

WSWS International Editorial Board meeting

Report on Latin American perspectives

Part Two

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Published below is the conclusion of a two-part report on Latin America delivered by Bill Van Auken to an expanded meeting of the World Socialist Web Site International Editorial Board (IEB) held in Sydney from January 22 to 27, 2006. Part one was posted on March 18. Van Auken is a member of the World Socialist Web Site IEB and the Socialist Equality Party (US) central committee.

WSWS IEB chairman David North's report was posted on 27 February. SEP (Australia) national secretary Nick Beams' report was posted in three parts: Part one on February 28, Part two on March 1 and Part three on March 2. James Cogan's report on Iraq was posted on March 3. Barry Grey's report was published in two parts: Part one on March 4 and Part two on March 6. Patrick Martin's report was published in two parts: Part one on March 7 and Part two on March 8. John Chan report on China was published in three parts: Part one was posted on March 9, Part two on March 10 and Part three on March 11. Uli Rippert's report on Europe was posted in three parts: Part one on March 13, Part two on March 14 and Part three on March 15. Julie Hyland's report on New Labour in Britain was posted in two parts: Part one on March 16 and Part two on March 17.

What is the character of the Chavez government in Venezuela? Its political origins lie in a conspiratorial young officers' movement that emerged out of opposition to the corruption of the old Venezuelan political system and anger over the use of the military to suppress the Caracazo uprising of 1989. Chavez was catapulted to national prominence with the abortive 1992 coup against the Accion Democratica government of Carlos Andres Perez.

Released after a brief imprisonment, Chavez forged alliances with various elements of the Venezuelan left and was popularly elected in 1998.

The ideological foundations of the Chavez movement have the eclectic character that is common to bourgeois populism. He has himself cited as inspiration for his political career the regime headed by Gen. Omar Torrijos of Panama and the "revolutionary" military government headed by Gen. Juan Velasquez Alvarado in Peru in the late 1960s and early 1970s.

Among his early political advisers were a former senior leader of the Venezuelan Communist Party and a self-exiled Argentine semi-fascist who espoused anti-Semitism and the virtues of military rule.

Those who describe the Chavez government as "socialist" engage in gross distortion. It did not emerge out of any independent movement of the working class. Moreover, today in Venezuela more of the economy is in the hands of private and foreign capital than in the heyday of Accion Democratica 30 years ago. The country's land distribution remains among the most unequal on the Latin American continent.

One recent article quoted Ramon Mayorga, the Venezuelan representative to the Inter-American Development Bank, as characterizing the collaboration between the country's private banks and the Chavez government as "highly rewarding."

"The banks have been making tons of money," declared Mayorga. The increase in after-tax profits in the banking system last year topped 30 percent, almost the highest in the world. Venezuelan bank assets have tripled since Chavez came into office.

The commanding heights of the Venezuelan economy remain just as firmly under the control of finance capital as ever, while a portion of the country's oil revenues has been diverted to provide aid to Venezuela's poor in the form of literacy, health and food distribution programs, as well as the creation of cooperative enterprises.

The Venezuelan government continues to bear the stamp of the military origins of Chavez's movement, including among its top officials numerous retired and some current military officers.

There is a long history of such "left" military tendencies in Latin America and the opportunist adaptation to them by Stalinists, revisionists and left nationalists. Frequently, they have been seen as a shortcut to power, obviating the need to mobilize the masses or politically educate the proletarian vanguard.

The experiences with Velasco in Peru, J.J. Torres in Bolivia, Torrijos in Panama all ended in the betrayal of the working class. In virtually every case, these regimes were the antechamber of right-wing regimes—or, in the case of Panama, an unopposed US invasion.

The reactionary character of this military tendency can be seen perhaps most clearly in Chavez's backing for the Peruvian presidential candidate Ollanta Humala, a nationalist ex-military officer who, like Chavez, got his start in politics with a failed military coup—in his case in 2000 against the corrupt and reactionary regime of Alberto Fujimori, which collapsed barely a month afterwards.

Now the favorite to win the election in April, Humala heads a party called the Movimiento Etnocaceristas, named for Peru's nineteenth century president, Andrés Avelino Cáceres, who was the hero of the war against Chile. The "etno" part of the title stems from the movement's promotion of a form of Indian nationalism.

Among Humala's political antecedents is a movement founded by his father which advocated that only Peru's Indian population be allowed full citizenship, excluding whites, Asians and blacks. It is worth noting that reporters who went to the village where the family resided found that the native population considered the Humalas white, because they were significant landholders.

