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Major advances in national production

Members of Venezuela's Executive Cabinet testified before parliament this week on progress made in national industry

Great strides in reviving Venezuela's agricultural industry, which was abandoned during the twentieth century to oil-hungry governments, have been made during the last ten years. President Hugo Chavez has ensured his government has invested heavily in national industries, including science and technology, in order to decrease dependence on the oil sector.



BBC Mundo: No Internet censorship in Venezuela

According to *BBC Mundo*, there is no evidence of Internet censorship in Venezuela.

The article, titled Internet Censorship Map and The War Over Payments, reports on an investigation by OpenNet, a joint initiative between Harvard Law School and Citizen Lab of the University of Toronto, regarding countries that censor Internet, the type of content that is censored and how it is done.

A new online tool, the Global Internet Filtering Map, evaluates the type content that countries cen-

sor, such as political content that expresses views in opposition to those of the current government, or that related to human rights, freedom of expression, minority rights, and religious movements; social content related to sexuality, gambling, and illegal drugs and alcohol, as well as other topics that may be socially sensitive or perceived as offensive; conflict and security content related to armed conflicts, border disputes, separatist movements, and militant groups; and internet tools such as

web sites that provide e-mail, internet hosting, search, translation, telephone and services.

In every category no evidence was found of Internet censorship in Venezuela. Other countries with no evidence of Internet censorship include Ecuador, Bolivia, Mexico Chile and Paraguay. However, in the United States, Colombia, Peru, Brazil and Argentina some type of censorship was detected.

The Global Internet Filtering Map can be found at the following link: map.opennet.net/filtering-pol.html

Venezuela rejects US meddling



Minister of Foreign Affairs, Nicolas Maduro, reiterated Venezuela's rejection of US government interference in the country's domestic affairs, after a statement by the US State Department supporting a protest by a group of opposition students at the OAS headquarters in Caracas.

On Friday, during a joint news conference with the Minister of Interior Relations, Tareck El Aissami, Maduro rejected the US statements and urged "those who are instigating young students to put their health and lives at risk", to reflect.

"Again we reject that the US government gets involved in affairs that only concern the Venezuelan people", he said.

Maduro highlighted that the Venezuelan government has addressed the situation respectfully, through Minister El Aissami, who recently met with the group of young students to listen to their requests and create mechanisms to allow for a solution.

The senior official said that Venezuela is undergoing a political process of higher democratic dialogue and public debate. "The affairs of Venezuelans are ours and we must debate them ourselves", he stressed.

The opposition protestors ended their strike on Tuesday, applauding the Chavez government's requests for dialogue.



Battling crime

The Venezuelan government is working hard to fight a growing crime and violence environment nationwide that has caused great discomfort and concern in the country. A new police force, new security university and coordinated regional efforts are some of the innovative methods being employed to end the plague of violent crime in Venezuela.

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International No, Gaddafi is not in Venezuela

And he's not coming! Despite media rumors, Libya's embattled leader is home.

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Thousands signed petitions requesting the legislature pass a law protecting tenant's rights in Venezuela.

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Politics Opposition students end hunger strike

Recognizing the efforts of the Chavez government to dialogue, a US-backed anti-Chavez student group ceased a 23-day hunger strike.

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Venezuela: Tackling security and crime nationwide

A special meeting will be held this Saturday with governors, mayors and representatives from the Executive Branch to coordinate security strategies for combatting crime and violence throughout the country

Venezuelan Vice President, Elias Jaua, called for a special session of the government's Federal Council to be convened next week to deal specifically with the question of security and violent crime in the country.

The announcement was made from the state of Falcon during a commemorative ceremony marking the 152nd year since the beginning of the country's bloody 4 year Federal War.

"The struggle against crime is not a struggle for cowboys", Jaua said last Sunday. "It's a struggle of moral authority, social organization and, of course, the presence of police officers trained to contain crime within the framework of the constitution and the laws".

Violent crime in Venezuela has been a major obstacle for the national government, which has had to contend with high homicide rates and an ineffective and often corrupt police force inherited from previous governments.

In order to combat the problem, the government launched in 2006 its National Commission on Police Reform to analyze its deficiencies and solicit community input in the formulation of solutions.

Over the year of its work, the commission consulted with more than seventy thousand residents and evaluated all 138 police forces in the country.

COMMUNAL POLICE FORCE

The commission's findings led to the creation of the General Council of Police, an advisory body linking the government formally with community sectors, and a new security force known as the National Bolivarian Police (PNB).

By working with residents and becoming involved in neighbor-



hood workshops, the PNB has displayed marked decreases in crime in the specific areas in and around the capital city of Caracas where it has been operative.

Over the first year of its existence, the national police has been able to reduce overall crime by more than 55 percent and homicides by more than 40 percent, according to government numbers.

Jaua spoke last week of plans to expand the PNB's presence to thirty-six municipalities in the country and work tirelessly until the problem of violent crime is successfully contained.

"The government of [President] Hugo Chavez will not rest until it has achieved the highest levels of peace and security for our people

and the guarantee of all of fundamental rights", Jaua said.

