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## ARTICLES OF LASTING INTEREST

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## Hizbullah

### "God's Own Party"

by Laura Deeb, *Red Pepper (UK), September 2006*

*There is much misleading media coverage of Hizbullah, the Lebanese Shia movement whose militia is fighting the Israeli army in south Lebanon. Lara Deeb provides a historical analysis of a complex movement.*

*The Hizbullah movement is much more than a militia; it is also a political party, a provider of social services and a powerful, elected actor in Lebanese politics. It arose to resist Israel's occupation of south Lebanon from 1982-2000 and to act as an advocate for Lebanon's historically disenfranchised Shia Muslim community. While it has many political opponents in Lebanon, Hizbullah is very much of Lebanon, not a creature of Iranian and Syrian sponsorship.*

**W**ITHIN THE LEBANESE POLITICAL SYSTEM, Shia Muslims have been historically underrepresented and disproportionately poor. In the 1960s and early 1970s, Shia Lebanese were the main source of support for leftist parties, including the Lebanese Communist Party. In the 1970s, though, the charismatic Muslim cleric, Sayyid Musa al-Sadr, challenged the leftist parties for the loyalty of Shia youth, and offered instead the 'Movement of the Deprived'. A militia branch, Amal, was founded at the start of the Lebanese civil war in 1975.

Other activist Lebanese Shia religious leaders who worked to establish grassroots social and religious networks in the Shia neighborhoods of Beirut included Sayyid Muhammad Husayn Fadlallah, today one of the most respected 'sources of emulation' among Shia Muslims in Lebanon and beyond. A 'source of emulation' (marja al-taqlid) is a religious scholar of such widely recognised erudition that individual Shia Muslims seek and follow his advice on religious matters.

Between 1978 and 1982, a number of events propelled the nascent Shia mobilisation forward and further divorced it from the leftist parties. Of particular importance were the two Israeli invasions of Lebanon in 1978 and 1982, the unexplained



*One of the released Palestinian prisoners, part of the Israel-Hizbullah prisoner swap, kissing his mother's hand. Photo: Annahar 2/1/2004*

disappearance of key leaders, and the Islamic Revolution in Iran, which set a new sort of example for Shia Muslims around the world and provided an alternative worldview to western liberal capitalism different from that espoused by the left. At the same time, there was a general perception among Shia that the Lebanese left had failed, both in securing greater rights for the poor and in protecting the south from the fighting between the PLO and Israel.

The second Israeli invasion of Lebanon in June 1982 was the decisive factor leading to the eventual formation of Hizbullah. Israeli troops, aiming to expel the PLO from Lebanon entirely, laid siege to west Beirut. Tens of thousands of Lebanese were killed and injured and another 450,000 people displaced. Most notoriously, between 16-18 September 1982, under the direction of the then Israeli defence minister, Ariel Sharon, a Lebanese Phalangist militia unit entered the Sabra and Shatila refugee camps in Beirut, raping, killing and maiming thousands of civilian refugees.

Following these events different groups engaged in fighting the Israeli occupation coalesced to form Hizbullah. The foundation of the 'Party of God' and its armed wing, the Islamic Resistance, was announced on 16 February 1985 in an 'Open Letter to the Downtrodden in Lebanon and the World'.

### Hizbullah and the US

In the US, Hizbullah is generally associated with the 1983 bombings of the US embassy, the marine barracks and the French-led multinational force headquarters in Beirut. The movement is also cited by the state department in connection with the kidnappings of westerners in Lebanon and the hostage crisis that led to the Iran-contra affair, the 1985 hijacking of a TWA flight and bombings of the Israeli embassy and cultural centre in Buenos Aires in the early 1990s.

Hizbullah's involvement in these attacks remains a matter of contention, however. Even if their involvement is accepted, it is both inaccurate and unwise to dismiss Hizbullah as 'terrorists'.

First, Hizbullah's military activity has been committed to the goal of ending the Israeli occupation of southern Lebanon. Since the May 2000 Israeli withdrawal, it has largely operated within the 'rules of the game' for low-level border skirmishes with Israel that avoid civilian casualties. In addition, Hizbullah has changed significantly since its inception, and has developed into a legitimate Lebanese political party with a myriad of social welfare

institutions.

Another aspect of the US listing of Hizbullah as a terrorist organisation is related to the group's reputation as undertaking numerous 'suicide attacks'. In fact, of the hundreds of military operations undertaken by the group during the Israeli invasion and occupation of Lebanon, only 12 involved the intentional death of a Hizbullah fighter. At least half of the 'suicide attacks' against Israeli occupying forces in Lebanon were carried out by members of secular and leftist parties.

A third element in the labelling of Hizbullah as terrorists is the notion that its *raison d'être* is the destruction of Israel. However, prior to May 2000, almost all of Hizbullah's military activity was focused on freeing Lebanese territory from Israeli occupation. The cross-border attacks from May 2000 to July 2006 were small operations with tactical aims (Israel did not even respond militarily to all of them).

Hizbullah's founding document says: 'We recognise no treaty with [Israel], no ceasefire and no peace agreements, whether separate or consolidated.' But Augustus R Norton, author of several books and articles on Hizbullah, notes that, 'While Hizbullah's enmity for Israel is not to be dismissed, the simple fact is that it has been tacitly negotiating with Israel for years.' Hizbullah's indirect talks with Israel in 1996 and 2004 and their stated willingness to arrange a prisoner exchange today all indicate realism on the part of the party leadership.

#### **Resistance, politics and rules of the game**

In 1985, Israel withdrew from most of Lebanon, but continued to occupy the southern zone of the country, controlling approximately one tenth of the country. Hizbullah's Islamic Resistance took the lead, though there were other contingents, in fighting that occupation.

Hizbullah also chose to participate in the first post-war elections held in Lebanon in 1992, declaring its intention to work within the existing Lebanese political system, while continuing its guerrilla campaign against the Israeli occupation in the south. In that first election, the party won eight seats, giving it the largest single bloc in the 128-member parliament. Hizbullah developed a reputation (even among those who disagree with their ideologies) for being a 'clean' and capable political party on both the national and local levels.

The occupation of south Lebanon was costly for Israel and came to an end in May 2000. Despite withdrawal, a territorial dispute continues over a 15-square mile border region called the Shebaa Farms that remains under Israeli occupation. Lebanon and Syria assert that the mountainside is Lebanese land, while Israel and the UN have declared it part of the Golan Heights and, therefore, Syrian territory (though occupied by Israel). Lebanon has also been waiting since 2000 for the delivery by Israel of a map of the locations of over 300,000 landmines planted by the Israeli army in south Lebanon.

Since the Israeli withdrawal in 2000, all parties to the Israeli-Lebanese border dispute have largely abided by unstated 'rules of the game', based on not targeting civilians. Both sides have broken these rules on occasion, though UN observer reports of the numbers of border violations find that Israel has violated the Blue Line between the countries ten times more frequently than Hizbullah.

Hizbullah abducted an Israeli businessman in Lebanon in October 2000, claiming that he was a spy. In January 2004, through German mediators, it concluded a deal with Israel whereby Israel released hundreds of Lebanese and Palestinian prisoners in exchange for the businessman and the bodies of

three Israeli soldiers. At the last minute, Israeli officials defied their own Supreme Court's ruling and refused to hand over the last three Lebanese prisoners. At that time, Hizbullah vowed to open new negotiations at some point in the future.

#### **Hizbullah's nationalism**

There is no doubt that Hizbullah is a nationalist party. It offers a nationalism that views Lebanon as an Arab state that cannot distance itself from causes like the Palestine question.

Its political ideology maintains an Islamic outlook. The 1985 'open letter' notes the party's desire to establish an Islamic state, but only through the will of the people. The party's decision to participate in elections in 1992 underscored its commitment to working through the existing structure of the Lebanese state, and also shifted the party's focus from a pan-Islamic resistance to Israel toward internal Lebanese politics. Since 1992, Hizbullah leaders have frequently acknowledged the importance of sectarian coexistence and pluralism within Lebanon. Many of Hizbullah's constituents do not want to live in an Islamic state; rather, they want the party to represent their interests within a pluralist Lebanon.

The nationalist outlook of the party has grown throughout Hizbullah's transition from resistance militia to political party and more. Indeed, after the 2005 elections, Hizbullah chose to participate in the cabinet for the first time, and currently holds the energy ministry.

Hizbullah does not regard its participation in government as contradicting its maintenance of a non-state militia. It has pledged to 'safeguard Lebanon's independence and protect it from the Israeli menace by safeguarding the Resistance, Hizbullah's military wing and its weapons, in order to achieve total liberation of Lebanese occupied land'. This stance places the party at odds with UN Security Council Resolution 1559, which called for the disbanding and disarmament of all Lebanese and non-Lebanese militias' in September 2004, and with those political forces in Lebanon that seek to implement the resolution.

But the party has a social platform as well, and views itself as representing not only Shia Lebanese, but also the poor more generally. The party also plays the usual political game in Lebanon, where candidates run on multi-confessional district slates rather than as individuals, and it allies itself (however temporarily) with politicians who do not back its programme.

#### **Social welfare**

Among the consequences of the Lebanese civil war was a widening gap between the ever shrinking middle class and the ever expanding ranks of the poor. In the 1970s and 1980s, a Shia Muslim social welfare network developed with key actors including al-Sadr, Fadlallah and Hizbullah. Today, Hizbullah functions as an umbrella organisation under which many social welfare institutions are run.

