

# The Idea of Hugo Chavez and What it Means for the Future of Venezuela

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Global Research, March 14, 2013

[Silent Crow News](#)

Region: [Latin America & Caribbean](#)

*No army can withstand the strength of an idea whose time has come. Victor Hugo*

The Passing of Venezuela's President Hugo Chavez has people from all over the world mourning. Many are also celebrating, especially in Washington. What does the loss of Hugo Chavez and his idea of the Bolivarian Revolution mean? Would Venezuela's political, social and cultural transformation in the last 14 years be dismantled with the next presidential elections if Henrique Capriles Radonski were to be elected? *Yes, of course that's why he is Washington's choice. But the idea of Hugo Chavez in Venezuela will never die. The people will vote for Vice President Nicolas Maduro and will win because he will continue the revolution.*

✘ Hugo Chavez may be physically dead, but his idea and spirit is alive among the Venezuelan people. Hugo Chavez proved to the world that alternative political and economic solutions are possible and that Washington's Neoliberal policies have been a failure. I am not just talking about the system of the Bolivarian Revolution, but also alternative political and economic systems that are democratic in nature were ideas that resonate even today; those that would allow people to participate and make decisions that affect their everyday lives.

There are a number of ideas from the past that were democratic such as the *participatory democracy* of the Iroquois Confederation, which was a political system that united several tribal nations that made political decisions based on a consensus. The Iroquois confederation was located in North America that existed centuries before European contact. A *Republic* was another idea where the state was ruled by representatives elected by the people. The United States had a Republic at one time in their history before it became a corporate democracy. Both political entities started with an idea, one that advanced human right principles for every man, woman and child. They were allowed to decide and vote for what is in their best interests for themselves and their communities. American-style Democracy and its neoliberal policies have failed in Latin America. That is why Chavez came to power with a new idea, one that would transform Venezuelan society forever.

Chavez and the Venezuelan people have been fighting Neoliberal economic policies dictated by Washington since he got into office in 1999. Reforms based on the Bolivarian revolution's principles undermined major oil companies, international banks (IMF and the World Bank) and Washington's political class in terms of profits that only benefitted oil executives and Wall Street. Chavez reversed that trend by nationalizing the oil industry to benefit the vast majority of Venezuelan people that were poor and disenfranchised. What is wrong with using profits made from a nation's natural resources to benefit the people? Oil

companies should be able to make a profit that is reasonable and fair, but with the majority of Venezuelans living in poverty for so long shows the opposite.

Washington and Big Oil corporations were obviously unreasonable. Chavez was instrumental in orchestrating land and oil industry reforms that made him an enemy of Washington. With the reforms, he improved the education system for school-aged children and created 'Mission Robinson' a literacy program for adults who learned how to read and write. Back in 2005, *UNESCO* declared Venezuela an "Illiteracy Free Territory". It is interesting to note that on March 7<sup>th</sup>, *CBS news* reported that the largest and most expensive school system in the United States, the New York City Public School system was a failure.

Why? Because more than 80% of its high school graduates entering the City University of New York (CUNY) community colleges as freshmen cannot read or write or do not know basic math skills according to CUNY officials. Chavez also provided universal healthcare, job training programs, free university tuitions and subsidies to single mothers helped elevate the Venezuelan people to a better life. He has reduced poverty levels by more than half where at one time close to 70% percent of the population was living below the poverty line.

Let's get into a hypothetical scenario. What if the US government decided to use its natural resources such as natural gas (although "Fracking" has become a serious environmental problem that poses a threat to drinking water and the public's health) or untapped oil reserves to rebuild its infrastructure or to help the poor with basic needs? Wouldn't that be reasonable? What if a fair share of profits made from oil and natural gas sales were returned to the people in America for basic services such as healthcare or a college education? There are millions of people who do not have health insurance (ObamaCare would not solve the problem!) and millions more who owe thousands of dollars for student loans. Many would say that the US government does help the poor in America.

Yes they do in a way, but American tax dollars pay for a failed public education system, corrupt welfare programs, the Military-Industrial Complex and its ongoing wars and for the defense of Israel. The United States has one of the most unequal societies in the Western Hemisphere. It imprisons more people than any other country in the entire world. It has the worst public schools (indoctrination centers) and a mediocre healthcare system. It has gone to war and created political instability in more than 35 countries since the end of World War II including Venezuela. In fact, Venezuela has not invaded any country for that matter.

