment in containing it that has allowed Zapatismo the space to define its principles so clearly; elsewhere in Latin America, class conflict has stirred up huge clouds of theoretical mud. For example, a “keyleader” of one of Bolivia's social movements, Oscar Olivera, explained to Uruguayan political scientist Raúl Zibechi that “we are creating a movement, a nonpartisan social-political front that addresses the most vital needs of the people through a profound change in power relations, social relations, and the management of water, electricity, and garbage.”<sup>12</sup>

“Addressing the most vital needs of the people” is not a way of independently defining people's needs but only of redressing their grievances. These vital needs are a hostage to the one trump card held by the MAS, or “Movement Toward Socialism,” on behalf of Bolivia's social movements: physical control of highly marketable natural gas reserves. Unlike the Chavistas of Venezuela, who inherited a fully integrated oil industry, the Bolivian state lacks control over the industry that extracts the gas reserves; nor are they strong enough to force the hand of their neoliberal opponents. So although Evo Morales has his mandate, he can only deliver on it outmaneuvering the capitalist globetrotters who supply the money and above all expertise to get the natural gas out of the ground. This, unfortunately, limits the social movements to a goal of redistributing profits more equitably — achieving which would bring tears of moral joy to every leftist's face, it is true. But “revolutions” that stop with

redistributing wealth are merely paying into the pot of class struggle, which is why they can never be socialist: they serve only to perpetuate the struggle.

Anselmo Martínez Tola, an organizer of indigenous groups in Potosí, speaking for the social movements, put the case for nationalizing natural gas and redistributing land in the following terms: “We are a majority and through the [upcoming constituent] assembly we hope to rescue what belongs to us.”<sup>13</sup> Resources produced and sold in the marketplace for a profit are inevitably the property of an élite, and an élite that accumulates capital

— whether it adopts the fiction that those resources belong to the people or not — is a capitalist class. Nationalizing natural gas would only bring the Bolivian working class up against the real question: the urgent need to abolish capital and wages through transfer of all productive assets to the community.

transfer of all productive assets to the community — communalization of the means of life, rather than their mere “socialization,” so popular on the Left. The same may be said for the proposed constituent assembly Morales was elected to convoke (and which his neoliberal opponents in Santa Cruz have attempted to stave off), which will serve only to sharpen class antagonisms, no matter whom the new constitution assigns to dispense the profits.

### Brazil: Wave of the past

The future appears at once less exciting and more dismal for the social movements of Brazil (including organized labor), who while they have achieved a high degree of organization since the generals were booted out, have demonstrated a propensity for repeating the mistakes made by others. Since the Workers' Party formed a minority government in 2002 with Luis Inácio Lula da Silva (“Lula”) as President, it has compiled a record that is eerily similar to that of the first two Labor governments in Britain (1924 and 1929,

Army of National Liberation, June 2005, trans. “irlan-desá”; retrieved 30 April 2007 from <<http://www.ezln.org/documentos/2005/sexta1.en.htm>>, <<http://www.ezln.org/documentos/2005/sexta2.en.htm>> and <<http://www.ezln.org/documentos/2005/sexta3.en.htm>>.

12 “The Progressive Mandate in Latin America: Bolivia, Evo Morales and a Continent's Left Turn,” Benjamin Dangl and Mark Engler, *Z Magazine* March 2006; retrieved 27 April 2007 from <<http://www4report.com/node/1902>>.

13 Ibid.

both times likewise in the minority); then, too, and for very similar reasons, Ramsay MacDonald's Labor Party had left office choking on its own promises.

The problem is that, despite a sharp antagonism toward the neoliberal model, neither Brazil's social movements nor organized labor and its political parties have shed their naïve belief that the working class can collaborate with the capitalist class to achieve mutually beneficial goals. While neoliberals around the globe chuckle all the way to the bank, delighted that Lula has turned out to be such a good boy, the workers, the unemployed, the landless, the indigenous peasants console themselves that having Lula's administration in office at least allows them some scope for organizing, even though many of them have already written off Lula as politically incompetent.<sup>14</sup> Brazil's working class shares with Venezuela's a history of rural depopulation and rampant growth of shanty towns,<sup>15</sup> though it was historically better organized. But until it begins to cultivate the habit of thinking originally, it will be condemned to repeat coping strategies that have notoriously failed elsewhere. Going on the offensive against the interests of capital does not mean winning the class war but ending it, and that can only happen as a result of abolishing capital and wages — and with them, the working class itself.

## Venezuela

This brings us to the strange case of Venezuela. Understanding Chávez's "socialism for the 21st century" requires a little background. From a working-class standpoint, the launching of the oil-export economy in the 1950s was an unfolding horror story in a country where agriculture, fishing and forestry accounted for more than half the GDP (Gross Domestic Product). Over the next three decades, job and farming opportunities in the countryside shrank by 50 per cent, while jobs in the

14 "The State and Economy in Brazil: An Introduction," Rosa Maria Marques and Paulo Nakatani, *Brazil Under Lula: An MR Survey — Politics and Economy*; *Monthly Review*, Vol. 58, No. 9, February 2007.

15 "The WTO ... will meet somewhere, sometime. And we will be there!" Annette Aurélie Desmarais, VOICES: The Rise of Nongovernmental Voices in Multilateral Organizations, a project of The North-South Institute, Ottawa, Canada, 2003.

rapidly expanding petrochemical industry amount at present to no more than one per cent of all employment in Venezuela. Huge numbers of displaced rural workers and farmers just had to pull up stakes and look for "other work."<sup>16</sup> Idle real estate tied up in large properties (latifundios) could not provide it. Capitalists saw no profit in acting on the textbook mantra of ultimately providing viable substitute forms of employment, and so they left their hapless victims to fend for themselves.

By 1998 over half of all Venezuelans were classified below the poverty line, many living in sprawling *ranchos* (shantytowns) orbiting the relatively small number of large cities, with prices rising at more than 30 per cent annually. Rural areas lost population through migration to urban areas, which had neither the vision nor the budget to accommodate the imbalance. The politicians, visibly in bed with their capitalist benefactors, were perceived as having utterly mismanaged the economy. With the stage set for a populist hero, a charismatic demagogue, or even a virtuous democrat, Hugo Chávez Frías was elected President on a promise to set things right. According to Greg Palast, "to most of the 80 per cent of Venezuelans who are brown, Hugo Chávez is their Nelson Mandela, the man who will smash the economic and social apartheid that has kept the dark-skinned millions stacked in cardboard houses in the hills above Caracas while the whites live in high-rise splendor in the city center."<sup>17</sup>

Despite all the hubbub, however, even a cursory glance shows that common ownership of the means of production in Venezuela is not imminent — which does not make it easy to predict where the radical Bolivarian reforms are taking capitalism:

While [Chávez] may not have figured out exactly what the socialism of the 21st century is yet, he has some ideas under way, such as endogenous development, participatory democracy, land reform and co-management. A nationwide poll carried out ... in late May and early June 2005 showed that about 48 per cent of respondents preferred a socialist over a capitalist system, with

16 "Venezuela," *EB*.