Some of these institutions provide monthly support and supplemental nutritional, educational, housing and health assistance for the poor; others focus on supporting orphans; still others are devoted to reconstruction of war-damaged areas. These social welfare institutions serve local people regardless of sect, though they are concentrated in the mainly Shia Muslim areas of the country. They are run almost entirely through volunteer labour, mostly that of women, and much of their funding stems from individual donations, orphan sponsorships and religious taxes. (Shia Muslims pay an annual tithe of one fifth of the income they do not need for their own family's upkeep.) Much of this financial support comes from Lebanese Shia living abroad.

### Who supports Hizbullah?

As one of Israel's stated goals in the current war is the 'removal' of Hizbullah from the south, it is critical to note that the party has a broad base of support, throughout the south in particular and increasingly the country as a whole. It is a base that is not necessarily dependent on being born to a Shia Muslim family, or being a practising and pious Shia Muslim.

Nor does it entirely depend on socio-economic status. The party's popularity is indeed based in part on its dedication to the poor, but also on its political platforms and record in Lebanon, its Islamist ideology, and its resistance to Israeli occupation and violations of Lebanese sovereignty.

For some, Hizbullah's ideology and policies are viewed as providing a viable alternative to a US-supported government and its neoliberal economic project in Lebanon and as an active opposition to the role of the US in the Middle East. Its constituents are not only the poor, but increasingly come from the middle classes and include many upwardly mobile, highly educated Lebanese. Many of its supporters are Shia Muslim, but there are also many Lebanese of other religious backgrounds who support the party and/or the Islamic Resistance.

'Hizbullah supporter' is itself a vague phrase. There are official members of the party and/or the Islamic Resistance; there are volunteers in party-affiliated social welfare organisations; there are those who voted for the party in the last election; there are those who support the Islamic Resistance in the current conflict, whether or not they agree with its ideology. To claim ridding south Lebanon of Hizbullah as a goal risks aiming for the complete depopulation of the south, tantamount to ethnic cleansing of the area.

In terms of the current conflict, while Lebanese public opinion seems to be divided as to whether blame should be placed on Hizbullah or Israel for the devastation befalling the country, this division does not necessarily fall along sectarian lines. More importantly, there are many Lebanese who disagree with Hizbullah's Islamist ideology or political platform, and who believe that their 12 July operation was a mistake, but who are supportive of the Islamic Resistance and view Israel as their enemy.

These are not mutually exclusive positions. One of the effects of the Israeli attacks on selected areas of Beirut has been to widen the class divides in Lebanon, which may serve to further increase Hizbullah's popularity among those who already felt alienated from Hariri-style reconstruction and development.

Israel's initially stated goal of securing the release of its two captured soldiers has faded from Israeli discourse and given way to two additional stated goals: the disarmament or at least 'degrading' of Hizbullah's militia, as well as its removal from south Lebanon. According to an article in the 21 July San Francisco Chronicle, 'a senior Israeli army officer' had presented plans for an offensive with these goals to US and other diplomats over a year before Hizbullah's capture of the two soldiers. Though Israel is not in compliance with several UN resolutions, the Israeli army appears to be attempting single-handedly (though with US approval) to implement UN Security Council Resolution 1559.

It is unclear how the aerial bombardment of infrastructure and the killing of Lebanese civilians can lead to the achievement of any of these goals, especially as support for Hizbullah and the Islamic Resistance appears to be increasing. Outrage at Israel's actions trumps ideological disagreement with Hizbullah for many Lebanese at this point, and thus it is likely that support for the party will continue to grow.

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## Cuba Goes Totally Organic Urban Organoponics Succeeds Agribiz

by Andrew Buncombe, *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*, 13 Aug 2006

**T**O THE RIGHT LAY REVOLUTIONARY TOMATOES and to the left lay revolutionary lettuces, while in the glass in my hand, filled to the brim and frothing with vitality, was the juice from revolutionary mangoes. It was thick, unfiltered and fabulously sweet. It was also organic.

"Yes, it is very good. It's all natural," said Miguel Salcines Lopez, his brow dotted with sweat from the midday sun, as he raised a glassful to his lips. "Growing food in this way is much more interesting. It is much more intelligent."

Almost five decades after the now ailing Fidel Castro and his comrades overthrew the dictator Fulgencio Batista and seized power in Cuba, another revolution, largely unnoticed by most visitors and tourists, is well under way on this Caribbean island. And Salcines and his small urban farm at Alamar, an eastern suburb of the capital, Havana, are at the center of a social transformation that may turn out to be as important as anything else that has been achieved during Castro's 47 years in power.

Spurred into action by the collapse of the Soviet Union and the disastrous effect this had on its subsidized economy, the government of Cuba was forced to take radical steps to feed its people. The solution it chose—essentially unprecedented both within the developed and undeveloped world—was to establish a self-sustaining system of agriculture that by necessity was essentially organic.

Laura Enriquez, a sociologist at the University of California-Berkeley, who has written extensively on the subject of Latin American agriculture, said: "What happened in Cuba was remarkable. It was remarkable that they decided to prioritize food production. Other countries in the region took the neoliberal option and exported 'what they were good at' and imported food. The Cubans went for food security and part of that was prioritizing small farmers."

### Ecological Know-How to Feed Everybody

Cuba is filled with more than 7,000 urban allotments, or *organo-ponicos*, which fill perhaps as many as 81,000 acres. They have been established on tiny plots of land in the center of tower-block estates or between the crumbling colonial homes that fill Havana. One afternoon I visited a small garden of tomatoes and spinach that had been dug just a few hundred yards from the Plaza de la Revolution, a vast concrete square where Castro and his senior regime members annually oversee Cuba's May Day parade. More than 200 gardens in Havana supply its citizens with more than 90 percent of their fruit and vegetables.

Of all these gardens, the *Vivero Organoponico Alamar* is considered one of the most successful. Established less than 10 years ago, the 0.7-hectare [1.7 acre] plot employs about 25 people and provides a range of healthful, low-cost food to the local community.

Salcines led a brief tour of his garden, stopping off to point

out things of which he was particularly proud. There was the shed of tomatoes that had produced five tons of fruit in six months, a self-designed metal pyramid structure that he claimed focused natural energy and benefited not just the plants but the gardeners as well, a worm farm wriggling with California Red worms and the bright marigolds planted at the end of each row of vegetables to attract bees and butterflies.

He was also very proud of his crop of splendid, shiny mint. "The Hotel Nacional (Havana's state-run landmark hotel once frequented by the likes of Al Capone) uses our mint for its mojitos (a mint-based cocktail)," he said. "It's because it's organic."

#### **Many Varieties of Organic Production**

The economics of various organoponicos differ. At the Metropolitana Organoponico in the city center, two of the four workers who tend the plot said the land was owned by the government and that everything grown there was split 50-50. "It's very good. It means that food does not have to be brought into the city," said one of the men.

At Alamar, Salcines said that once the workers had grown their set quota of food and given that to the government, the surplus was theirs to sell with the profits then divided among them. Such a sense of cooperation—along with the free meals for the workers—added to the heady sense of idealism at Alamar, the sort of socialist idealism that has earned Cuba many international supporters over the years, despite Castro's dictatorial rule and his repression of political dissent.

Such farms barely existed in the late 1980s. Back then, Cuba's economy was extraordinarily reliant on subsidies from its political older brother, the Soviet Union. Its agriculture was designed with one aim in mind—namely to produce as much sugar cane as possible, which the Soviets bought at more than five times the market price, in addition to purchasing 95 percent of its citrus crop and 73 percent of its nickel. In exchange, the Soviets provided Cuba with 63 percent of its food imports and 90 percent of its petrol. Such a relationship made Cuba extraordinarily vulnerable.

With the collapse of the Soviet Union, such subsidies halted almost overnight. Suddenly, the future looked bleak. Nowhere was the effect felt more strongly than in the stomachs of the ordinary people. Figures produced by the U.N. Food and Agriculture Organization suggest that the daily calorie intake of the average Cuban fell from about 2,600 calories a day in the late 1980s to between 1,000 and 1,500 by 1993. Essentially, people had to get by on about half the food they had been eating.

#### **Intelligence Works Better Than Trade**

With no subsidies and limited resources, the Cuban regime took the decision to look inward. Ceasing to organize its economy around the export of tropical products and the import of food, it decided to maximize food production. By necessity, this meant a back-to-basics approach; with no Soviet oil for tractors or fertilizer it turned to oxen, with no Soviet oil for its fertilizer and pesticide, it turned to natural compost and the production of natural pesticides and beneficial insects. It is estimated that more than 200 locally based centers specializing in biopesticides annually produce 200 tons of verticillium to control whitefly, and 800 tons of beaveria sprays to control beetles.

Professor Jules Pretty, of the University of Essex's department of biological sciences, recently wrote: "Cut banana stems baited with honey to attract ants are placed in sweet potato fields and have led to control of sweet potato weevil. There are

170 vermicompost centers, the annual production of which has grown from three to 9,300 tons. Crop rotations, green maturing, intercropping and soil conservation have all been incorporated into polyculture farming."

Remarkably, this organic revolution has worked. Annual calorie intake now stands at about 2,600 a day, while UNFAO estimates that the percentage of the population considered undernourished fell from 8 percent in 1990-92 to about 3 percent in 2000-02. Cuba's infant mortality rate is lower than that of the U.S., while at 77 years, life expectancy is the same.

Everyone appears to agree that this new, organic approach is far more efficient than the previous Soviet model that emphasized production at all costs. Fernando Funes, head of the national Pasture and Forage Research Unit, told *Harper's* magazine: "In that old system it took 10 or 15 units of energy to produce one unit of food energy. At first we did not care about economics, (but) we were realizing just how inefficient it was."

A second step Cuba took in the mid-1990s to try to save its economy was the establishment of mass tourism. Yet while this has provided the government with a ready source of millions of dollars in hard currency, it also has helped produce a dual-track society with its own tensions and clear divide between those who have access to foreign currency—or the Cuban Convertible Peso—and those who make do with the lowly Cuban peso, which cannot be used to buy many goods.

