

Editorial

What is the Issue in Venezuela?

There has been a lot of speculation about Venezuela and its president, Hugo Chavez, since the narrow defeat of his constitutional reforms last month. Some commentators have claimed that the defeat seriously undermines Chavez' attempts to build "socialism for the twenty-first century". Others, by contrast, have tried to portray the defeat as a victory of sorts for Chavez, presenting him as a great statesman for his gracious acceptance of the referendum results. Some supporters of Chavez have even welcomed the results because they believe that his proposed reforms would have concentrated too much power in the hands of the president. Still others have supported the reforms, claiming that the building of socialism requires the concentration of powers in the hands of one man.

Almost all of the commentaries and speculation regarding the referendum results have centred on the issue of socialism. Apart from the fact that there is an almost complete lack of scientific analysis of precisely what Chavez' "socialism for the twenty-first century" really amounts to, the bottom line is that all of this speculation misses the main point in regard to Venezuela and the role being played by President Chavez.

It is really irrelevant whether or not Chavez is building socialism in Venezuela or what kind of socialism he envisions. That is a matter for the people of Venezuela to sort out; they have a right to build whatever social and economic system they desire, without interference from abroad. They have a right to

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Annapolis Summit: Tragedy or Farce?

Sometimes, you don't know whether to laugh or to cry. So it was following the November 27 Annapolis peace summit, convened by George Bush as part of his administration's attempt to assert some controlling role for the Americans somewhere in the Middle East.

In many ways, the gathering was a farce from the start. The government elected by the Palestinians two years ago in what all observers declared to be free and fair elections (with the exception of restrictions imposed by the Israeli occupation) was absent from the talks. Ever since its election victory both the United States and Israel have categorically refused to negotiate with Hamas and have instead anointed Mahmoud Abbas as what they consider to be the only legitimate representative of the Palestinian people. As such, Abbas came to Annapolis with no mandate and no ability to

implement a single thing he said.

At the same time, Ehud Olmert's presence at Annapolis was violently opposed by the growing neo-fascist movement in Israel along with several members of his fragile coalition government. Tens of thousands of Zionist fanatics demonstrated in Jerusalem the night before the summit opened, proclaiming that they would not cede one inch of territory to the Palestinians.

From this meeting of Olmert and Abbas, George Bush announced, would come not a settlement or agreement but yet another "process" to reach an agreement, this time with a deadline of 2008. Ironically, in 2008 Palestinians around the world will celebrate the sixtieth anniversary of the *Naqba* – of their expulsion from their ancestral lands and the ethnic cleansing and destruction of over 500 of their

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villages following the formation of the State of Israel in May 1948.

The summit itself opened two days before a significant anniversary. Sixty years ago, on November 29, 1947, the United Nations General Assembly voted to partition Palestine into two parts, with 55 per cent of the land to be handed over to Zionists for the creation of the Jewish state. For 60 years since then the Palestinians have struggled for their right to exist as a people. Despite every possible reason to give up on this struggle they have persevered, but unfortunately still to no avail.

A full 16 years after the negotiation of the Oslo Accords, followed shortly after by Yasser Arafat and Yitzkah Shamir's so-called "historic" handshake at the White House, American and Israeli promises at Annapolis that the Palestinians would have their state could only have sounded plausible to the deluded or those openly in the service of U.S. imperialism.

Since the Oslo Accords, not only has not a single square inch of territory been granted to the Palestinians but the Israeli occupation has intensified. Settlements have expanded in both the West Bank and Jerusalem. The construction of the so-called Israeli security wall has clawed back even further the small amount of territory – the 22 per cent of the land partitioned by the UN in 1947 - promised to the Palestinians. Despite almost 20 years of promises, the only settlements that have been dismantled by the Israelis were those in the Gaza Strip where, despite the rhetoric, the occupation has not ended. Gaza today is an open-air prison for 1.3 million Palestinians, whose very existence depends on the mercy of Israeli control of land, air and sea borders.

In the 40 years since the occupation began not a single promise made by the Israelis has been kept. Not a single promise made by Israeli politicians since Oslo has been kept. Indeed, successive Israeli governments have bragged openly about entering into negotiations as a way to buy time while expanding what George Bush referred to in 2004 as the "facts on the ground" – the settlements and the infrastructure of occupation.