17 "Hugo Chávez is Crazy!" Greg Palast, AlterNet, 25 June 2003; retrieved 15 April 2007 from <<http://www.alternet.org/module/printversion/16255>>.

less than 26 per cent preferring the latter. These results, Chávez's rhetoric and the above-mentioned initiatives notwithstanding, Venezuela's constitution still protects private property rights, the government still courts international investors, and capitalism is alive and well throughout Venezuela.<sup>18</sup>

What is more, as Dangl and Engler in *Z Magazine* point out, "Several observers have noted that the redistributionist programs that are the hallmark of [Chávez's] social policy owe more to the New Deal than to Cuban state socialism ... Chávez's decidedly un-neoliberal economic policy has created the most robust growth in the hemisphere, with the country's GDP surging 18 per cent in 2004 and approximately 9 per cent in 2005."<sup>19</sup> These things, taken together, suggest that Chávez does indeed view "socialism for the 21st century" through a social-democratic lens, cannily aiming to have the capitalist class pay for the Bolivarian revolution yet keeping the meddling neoliberals at arm's length.<sup>20</sup>

Marta Harnecker, the Chilean Marxist who has worked closely with the Venezuelan government to launch the "communal council" system, remarked in a recent interview with *Green Left Weekly*:

In Venezuela, up to now, we don't have unity of the workers within the [revolution]. The union movement is not strong enough at this stage ... We should think of the communal councils as a central community of workers [as well as of neighbours]. To me, it is very important to ... bring in economic organisations so that they can be democratised, in the direction of solidarity and not of corporatism. There should be a close link between the organisation of work and the community.<sup>21</sup>

There are now upwards of 16,000 communal councils, with many more on the way, and no one really knows yet how they will work out as an institution, or

## "Neocapitalism" concluded on p 13

18 *The Venezuelan Revolution: 100 Questions — 100 Answers*, Chesa Boudin, Gabriel González and Wilmer Rumbos (New York: Thunder's Mouth Press, 2006), 10.

19 "Progressive Mandate in Latin America."

20 "Hugo Chávez's Social Democratic Agenda" Stephen Lendman, 22 February 2007; retrieved from <<http://www.venezuelanalysis.com/print.pht?artno=1965>>.

21 "Venezuela's Experiment in Popular Power," Interview with Marta Harnecker by Coral Wynter and Jim McIlroy (*Green Left Weekly*), 9 December 2006; retrieved 18 April 2007 from <<http://www.venezuelanalysis.com/print.pht?artno=1909>>.

# Capitalism's Weak Link

The Left is too busy being "practical" to have any time for ditching capitalism; but no matter whom you listen to, they will one and all have you chasing endlessly round and round on a nightmarish treadmill of short-term issues. Get the Socialist perspective on today's problems, and see for yourself why eliminating the employment system *FIRST* remains the only option that makes any real sense.

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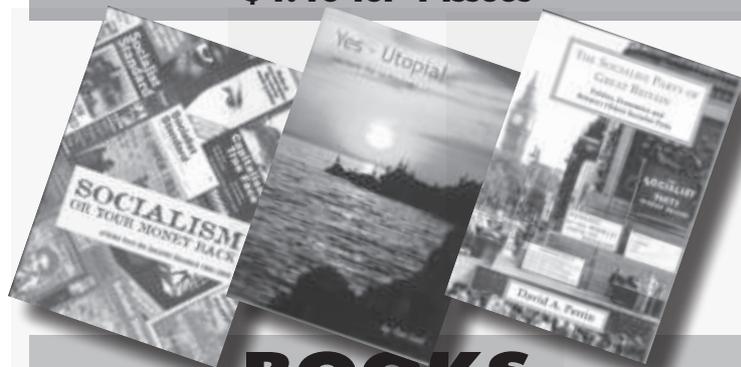
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# THE WORLD SOCIALIST PARTY OF THE UNITED STATES

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The establishment of a system of society based on the common ownership and democratic control of the means and instruments for producing and distributing wealth by and in the interest of society as a whole.

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*The Companion Parties of Socialism hold that:*

1. Society as at present constituted is based upon the ownership of the means of living (i.e., land, factories, railways, etc.) by the capitalist or master class, and consequent enslavement of the working class, by whose labor alone wealth is produced.
2. In society, therefore, there is an antagonism of interests, manifesting itself as a class struggle between those who possess but do not produce, and those who produce but do not possess.
3. This antagonism can be abolished only by the emancipation of the working class from the domination of the master class, by the conversion into the common property of society of the means of production and distribution, and their democratic control by the whole people.
4. As in the order of social evolution the working class is the last class to achieve its freedom, the emancipation of the working class will involve the emancipation of all mankind, without distinction of race or sex.
5. This emancipation must be the work of the working class itself.
6. As the machinery of government, including the armed forces of the nation, exists only to conserve the monopoly by the capitalist class of the wealth taken from the workers, the working class must organize consciously and politically for the conquest of the powers of government, in order that this machinery, including these forces, may be converted from an instrument of oppression into the agent of emancipation and overthrow of plutocratic privilege.
7. As political parties are but the expression of class interests, and as the interest of the working class is diametrically opposed to the interest of all sections of the master class, the party seeking working class emancipation must be hostile to every other party.
8. THE COMPANION PARTIES OF SOCIALISM, THEREFORE, enter the field of political action determined to stand against all other political parties, whether alleged labor or avowedly capitalist, and call upon all members of the working class of these countries to support these principles to the end that a termination may be brought to the system which deprives them of the fruits of their labor, and that poverty may give place to comfort, privilege to equality, and slavery to freedom.

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All party meetings are open to the public.



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We are committed to one overriding goal: the abolition of capitalism and the establishment of a truly democratic, socialist form of society. Accordingly, membership in the World Socialist Party requires a general understanding of the basic principles of scientific socialism and agreement with the Declaration of Principles. It is our view that a worldwide system of production for the satisfaction of human needs, individual and social, rather than for private profit requires a majority that is socialist in attitude and commitment. Events since the beginning of the World Socialist Movement have demonstrated the validity of this judgment.



Since our fundamental goal is quite firmly defined as the attainment of socialism it is important that members understand and accept our principles. To dilute the principles with reformist tendencies or advocacy of the undemocratic idea of “leadership,” for example, would be to subvert the Party’s reason for being.

That said, we recognize there is room for differences of opinion in a socialist party. In contrast to principles, relatively few in number, there are a multiplicity of matters upon which socialists may have all kinds of conflicting views. If you agree with the following statements, you are a socialist and you belong with us.

### • Control of State Power

*To establish socialism, the working class throughout the world must gain control of the powers of government through political organization.* It is by virtue of its control of state power that the capitalist class is able to perpetuate its system. In a modern, highly developed capitalist society, the only way to oust the capitalist class from ownership and control of the means of production is to first strip it of its control over the state, as a precondition for converting it from a coercive power to an administrative arm of the community. The World Socialist Party, therefore, advocates the ballot as the means of abolishing capitalism and establishing socialism, since socialism can only be established democratically; means cannot be separated from ends.

### • Reforms and Reformism

*The present, capitalist, society, even with “repair” and reform, by its very nature cannot function in the interests of the working class, who make up the majority of the population in most of the world today.* Reforms can never alter the basic exploitative relationship of wage-labor and capital, or production for profit. Capitalism could never get by without them. Whatever the intentions of reformers, socialists recognize the futility of their attempts and direct their efforts only to the complete abolishment of capitalism. The World Socialist Party does not advocate reforms of capitalism — only socialism.