#### **Lots of Labor, More Equality**

By contrast, Salcines believes the introduction of organoponicos—a loosening of government control that also saw small restaurants and some private businesses established—has been a success. He also believes these allotments have stayed true to Cuba's revolutionary ideas. "Not everything is perfect," Salcines said. "But if you look at what capitalism has done for other countries in the region, I believe that the situation for poor people is better in Cuba. Our society is more equal."...

Champions of organic, non-intensive agriculture might cite Cuba as an example that other countries could adopt rather than following the large-scale, industrial agriculture system. But could Cuba's labor-intensive example be repeated without the availability of large numbers of enforced workers? "I don't know. I think it is true that it has required much labor," Pretty said. "The thing is that it has also produced a lot of food. ... People are also closer to their food production. (In the West) we are worried that we don't know about where our food comes from. In Havana, people are closer to their food production and that may also have psychological benefits."

The same day as visiting the allotment at Alamar, I took a visit to the other side of Cuba's dual-track economy. The Hotel Nacional has hosted the likes of Winston Churchill and Fred Astaire, and more recently Naomi Campbell and Leonardo DiCaprio. On a lawn overlooking the ocean, I paid the equivalent of an ordinary Cuban's weekly wage for a *mojito* [cocktail]. It tasted great, but it didn't taste of the revolution.

*Andrew Buncombe writes for The Independent in Britain. See organoponics details also for Peru and Venezuela at [www.gobartimes.org/gt20040315/gt\\_covfeature1.htm](http://www.gobartimes.org/gt20040315/gt_covfeature1.htm)*

## Venezuela Revolution Explained A Solid Protagonist Democracy

Greg Grandin, *Boston Review*, May/June 2006

HERE IS SOMETHING QUIANT—flattering, even—about the way Venezuelan President Hugo Chávez insists on calling George W. Bush “Mr. Danger.” The taunt, which Chávez delivers in English with rolled-out vowels and pinched consonants, evokes an earlier era of cloak-and-dagger politics and lends Bush a certain mystery that he is generally denied in these shrill times of stateless terrorism. Mr. Danger, it turns out, is a minor character in Rómulo Gallegos’s 1929 novel *Doña Barbara*, a landmark in Venezuelan literature and before the fiction boom of the 1970s one of the most widely read Latin American novels in the world. A “great mass of muscles under red skin, with a pair of very blue eyes,” he is one of many unsympathetic misters who populate 20th-century Latin American social and magical realist prose, beginning in 1904 with the Chilean writer Baldomero Lillo’s abusive mine foreman Mr. Davis and continuing through Mr. Brown, the manager of a U.S. banana company in Gabriel García Márquez’s *One Hundred Years of Solitude*.

In *Doña Barbara*, the inhabitants of Venezuela’s untamed southern plains at first welcome the arrival of Mr. Danger, believing that he will bring “new ideas” to help modernize the region’s agricultural production. Their hopes are quickly dashed as the “scornful foreigner” loafs in his hammock, smoking his pipe and living off rustled cattle, stirring only to shoot alligators and ply his neighbor with liquor to steal his property and despoil his daughter. Mr. Danger is a “humorist in his own way” who, when introducing himself, repeats his surname in Spanish—*peligro*—“to emphasize its disconcerting translation.” It’s a trick Chávez, also easy with a joke, likewise enjoys: “The greatest *peligro* in the world,” he warns, “is Mr. Danger.” Gallegos himself served as Venezuela’s president for less than a year in 1948 before being ousted in a coup that many Venezuelans insist had the support of Standard Oil and the U.S. embassy. So for the millions reared on the novel Chávez’s own disconcerting translation has special force.

### The Erudite Mr. Chávez

Chávez’s success owes much to his creation of a colloquial cosmopolitan nationalism, his ability to thread into his speeches historical figures such as Simón Bolívar and literary references more obscure than Mr. Danger. As his international stature and aspirations have increased, Chávez has expanded his repertoire. He now moves seamlessly from Simón Bolívar to Jawaharlal Nehru, Bertrand Russell to Noam Chomsky. But Mr. Danger has only a bit part in *Doña Barbara*, which is concerned less with vanquishing the imperial interloper than with taming Venezuela’s inner demons. The novel follows the progress of Santos Luzardo, beginning with his return from Caracas to his ancestral ranch deep in Venezuela’s mythic Llano country. Urbane and lettered, Luzardo at first hopes to sell his inheritance but soon succumbs to the call of the land. Gallegos leaves little to the imagination. Santos Luzardo, a lawyer whose name means Sacred Light, slowly gains the advantage in a war of maneuver with his neighbor, Doña Barbara, an enchantress whose impulsive power over men symbolizes all that the interior of the nation, and thus the nation itself, must overcome if it is to move forward: hierarchy maintained by arbitrary clientalism; profit derived from theft rather than production; and society held together by fear in lieu of law.

For those familiar with *Doña Barbara*, it might seem odd that Chávez, in invoking Mr. Danger, implicitly identifies with Luzardo, whose struggle to civilize the plains was represented by his installation of a barbed-wire fence around his vast ranch. Chávez, after all, has done more than any of his center-left counterparts who now govern throughout Latin America to weaken the absolute right of private property that has been the cornerstone of the global political economy for more than two decades. He has distributed large, unproductive public lands and private estates to peasant cooperatives, nationalized bankrupted industries, and forced oil multinationals to renegotiate operating contracts. But Chávez easily updates the values that mark Doña Barbara’s barbarism to lambaste “cruel and savage” free-market capitalism. And like Luzardo, who triumphs by putting his enemies’ weapons to his own use, Chávez, a former coup plotter and self-described revolutionary, has bested his opponents at their own electoral game.

### US Free-Market Policy Backfires

Since the end of the Cold War, the United States has moved away from its traditional reliance on military strongmen in Latin America, instead staking its future on the promotion of unregulated markets and constitutional democracies. It has turned out to be an explosive combination. Decades of financial liberalization, tight money, and open markets, along with the rampant corruption that took place with the selling off of state industries, have bejeweled the few while leaving the rest ragged. During the first five years of this decade the region’s economy grew by one point, and during the previous decade it grew by only nine points. In contrast, the heyday of state developmentalism, between 1960 and 1980, produced 82 percent growth. Today, over 213 million of Latin America’s 520 million people live in poverty, 88 million of them in extreme poverty. Provoked mostly by this social catastrophe but also by Bush’s post-9/11 embrace of unilateral militarism, voters in Venezuela, Brazil, Uruguay, Argentina, and Bolivia have in recent years elected presidents sharply critical of Washington, a trend that may continue in July when Mexicans go to the polls. But these new leftists, constrained by free-trade treaties, autonomous central banks, and the fickleness of financial markets, have mostly opted to pursue mild reform while leaving unchallenged the assumptions of export-led market development. Even Bolivia’s Evo Morales, who came to power promising to be Washington’s “nightmare,” conceded just before his election that in office his hands would be tied by “20 years of neoliberal laws.”

It was Venezuela that provided the prototype for this kind of top-down, restricted democracy. After a decade-long dictatorship ended in 1958, the formalities of democratic rule were maintained for 40 years as power rotated between two ideologically indistinguishable parties: Acción Democrática and the Comité de Organización Política Electoral Independiente. By the early 1980s, the country had enjoyed such a long period of stability that it was celebrated by the U.S. State Department and its allied policy intellectuals, among them Samuel Huntington, as the “only trail to a democratic future for developing societies . . . a textbook case of step-by-step progress.” In hindsight, its institutions were rotting from the inside out. Every sin that Chávez is today accused by his opponents of committing—governing without accountability, marginalizing the opposition, appointing partisan supporters to the judiciary, and dominating labor unions, professional organizations, and civil society—flourished in a system described by the political scientist Michael Coppedge as “partyarchy.” This arrangement solidified during the flush years

of high oil prices, with export revenue funding an enormous patronage trough, including graft and kickbacks for political and business elites and what was hailed as a showcase welfare system for everyone else. Absolute poverty and inequality did decrease somewhat in the 1970s, less a result of government programs than a massive march of migrants in search of industrial wages escaping to either Caracas or one of the country's provincial towns organized around oil drilling, refining, and shipping.

But petroleum prices began to fall in the mid-1980s. By this point, Venezuela had grown lopsidedly urban, with 16 million of its 19 million citizens living in cities, well over half of them below the poverty line. Between 1981 and 1997, the share in national income of the poorest two fifths of the population fell from 19.1 to 14.7 percent while the share of the wealthiest tenth increased from 21.8 to 32.8 percent. During roughly this same period, the percentage of those living in extreme poverty tripled, from 11 to 36 percent. Throughout the 1980s, Caracas grew at a galloping pace, creating combustible concentrations of poor people cut off from municipal services—such as sanitation and safe drinking water—and hence party control. The spark came in February 1989, when AD's recently inaugurated president Carlos Andrés Pérez, who had rallied against the IMF during his campaign, announced that he had no choice but to submit to its dictates, which included abolishing food and fuel subsidies, increasing gas prices, privatizing state industries, and cutting spending on health care and education.

#### **A Leftist Military and a Furious White Elite**

Three days of rioting and looting spread through the capital following Pérez's announcement. The Caracazo, as the uprising became known, heralded both the beginning of the hemisphere's increasingly focused opposition to free-market absolutism and the end of Venezuela's exemption from the pitched cycles of radicalism and reaction that had overtaken most of its neighbors during the Cold War. Established parties, unions, and government institutions proved entirely incapable of restoring legitimacy in austere times, committed as they were to not challenging a profoundly unequal class structure. The military, which remained relatively respected during the declining years of AD-COPEI rule, was torn apart, having killed (according to some observers) over a thousand people to restore order. Hugo Chávez emerged from this ruin: leading a group of young officers, many of them educated in civilian universities and untutored in U.S. counterinsurgency doctrine, who were committed to a broad and vague program that rejected free-trade austerity, he repudiated the country's unresponsive and corrupt political system and sought to restore the prestige of the armed forces.