Venezuela has set an example for the rest of the world, one that has elevated its political and economic status among its people to a fairer and just society. Venezuela does have one of the highest crime rates in Latin America along with a huge drug problem and it still has a significant number of people living in poverty. There were close to 70% of people living below the poverty line with 40% of those living in extreme poverty with an inflation rate of that exceeded more than 100% by the end of 1996. The neo-liberal economic model that Washington wanted Chavez to follow was harsh to say the least. It impoverished Venezuela for decades only benefitting Venezuelan ultra elites aligned with Washington. Many of the Venezuelan elites also have homes in Miami, Florida where many former dictators such as Cuba's Fulgencio Batista or the "Mafia's President" and Nicaragua's Anastasio Somoza lived. Under Chavez, poverty levels have decreased by 50% and extreme poverty levels by 70%. Economist and Co-director of the *Centre for Economic and Policy Research (CEPR)* Mark Weisbrot summed it up in *The Guardian* on October 2012:

*Since 2004, when the government gained control over the oil industry and the economy had recovered from the devastating, extra-legal attempts to overthrow it (including the 2002 US-backed military coup and oil strike of 2002-2003), poverty has been cut in half and extreme poverty by 70%. And this measures only cash income. Millions have access to healthcare for the first time, and college enrolment has doubled, with free tuition for many students. Inequality has also been considerably reduced. By contrast, the two decades that preceded Chávez amount to one of the worst economic failures in Latin America, with real income per person actually falling by 14% between 1980 and 1998.*

In a report conducted by the *United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America (ECLAC)* called the "2011 Social Panorama of Latin America" stated that in 2010 the number of Venezuelans living in poverty reached 27.8 %, making Venezuela the third-lowest poverty rate among Latin American countries. Chavez changed the system and defied Washington. The people of Venezuela would not want their country to return to the policies of the past which was dictated by Washington and big oil corporations that has devastated the country for decades. Chavez had the idea that a different way of life is possible and that idea is within the people of Venezuela. US President Barack Obama's statement in regards to Chavez's death stated the following:

*"As Venezuela begins a new chapter in its history, the United States remains committed to policies that promote democratic principles, the rule of law, and respect for human rights."*

This is coming from an American president who supports numerous dictatorships such as Saudi Arabia, where *Human Rights Watch* stated in the past that:

*Authorities continue to systematically suppress or fail to protect the rights of nine million Saudi women and girls, eight million foreign workers, and some two million Shia citizens. Each year thousands of people receive unfair trials or are subject to arbitrary detention. Curbs on freedom of association, expression, and movement, as well as a pervasive lack of official accountability, remain serious concerns.*

The US also supports Uzbekistan (who boiled two prisoners to death as reported by *The Guardian*) and Jordan, where torture is common. In the past, the US supported dictatorships in Latin America and the Caribbean such as the Somoza Dynasty of Nicaragua, Papa and Baby Doc Duvalier of Haiti, Augusto Pinochet of Chile and many others in Asia and Africa.

The new President of Venezuela Nicolas Maduro will encounter threats from Washington as did Chavez. Maduro will continue the same policies of the Chavez government that will advance the political and economic future for the people of Venezuela. The Venezuelan people will back Maduro. If Washington were to remove Maduro from office by a Coup d'état, assassination or through fraudulent presidential elections (which is possible) there would be another Chavez in the future with the same idea that would continue its fight for basic human rights and principles the Venezuelan people deserve. The idea of Chavez is in the minds of Venezuelans and that is hard to overcome. The war of ideas between Washington and Chavez was long, but in the end Chavez won the battle. US President John F. Kennedy once said *"A man may die, nations may rise and fall, but an idea lives on."* The idea of change is possible and will live on in Venezuela.

What does Washington want? A dictatorship that is subservient to Washington, Wall Street

and Big Oil Corporations. President Franklyn D. Roosevelt once said that *“Somoza may be a son of a bitch, but he’s our son of a bitch”* Anastasio Somoza Garcia was a corrupt Nicaraguan dictator who tortured and murdered dissidents was backed by the United States. Washington is waiting for the next *“Son of a Bitch”* to run Venezuela. The opposition candidate Henrique Capriles Radonski who would bring back the same Neoliberal policies that impoverished Venezuela would fit the job description. But that will not happen any time soon, but then again Washington is capable of doing anything to regain control of Latin America it once had. We shall see.

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