### • The Parties of Reform

*The World Socialist Party opposes all parties or organizations that do not desire the*

*achievement of World Socialism.* We can only stand against those parties that one way or another support the present system. Our main purpose is to make socialists, not to advocate the use of the ballot for anything short of socialism.

### • State Capitalism

*The various forms of so-called “communist” government (such as the old Soviet Union, China, Cuba, etc.) were not and are not socialism or communism.* “Socialist government” is an oxymoron of the first order. All states past and present calling themselves socialist are nothing more than systems in which the state holds varying degrees of control over the means of production. They justify their existence with the misguided notion that the state is somehow an extension of working-class power. In those countries, as in the United States, goods and services were and are not primarily produced for use. In addition, nationalization and government “ownership” of industry in no way alter the basic relationship of wage labor and capital. The bureaucratic class that controls this form of the state remains a parasitical, surplus-value-eating class.

### • Organized Labor

*Trade unionism is the institution by which wage and salary workers attempt by various means to sell their working abilities at the best possible price and to improve their working conditions.* It is not a satisfactory tool to end class conflict. Unions must work within the framework of capitalism and therefore are useful only to a limited extent. They cannot alter the fundamental relationship between

wage-labor and capital. Better that workers strive to abolish employment altogether.

### • Leadership

*The World Socialist Party rejects the political theory of leadership.* Neither “great” individuals nor self-appointed “vanguards” can bring the world one day closer to socialism. The emancipation of the working class must be the work of the working class itself. Educators to explain socialism, yes! Administration to carry out the will of the majority of the membership, yes! But leaders or “vanguards,” never!

### • Historical Materialism

*The socialist point of view rests solidly on the materialist conception of history,* a way of looking at things that focuses on how human communities meet their actual survival needs by producing what they need to live (their economic systems, in other words). Out of this process the human brain weaves its ideas, which eventually exert their own influence on the cycle, causing it to become more and more complex as society evolves.

This approach, known as historical materialism, is a scientific method for helping us understand how and why capitalism does what it does. Armed with this understanding, socialists realize that capitalism can never deliver the goods for the vast majority of people. Other approaches, lacking this focus and overlooking the basis of capitalist society, can easily miss this point, so that their advocates get bogged down in vain efforts to make capitalism work for the majority.

### • Supernatural Explanations

*Socialists hold that materialist explanations of human society and the rest of nature supersede supernatural ones.* A religious perspective won’t necessarily prevent anyone from striving to abolish capitalism and its evils, and the ethical elements of religious teachings may even be what first make many people aware of the injustices of a class-divided society. But they don’t in themselves lead to an understanding of the causes of such injustices. (More often than not, religious institutions themselves justify and commit them.) The world socialist perspective is in any case essentially post-religious, because the case for socialism hinges on the scientific use of evidence. Socialists therefore look on supernatural explanations as obsolete. ☺

# YOU SAID IT!



## WE DON'T WANT THAT!

Found on page 54 of the February 2007 *Monthly Review*: a little secret of success shared with the unemployed by capitalist guru and former CEO of Chrysler Corporation Lee Iacocca at a 1993 press conference in Buenos Aires. Sir Lee's solution is, shall we say, tough love:

The problem of unemployment is a tough one. Today we can make twice as many cars with the same number of people. When they talk about improving people's educational levels as a solution to the problem of unemployment, I'm always bothered by the memory of what happened in Germany. Education was put forward as the solution to unemployment, and the result was hundreds of thousands of frustrated professionals who then turned to socialism and rebellion. It's not easy for me to admit, but I wonder if it wouldn't be better for the unemployed to smarten up and go straight to McDonald's to find a job. (Quoted in Eduardo Galeano, *Upside Down* [New York: Henry Holt, 1998], 169).

Oh, to return to that imperfect (so perfect) world where the capitalist class granted itself limitless freedom and where unions and socialists dared not tread! Or was it the reverse? Or ... uhm ... so what actually did happen, then?

Iacocca's psychotically bad history apart (on a par, it would seem, with Ronald Reagan's), one wonders how anybody could see his advice as smart. It

sounds more like His Majesty talking down to the little folk, not too concerned with whether they will even get it as he smirks on his way to the counting house: now that it's the 1990s, you see, we don't ever want to

see that damned socialist stuff again.

When the ice caps have melted, maybe we will all go up and ask The Royals for some Whoppers.

## WE DO WANT THAT!

It has probably not occurred to anyone that the following innocuous-sounding scientific summation, taken from a brochure published by the Dana Alliance for Brain Initiatives, 2004, titled "Answering Your Questions About Brain Research: Can our experiences change our brain?" should be considered dangerous radical thinking:

Scientists now know that the brain is remarkably "plastic": it continues to change throughout life in accordance with our experiences. It is also clear that our surroundings influence our experiences, to a large degree driving our behavior and thinking, as we adapt to our environment. Our brain, in turn, reflects our behavior, since behaviors are the sum total of patterns of neural activation. In essence, then, brain, behavior and environment are all intricately linked in an interactive loop: changes in the environment lead to changes in behavior, which lead to changes in the brain.

...New nerve cells are even born in certain brain areas, and with the right environmental influences, the new cells migrate, differentiate and form synapses with other cells, a process known as "neurogenesis." Scientists have linked neurogenesis to learning and have shown that stimulating environments increase the rate of neurogenesis.

The scientists whose investigations this refers to have been showering an excited public with such revelations in recent years. How could such information be dangerous? Well, just think what would happen if some socialist nutcases succeeded in reprogramming enough of their fellow human beings' brains using the procedure described above. A large enough socialist majority would actually be a step forward in human evolution, a biologically new thing.

So if the world we humans have programmed into our own skulls thus far in the course of civilization is as perfect as many people tell us it is, changing ourselves so recklessly would be a great evil. It must be stopped. We have had it relentlessly dunned into our heads that we are the "most successful species." From a capitalist perspective, this is truly the best of all possible worlds. And why mess with Mr. In Between? Global warming (if it exists) is nothing if not a fine opportunity to turn a profit! ☺



Pass this copy on to a friend!

## Neocapitalism - Cont. from pg 9

even if they will ultimately succeed.<sup>22</sup> At the same time, no massive redistribution of oil wealth has yet occurred, land reform has progressed slowly, and only a minority of workers have stable employment in the legal economy. Complementing this, organized labor is submerged in factional conflicts and is largely unresponsive to the government's efforts to expand workers' control.<sup>23</sup>

On a final note, while it would be a mistake to take Chávez or Morales literally when they use the word "socialism" in their speeches, Morales did tell two *Spiegel* interviewers not long ago that "there was no private property in the past. Everything was communal property. In the Indian community where I was born, everything belonged to the community. This way of life is more equitable."<sup>24</sup> This is more than just a variation on the leftist cop-out that socialism is a goal for the distant future; it is, on some level, an acceptance of it as a real alternative to capitalism. This fleeting glimpse into indigenous thought processes also hints at a deep, strong and irreducible human urge to community. It is this need for community that will kick in when the working class of the world drops the scales from its eyes and finally "gets" the obsolescence of the arrogant tyrants who now employ us. There are actually plenty of socialists around: they just keep betting on the wrong horse.