Chávez's fearsome political skills—his ability to bob and weave and keep his opponents off-balance—contributes to the sense that he has no political program beyond responding to exigencies. Yet for a decade before the Caracazo, Chávez had patiently built ties between his fellow young cadets and civilian reformers, excavating embryonic concerns about economic justice, racial inclusion, and social solidarity within Venezuelan nationalism and fusing them to the leftist political alliances that emerged in the wake of Venezuela's failed insurgency of the 1960s and breakup of the Communist Party.

By the time he burst onto the national scene with his 1992 coup attempt, he had secured at least the tacit endorsement of much of the country's true opposition, those activists and parties cut out of the AD-COPEI duopoly. During the six years between

the aborted coup and the 1998 elections, two of which Chávez spent in jail, the wildfire spread of his putschist-turned-electoral movement was fanned by more than a would-be caudillo's magnetic appeal to an amorphous mass. Venezuela—like other countries in the region—witnessed the emergence of independent grass-roots organizations not dependent on party patronage, including neighborhood councils; feminist, economic-justice, and human-rights groups; environmental coalitions; and breakaway unions. Chávez's 1998 presidential candidacy provided a focal point for this diffuse civil society, at first more metaphorical than institutional. Sixty-seven percent of Venezuelans are considered mestizos, ten percent black, 21 percent white, and two percent indigenous, a racial distribution that largely corresponds to the class distribution. The esteem in which Chávez is held by the dark-skinned poor is amplified by the rage the Venezuelan president provokes among the white and the rich, a distinction that has destroyed the country's myth of racial democracy as thoroughly as it has its sense of political exceptionalism.

Winning the presidency in 1998 with 56 percent of the vote, Chávez at first seemed to be following the path blazed by Alberto Fujimori in Peru, who harnessed the electorate's anger to strengthen the executive branch at the expense of the congress and the judiciary. Shortly after his inauguration in early 1999, Chávez launched a series of votes that resulted in the ratification of a new constitution and the replacement of a bicameral legislature with a unicameral one. In July 2000, 6,000 political offices, from community posts to the presidency, were put to a vote under the terms of the new charter. Chávez was reelected, and his supporters won a majority in the new legislature and 15 out of 23 state governorships.

But the experience of Peru under Fujimori was fundamentally different. The former Peruvian president came out of nowhere, with no social base or political tradition to build on, leading him to rely on the services of his deadly intelligence director Vladimiro Lenin Montesinos and to implement economic policies favored by Wall Street and Washington. Chávez, in contrast, had spent decades building relations with left-wing and reformist civilians and military officers, and his populism has a depth that hasn't been seen in Latin America since the days of Juan Perón. He also has oil, which has allowed him to forge his own version of Venezuelan exceptionalism: an ability to keep his currency stable and investment flowing even as he provokes the United States, negotiates favorable terms with multinationals, and increases social spending.

#### **New Constitution—Developmental, Social, Activist**

The current constitution is Venezuela's 27th, a caution to those who treat it as evidence that "Chavismo" represents a definitive split with the past. But the charter did rotate the distribution of power away from decentralized party politics toward a greatly fortified president and an empowered citizenry. It also broke with the stringent definition of democracy that has prevailed in Latin America—officially, at least—since the end of the Cold War. It is an explicitly social instead of narrowly political compact, developmentalist rather than market-oriented, and potentially participatory as opposed to strictly representative. It bans the privatization of the country's public pension fund and the state-owned **Petróleos de Venezuela (PDVSA)** and guarantees a range of economic, personal, cultural, and even environmental protections. The government now pledges that "every worker has the right to a sufficient salary to live a life with dignity" and "recognizes work at home as an economic activity" eligible for Social

Security, while assuming the authority to promote industry and agriculture in ways that would fulfill these promises. The new constitution requires a plebiscite on any treaty that would infringe on national sovereignty, including free-trade agreements, establishes transparent mechanisms for citizens to recall politicians and hold referenda to pass or rescind legislation, and protects the right of civil disobedience in pursuit of justice.

The outgoing political order, along with the country's business associations, opposed the new constitution, but dissent, though visceral, remained unfocused during the first few years of Chávez's tenure. The country's fair-skinned upper and shrinking middle classes had been on the lookout for their own Fujimori since the Caracazo, and if Chávez wasn't willing to rule on their behalf they assumed he would quickly fall. And there were deep divisions between gung-ho global entrepreneurs—men like Gustavo Cisneros, the owner of the Venevisión TV network and the junior partner to AOL, Coca-Cola, and Pizza Hut—who wanted to finish the job of opening up Venezuela to foreign capital and those invested in the previous party system, bloated state bureaucracy, and privileged sectors of organized labor who wanted to return to an easy life of high oil rents. Since neither of these two options appealed to a now unleashed electorate, there was little they could do to stop the new charter's momentum. But Chávez's opponents began to draw together toward the end of 2001, after the government passed a series of laws that further formalized their disenfranchisement. These included a land reform, efforts to democratize unions and political parties, and, most critically, a move to place PDVSA, which had been run by an autonomous group of technocrats committed to its privatization, under government control and use its revenue for social spending and non-oil sector investment.

#### **The Elites Fight Back, yet Chavista Ethic Grows**

If the first three years of Chávez's administration were spent in an effort to change Venezuela's political rules, the following three years were a full-on fight by the old regime to prevent the rules from going into effect. Blind to Chávez's popularity among the heretofore invisible urban poor and counseled by hard-liners in the Bush administration, the opposition launched a series of maximalist actions to drive him from power, including an April 2002 coup attempt, a two-month oil strike that cost the country \$6 billion, and an August 2004 recall vote. Chávez beat back this campaign and emerged from the crisis years greatly strengthened, with PDVSA firmly under state control, his victory in the recall vote confirmed by the Organization of American States, the European Community, and the Carter Center, his adversaries in the military, police, and unions removed from office, and his bond with the poor strengthened.

The corporate print and TV media, which not only sided with Chávez's enemies but roused them to action, lost its credibility as a tribune of public trust and could credibly be dismissed by government supporters as an instrument of a self-interested and revisionist oligarchy. More critically, polls reveal that an overwhelming majority of citizens, regardless of their opinion of Chávez, consider the new political arrangement put into place between 1999 and 2001 to be lawful. Recent surveys report that while roughly 39 percent of Venezuelans disapprove of their president, the opposition's core support has shriveled to less than ten percent of voters.

Yet as Chávez's position has become more secure, Washington has stepped up its efforts to stoke the opposition's militancy. Bush's new national-security strategy specifically identifies Chávez as a threat, a "demagogue awash in oil

money" seeking to "undermine democracy" and "destabilize the region," while Donald Rumsfeld recently compared the Venezuelan president to Hitler, noting that both men came to power through the ballot. Because of high oil prices, Chávez has more room to maneuver than do other Latin American presidents, leading Washington to look for new ways to constrain him. Last year, Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice proposed that the OAS expand its Cold War mandate as a mutual-defense alliance against extra-hemispheric threats to "monitor" the internal politics of member nations to ensure they adhered to the norms of democratic procedure. Latin Americans voted down the proposal, understanding it to be an attempt by the United States to isolate Venezuela, but it is now part of Rice's stump speech on Latin America to warn "leaders who are elected democratically" to "govern democratically."

#### **CIA and Its Subsidiaries vs. Democracy and Sovereignty**

Democracy in Latin America has long been infamously fragile, a liability that social scientists often like to blame on an authoritarian political culture. Yet it didn't help that that culture developed in the shadow of a world power that repeatedly sacrificed political liberalism for "hemispheric stability." Throughout the Cold War, the CIA habitually subverted the press, legislature, labor movement, and military whenever an executive began to take sovereignty too seriously. A long list of Latin American presidents, from the familiar Salvador Allende in Chile to the less-well-known Ramón Villeda Morales in Honduras, lost Washington's favor for one reason or another and then found the pillars of pluralism pulled out from under them.

Washington today prefers to outsource much of this "democracy promotion" work to organizations such as the quasi-private but publicly funded International Republican Institute. The IRI recently came to prominence in the United States when *The New York Times* reported that in Haiti it worked to unify President Jean-Bertrand Aristide's opponents, counseling them not to negotiate with him in order to provoke a conflict and force his ouster, which is what happened in 2004. But the IRI has been well known in Venezuela since 2002, when the story came out that it had helped coordinate the activities of a number of groups involved in the destabilization campaign leading to the April coup. The IRI presents itself as part of a mainstream democratic consensus, yet even as the OAS and every other Latin American and European country were condemning the brief overthrow of Chávez, the IRI's president was issuing a press release praising the "bravery" of the plotters and practically claiming credit for their fleeting success. "The Institute," he wrote, "has served as a bridge between the nation's political parties and all civil-society groups to help Venezuelans forge a new democratic future."

The IRI, along with similar organizations such as the Center for International Private Enterprise, continues to work closely with some of the most unbending anti-Chávez militants, including those who last December, ripping a page out of the Haitian playbook, boycotted Venezuela's congressional elections. Going into the vote, polls predicted that the Chavistas would increase their slim legislative majority from 52 percent to about 60 percent, a significant but by no means suffocating margin. Yet in a move that *The New York Times* editorial page—no friend of Chávez—called "petulant idiocy," opposition leaders, deciding that 40 percent wasn't worth the candle, withdrew from the election, even though OAS representatives successfully lobbied the National Election Commission to meet their demands for stricter voting secrecy. As this December's presidential elections ap-

proach [BCA Readers, are you signed up to observe them? See BCA Dispatch for September. Call 617-266-8687 —Ed.], surveys have consistently reported that 60 percent of Venezuelans both approve of Chávez and believe his government, including the legislature (now completely controlled by Chavistas because of the boycott), to be legitimate.