In an interview after leaving office, former Israeli prime minister Yitzak Shamir said he participated in peace negotiations simply because it assisted him to continue his expansion of the settlements unopposed. "I would have carried on autonomy talks for ten years and meanwhile we would have reached a half million people in Judea and Samaria" he acknowledged. In

the same vein, Dov Weissglas, advisor to Ariel Sharon on the Gaza withdrawal, predicted in 2004 that the Gaza disengagement "supplies the amount of formaldehyde that is necessary so there will not be a political process with the Palestinians." This, he argued, would "prevent the establishment of a Palestinian state" as well as ensuring there could not be "a discussion on the refugees, the borders and Jerusalem."

Indeed, there is no Israeli plan for a Palestinian state nor has there ever been one. The only plan the Israelis have has remained the same as the one articulated by David Ben Gurion, Israel's first prime minister, in 1938: "After the formation of a large army in the wake of the establishment of the state, we shall abolish partition and expand into the whole of Palestine."

Which is why it was hard to know whether to laugh or cry when Bush declared, at the end of the Annapolis conference: "Now is the time to show Palestinians that their dream of a free and independent state can be achieved at the table of peace and that the terror and violence preached by Palestinian extremists is the greatest obstacle to a Palestinian state." Bush also warned that without forgoing "extremism" (meaning abandoning Hamas), "a generation could be lost."

However, the reality is that several generations have already lost out on a Palestinian state. Instead of a state they have had expulsion, ethnic cleansing, occupation and empty promises. The fact remains that the only obstacle to a Palestinian state is the refusal of Israel, backed fully by U.S. imperialism, to allow such a state to exist.

Terrorism and the Creation of a State

At the Annapolis conference on November 27, George Bush repeatedly stressed that a Palestinian state was impossible if the Palestinian people did not renounce what he described as terrorism. In his prepared remarks, he stated: "Now is the time to show Palestinians that their dream of a free and independent state can be achieved at the table of peace and that the terror and violence preached by Palestinian extremists is the greatest obstacle to a Palestinian state." Speaking to reporters later, Bush again reiterated, "...a Palestinian state cannot be borne out of terrorism ... a state cannot be created through acts

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For Your Information

Linking Mulroney's Agenda With the Harper Government's Agenda

An e-mail from the Canadian Association of Income Trust Investor's President and CEO began making the rounds shortly after the Harper government declared former Prime Minister Brian Mulroney persona non grata. Faced with the growing controversies around Karlheinz Schriber's testimony about handing over hundreds of thousands of dollars in unmarked bills to Mulroney, the Harper government, which defeated the previous Liberal administration for engaging in the same kind of corruption, has been desperate to suggest there have been no official links between Mulroney and the current Conservatives.

The Canadian Association of Income Trust Investors has something of a stake in discrediting the Harper government, which broke an election promise by clamping down on income trust activity. That

being said, the e-mail is interesting in its bald description of the kind of facts usually not spoken about in official circles, namely, the number of corporate boards Mulroney sits on as a director and how these interests he represents intersect with the Harper government's agenda.

These include:

1. Archer Daniels Midland Company (ADM), which intersects with Harper's personal vendetta against the Canadian Wheat Board. (ADM, one of the world's largest agricultural processors of soybeans, corn, wheat and cocoa, also has a substantial share in Viterra, the grain company formed through the merger of Saskatchewan Wheat Pool and Agrico United. ADM would make hundreds of millions of dollars a year in additional revenues if the CWB's marketing monopoly is eliminated).

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of terror.”

However, putting aside the whole question of what Bush means when he refers to Palestinian terror, the fact is that there is a state in the region which was created following an orchestrated campaign of terror – the State of Israel.

This terror campaign, which began shortly after the onset of the British mandate in Palestine in 1923, was coordinated by militant Zionist groups, organized in the coalition United Resistance. For most of the Second World War, they suspended attacks on British military targets, although one group, the Stern Gang (or Lehi), continued what it described as “direct action” against the British, including the assassination of Lord Moyne in Cairo in November 1944. In 1945, United Resistance resumed its pattern of attacking British targets, including two raids on the British Intelligence offices, an attack on the Schneller Army camp and the 1946 bombing of the British Embassy in Rome. Members of the Stern Gang also assassinated a United Nations-appointed mediator in September 1948.