— Ron Elbert

22 "Communal Councils in Venezuela: Can 200 Families Revolutionize Democracy?" Josh Lerner (*Z Magazine*), 6 March 2007; retrieved from <<http://www.venezuelanalysis.com/print.pht?artno=1975>>.

23 "Venezuela: Chávez Calls for United Socialist Party: Rank-and-File Committees to be Building Blocks for New Organization," John Riddell, *Socialist Voice*, issue #108, 11 January 2007; retrieved 3 May 2007 from <<http://www.socialistvoice.ca>>.

24 "Capitalism Has Only Hurt Latin America," *Spiegel* Interview with Bolivia's Evo Morales (Jens Glüsing and Hans Hoyng, tr. Christopher Sultan), retrieved 16 April 2007 from <<http://www.spiegel.de/international/spiegel/0,1518,434272,00.html>>



BBC News 3/31/04 "More Money for Brazil's Landless: Landless Brazilians are impatient with the rate of change." Source: <<http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/americas/3586943.stm>>.

BBC News 6/7/06 "Landless Storm Brazilian Congress: The protesters say land reform is too slow." Source: <<http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/americas/5054338.stm>>.



## Romancing the working class

**B**razil is only slightly smaller than the United States (3.3 v. the U.S.'s 3.6 million square miles, counting Alaska and overseas), with a population density that is almost a third less: 21.86 persons per sq. mi. for an estimated population of 186 million v. the U.S.'s 30.71 persons for a population of 292 million. Thus, while Brazil's population is almost two-thirds that of the U.S., its GDP (Gross Domestic Product) is only a fifth (8k:40k). Brazil also has a much younger and faster growing population. After four centuries of one-product export boom-and-bust cycles, Brazil attempted in the mid-20th century to stabilize its economic development by cultivating home-grown industries based on a policy of import substitution, only to be stymied in 1964 by the regressive policies of a military dictatorship that squandered precious growth opportunities and pitched Brazilian capitalism into a debilitating spiral of long-term indebtedness and currency inflation. This has produced a certain anxiety among Brazil's capitalist class to square itself in the eyes of the world.

Although the Lula Administration provides a long-overdue acknowledgment that Brazil really does have a working class — one with political muscle — the government's abject submission to the diktat of neoliberal capitalism does not speak well for the working class's political instincts. Lula's Workers' Party (WP) learned in the course of fielding his candidacy in the 90s that it could not expect to run the government unless it talked the neoliberals' talk and walked their walk. So Lula promised

before taking office in 2002 to honor the debt repayment commitments of outgoing President Fernando Henrique Cardoso. (Cardoso himself, interestingly enough, rejects the label of "neoliberal.")<sup>1</sup>

The outcome only serves to demonstrate yet once again that those who would reform a bad system are stuck with bad options:

The prospect of Lula's election had frightened the people, in Brazil and abroad, who lend the government the money it needs to pay its bills. So the outgoing government of Fernando Henrique Cardoso got Lula da Silva and the other candidates in the Presidential election to sign a commitment approved by the International Monetary Fund. Reassured by this agreement, the Fund supplied a \$30 billion cushion to prevent panic. Thanks to this agreement, Brazil avoided the kind of crash Argentina had just gone through.<sup>2</sup>

So it happened that a chastened Workers' Party, desperate to put the stamp of organized labor on Brazilian politics, found it had to dump its very principles just to get in office. The WP now sees it as its mission to validate openly anti-working-class economic policies while trumpeting a string of marginalized social reforms that it touts as cost-effective (i.e., harmless to profits). It has to live with the verdict of capitalists that, although "the poverty rate ... fell from 28 per cent of the population

in 2003 to 23 per cent last year, which was comparable to the improvement brought about by the end of hyperinflation in the early 1990s ... Lula has done too little to spark higher growth."<sup>3</sup> It is safe to say that the WP's good intentions proved good only for getting results that were practically indistinguishable from the autonomous workings of the marketplace anyway.

The disdain Lula's government elicits from capitalism's global hierarchy is somewhat akin to what an ex-con getting elected President in this country might confront. It is easy to understand the panic that gripped investors on hearing that such a firebrand labor leader as Lula during the dictatorship should have led a rapidly growing opposition labor party into office in 2002. Once they realized their nemesis was actually a cowering giant, however, the kid gloves came off and a catty, patronizing tolerance began to replace them.

The backwardness of organized labor in Brazil can be measured by the WP's infatuation with the same quaint old Fabianism that now demurely lives out its days in a British nursing home managed by Gordon Brown's Labour Party Inc. Its belief that socialism is really just a properly — and fairly — run capitalism can lead only to painful bouts of humiliating submission and endless, grinding poverty. To be fair, however, seeing through this power broker's shell game is a lesson that the working class majority in most places seems still not to have learned.

All the more reason, then, for socialists in Brazil to take their cue from the landless workers' movement: to look upon the present sour fortunes of the Brazilian working class as an opportunity to take advantage of a relatively wide political opening and launch a movement for the immediate abolition of capital and wages, through the establishment of common ownership and democratic control of wealth production. This will be the working class's last historical act on the stage of history; everything else pales in urgency beside it.

Let us rise!

— ROEL

<sup>3</sup> "Love Lula if you're poor, worry if you're not — Brazil. (Lula's record in Brazil)." *The Economist* (US) 380.8497 (Sept 30, 2006).

<sup>1</sup> "Globalization and Democracy: An Interview with Fernando Henrique Cardoso," Heinz R. Sonntag, held at Brown University, Providence, RI, October 19, 2003 Retrieved on 16 April 2007 from <http://crab.rutgers.edu/%7Eegoertzel/FHCHRSInterview.htm>.

<sup>2</sup> "Betrayal of a Flawed Vision: Corruption in Brazil's PT Government..." Ted Goertzel, week of July 16–22, 2005, retrieved 16 April 2007 from <[http://www.info-brazil.com/Conteudo/Front\\_Page/Opinion/Conteudo.asp?ID\\_Noticias=967&ID\\_Area=2&ID\\_Grupo=9](http://www.info-brazil.com/Conteudo/Front_Page/Opinion/Conteudo.asp?ID_Noticias=967&ID_Area=2&ID_Grupo=9)>.

# Is Cuba socialist?

In October 2004 I spent a week wandering the streets of Havana, against the advice of my country and friends, my family and colleagues, and yet what I learned was more than anything I could have gleaned from the political analyses that have attempted to forecast the final downfall of the “socialist” empire. I was in Cuba to discuss the educational system of Cuba with the World Congress of Comparative and International Education; however, given the events shortly before we arrived, Castro falling on stage and breaking his leg, what was on everyone’s mind was how long Fidel would last and what would happen in Cuba upon his death. If that wasn’t enough, it was the week that the world would vote on the U.S. embargo of Cuba; my visit taught me much about the nature of Cuba, its pretensions to socialism, and the future of the island that has plagued neoliberal capitalism for half a century.