#### Opposition Splits into New Parties

The public-opinion numbers have split the opposition. New political parties untainted by the rot of the old "partyarchy," such as Primero Justicia, have signaled their willingness to participate in the coming vote, hoping to establish themselves as a responsible minority able to step in and govern when Chavismo falters. But so far they have been pressured into taking a hard-line stance by a more feverish "National Resistance" faction, made up of AD and COPEI holdovers and upper-class ideologues who have nothing to lose and everything to gain by forcing polarization. Adding to the potential for confrontation, there is also a move to again invoke the constitution's referendum clause, as the opposition did in the recall vote, this time to allow inhabitants of the oil-rich state of Zulia [see article below on Local Councils —Ed.], a conservative stronghold, to vote on secession from the federal government.

Chavista officials say they are aware of the danger of unchecked power, both to their own legitimacy and to their professed goal of building institutional stability. Yet they insist that the opposition must give up its attempt to drive the president from power. All of the controversy surrounding the government's prosecution of those who participated in the coup and oil strike, and its attempts to regulate the rabidly anti-government corporate media and to monitor civil organizations that take money from the United States turns on this distinction. "I am a democrat," Venezuelan Vice President José Vicente Rangel said recently. "I've spent 50 years in the opposition. I've been exiled, jailed, persecuted, and I know the importance of an opposition . . . If only we had an opposition that was sane and not one with a knife up its sleeve ready to stab you in the back. But we have an anti-democratic opposition . . . It is irrational and transnational."

#### Controlled Oil Prod'n Ups Social Programs & Economy

Considering how well so many Venezuelans are doing under his administration, irrational seems an apt description of the elite hatred of Chávez. Since the government won the fight for control of PDVSA, the economy has grown rapidly: by 18 percent in 2004, and by 9.9 percent in 2005. Currency reserves and current-account surpluses are high, inflation has remained under control, and unemployment has been halved from the height of the crisis in 2003, when it stood at 20 percent. Overall poverty has fallen to its lowest levels in over a decade, and purchasing power is up across the board, rising 43 percent last year among the poorest fifth of the population. General Motors reports that car sales hit record numbers last year.

Critics are loath to give Chávez any points for this boom; they attribute it to skyrocketing oil prices. But one of his first diplomatic initiatives upon taking office was to end Venezuela's habit of pumping more oil than was allowed under OPEC's production quotas and to work with Iran and other petroleum-exporting nations to orchestrate an increase in world prices. The government has diverted billions of dollars of PDVSA revenue and Central Bank reserves to diversify the economy and to create a sustainable agricultural sector. Even as the petroleum-related portion of the economy fell a bit in the last quarter of last year, non-oil-related growth accelerated, suggesting that government

efforts to diversify the economy are having some effect. Last year, manufacturing was up nine percent while the commercial, construction, and communication sectors were each up 20 percent. Domestic finance has grown 30 percent, partly the result of a new law requiring that nearly a third of all loans go to low-income mortgages and small-scale agriculture, which has led to sharp spikes in deposits and lending. (The state's underwriting of credit to small businesses and cooperatives has also contributed to this trend.) Chávez's purchase of billions of dollars of Argentine and Ecuadorian debt has likewise benefited national banks, which buys the debt from the government and then resells it on the open market for a profit.

#### Complex Economy, Protagonist Democracy

But it is never just the economy. Chávez elicits hostility not only because he spends more on the poor—a record \$17 billion this year—but because of how he spends it. Much of the government's social expenditure is budgeted not through the country's notoriously corrupt and inefficient state ministries but through newly created "missions." Misión Robinson has significantly reduced illiteracy; Misión Barrio Adentro, a country-wide network of clinics, provides free, high-quality health care to the poor; and Misión Mercal distributes subsidized food and household goods to over 11 million Venezuelans. To nurture what Chavista intellectuals call a "protagonist democracy," the government channels welfare, property titles, and even municipal services through new grass-roots organizations such as urban land committees, peasant cooperatives, local citizens' councils, community banks, prenatal and day-care centers, and independent TV and radio stations. In Caricuao, for example, a sprawling shantytown in southwestern Caracas, 72 "health committees" made up of community activists carry out Misión Barrio Adentro's preventive health program at the household level. What is happening in Venezuela, in other words, is a fusion of the bottom-up civil-society model of social change that has evolved throughout Latin America over the last two decades with an older, state-directed vision of development and wealth redistribution.

The opposition charges that Chávez is building a political patronage machine, cynically using the language of "participatory democracy" to mask high-level government corruption and cloak the consolidation of unchecked power. A recent survey of activists in poor neighborhoods conducted by an economist and political scientist from Brigham Young University did raise concerns that too much organizing was dependent on a charismatic identification with Chávez, which, they felt, could undermine democratic institutionalization. Yet they also found a significant degree of both financial and political independence from national-level organizations. A large majority of their sample were committed to "liberal conceptions of democracy and held pluralistic norms," believed in peaceful methods of conflict resolution, and worked to ensure that their organizations functioned with high levels of "horizontal or non-hierarchical" democracy. In fact, there is a good deal of competitive pluralism among grass-roots organizations. In Venezuela it is common to find committed Chavistas who not only are not members of Chávez's official party, the Movimiento Quinta República, but are openly hostile to it—which, at least in principle, helps keep it responsive and honest. This stands in sharp contrast to Nicaragua in the 1980s, where it would have been impossible for someone to oppose the Sandinistas and still consider himself or herself a revolutionary. Whatever the potential for abuse, a mobilized citizenry has saved Chávez more than once, while the missions are so suc-

cessful that even a representative of the Inter-American Development Bank has praised them for striking "at the heart of exclusion."

One gets the sense when visiting Venezuela that the country, despite the revival of the regulatory state, is in the middle of an economic and political free-for-all. Construction sites are blooming throughout Caracas, and street trade is vibrant. Opposition newspapers publish daily jeremiads, often in response to something Chávez said in a multi-hour speech the previous day. In the barrios, activists carry on with their particular contributions—drug rehabilitation, popular education, cooperatives, battered-women shelters, exercise classes for senior citizens—to what they call *el proceso*. Government supporters and opponents hold each other responsible for a number of still-unsolved killings that took place during the April 2002 coup attempt. But compared to the political repression that plagues neighboring Andean countries, Venezuela's revolution has been remarkably tolerant and peaceful. If there has been violence, it has arguably been mostly directed against Chavistas. Last month, Venezuela's peasant federation claimed that over the last few years, paramilitaries working on behalf of landlords have assassinated 164 rural activists involved in land disputes.

Critics are right when they say that high oil prices help Chávez hold it all together, allowing him to mediate between those within his coalition who want to accelerate social transformation and those who hope to make a permanent peace with domestic and international capital—not unlike the way the hero of *Doña Barbara* reconciles conflicting national values. But even if oil stays expensive, it is unclear how long he can maintain this balancing act. The success of many of his initiatives will bring new demands and new conflicts, and without an opposition to provide institutional ballast more political polarization is likely to come. Governing without opposition is "very boring," says Vice President Rangel. It is also very dangerous, which is what, it seems, Mr. Danger is banking on.

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## **Mahatma Gandhi, Superstar Coming Back Big in Modern India**

*by Justin Huggler, The Independent (UK), 16 Sept 2006*

*He's a huge box-office hit. He's at the top of the Indian music charts. He's on the front cover of magazines. One hundred years after Gandhi first called on his compatriots to resist white colonial rule without violence, he is back in fashion once more.*

INDIANS THIS WEEK HAVE BEEN REMEMBERING THE DAY which changed the fate of their nation for decades to come. A hundred years ago, on 11 September, 1906, a young British-trained barrister named Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi addressed a meeting of 3,000 Indians in the Empire Theatre building in Johannesburg and asked them to take an oath to resist white colonial rule without violence. It was the birth of the modern non-violent resistance movement— and it has not been forgotten.

Suddenly the Mahatma is back in fashion in India. Two years ago, it was unthinkable that the centenary of a speech by Gandhi, seen as a relic of the past by most young Indians,

would be so much as noticed in a country that was obsessed not with figures from its past, but with its headlong rush to embrace modernity.

But today Gandhi has caught the Indian imagination all over again. He appears as a character in the biggest Bollywood hit of the summer - a comedy, but one that even his admirers accept does not degrade his message. His writings are bestsellers again. He is at the top of India's music charts too, with a tape of his Hindu devotional songs, or bhajans. A new Gandhi museum in Delhi is opening its doors to 2,000 visitors a day.

His sayings are visible all over India's cities. People are openly displaying them. The sunshades across the rear windows of cars proclaim "There is no way to peace; peace is the way". Young Indians are wandering around in T-shirts that say "Be the change you want to see in the world", complete with the image of Gandhi's trademark circular-lensed spectacles.

Outlook magazine, India's answer to Time and Newsweek, even featured Gandhi on its front cover this week - which is more often adorned with besuited and self-satisfied looking businessmen. The previous week's cover, by comparison, showed high-flying students at India's business schools leaping in the air.

Something remarkable is happening in India. Just as the world is beginning to see the country as an emerging economy obsessed with copying all things Western, and ever more hooked on consumerism, India has rediscovered another voice from its past, a voice that spoke of a different vision for his country.

