

افغانستان آزاد – آزاد افغانستان

AA-AA

چو کشور نښاد تن من مباد بدین بوم و بر زنده یک تن مباد
همه سر به سر تن به کشتن دهیم از آن به که کشور به دشمن دهیم

www.afgazad.com

afgazad@gmail.com

European Languages

زبانهای اروپایی

FEBRUARY 1, 2019

by NICK PEMBERTON
04.02.2019

What Bernie Sanders Could Learn From Venezuela

Bernie Sanders, we hear, is interested in running for President in 2020. Bernie has once again shot himself in the foot before the starter's gun goes off. Sanders best known Trump-like statement was calling Venezuelan revolutionary President Hugo Chavez “a dead communist dictator.” Now Sanders, while bucking the establishment on regime change in Venezuela, remains woefully uninformed about neoliberalism's effects on a global level, and therefore cannot be taken seriously as an agent of radical change. Sanders released a statement on Venezuela that had nothing of substance in relationship to the 1%, neoliberalism, neocolonialism or any of the driving forces of a clear political crisis in the country. Instead, Sanders merely echoed right-wing talking points on Venezuelan President Nicholas Maduro, and then, almost as an aside, said the U.S. intervening in Latin America, well, it ends badly.

And perhaps, one could argue, that a non-intervention response, no matter how you get there, is good enough, especially considering the political spectrum of the United States establishment, which has assassination lists coming from its Nobel Peace Prize winners. But Bernie's failure to understand global politics and the hopelessness of his own party (Democrats), leads one to believe that any revolution he will bring will be half-baked, and easily squashed, as it was in 2016.

Simply being against intervention is not good enough for another reason: the Venezuelan people are in an economic crisis and it is important to understand why. So far, the United

States has not intervened militarily, and yet, our policy in Venezuela has still been deadly, something Sanders failed to acknowledge in his statement on Venezuela.

Anyone interested in the well-being of Venezuelans does have to admit that for one reason or another, the Maduro government has failed to provide for the masses in the ways that the Chavez government did for so many years. Jorge Martin, when speaking to Chuck Mertz, said while he was certainly a Chavez supporter, he was open to criticism of Maduro. His criticism, unlike the U.S. corporate media, came from a left perspective. He argued that Maduro's downfall came because he made concessions to the free market opposition. This opposition has only sabotaged the economy, despite Maduro's willingness to play ball, according to Martin. It is similar to the U.S. where centrism, while much lauded as a virtue, will always be sabotaged by the right. If you give these bastards an inch, they will take a mile. Martin instead argues that the entire economy must be owned by the state. Half measures with the capitalists simply leaves them too much power, and as a result, they will destroy you for trying..

Bernie could learn from Maduro's mistakes. In fact, these men may have more in common than either would like to believe. Bernie, like Maduro, has chosen to remain relevant politically over a radical left politics that puts the people first. As oil prices fell, sanctions mounted, regime change threats abounded and people began to starve, Maduro chose to make concessions to neoliberal development and the privatization of the market. This, while saving Maduro in the short-term, has only devastated the economy for working class Venezuelans; and it is the reason that some Venezuelans really do want Maduro to go. Likewise, Bernie continues to prop up the Democratic Party and the American Empire in the hopes that one day they will throw him a bone.

According to OPEC, 95 percent of Venezuela's wealth comes from oil exports. Venezuela is in an economic crisis in part because the price of oil plummeted. Oil acts like a cash crop for poorer countries. Under Structural Adjustment Programs facilitated by the IMF and the World Bank, smaller economies specialize in a single product, acting as exporters for larger countries with more diverse economies. As a result, historically colonized countries are extremely vulnerable to fluctuations in the global market, and are left without long-term economic stability—even if the economy is properly managed.

Ironically for the critics of socialism, such tides only justify a socialist model that draws its funding for an economy from far more diverse sources—the public. Turns out leaving

the entire economy in the hands of a few people is not only unjust, but unstable. Commentators whining about economic mismanagement of a socialist dictator operate in a completely mythical world. If the United States wanted to help, we could. If the United States wants to hurt, we can, and we do.

Blaming Venezuela for not diversifying the economy then is simply blaming the victims of neocolonialism. Venezuela has to rely on exports because of Structural Adjustment Loans that only allow countries to repay their debts in hard currency. In a recent article praising U.S. sanctions, The New York Times admitted that U.S. consumption of oil provides Venezuela with a key cash flow. The United States simply does not need Venezuela in the same way as Venezuela needs us, as they can sanction the oil and still trade with a plethora of dependent governments in the Middle East. To the contrary, if Venezuela does not do the bidding of the United States, their people starve, and their government officials lose legitimacy.