I had no illusions that Cuba was the socialist nation that it or other nations still claim it to be. It was clear to me that Cuba was a totalitarian state. I had read many histories of the nation and the revolution before I arrived and knew about its social programs that put the United States social infrastructure to shame, but while I had heard about the impoverished state of the people before I took my flight from Miami (yes, the United States has regular flights for those having business on the island), I did not understand what life was like there before I arrived. Walking through Havana, shopping in local grocery stores, and eating dinner with new Cuban friends over conversations about their “socialism,” I began to understand the extent of poverty Cubans faced. On the first and last night of my visit, I had run-ins with *jineterismos* (prostitutes), both male and female, and heard them glorify Fidel in the same breath they offered their body for money. I supported the black-market trade



**Cuba: Harvest time.**

in cigars, and while smoking them with new comrades along the Malecón, I was the object of crime. Every time I thought a monolithic Cuba was emerging, that same moment would reveal the paradoxical and the plurality of life on the island.

So what is Cuba? Since the revolution, Cuba’s social infrastructure has shown the world what is possible in the market economy when a state dedicates itself to the care of its citizens. Maintaining one of the lowest infant mortality rates in the world, free education, and a foreign policy that has sent doctors and money around the world to assist needy countries (an offer was even made to the United States in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina but was refused by President Bush), Cuba has repeatedly provided for the poor within and outside its borders. At the same time however, it is clear that the level of inhumane treatment of those who differ ideologically with the state has been swift and severe, dating as far back as the trials of Batista loyalists. That was just the beginning of the incarcerations, torture and executions.

## **The embargo and its consequences**

The economic state of Cuba is just as complex and paradoxical. One might claim the embargo is to blame for the poverty of the Cuban people and wouldn’t be completely misguided. The embargo limits the ability of anyone connected to the United States, both companies and individuals, to have an economic relationship with anyone within Cuba, causing, according to the Cuban government, a loss of more than 70 billion dollars in trade

revenue each year; however, the economic deprivations of the Cuban state have not created a serious internal threat to Fidel. Some conservative theorists claim this has unwittingly allowed Fidel to continue his régime, placing the United States as the enemy. Noam Chomsky takes a different stance, claiming the embargo is yet another example of the United States resisting world opinion to interfere with leftist leaning governments throughout Central and South America.

The embargo, however, has done something more. By limiting the wealth that may enter the country, the embargo has limited the ability of the Cuban state to develop the wealth needed to form state capitalism, like the system China constructed, and instead, has fostered the development of a social state infrastructure to counterbalance the eradication of individual concerns. Outside the food rations, the exchange economy within Cuba is just as prominent as in the United States and other capitalist nations. The income of all Cubans is limited, and employment is regulated. Economic leveling within Cuba helps support the capitalist critique of socialism: universal economic deprivation. Access to goods and services is limited to those who can afford it, not those who need it, and with the reintroduction of the tourist industry, many millions of dollars have been reintroduced into the Cuban economy; however, the economic well-being of its citizens has increased little.

What then can we learn from an examination of Cuba, even a superficial one such as this? I believe two lessons are clear. First,

**Concluded next page**

and most encouraging, we see that even in the absence of real socialism, huge strides in social care and infrastructure can be made in a short period of time due to the merits and ethical superiority of a state-managed system when compared to neoliberal capitalism. (Cuba's increase in literacy in two years after the initiation of the revolution is the largest ever recorded.) The "communist" government reveals the power of a system that, even in the most pessimistic interpretation, uses social programs to create a hegemonic control of its populace that in turn legitimizes the notion of mutual aid within Cuban society. In other words, even in its most prosaic interpretations, Cuba's Marxist rhetoric has produced results that are the envy of most nations around the world.

The second lesson we can learn about Cuba is that while it has mobilized "socialism" rhetorically, it has yet to be true to its socialist claims. It relies on an exchange economy structured around the Cuban dollar and peso, where profit is centrally located within the state. This

has allowed the social infrastructure to crumble, forcing on the Cuban people the need to struggle, even the most educated, and ironically, a reliance on the "creation" of wealth through international trade. This differs greatly from the concept of socialism as a system of free access and purely voluntary labor, both in its reliance on systems of monetary exchange (which reconstitute poverty) and its arbitrary limitation of people's access to goods and services. Most importantly, the Cuban state has relied on a totalitarian régime to maintain centralized power through violence and poverty.

### Democratic ethics

Socialism, at its core, centers on democratic ethics, where the social, political, and economic conditions of everyone are liberated from the constraints and oppressions generated by class ownership of the means of production. Humans are political animals, and without democracy, socialism is inconceivable. So what

will happen when Fidel dies? There are probable outcomes. First the Cuban state will continue as it has, relying on those in power to continue a system of state capitalism, either impoverished or wealthy (whether or not the U.S. lifts the embargo), or second, it opens up completely and the flood of U.S. capital invades the island, the monuments of the revolution falling like the statues of Saddam. Either way the Cuban people will continue to feel the effects of poverty. The only hope of Cuba, and those around the world, is to stand up and demand socialism in its true form, a system that provides for all individuals through universal access dependent upon universal responsibility. In Cuba as everywhere else in the world, we must stand and demand a system of equality, a system that the World Socialist Party advocates, for, as Marx stated, all we have to lose are the chains that bind us and the illusions that blind us to the world that is possible.

— Tommy Williford

**L**ast October 26th, the World Socialist Party lost one of its most energetic and committed spokesmen — a "stalwart" in the old sense — Comrade Len Fenton. Surviving the death of his wife Ann Rab by four years, he retired gradually from party functions till his last remaining activity was keeping a monthly log of postal mail received.

Fenton's first contact with the organization was in 1936, during a lunch break on Boston Common, where the party speakers frequently and forcefully argued the case for socialism. He was soon deeply impressed; he joined the party in December 1936 and became an official speaker himself in 1938, joining Comrades Rab and Gloss on the stand at outdoor meetings.

Developing his talent for public speaking of all kinds, Fenton was Boston Local's most effective speaker over a long span of years. From 1947 through the 1970s, he frequently represented the WSP at debates with other organizations and at various colleges and universities in the Boston/Cambridge area.

He recruited several other members of his family into the movement. He served on the Editorial Committee of *The Western Socialist* (the predecessor of the *World Socialist Review*)

## Len Fenton (1917-2006)

from 1939 until its last issue in 1980.<sup>1</sup>

Although Fenton's forté was as a speaker and debater rather than as a writer, he was very active on the Circulation Committee of the *WS*, and in 1955 he initiated a campaign to get the journal into libraries, which succeeded in boosting its circulation significantly over the next few years (a period in which many radical journals were losing readership). He was also active on the National Administrative Committee, occasionally serving as National Secretary or Treasurer.

Len combined a lucky gene with financial acumen to rise to the status of "cockroach capitalist," a term applied to members who went into business and did well. This phenomenon has sometimes caused critics to wonder how a party of the working class, committed

<sup>1</sup> In 1939 the Socialist Party of Canada, dodging the wartime censors, asked the WSP to take over its publication for the time being as a joint venture — a relationship that ended after 1968, when the SPC launched an independent journal.

to abolishing capital and wages, can harbor members of the capitalist class in its ranks. But just a little reflection will show that a socialist revolution aims to abolish the *function* of capital and the necessity of working for a living; the capitalists themselves only personify their capital.