When I arrived in India two-and-a-half years ago, it was very different. I tried to ask Indians at a dinner party about Gandhi. "Oh, we don't think about him," I was told. "He's just someone whose statues are around the country and whose face is on the money." Not any more. It's not just on the cinema screens and in the CD shops that Mahatma Gandhi is back. Thousands of young Indians are joining Gandhian youth organisations, or flocking to summer camps at Gandhian ashrams. Teenagers are volunteering to work in slums and poor villages. Not just Gandhi's image, but his principles and the way of life he taught are catching on in India again.

Some are ascribing the sudden renewal of interest in the Mahatma to the movie *Lage Raho Munnabhai*, or *Carry On Munnabhai* (the British *Carry On* films are bizarrely popular in India). The big Bollywood hit of the year, the film depicts Munnabhai, a small-time Bombay goonda, or gangster, and his attempts to win the heart of a radio announcer. After he crams for a radio quiz on Gandhi's life to impress her, the spirit of Gandhi appears to Munnabhai and advises him on how to cope with the obstacles in his life without violence.

The film has won universal praise for its success in incorporating a completely uncompromised portrayal of Gandhi and his teachings into a seriously funny comedy. One reviewer described it as "something to watch before you die".

But other observers say *Carry On Munnabhai* didn't start the wave of new interest in Gandhi - it was part of it. They say there have been signs of growing interest in Gandhi for some years. Publishers have been astonished to see translations of his books in some of India's regional languages sell hundreds of thousands of copies over the past five years. The number of applications to Gandhi's estate for the rights to publish his works has doubled in the past two years.

The outside world never really lost interest in Gandhi. The British may have mocked him in their cinema newsreels during

the early years of his campaign for independence, but they soon learnt to take him seriously. Such is the power of Gandhi's message that, even from beyond the grave, he was able to demand international respect for his country even during the long years when it was an economic basket-case, mired in hopeless poverty.

He inspired Martin Luther King in the American civil rights movement, and Nelson Mandela in the struggle against apartheid in South Africa. But in his own country, Gandhi faded into the background. As the English-language Mumbai daily DNA put it in a leader this week, he became "a largely distant and overwringing figure" embedded in our collective consciousness but in a non-relevant, non-immediate way. "Yes, we know he is the father of the nation, we see his photographs on rupee notes and we all remember getting a holiday on his birthday, but what exactly did he say or do?" An "open letter" to Gandhi in the Indian Express put it bluntly: "To be honest we got too absorbed in our progress and technology to miss you. Our children never made any reference to you and we were too caught up in ourselves to notice that they were growing up without an idol."

But now Gandhi is back. As to why he has suddenly returned to the popular consciousness, observers have many answers. For some, it was about young Indians disinterring the human Gandhi behind the image that had been preserved in aspic by his followers, more monument than man.

"Gandhi was ill-served by everyone, including the Gandhians," Mushirul Hassan, a historian, told *Outlook* magazine. "They deified him and buried him in institutions. He was conveniently portrayed as a saint so they wouldn't be threatened by his ideology." A Annamalai, of the Gandhi Study Circle, one of more than 150 Gandhi youth organisations in India, said: "Young people may not be able to relate to a dhoti-clad Gandhi. But tell them how he was a millionaire London-returned barrister who threw away everything to fight for justice and equality, and they begin at once to appreciate him."

Suddenly Gandhi is an alternative voice in an India that has become obsessed with material wealth and advancement. "Corner offices are earned" say the deeply dispiriting billboards above Delhi, next to endless advertisements for mobile phones and cars that 95 per cent of Indians could never dream of affording. For young people in a country that has become so success-driven that sixth-form students who don't get the right grades commit suicide, Gandhi's anti-materialist message still has resonance.

The Rashtriya Suva Sanganathan, a national Gandhian youth movement, has even gone so far as to get rid of the traditional symbols of Gandhianism, the homespun dhoti, or loincloth, and the spinning wheel. People who see these as irrelevant are calling themselves new Gandhians. As one, Leeladhar Manik Gada, puts it: "What does it matter if a man wears pants, shirts, uses a motorbike rather than walk, so long as he gets the job done?" Others credit the new interest in Gandhi to the appeal of satyagraha, the philosophy of non-violent resistance he preached into a world that is racked by violence.

Under the headline "Gandhi is not history", Vinoy Lal wrote in *The Hindu*: "Many in Gandhi's own lifetime doubted its efficacy. Many more have since claimed that the unspeakable cruelties of the 20th century render non-violent resistance an effete, if noble, idea. [But] the advocates of non-violent resistance who are dismissed as woolly-headed idealists should, on the contrary, ask the proponents of violence to demonstrate that violence can

produce enduring good." In its leader, DNA asked: "Will those non-violent tactics work today, say with terrorists? We can't say for sure. But knowing Gandhi, he certainly would have given it a shot."

These are not just questions of far away places on television screens for Indians. In the past 12 months, India has suffered major bombings in Mumbai, Delhi, and Hinduism's holiest city, Varanasi, in which scores of people have died.

There is another possible explanation for Gandhi's appeal: the rise of Hindu nationalism. In a country that has been racked for the past decade and more by communal violence between Hindus and Muslims, often set off by far-right Hindu groups, Gandhi offers a different vision of Hinduism. Only four years ago, in Gandhi's home state, Gujarat, more than 2,000 people, most of them Muslims, were massacred in Hindu-Muslim riots. This week, the Bombay High Court has been giving its verdict in the trials over the 1993 Bombay bombings, in which more than 250 people died and which were widely believed to be Muslim revenge for Hindu atrocities in religious riots a year earlier.

On the back of this religious chauvinism, Hindu nationalists are still in power in many states, and make up the main opposition nationally.

In contrast to this stands Gandhi, who amid tensions between Hindus and Muslims in his lifetime, told his supporters: "I am a Muslim, I am a Hindu, I am a Christian, I am a Jew - and so are all of you." It is hard to imagine Tony Blair having the moral courage to stand up and say the same.

It is too early to say whether the renewal of Indian interest in Gandhi will last, or whether it is just this summer's fad, fuelled by a hit movie. But, judging by the enormous sales of his books across India, whatever big city society moves onto next, out there in the vast hinterland of India that he loved, Gandhi's message is getting out again.

When Gandhi summoned those 3,000 Indians to the Empire Theatre, he started a movement that changed the world without a shot being fired. Yet what sparked that meeting is often forgotten: it was a move by South Africa's colonial rulers to have all the Indians fingerprinted, which was seen at the time as tantamount to criminalising them. There is an irony that, amid today's anti-terror legislation, it would barely raise an eyebrow.

## Venezuela Grassroots Revolution Local Councils Trump Old Bureaucracy

by Renaud Lambert, *Le Monde Diplomatique*, Sept 2006

**J**UAN GUERRA, A LORRY DRIVER FROM ZULIA STATE, knew that he looked out of place in an office in his dirty jeans and three-day beard. But he had spent a week crossing Venezuela and he would not be intimidated by a civil servant from the national assembly. He slammed his fist on the table and said: "No, we are not asking, we are demanding that the comrade deputy transmit our complaint to the citizen president."

Juan and his colleague Jhonny Plogar represent 700 lorry drivers. In 2000 they filed a complaint against their employers, the coal haulage companies Cootransmapa, Coozugavol and Coomaxdi. According to the plaintiffs, the companies "misused their cooperative status to benefit from tax exemptions and state contracts". Over the past five years the two men have been shunted from office to office and Jhonny has a bulging file of copies of letters written to ministries, town halls, the state government and the president.

When Venezuela's National Superintendence of Cooperatives (Sunacoop) finally withdrew the companies' cooperative status, the national coal mining company continued to use their services. The Zulia state governor and presidential candidate, Manuel Rosales, who signed a decree dismantling all bodies set up during the 2002 coup, is in no hurry to put Sunacoop's decision into effect. The bosses are using the time to get organised. Hired killers known as sicarios will soon be threatening people.

This is a common situation in Venezuela. When the two men reached the national assembly to present their case, they found a crowd of other plaintiffs with similar cases. All support Hugo Chávez, the citizen president, and all demand an end to bureaucracy and corruption. They are hostile towards a government that they consider inefficient at best, reactionary at worst. Chávez himself has said: "Our internal enemies, the most dangerous enemies of the revolution, are bureaucracy and corruption".<sup>1</sup>

This language has been used before to blame incompetent activists for not applying presidential policies correctly. But the "Bolivarian process" stresses popular participation as a means of transforming the state apparatus. In Venezuela it is called "the revolution in the revolution".

Before Chávez was elected in 1998, two parties shared power for 40 years: the Venezuelan Christian Democratic party (Copei), and the social democratic party, Democratic Action (AD). They were adept at using petrodollars to deal with problems. They handed out government posts to calm social unrest but had to comply with the neoliberal ideology of the North and the need to limit public policies. The only way to offset the bloated state apparatus was to organise its inefficiency. With Venezuela's social divisions, skilled civil servants often come from backgrounds resistant to social change, sometimes because of ignorance of the conditions in which most Venezuelans live. Gilberto Gimenez, director of the foreign minister's private office, has said his solution was: "Diplomats will be promoted only if they spend two weeks in the barrios (working class districts)." He was smiling when he said it.

Few political leaders are able to take an active role in transforming the state from within. Before the foreign minister, Ali Rodríguez,<sup>2</sup> got the job, six others had tried their hand since 1998.

#### **Not a political party**

The Fifth Republic Movement that brought Chávez to power is not a political party. After 1994 (3) it grew out of a coalition of leftwing parties and former guerrilla movements disgruntled with their leaders, who some thought settled too comfortably into the society they had struggled against. Young activists trained by AD and Copei quickly realised that the Chávez candidature would open up new ways to reach power and many joined his ranks.