As a result, even good leaders may be in trouble as their economies fail—often to no fault of their own. It is the opinion of some that the government of Nicholas Maduro, which certainly rose up with the left forces of Hugo Chavez, is now choosing its own power over the will of the people. The fact that the original failure is no result of socialism is important, but that does not change the actions that have followed. Mike Gonzalez of Jacobin tracks a return to authoritarianism and neoliberalism to stay in power: “That said, we can pull three clear themes out of the government’s behavior: a revival of foreign investment in extractive industries, a growing militarization of the government, and the transformation of the United Socialist Party of Venezuela (PSUV) into an instrument of political control.”

Pointing these things out does not make one an advocate of regime change, it actually points to the real crisis of neoliberal imperialism. Dependent governments who wish to stay in power are forced to play ball with large corporations in order to provide any material gains for their people. In the past Venezuela could maintain independence from imperialism largely because it had the leverage to do so—given its large oil exports. As prices and production have dipped, and with the somewhat unique management skills of Chavez absent, we have seen neoliberal capital invade. Such a dynamic is present everywhere. Take the logic for putting oil pipelines put through indigenous communities in the United States and Canada. These communities are the ones most hurt by capitalism

and the ones most resistant to it. And yet, because of capitalism's sabotage, they need money and have little power to stop capitalism from invading.

Gonzalez continues: "Maduro has suggested one solution to the massive hole in the state budget: the Arco Minero, Venezuela's Amazon region. The area represents 12 percent of the national territory and holds a cornucopia of minerals, oil, and gas. Additionally, it is the country's principal source of freshwater. Chavez rejected a development proposal some years ago for environmental reasons and in recognition of indigenous communities' human and territorial rights. But last summer, Maduro began inviting multinational corporations to bid for concessions."

The sensible resistance to global capitalists by Chavez was only possible because, at least for a time, the country had enough resources and enough government control to hold the rich at bay. Now that Venezuela has less production of oil and the ruling class has a stronger grip over the government, capitalists can swoop in to save the day. The state, like the individual under neoliberal capital acts as a rentier, a debtor. Given few options to genuinely compete in the market, the underclass is forced to accept "development" projects in their communities that have devastating environment effects, profits that go towards the 1% and a slight padding for those who agree to help facilitate it.

This is why socialism must be an international venture. As long as neocolonialism remains in place, there will be no sustainable model for socialism. The economies are too interconnected, and without a clear advantage in resources, socialist countries can simply be sanctioned out of the competition. Left to rely upon exports to rich countries, poor countries only hold power as long as rich countries are willing to buy. Too much power in the hands of the people means not enough profits and projects for the rich. Therefore socialism becomes a problem, and socialist governments will be punished. As a result, socialist countries will become poor and rich countries will proclaim: socialism doesn't work! When in reality, capitalism is what made the people hungry, socialism is what made the people dangerous. But there is sadly an inevitable shelf life to socialism as long as the world powers remain capitalist, the rich remain powerful, and the poor remain dependent. For socialism to succeed in the long term, there must be a global revolution.

When the United States calls for intervention based on the issues of democracy and human rights, we fail to acknowledge our own role in the current crisis. If we should be intervening in anything, it should be the IMF, the World Bank and other institutions of

global capital that rig the economy against working people, especially in the global south. This would go a long way to curbing the human suffering in Venezuela.

A blind allegiance to the Nicholas Maduro would fail to cut to the heart of the issue. A more honest assessment would admit that building a prosperous economy for the masses under neocolonialism is a near impossibility, and that Maduro's concessions to neoliberalism is a predictable, if not inevitable consequence of this structure. It is clear that many Venezuelans want Maduro gone, but they are wise enough to know that if this regime change is facilitated by the United States and other Western actors, a change will only cement these dynamics under the guise of a free and fair market.

The reason many left governments become authoritarian, militaristic and corrupt is that they have to compete with capitalist governments for power. As left governments are left out of the free market of competition, they fail to provide for people in the ways they promised. Therefore they must either compete with capitalist governments through the military (Venezuela has been getting arms from Russia for years) or they must stifle dissent to stay in power. This has never been a problem of communism or socialism, but a natural consequence of capitalism, and an understandable response by the left as capitalism takes its hold. The only way to stop capitalism is to eliminate it all together. For as long as competition remains, it will be competition itself (capitalism) that will triumph.