His business allowed him the opportunity to travel abroad, and from 1965 on he and Ann made several trips to England, where they were hosted by comrades in the SPGB. Often they reciprocated the hospitality when some of these comrades would cross the Atlantic and stop in Boston. They formed lifelong friendships with SPGBers like Gilbert McClatchie (Gilmac), Cyril May, Jim D'Arcy and many others. In that bigger, less connected world, mutual contacts among socialists scattered widely across the globe had an intensity borne of a common sense of purpose.

Len Fenton never lost sight of the big picture. All through his long involvement in the world socialist movement, he maintained a contagious upbeat philosophy. Any success the party has in organizing for socialism will rest partly on the foundations he laid. In that sense, he is with us still. ☉

For close on 200 years the main geopolitical fact about Latin America has been the overwhelming economic and political domination of the United States — or, more precisely, of its ruling capitalist class. The wide range of instruments used to enforce this domination has included frequent direct and indirect military interventions. One source lists 55 such interventions since 1890.<sup>1</sup> Another important instrument has been the foreign policy known as the Monroe Doctrine, first proclaimed by the U.S. president of that name in 1823.

The gist of the Monroe Doctrine is that the U.S. regards Latin America as its own exclusive sphere of influence and will not tolerate the interference of “outside” powers in its affairs. The doctrine was initially directed against the colonial claims of Spain and France. For most of the 20th Century it was directed first against Germany and then against Russia (the USSR). But does it still have any relevance now that Russia’s ambitions are confined to regions nearer home?

In fact, as the Russian threat to U.S. hegemony in the Americas receded the doctrine was directed (albeit not publicly) against another challenger — Japan. On December 20, 1989, the U.S. bombed and invaded Panama, ostensibly in order to arrest the country’s president, Manuel Noriega, on drug trafficking charges. The real reason was that Noriega, who had earlier been willing to serve as an agent of the CIA, had begun to act in ways that the U.S. considered contrary to its interests.<sup>2</sup>

### The Japanese connection

One example concerns the School of the Americas, where the U.S. army trains military officers from all over Latin America as torturers and assassins. The school had been based in Panama from 1946 to 1984, when it was withdrawn from the country

1 <http://www2.truman.edu/~marc/resources/interventions.html>. The most recent instances were the sponsorship of a (failed) military coup to overthrow President Chávez in Venezuela in 2002 and an occupation of Haiti to remove President Aristide in 2004. Both presidents had been democratically elected.

2 On the background to the U.S. invasion, see Manuel Noriega and Peter Eisner, *The Memoirs of Manuel Noriega, America’s Prisoner* (New York: Random House, 1997).

at the demand of Noriega’s predecessor, Omar Torrijos.<sup>3</sup> Noriega refused to accede to a request from the Reagan administration to allow the school to return.

Noriega committed an even graver offense in U.S. eyes by entering into negotiations with a Japanese consortium that the businessman Shigeo Nagano had put together (with his government’s approval) for the purpose of financing the construction of a new and better sea-level canal between the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans.<sup>4</sup> The old Panama Canal, opened in 1914, has inadequate capacity for the current volume of traffic and cannot accommodate the largest of today’s seagoing vessels. It was, above all, the Japanese threat to its control of a strategic transportation route in its “backyard” that prompted the United States to intervene.

China’s economic penetration of Latin America has been even more striking than that of Japan. As recently as 1995, for instance, China’s trade with Brazil was a mere six per cent of U.S. trade with Brazil; by 2005–6 it had reached 39 per cent. In the case of Argentina the corresponding rise was from 15 per cent to 70 per cent.<sup>5</sup> China is still some way behind but catching up fast. Chinese firms are also investing on a large scale in some countries. Their Brazilian investments include metals, consumer electronics, telecommunications equipment, and space technology. China and Brazil are jointly developing two satellites.

Judging by the whole history of capitalist great power rivalry, we can expect that sooner or later the shifting pattern of economic relationships will change the military power equation, with a progressive dilution of U.S. domination over Latin America. Suppose that at some point in the future Japanese capitalists and a new Panamanian government revive the scheme for a new canal. But this time

3 In 2001 the school now at Fort Benning, Georgia, was renamed the Western Hemisphere Institute for Security Cooperation. Torrijos died in a plane crash under suspicious circumstances.

4 Or, alternatively, a new land-based inter-oceanic transportation system. See Noriega’s remarks to the Japan-Panama Friendship Association (a front for the consortium) in Tokyo on December 12, 1986 (Noriega and Eisner, pp. 271–5).

5 Comparing total value of imports and exports in 1995 and in 2005 and the first nine months (Brazil) or eight months (Argentina) of 2006.

## The changing geopolitical context

round, learning from experience, they press the Japanese government — no longer, perhaps, shackled by the “peace constitution” — to extend Panama military aid and a security guarantee.

Of course, no other state is likely to replace the U.S. as the clear hegemon in the region. Like Africa and Central Asia today, Latin America will be an arena in which a number of outside powers compete for influence. As a declining global power, the U.S. will have to reconcile itself to the new situation and finally bury the Monroe Doctrine.

### Workers cannot benefit

For Latin American governments the new geopolitical context will have certain advantages. They will have more room for maneuver and be able to play off one outside power against another. Latin American workers, however, will discover that their basic position remains unchanged despite the new mix of nationalities among their employers.

Workers in some African countries have already learnt this lesson. In Zambia, copper mines bought up by Chinese companies provided even lower pay and even more hazardous working conditions than mines owned by other foreign companies. Following an explosion in which 49 miners died, five protestors were shot dead by police. The government temporarily closed down one mine after men were forced to work underground without boots or safety gear.<sup>6</sup>

Social protest in Latin America has traditionally targeted “Yanqui imperialism,” just as social protest in Eastern Europe used to be aimed against “Soviet imperialism.” Both are understandable responses to real oppression — but also parochial and superficial responses. The source of the oppression is capitalism itself, not the various national flags under which it operates.

— Stefan

6 *Guardian Weekly*, February 9–15, 2007, p. 9.

All of these characteristics and relations coexist simultaneously and support one another in the world we want to build. Democratic decision making within the workplace (instead of capitalist direction and supervision). Democratic direction by the community of the goals of activity (in place of direction by capitalists), production for the purpose of satisfying needs (rather than for the purpose of exchange), common ownership of the means of production (rather than private or group ownership), a democratic, participatory, and antagonistic form of governance (rather than a state over and above society)... (p. 66-67)

So, how can we build this world?

He suggests (in Chapter 2 and elsewhere) that this world can be built in Venezuela with the support of Chávez's government. Lebowitz asserts (pp. 98 –99) that if the Venezuelan government under Hugo Chávez encourages "radical endogenous development," e.g., "preparing people for new productive relations through courses in cooperation and self-management," (which would be possible only for a government "prepared to break ideologically and politically with capital"), that can be seen as a step towards socialism.

Socialists have sometimes called government "the executive committee of the capitalist class." For that reason, the World Socialist Movement does not envision any role in socialist society for government per se, but anticipates that the men and women living in socialism will devise some method of managing affairs, with the necessary administrative authority but no coercive power.