In November 2001, when Chávez tried to pass 49 decrees to start social reform, Luis Miquilena, who had been responsible for bringing the Venezuelan left and Chávez together, decided the decrees were too radical. He resigned as interior minister (4) and his followers in the National Assembly followed. "We lost a legislature," explained sociologist Edgar Figuera, "They were passing those laws on the cheap. Venezuela is still stuck in the legal framework of the Fourth Republic" (5). Until the country could train its activists, a revolutionary project was being built with tools inherited from a state devoted to perpetuating the neoliberal model.

At the December 2005 parliamentary elections pro-government parties won all 167 seats in the national assembly and no longer had any excuse to delay legislative reforms. The 75% abstention rate in the elections may have been the result of a boycott by the opposition, realising that it would be beaten and preferring to abstain. Even so, it revealed dissatisfaction with a common failing in the revolutionary process, one with which Venezuela must deal: the replacement of a bourgeois elite by a political elite that has the same shortcomings and distances itself from the daily realities of the people.

Without a real party, a solid state, enough revolutionary activists or, for the moment, a coherent social movement, the Bolivarian revolution in Venezuela is no different from any other experiment in Latin America. Chávez said in 2004: "The people must be organised and take part in a new participative, social state so that the old rigid, bureaucratic, inefficient state is overthrown." He was referring to "missions", programmes managed by the community, that bypassed the old state to deal with social emergencies. The creation of communal councils this April is an important step towards building the new state and the type of local government on which it will be based.

A small house shelters the Unit of Popular Power (UPP) at Vela de Coro from the sun that scorches the Paraguana peninsula. A small poster explains that communal councils "are a push for participative democracy, for assisting social movements in their quest for solutions to collective problems and paying back the nation's social debt". Here, the town hall took the initiative to help set up these organisations. Xiomara Pirela, UPP coordinator, said: "We just supply the tools or help in the event of conflict. Only a citizen's assembly can make decisions."

#### **The councils at work**

The councils' task is to coordinate and integrate activities of local missions, urban land and cultural committees. Pedro Morales, director for the Caracas region of Fundacomun, the organisation that finances the councils, said they do not "represent, but speak for the citizens' assembly, which is the ultimate decision-making body".

Xiomara Pirela showed us a pile of maps, some drawn in felt-tipped pen. "People start by making a social sketch of their community: houses, inhabitants, their income, infrastructure, social problems." This work contributes to the "participative diagnosis" and highlights priorities: water supplies, drainage, a health centre. On that basis the communal council suggests projects to citizens' assemblies, passes them to relevant authorities and manages resources allocated through a communal, cooperative bank. Each project can get up to \$15,300; applications for more expensive projects can be made to public planning councils or town halls for the following year.

In Barinas, Mérida, Táchira and Trujillo, the four most advanced states of the Occidente region, more than \$44.6m has already been paid for some 3,000 projects. After 2007 half the money allocated to the Intergovernmental Decentralisation Fund and the Special Economic Assignments Law for mines and hydrocarbons, nearly \$1.2bn, will be earmarked to finance the councils. Town halls and states that used to benefit from these funds will have to make do with what is left over.

Some mayors are tempted to push their sympathisers for election to the councils, although it is illegal. According to Pedro Morales: "The councils are not only a response to the problems of bureaucracy and corruption; they also increase the accountability of people who were used to letting the state decide for them and then complain about the result." The population is

more than ready to take on the responsibilities.

On 16 July Block 45, a huge apartment building in the 23 de Enero barrio of western Caracas, leapt a political hurdle. After half a dozen preparatory assemblies, they elected a council. A resident pointed to the garbage piled carelessly around the block. "This building is known as one of the filthiest in all of South America," she said, then added proudly, "but now people will get a grip on the situation."

#### 'No vote, no meals!'

Something similar happened further up the hill in the El Observatorio district. A plastic sheet pinned in a corner served as a voting booth, a poster reminded voters "balloting must be direct and secret" and a queue formed in front of the cardboard urns, shown to be empty before voting began. As is so often true, the local women had taken matters in hand. The stakes were considerable and the law clear. Notices said: "If less than 20% of the community takes part (6) the election will be invalid and no complaints will be accepted afterwards. The women were confident: "The men will come," one said. "I've told my husband: no vote, then no meals, no laundry, nothing!"

In a few months thousands of councils have been or are being set up. Those that existed before the law was passed are gradually being legalised. There are already more than 500 in Caracas and 50,000 are expected overall. Upper-class districts are also taking part — "that is, when people agree to provide information on salaries", said a resident of Prado del Este. Xiomara Paraguán, an El Observatorio council member, said: "At least they're taking part. Who would have thought that possible a few years ago?"

Why did the government wait seven years to set up the councils? Engels Riveira of the Camunare Rojo council said: "If the mayors and governors had done their jobs properly, we wouldn't have needed the councils. In a way it's thanks to them."

The rush to set up the councils shows that they cater to a need for democratic process. Participation had already been encouraged in the workplace, as co-management, self-management or cooperatives (the number of these shot up from under 1,000 in 1999 to more than 100,000). There were local cultural committees. But political arrangements were still needed.

Now the community is the basic structural unit of government of the new state, legally defined as 200-400 families in urban areas, around 20 in the countryside and from 10 up for the indigenous population. The Spanish political analyst Juan Carlos Monedero observed that the main reason 20th-century socialism failed was a lack of participation by the people. Communal councils may be instrumental in the construction of Venezuela's 21st-century socialism. "If we get the money," said Xiomara Paraguán. Another El Observatorio council member countered, "If the money doesn't come, we'll go and get it."

Since the elections things are moving in El Observatorio. Paraguán attended a workshop on social projects and showed off her diploma. All council members will have similar training.

Faced with the inertia of some bureaucrats and politicians, people have to rely on the vigour of Contraloría (social control), a citizens' watch that defends the process. Councils may be more finely tuned version of the principle and help Venezuelans get the means to exercise co-responsibility with the state.

Juan Guerra is a grassroots expression of Contraloría. After he finally got to meet a deputy, he said: "Revolution is like an iron fence protecting the bourgeoisie. If we, the people, allow the rust to accumulate, the fence will fall."

#### NOTES

- (1) On Hugo Chávez's Sunday evening chat show, "Aló Presidente", 5 February 2006.
- (2) Rodríguez resigned for health reasons on 8 August.
- (3) The year Chávez was freed from prison after an attempted coup on 4 February 1992.
- (4) Before taking part in the April 2002 coup.
- (5) The 1999 constitution established the Fifth Republic.
- (6) Anyone over the age of 15 who has lived in the district for more than six months is entitled to vote.

## Tomorrow's Good World It's Already Happening

by Gar Alperovitz, *Mother Jones*, Jan/Feb 2006

**W**HERE IS AMERICA HEADED? It's not hard to find pessimists. Author and former Nixon adviser Kevin Phillips believes the nation is dominated by a new "plutocracy" in which wealth reaches "beyond its own realm" to control government at all levels. The writer Robert Kaplan predicts that our society could soon "resemble the oligarchies of ancient Athens and Sparta." Sociologist Bertram Gross has predicted a "friendly fascism." Imagine what another 9/11 would do.

It's also not hard to find optimists. Bush is in trouble, the GOP is struggling to recruit candidates in many races, and liberals are beginning to smell blood. After all, if 70,000 votes had gone the other way in Ohio—and if voters hadn't been forced to wait in line for endless hours—we might have a Democrat in the White House right now. The Dean campaign, America Coming Together, MoveOn, Wellstone Action, and many other efforts show new energies beneath the surface. The Iraq war is becoming increasingly unpopular. The pendulum will surely swing.

#### Union Decay and Corporate Avarice

My own view is that both these judgments are almost certainly wrong. Both assume that the crisis we face is a political one, pure and simple. But what if it is something different? There are reasons to believe we are entering what can only be called a systemic crisis. And the emerging possibilities are not easily described by the conventional wisdom of either left or right.

The institutional power arrangements that have set the terms of reference for the American political-economic system over roughly the last half century are dissolving before our eyes—especially those that once constrained corporate economic and political power. First, organized labor's capacity to check the giant corporation, both on the shop floor and in national politics, has all but disappeared as union membership has collapsed from 35 percent of the labor force in the mid-1950s to a mere 7.9 percent in the private sector today. Throughout the world, at the heart of virtually every major progressive political movement has been a powerful labor movement. Liberalism in general, and the welfare state in particular, would have been impossible without union money and organizing. The decline of labor is one of the central reasons traditional liberal strategies are in decline.

Second, globalization has further enhanced corporate power, as the threat to move jobs elsewhere erodes unions' bargaining capacity, while at the same time working to reduce taxation and regulation. (The corporate share of the federal tax burden has declined in eerie lockstep with union membership—from 35 percent in 1945 to 10.1 percent in 2004.) This in turn has intensified the nationwide fiscal crisis, further undercutting

efforts to use public resources to solve public problems ranging from poverty and hunger to energy conservation and even simple repair jobs such as fixing decaying roads, bridges, and water systems throughout the nation.

### **Dixie Rules Again**

Third—and most important—the Republican “Southern Strategy” has now completed the transformation of a once (nominally) Democratic South that at least voted for Democratic presidents into a reactionary bastion of corporate power based on implicit racism and explicitly religious divide-and-conquer fervor. Bill Clinton’s brief moment occurred just before the full consolidation of this Southern stranglehold. Very few observers have grasped the full implications of this shift: The United States is the only advanced political economy where the working class is fundamentally—not marginally—divided by race. It is also the only one where a massive geographic quadrant is now essentially beyond the reach of traditional progressive politics. George Bush, though extreme, is no accident; nor can the core political relationships that now define the South be easily unraveled. Hence, yes, a Democrat might be elected president one day. But no, such a shift is not going to nurture an era of renewed liberal or progressive reform. The system of power that once allowed this no longer exists. Period.