The unfortunate reality for the self-determination of Venezuelans is that to compete in the neocolonial economy, their government has to someone's bidding. The United States giving Venezuela no other options has meant them turning to Russia, a risky play to stay afloat. The sanctions of the United States have effectively decimated the bolivar, currency of Venezuela. As a result, some statistics say that as high as 90% of the country does not have enough food. Trump's war on the poor and brown continues to an extreme extent in Venezuela.

Russia itself suffers from U.S. sanctions, making its people another victim of American imperialism. Its government though remains capitalist, and in some cases imperialist. And its relationship with Venezuela, while in many ways admirable, is ultimately still an unequal neocolonial relationship that leaves Venezuela at the mercy of Russia and its capitalists.

After U.S. sanctions pushed Maduro's electorate to starvation, he had few options. He could give in to the opposition, which was only going to bring his country to the right, and therefore push it into long-term chaos. Or he could turn to Russia, who could operate in much the same way the U.S. would have—which is basically to loot a desperate country in exchange for cash loans. Ultimately Maduro has done some of both.

As Maduro is pushed to the brink of both his people's and his own survival, he has sold state-owned oil to Russia in exchange for cash. Nine of Venezuela's most important petroleum projects have been sold to Russia, according to Reuters. Ultimately this plan only further hurts the people of Venezuela as their assets are sold off on the cheap to an imperialist power. Amid food and medicine shortages, the concession for quick cash is predictable—but no less worrisome.

Regime change facilitated by neocolonial powers will only cement the current dynamics of dependence. Cheering on Maduro and Russia as the lesser evil is a more reasonable response than most, but it is clear that, in large part because of U.S. sanctions, even these actors have not provided for working class Venezuelans. It is easier said than done to return to a prosperous socialism, because so much of Chavez's success was based in the capitalist demand for oil that could be spread to the masses with a strong enough government.

The real dictators are the global capitalists who create such dynamics. Only overthrowing them and seizing their power will guarantee long term solutions for the international working class. For now, Nicholas Maduro and his dependence on Russia remains the lesser evil, and intervention should be opposed not just for sovereignty reasons, but for practical ones. The working class deserves far better than what neocolonialism and neoliberalism can provide, and if the people are to be saved, it will be by their communal will.

If the one good criticism of Maduro is that he, under enormous political pressure, has made concessions to the opposition, we should greatly fear a situation where the opposition takes full control. From Mint Press News: "The oil reporting agency S&P Global Platts reported that, in the immediate wake of the US anointing Juan Guaidó as Venezuela's supposed "president," the opposition leader already drafted "plans to introduce a new national hydrocarbons law that establishes flexible fiscal and contractual terms for projects adapted to oil prices and the oil investment cycle.""

In addition, Guaido is bringing the IMF and World Bank back to Venezuela in full force, something Chavez opposed strongly. The policy of these structures is quite simply austerity. In order to allow a government to trade with a rich imperialist country like the United States, Venezuela would have to agree to cut social programs, privatize their markets. Bernie grumbles a lot about student loans in this country, and I am grateful for that. But he fails to recognize that the exact same dynamics occur in countries like Venezuela, and have disastrous effects. Left with the choice of starving through sanctions or debt programs that hand over the government's keys to the private market, South American governments have been pushed out, and if too much resistance is given, they are simply handed a coup—likely with a Trump-like fascist as the head and a neoliberal corporatist as the body.

If the United States were really to become an economy owned by the state, it would be tremendous; not only for the working poor in this country, but for the entire globe. Right now the United State operates as a welfare state for the rich—where the poor pay for everything from the research behind the rich's "innovations" to the grotesque military that the rich use to loot resources from poorer countries. It is admirable that Bernie wants to make us a welfare state for the poor again, but his MAGA plan will be sabotaged and even if implemented, easily reversed, because the rich will still own the means of production, if not the distribution of the gains.

Hugo Chavez could only provide for the working people because his state owned the economy and it could keep the rich at bay. What it could not control was the global market, which fluctuates, especially for dependent single-resource countries of the global south. Nor could he completely control the government of the United States and the capital behind it, which would either loot or invade. A sustainable socialist future for the world then relies in large part on the imperialist powers becoming socialist too. This appears a long way off, not just because of corrupt campaign finance system in the U.S., but because of a loyalty to imperialism across the political spectrum. The Venezuelan people know what the phrase "Our Revolution" means, and could teach Uncle Sanders a thing or two, if he cared to listen.