One must ask, can a government "prepared to break ideologically and politically with capital" exist in the present world? Can a socialist nation exist, surrounded by capitalist nations on all sides?

Certainly, it must be pointed out, contemporary Venezuela is not an example of socialist society. Although Lebowitz may have asserted, "We see that... our unity and the common ownership of the means of production make us all the beneficiaries of our common efforts," there is really not, at this moment, common ownership of the means of production anywhere. (If there were, there would also be common ownership of the goods and services produced, which would imply free right of access to these things — but, as of this writing in 2007, Venezuelan citizens do not enjoy free access. It remains a goal to be achieved.)

On the other hand, this is not to say that they have not taken a step in that direction. "Radical endogenous development" could include building a socialist majority. Chávez has stated that as his intention. If that should happen, then a global Socialist Revolution would have a real chance of beginning in Venezuela.

**"Socialism" with a qualifier**

I want to take a moment here to talk about words. When Lebowitz speaks of "Socialism for the Twenty-first Century," does he mean the same thing by "socialism" that Hugo Chávez does? Does either of them mean the same thing that we do?

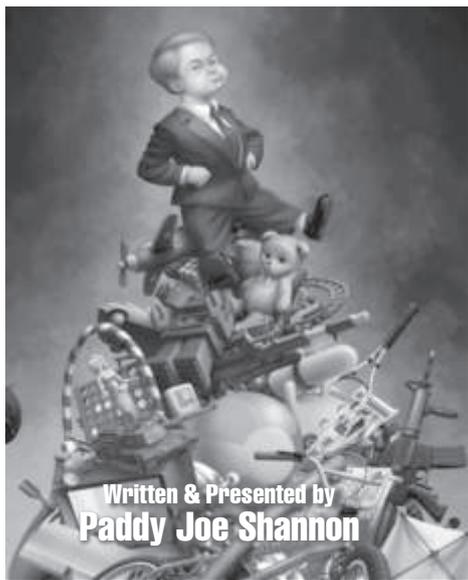
Over time, words change their meanings. When I was a child, for example, all wristwatches had faces, and when you said "watch" the concept called up was a circle of numbers with 12 at the top and 6 at the bottom. Since the advent of digital technology, "watch" no longer has that meaning. Now, if you want to refer to that kind of watch, you have to add a qualifier: "analog watch."

In order to call up the concept of "socialism" as Marx used it in the 19th Century, it is also now necessary to add a qualifier. The qualifier is "non-market." Without that qualifier, the word "socialism" means many different things to different speakers. Because I want to be crystal clear about what I mean by "socialism" in this writing, I will make a distinction between "non-market socialism" and "market socialism" (although I am aware that most people do not add "market" any more than people who wear a digital wristwatch add "digital").

**Socialism is not a market economy.** It is (as developed in Engels's *Socialism, Utopian & Scientific*) a society where money has become superfluous because the means of production are completely under social control. All labor is voluntary, everyone has free access to whatever goods and services are available.

Without importing goods from other nations, the people of Venezuela could never maintain an acceptable standard of living. No country in the world has all the raw materials necessary to do that, within its

**One must ask, can a government "prepared to break ideologically and politically with capital" exist in the present world? Can a socialist nation exist, surrounded by capitalist nations on all sides?**



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own national boundaries. Therefore, even if a socialist majority were to be created in Venezuela under Chávez, as long as there is a global capitalist economy, it could not establish non-market socialism. It could not become either moneyless or classless.

Perhaps Lebowitz has lost sight of this — or perhaps he believes that this aspect of Marxian socialism is not to be present in the Twenty-first Century version. He emphasizes, “I am convinced that worker management is the only real ultimate alternative to capitalism,” (p. 74), which implies he has forgotten that when the means of production are under social control, there is no more class of workers, and no more class of capitalists either. There are just people, all equal members of society.

Venezuela needs a money economy now to trade even with neighboring Latin American countries, let alone with giant imperialist states like the US; so, when one refers to “socialism” in Venezuela under Chávez — or in Cuba under Castro — what is really meant is “market socialism,” in which money is still used to regulate the exchange of goods and there is no common right of access. Moreover, the government of a “market socialist” economy (think: Cuba) is forced to exert coercive authority over people from time to time.

Will a conscious, political socialist majority in Venezuela put up with this?

Or, freed from the logic of capital, will they take the next step and demand free access to what they produce?

### Hope for a real alternative

I think there is reason for optimism, and I applaud Lebowitz for his careful and insightful development of the situation in Venezuela. Certainly, there is hope for a real alternative to global capitalism resulting from the circumstances described in *Build It Now*.

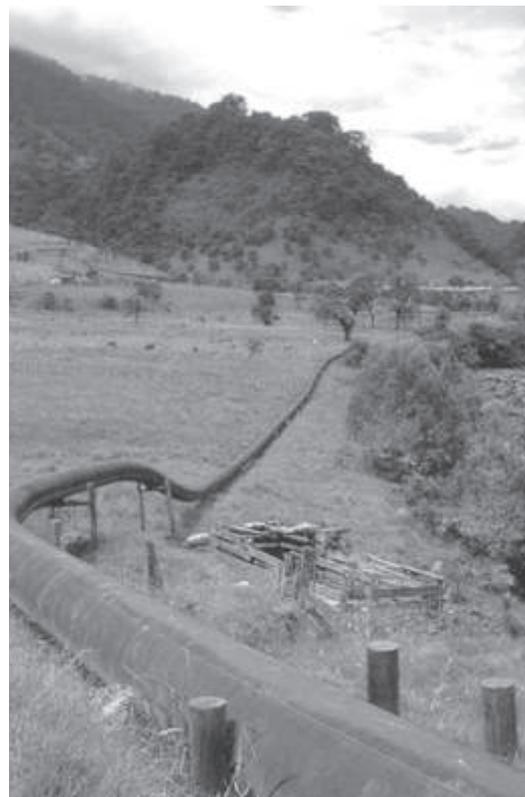
Hugo Chávez himself, shortly after his election last year, called on his followers to dissolve their existing parties and to form a new “United Socialist Party of Venezuela,” which would provide a forum for discussing how to “construct socialism from below.”<sup>3</sup>

The material conditions in the world are ripe today for a global Socialist Revolution, except for the lack of a majority of people who understand that non-market socialism represents a viable alternative to capitalism and are willing to commit themselves to making it work. Capitalism has wrought so much havoc on the ecology of Earth that the welfare of all human beings — capitalists

as well as workers — is threatened. Not just the working class, but all of humanity, need to stop the engine of capital, if we are to survive.

The revolution has to start somewhere, and the indigenous Venezuelans who elected Chávez may yet set an example for the rest of the planet.

— Karla Rab



Venezuela: Oil pipeline.

<sup>3</sup> “Chavez Calls for United Socialist Party of Venezuela,” by Gregory Wilpert; retrieved from <<http://www.venezuelanalysis.com>> Dec 18, 2006.

## Harriett Machado (1931-2007)

**C**omrade H (the name she liked to use on line) was born Harriett Bradlin in Detroit, Michigan, and died Harriett Machado, on September 20, 2007. All of us who knew her mourn her passing, and have felt her loss to this organization during the past few years as her final illness overtook her.