The most infamous Zionist terrorist activity took place on July 22, 1946, when members of the Irgun group, acting on instructions from the United Resistance, carried out the first modern large-scale terrorist attack in the Middle East. Irgun – which

subsequently claimed responsibility for over 200 acts of terrorism against both the British and the Arab population between 1946 and 1948 - bombed the King David Hotel, where the British administration was housed. Led by Menachem Begin, who was later elected Prime Minister of Israel, the Irgun terrorists disguised themselves as Arab hotel workers and planted 350 kg of explosives, hooked up to six different chargers, in the hotel basement. They fled and set off their bombs, killing 91 people, mainly civilians, and wounding another 45 people. Irgun claimed responsibility for the attack immediately, but blamed the British for all casualties, claiming to have delivered a warning to evacuate the hotel over 20 minutes before the bombs were detonated. However, according to an internal British police report, which was made public in the 1970s, the British received the warning at the same time that the bombs went off.

The attack on the King David Hotel remains part of the founding mythology of the State of Israel. In July 2006, a sixtieth anniversary celebration of the bombing was organized by the Menachem Begin Centre and attended by, among others, former Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. The British Ambassador in Tel Aviv issued a statement on the occasion stating: “We do not think that it is right for an act of terrorism, which led to the loss of many lives, to be commemorated.”

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set oil royalties at a level that they deem fair and to use the revenues from the sale of oil for whatever purposes they see fit without threats of sanctions or military interventions by U.S. imperialism. They also have the right to establish whatever economic, political and military alliances they feel are necessary to ensure the survival and prosperity of their country.

If Chavez feels that it is desirable to link the independent development of Venezuela to the mission of the working class to build socialism, so be it. However, support for his policies should not be contingent on what he claims to be building. Many before him have claimed to be building socialism in order to cover up their conciliation and collaboration with imperialism and the collapse of their so-called "socialisms" has inflicted tremendous harm on the anti-capitalist and anti-imperialist movements.

For almost 50 years Cuba has stood as a symbol of unflinching opposition to U.S. imperialism and as a staunch supporter of the oppressed peoples of the world. Within that context, whether or not Cuba represents a model for building socialism is essentially irrelevant. Cuba has managed to maintain its independence from U.S. imperialism despite great

difficulties and many twists and turns in international politics. It could not have accomplished that feat if the Cuban state did not serve the interests of the Cuban people or if the Cuban people did not support the Cuban state. The content and orientation of the Cuban revolution is a matter between the Cuban people and the Cuban state. It is sufficient for the rest of the world's people that Cuba has resolutely opposed U.S. imperialism and its hegemonic machinations around the world.

This should also be the standard of support in the case of Chavez and Venezuela. If Chavez continues to oppose U.S. imperialism and defend the independence of Venezuela and other countries threatened by imperialism, he deserves the support of the world's people. That support should not be conditional on whether or not Chavez is building socialism in Venezuela, nor on the relative quality of that socialism. Those who insist on making the issue in Venezuela a matter of socialism (and especially those who are attempting to use Chavez' "socialism for the twenty-first century" to oppose the socialist projects of the twentieth century) are doing a disservice both to the struggle for socialism and the struggle against imperialism.

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2. Barrick Gold Corporation, which intersects with Harper's recent visit to Africa. While much hyped as a visit linked to aid projects, the e-mail points out that it was a meeting with officials from a dozen Canadian investors, led by mining giant Barrick Gold Corp., that dominated the trip.

3. The Blackstone Group L.P. intersects with the Harper government's policy to eliminate the 15 per cent withholding tax on interest paid by private equity firms on leveraged buyout debt. "Plus," the e-mail notes, "Stephen Harper's policy to tax income trusts (and restrict their growth) in the hands of Canadian Investors and not in the hands foreign private equity, which has resulted in the perfect event driven arbitrage situation for foreign private equity firms like Blackstone to pick of these sitting ducks. To date there has been \$65 billion in takeover activity caused by this policy. Over half of it by private equity via leveraged buyout loans."

4. Quebecor Inc. intersects with recent revelations that Mulroney lobbied Harper government ministers on deregulating the wireless industry, through which

Quebecor is poised to make hundreds of millions of dollars.

5. The Council on Foreign Relations, which intersects with Harper's public and unequivocal support for the Security and Prosperity Partnership.

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