Some who have sensed the far-reaching character of these system-wide changes have despaired of any hope for the future. Perhaps the end of one set of structural relationships—the ones we have come to take for granted in our own lifetimes—spells the end of all potentially positive systemic possibilities. Perhaps. But I am a political economist and a historian, one for whom the best way to understand current events is to think of them as an ongoing movie, not a snapshot. What is interesting is not simply the current reel, but the previous one, and above all what both suggest about the next one. Even though I think times are likely to get worse before they get better, let me explain why I am a prudent optimist about the long haul—even allowing for the profound changes taking place (and in some ways because of them).

There have been other times when change seemed impossible. During the McCarthy era of the mid-1950s, for instance, they shot anything that moved politically, especially in my (and Joseph McCarthy’s) home state of Wisconsin. Fear erased any suggestion of progressive ideas, and anyone who dared to even say as much was obviously a fool. What came next, of course, were the multiple—and totally unpredicted—political explosions of the 1960s. Clearly, those who viewed the 1950s simply as a depressing snapshot were missing something very important.

Similarly, we tend to recall Martin Luther King Jr. and the great civil rights moment of the 1960s as if they’d arisen easily, almost naturally. We forget that for many decades prior, there was very little to suggest the possibility of momentous change. Those who thought otherwise, who did attempt to organize in the South, risked their lives. The challenge of George Bush pales in comparison with the challenge of Mississippi in the 1940s and 1950s.

### **Change Can Come Suddenly, Starts Locally**

The idea that environmental concern might one day become important also seemed far-fetched only a few decades ago. When I directed legislative work for Senator Gaylord Nelson, the founder of Earth Day, everyone knew environmentalism was a political non-starter—until, seemingly out of nowhere, a powerful movement forced Richard Nixon to create the EPA and sign the Clean Air and Clean Water Acts. We also tend to forget that the

feminist movement produced what became the most important cultural revolution in modern history after decades of seeming quietude once the franchise was achieved in 1920. Even more broadly: The Soviet Union collapsed, apartheid retreated abruptly, the French Revolution overthrew the monarchy, a handful of minor American colonies defeated the great British Empire—all against huge odds, and all unexpected by the experts.

Such reminders of historical possibility do not guarantee that a future progressive revival is building up beneath today’s surface calm. They simply suggest that the pessimists may—or may not—be right, and that those with their noses glued to the window glass of the immediate present commonly miss the changing weather patterns in the distance.

It is the nature of a systemic crisis to create pain—from loss of jobs and lack of health care to trouble paying for college or even secure housing—especially (as Katrina revealed) at the state and local levels. Which also means that this—not national politics, where progressives so often feel impotent—is the place to look for longer-term hope of change. In almost every era of American history, the ideas, experiments, programs, and organizing that ultimately fueled major societywide reform were developed first at the state and local levels—and they were usually developed, we might add, out of pain.

Moreover, in almost every instance, ordinary people—not saints, not national leaders—were central to the process. Poor farmers in Mississippi slept with shotguns next to their beds during the civil rights era. Nineteenth-century women organized to demand the right to vote at a time when the mere idea seemed laughable—and slowly, agonizingly succeeded in state after state until they built up enough momentum to enact constitutional changes. The workers and farmers who laid the groundwork for the populist and progressive eras faced organized violence, Pinkerton goons, armed troops deployed against strikers, but in the end they, too, achieved system-wide reforms. And during the hysteria of the McCarthy era, ordinary people in Wisconsin—teachers, college students, factory workers—quietly laid the foundation for an ultimately successful “Joe Must Go” effort. I vividly remember one of my high school English teachers stuffing pamphlets into mailboxes at night. He would have lost his job had he been discovered—not for participating in politics, which at least in theory was his right, but for daring to defy a senator who brooked no challenge.

It is a commonplace of serious historical research worldwide that the unsung actions of people where they live and work are central to large-order change. Regulatory commissions for railroads and other industries, minimum-wage laws, food-and-drug-safety laws, the estate tax, the eight-hour workday, Social Security and related forms of public insurance, child labor laws, laws to increase factory safety, workers’ compensation, the preservation of national parks and other conservation measures, and many, many other national policies at the heart of modern American reality built upon precedents first developed and refined by local citizen effort.

### **Quietly the People: Employee Ownership, CDCs, Muni Enterprises, Land Trusts, Pension Assets, Living Wage...**

Is there anything important and potentially system-changing going on at the grassroots today? Yes—but you have to look beyond conventional media reporting, and even beyond the traditional New Deal and progressive policy paradigms. One of the most important trends involves an array of new economic institutions that transform the ownership of wealth in ways that

benefit "small publics," groups of citizens whose efforts feed into the well-being of the community as a whole.

Here are a few little-known facts: More people are now involved in some 11,500 companies wholly or substantially owned by employees than are members of unions in the private sector. There are more than 4,000 nonprofit community development corporations that build housing and create jobs in cities across the nation. Both Democratic and Republican city officials have begun to establish municipally-owned public companies to make money for their communities (and often to solve environmental problems). Numerous quasi-public land trusts that stabilize housing prices now exist. Cities and states regularly invest in job-creating efforts, often using large-scale public pension assets. In Alaska, the state's Permanent Fund invests oil revenues and provides each citizen with dividends. In Alabama, the public employee retirement system finances a broad range of job-stabilizing and moneymaking industries, including many employee-owned businesses. Numerous other local and state activist efforts to shift the way wealth accumulates and moves around are under way, from "living wage" campaigns to Wal-Mart challenges and beyond.

Not surprisingly, in case after case, ordinary citizens have taken the lead in developing these new strategies, because they often represent the only way to solve real-world problems in the face of national-level failure. Put another way: The systemic crisis is systematically driving unsolved problems to the local level—and systematically, too, forcing the development of (and opening the way for) new approaches.

#### **Our Pluralist Commonwealth**

The emerging strategies point toward a quietly developing "commonwealth tier" of the economy. At the same time, in quite another realm, there has also been what might be called a "populist vector" of change—a push to create more economic equality, not by taxing the middle-class suburbs (as in much traditional liberal policy), but rather the top 1 to 3 percent who, amazingly, own more than half of all of America's investment capital. (The top 1 percent alone has twice the income of the bottom 100 million Americans!) These new strategies move the political divide, putting 97 to 99 percent of the population together more marginal than today's liberals; the idea that you could change the system in their direction seemed absurd. Long before Goldwater in 1964 and Reagan in 1980, however, serious conservatives got down to the work of putting together a movement that would come to dominate every major institution of national governance. For the moment, that is—until we see the next reel of the movie.

*Gar Alperovitz is a professor at the University of Maryland, and the Author of America Beyond Capitalism: Reclaiming Our Wealth, Our Liberty, and Our Democracy.*

## **9/11 and the New World Order**

### **Letter from Behind the Bush**

Dear Reader:

My California brother Rev. Ignacio Castuera studied for his doctorate with John Cobb, professor emeritus at Claremont Graduate School of Theology. Cobb's friend and colleague David Ray Griffin, of the same School, coauthored several books and papers on the dramatic attacks on New York's World Trade Center and the Pentagon in Washington, on 9/11/2001.

Both are accomplished scholars with many publications on a variety of philosophical/scientific/theological subjects. I have had the pleasure of several hours with Cobb, and find him aware, circumspect, respectful, and profound. They, especially Griffin, have been attacked by several gurus of the left—including Alexander Cockburn, and also Matthew Rothschild and David Corn—as being "nuts" because they argue that 9/11 attacks were engineered inside the US government. Theirs are not critiques; they are rants, cherry-picking a few elements of especially Griffin's heavily evidence-based arguments (he has written two books critiquing the 9/11 Commission's report). Cockburn just can't believe that Bush people are smart enough to orchestrate this many-faceted event. But tell me, is this ringer Osama bin Laden that smart and well-positioned all by himself? I look forward to a more serious critique from any of these gentlemen.

After reading Griffin's *Christian Faith and the Truth Behind 9/11* I have no doubt that the attacks were an "inside job". The first 80 pages detail the evidence pointing to that conclusion. There is much physical and logistical evidence, even though much was destroyed or hidden immediately after the 9/11 event. But particularly compelling were the suppressed interviews with NY firefighters and WTC employees on the scene. These consistently indicate systematic chains of explosions set to demolish not only the two towers but also Building 7, which housed an NYC control center (which might have—not in Griffin's argument—been used to control the perfect hits of the two airliners, presumably manned by suicide pilots insufficiently experienced to fly such planes properly especially near the ground where aerodynamics and visuals are different).

It was publicly documented in "Project for a New American Century" before Bush took office that his neo-conservative associates, including Cheney, sought an equivalent of Pearl Harbor in order to trigger US invasion of mideast and central Asian countries like Afghanistan, Iraq, and Iran—all key in controlling oil and blocking access of China to it—in order to enable US partner Israel to dominate the middle east and the US to dominate the earth from land, sea, and space. 9/11 filled that need. There is plenty of evidence that Bush associates were well positioned and motivated, and acted, to satisfy that need.

That news media failed to investigate persistently and to report what they succeeded and failed to succeed in finding is to their everlasting discredit. It may take some real Christian dedication on the part of a number of editors and producers to break through this inhibition. Folks in the Gandhi tradition must help. Griffin reviews the life and words of Jesus in relation to the Roman empire—he was clearly anti-imperial. Speaking theologically he identifies the demonic and the divine in world politics, and finds the US at odds long-term with its divine self-image. But this material is ancillary to the outrage of 9/11. If the media won't inform the public, he admonishes, then the churches must.

My, brother Ignacio is urging the Methodist bishops in their upcoming conference to vote a resolution to this effect.

Aloha----- *Dave Lewit*, Editor

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