Humala is campaigning on a virulently anti-Chilean platform calling for the expulsion of Chilean businesses. He has likewise called for an amnesty for Peruvian military personnel accused of massacres,

assassination and torture during the dirty war against the Sendero Luminoso and MRTA guerrillas in the 1980s and 1990s, ending the recent prosecutions over some of the worst of these crimes.

At the same time, these regimes include among their leading personnel former guerrillas and their supporters from the period of the 1960s and 1970s, such as Bolivia's Vice President Linares and Jose Dirceu, the leading figure in the Brazilian Workers Party, recently forced to resign over a massive vote-buying and kickback scandal.

Pabloite opportunists prepare new betrayals

And, just as the Pabloite revisionists adapted themselves to Peronism and similar movements in the 1950s and to guerrillaism in the 1960s and '70s, so today, the Pabloite groups are building up movements such as that of Chavez as a new road to socialism. They are clearly nothing of the sort.

A word that crops up repeatedly in the descriptions—as well as self-characterizations—of the Latin American governments associated with the “turn to the left” is “governability.” The old traditional parties have been utterly discredited, not just in Venezuela, but throughout the hemisphere. “Throw them all out,” the slogan that predominated in the upheavals in Argentina five years ago, has been repeated in country after country.

Parties and individuals identified with the left have been brought into power as a means of restabilizing capitalist domination. This tendency emerged first and most prominently in Brazil with the rise of the Workers Party as the principle political instrument of bourgeois rule. The Brazilian ruling elite required such a movement under conditions in which every other party was implicated in the dictatorship and the massive corruption and social reaction that continued in its wake.

Among the Pabloite revisionists, who played such a crucial role in betraying the revolutionary developments in Latin America in the 1970s, there is a definite political continuity with the positions of that period, when they embraced left nationalist movements, beginning with Peronism and the MNR in Bolivia, and later Castroism and guerrillaism. Then, as now, they rejected the necessity for a conscious, independent revolutionary movement of the working class. Now, they have become direct defenders and instruments of the bourgeois state.

A case in point is the reaction to the election of Morales by a Bolivian group called POR-Combate, affiliated to the Pabloite United Secretariat. It recently issued a statement lamenting the fact that the Bolivian Workers Confederation (COB) remained critical of Morales and justifiably skeptical that he has any intention of fulfilling demands for the nationalization of Bolivia's energy resources.

“It is necessary for the reformists and the revolutionaries, the nationalists and the socialists to analyze and discuss together, first of all about the role that the proletariat must play and what alliances it can establish, then about the strategy for the taking of power and the building of socialism,” the group declares. “All the rest is just errors and irrelevancies. Today, the forces of the MAS and of the COB are unfortunately very far from the objectives laid out by this document and this tactic.”

Thus, it laments the failure of the COB to fully integrate itself into the bourgeois nationalist regime of Morales, who was recently inaugurated following a world tour conducted to assure foreign capital that his government could be counted upon to defend private property and profit. Its perspective—that socialist revolutionaries seek the approval of the national reformists, i.e., the representatives of the bourgeoisie, as to what “role the proletariat must play and what alliances it can establish”—is a clear prescription for subordinating the Bolivian workers to capitalism and

paving the way for another betrayal and defeat.

Although, given the diminished influence of the Pabloites, there is an element of “first time tragedy, second time farce” in these positions, they unmistakably echo the great betrayals carried out by this revisionist tendency in the 1960s and '70s, from Sri Lanka to Chile and Argentina.

Among the most shameless adulators of the Chavez government is Alan Woods, leader of the British centrist group formed by Ted Grant. In a recent statement responding to critics accusing him of opportunist relations with the Venezuelan government, Woods wrote, “If the Venezuelan Marxists are not to be condemned to complete isolation and impotence, they must work to establish links with the Bolivarian movement, to push it to the left and try to win it to the policies and programme of Marxism.”

He continued: “The masses in Venezuela follow their leaders and have faith in them. They are not yet convinced of the ideas of the Marxists.”

The language repeats virtually word-for-word the justifications given by the leaders of the US Socialist Workers Party in the early 1960s for their own opportunist adaptation to Castroism. To oppose a Marxist perspective based on the political independence of the working class to Castroism, they warned, carried the risk that the parties of the Fourth International would become hopelessly isolated in Latin America.