At the age of 16, Harriett became one of the comrades in the revitalized Detroit Local that resulted from I. Rab's organizing visit there in 1947. There, she worked side by side with Irving Canter, Mardon Coffin, George Lynch, Gordon Coffin and “Chubi” Rebo Kligman, as well as other members of the Local. During the period (1949 - 1954) when the National Office of the WSP(US) was located in Detroit, Harriett served briefly as Foreign Secretary of the organization.

Although she drifted away from the socialist movement during the 1960s and 70s, she returned to become one of the most influential members of the WSP in the years following Rab's death, when the organization was most in need of comrades who could inspire socialist fervor. She served on the National Administrative Committee from 1999 - 2003, and hosted the annual WSP Conference at her home in Pasadena in 2001.

When Harriett spoke, she had a way of combining rigorous Marxian scholarship with



an emotional appeal to the heart of anyone who listened to her.

Over the course of a long and productive life in the World Socialist Movement, she developed and articulated a perspective on how human nature may finally be given full expression in socialism, and how the capitalist system warps family relationships. She was interested in the plight of women, especially bemoaning how modern life keeps parents from the physical proximity with infants and young children which she saw as essential to successful attachment. She loved to discuss tribal relationships in primitive communities.

Harriett also had an ongoing interest in the arts, especially the theater. In the words of our comrade Dr. Who, “Whatever we discussed, she exuded a wonderful curiosity and a powerful hope for human freedom.” ☪

## BOOK REVIEW

**M**arx wrote: “Men make their own history, but they do not make it as they please; they do not make it under circumstances chosen by themselves, but under circumstances directly encountered, given and transmitted from the past.”<sup>1</sup>

The circumstances encountered by those of us striving to build a socialist majority in the North today include a population made up almost entirely of people who have never known any form of society except for capitalism. Arguably, this is the greatest obstacle to building a socialist majority here in the United States, and has been so for many generations.

But in Venezuela, this obstacle does not loom quite so large. In a speech made on Dec. 15, 2006, Hugo Chávez claimed that the indigenous peoples in Venezuela had “lived in socialism for centuries,” and called them “the bearers of socialist seed in our land.”<sup>2</sup> (According to the *Encyclopedia Britannica*, about two-thirds of Venezuelans have some Indian ancestry.) In other words, the constituency who voted overwhelmingly for Hugo Chávez in 2006 is made up, in part, of people who can still remember another way of life.

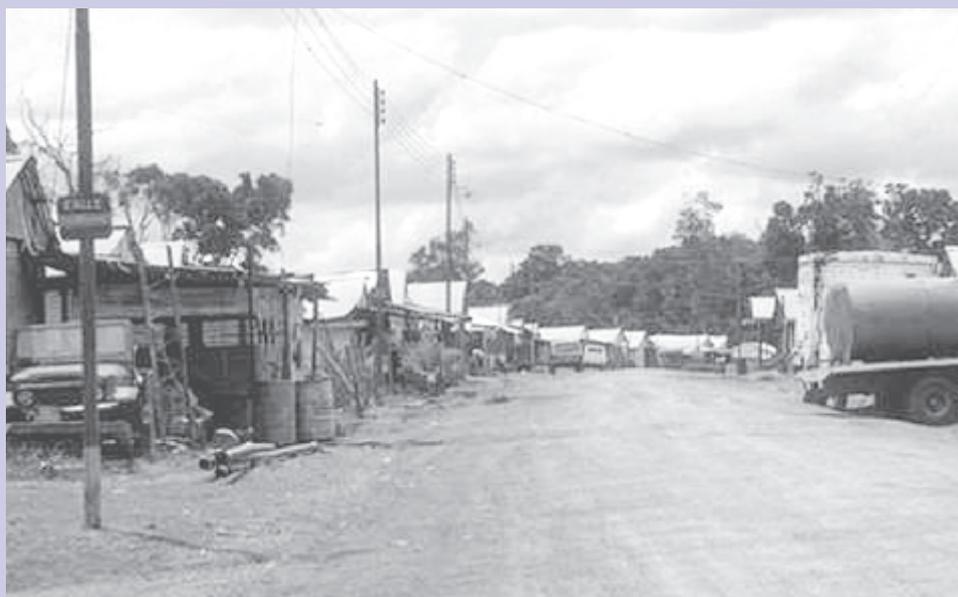
A case can certainly be made that the “circumstances directly encountered” by people striving to build a socialist majority in Venezuela are more propitious than what we Americans are used to.

*Build It Now: Socialism for the Twenty-First Century* gives us a fascinating look at contemporary Venezuela. Its author paints a picture of “a country which at the time of this writing embodies the hopes of many for a real alternative to capitalism.” (Introduction, p 10).

Since most readers of this journal understand that the only two possible “real alternatives” to capitalism are socialism or barbarism, in this review I would like to address the question: “Is Venezuela under Hugo Chávez actually on the road to socialism?”

1 *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*, I.

2 “Chávez Calls for United Socialist Party of Venezuela” by John Riddle, *Socialist Voice*, December 2006.



Venezuela: Rural settlement.

## BUILD IT NOW: SOCIALISM FOR THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY

Michael A. Lebowitz

**Lebowitz is a Marxist writer** based in Caracas, and in *Build It Now* he makes many worthwhile points. One is that, once you understand the nature of capitalism, “you can no longer look at capital as this wondrous god providing us with sustenance in return for our periodic sacrifices. Rather, you understand capital as the product of working people, our own power turned against us.” He makes the case that we must “go beyond capitalism” if we want to end the exploitation of the working class; and states (p. 30):

The society to which Marx looked as an alternative to capitalism was one in which the relation of production would be that of an association of free producers. Freely associated individuals would treat ‘their communal, social productivity as their social wealth,’ producing for the needs of all.

The chapter entitled “The Knowledge of a Better World” contains some of the key points in the book. Lebowitz tells us:

Knowing where we want to go is a necessity if we want to build an alternative. But, it is not the same as being there. We live in a world dominated by global capital, a world in which capital divides us, setting the people of each country against each other to see who can produce more cheaply by driving wages, working conditions, and environmental standards down to the lowest level in order to survive in the war of all

against all. We know, too, that any country that would challenge neoliberalism faces the assorted weapons of international capital — foremost among them the IMF, the World Bank, and imperialist power...

We need to recognize the possibility of a world in which the products of the social brain and the social hand are common property... For this reason, the battle of ideas is essential.

**It is easy to find inspiration** in the following words, that Lebowitz addressed, in 2005, to a National Conference of Revolutionary Students for the Construction of Socialism in the Twenty-first Century, in Mérida, Venezuela:

We need to remember the goal. If you don’t know where you want to go, then no road will take you there. The world that socialists have always wanted to build is one in which people relate to each other as members of a human family, a society in which we recognize that the welfare of others concerns us; it is a world of human solidarity and love where, in place of classes and class antagonisms, we have “an association, in which the free development of each is the condition for the free development of all.” (pp. 64-65)

... We see that our productivity is the result of combining our different capabilities and that our unity and the common ownership of the means of production make us all the beneficiaries of our common efforts... (p. 66)

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