This perspective of worshiping Castroism and Guevarism meant the abandonment of any struggle to build revolutionary parties in the working class and led to the physical destruction of Trotskyist cadre and, ultimately, to catastrophic defeats for the Latin American working class. The outlook put forward by these latter-day Pabloites in relation to Venezuela is no different.

The bankruptcy of this perspective is spelled out in a 2004 statement issued by the Grant-Woods group entitled “Venezuelan Revolution in Danger.” The statement presents the following assessment of the current conjuncture in Chavez's Venezuela:

“... the justice system is still firmly in the hands of reaction. This was clearly shown when the Supreme Court of Justice ruled that there had been no coup in April 2002, but just a ‘power vacuum’ ...

“The Venezuelan oligarchy and multinational companies still have a firm grip over the mass media, private industry and the banking system. They use their ownership of these key levers in society in order to sabotage the will of the majority and plot another reactionary coup ...

“Though the oil sabotage was defeated through the direct action of the oil workers who took control (together with the local communities and the national guard) of the oil industry, the same bureaucratic structures are still largely in place in the state-owned oil company, PDVSA ...

“Though many reactionary army officers left the Army when they declared themselves to be in rebellion, many are still active within the army, and the traditional bourgeois structure of the Army remains largely intact ...

“The Ministries and the state apparatus in general are full of reactionaries who constantly sabotage the revolutionary process. These capitalist institutions must be done away with and replaced by the popular election of all public officials ...”

The dangers are spelled out in some detail in this statement, but it begs the question of what precisely is the character of this “revolution” that has left all of the principal levers of the state and the economy in the hands of its reactionary bourgeois opponents. This portrayal of the situation provides an unwitting confirmation of the absolute political necessity of building a revolutionary party of the working class independent of and in opposition to the Chavez government.

Then there is the situation in Brazil, where the reactionary opportunist role of the Pabloites is, if anything, even more naked. Last year, the Pabloite United Secretariat issued a statement titled “On the Brazilian Situation,” drawing a balance sheet of the first two years of the Workers Party (PT) government of President Luiz Inacio “Lula” da Silva.

Included in this assessment was the admission that the PT administration has faithfully carried out the policies dictated by the International Monetary Fund, attacking the pensions, wages and basic rights of Brazilian workers, while preparing even more reactionary measures, such as the privatization of state universities.

“The government’s general orientation turns left-wing ministers into mere insurance policies or hostages for overall policies that are not their own,” the statement declares. “These two years of experience show clearly that building an anti-neoliberal, anti-capitalist socio-political workers’ bloc is in contradiction to support for and participation in the current government.”

The Pabloites confront an unpleasant fact: Their leading member in Brazil—Miguel Rossetto—is playing precisely such a role as an “insurance policy” and “hostage” of the Lula government’s right-wing policies by continuing to serve as its minister of agrarian reform. While now claiming that it had its reservations about Rossetto’s joining the government, the Pabloite leadership allows that it had “avoided posing the issue of participation in the Lula government in dogmatic terms.”

If it has now decided to go public with its qualms, it is because the reactionary program and gross corruption of the Lula government have led to the disaffection not only of large sections of the Brazilian working class, but also of the revisionist and petty bourgeois radical tendencies within which the Pabloites work. Leading members of their own section in Brazil have been expelled from the PT and have joined in the efforts to create another left-centrist electoral party—the PSOL, or Party of Socialism and Freedom—as a buffer between the working class and the PT government.

Confronted with a situation in which the leading faction of its Brazilian group remains within a government that has expelled members of the organization from the ruling party, who have in turn gone on to advocate the building of a new party in opposition to this government, the United Secretariat’s advice is one of “live and let live.” It declares that its aim is to “foster dialogue” between the expellers and the expellees.

To their own Brazilian members now arrayed in opposition to each other, the Pabloites counsel: “... even if they are implicated today in different choices and dynamics, they should make an effort not to burn their bridges and to keep their future options open.”

Don’t “burn your bridges” and “keep your options open”—there could be no cruder elaboration of the essential outlook of opportunism.

The fact that the bourgeoisie in Latin America has to draw upon such elements formerly associated with Trotskyism to defend its rule has immense historical significance. They are being recruited into existing regimes as part of an attempt by the national bourgeoisie to contain an explosion of the class struggle.

What the International Committee of the Fourth International and the *World Socialist Web Site* do in this situation is decisive. Clearly, there are immense opportunities opening up for the building the ICFI in Latin America, and we must develop the work of the WSWS accordingly.

Concluded



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