The Federal Council session to be held on February 26th will discuss the creation of a new Constitutional Police Law and the development of "the correct equipment policies for all the country's officers who are part of the national police system", Jaua reported.

Another key area of discussion will be the creation of universal standards and sanctions for the force as well as the articulation of local security policies to the larger initiatives of the national project.

ANNIVERSARY OF SECURITY UNIVERSITY

The educational and training arm of the new police force, the

National Experimental Security University (UNES), celebrated its 2nd year of operations last week amidst announcements of its projected expansion to at least six new states in the country.

The university, currently headquartered in the Caracas neighborhood of Catia, is expected to open new facilities in the states of Tachira, Zulia, Aragua, Carabobo, Lara, and Anzoategui in the coming years.

"We're changing the old police model and the old academy that was punitive, punishing, and militarized. The UNES is a university that is leading the way towards a new police model and a new model of university education", said the university Dean, Soraya El Achkar during an act celebrating the anniversary last Thursday.

The UNES is considered by many to be the driving factor behind the National Bolivarian Police's success in the capital of Caracas.

Officials report that by providing cadets with a high quality education and training in human rights, the university is breaking with older models of police recruitment based on patronage and corruption.

According to head of the academic director of the UNES, Pablo Fernandez, earlier police

training methods implemented by previous governments had been "deficient and sometimes non-existent".

"We have found cases in the interior of the country where the police commissioner who had twelve years of public service didn't even have a high school diploma", Fernandez reported.

"Promotions were handed out as benefits for being a member of a political party or for doing certain kinds of personal favors", he added.

PROFESSIONAL SERVICE

In contrast to the past, the UNES now creates a culture of professionalism within Venezuela's security forces where young people who wish to serve their communities have a chance to receive a quality education and career opportunity, Fernandez affirmed.

Last year, four thousand cadets graduated from the university and currently some 2,800 aspirants from all over the national territory are enrolled in its program, which includes instruction by more than 300 professors.

"In the UNES, we're working with human rights experts who have more than twenty-five years of experience. The university was born under the standards of the General Council on Police but we also have the freedom to create [programs] because we're an experimental university which adapts to the needs of the country and the community", Fernandez said.

After a one-year training program, UNES students also have the possibility of continuing their education to receive a bachelor's degree in Police Science.

For Dean Achkar, the success of the university in contributing to a drop in crime in the areas of Caracas where the new police force has been active has compelled the national government to expand the program.

"If the [National Bolivarian Police] is already providing [positive] results, our goal is to grow. We want the levels of violence in the areas where the force is active to continue to fall", she proclaimed.

T/ Edward Ellis
P/ Presidential Press

“Gaddafi not fleeing to Venezuela” say government officials

In response to rumors based on a comment made by British Foreign Minister William Hague, Venezuelan authorities have confirmed that Libyan leader Muammar al-Gaddafi has not fled to Venezuela. They also expressed their hopes for a “peaceful” resolution to the unstable situation in Libya.

On Sunday, Hague stated he had “seen some information suggesting he [Muammar al-Gaddafi] is on his way there [to Venezuela] at the moment”.

Hague made the comment during a meeting of EU foreign ministers, and said his information was “unconfirmed”.

Also, according to *Fox News Latino*, on Sunday and Monday, “Facebook and Twitter [were] buzzing with rumors that Libya’s long-standing strongman, Muammar al-Qaddafi, has fled to Venezuela to avoid violence and protests”.

Venezuelan Information and Communication Minister, Andres Izarra, told the Associated Press “it’s false” that Gaddafi is fleeing to Venezuela. Venezuelan Deputy Foreign Minister Temir Porras also denied that Gaddafi was traveling to Venezuela.

As a follow-up to those clarifications, Venezuela’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs released a statement on Monday, informing that Minister of Foreign Affairs, Nicolas Maduro, had communicated by phone with his counterpart in Libya, Mussa Kussa.

In the conversation, Kussa said Gaddafi remained in Tripoli, “carrying out his duties and tackling the situation in the country”.



Maduro also expressed his hope that the Libyan people “find, in exercising their sovereignty, a peaceful solution to their difficulties, one that preserves the integrity of the people and the Libyan nation, without the interference of imperialism, whose interests in the region have been affected in recent times”.

Maduro and Kussa agreed to stay in contact in order to “exchange firsthand information about the development of the situation”.

Finally, speaking on Libyan television Monday evening, Gaddafi himself confirmed that he was in Libya’s capital city of Tripoli.

MEDIA MANIPULATION?

In response to news reports citing Hague’s “unconfirmed” reports, the Venezuelan Embassy in London released a statement

yesterday saying, “*Al Jazeera* and *Associated Press* have continually published the statements by Venezuelan authorities. To those British media outlets which published the statement made by William Hague, the Venezuelan Embassy requests that they would equally make clear about the mistaken aspect of such statement”.

According to protest and human rights organizations, there have been at least 560 deaths and over 1000 people have disappeared during the protests in Libya against the government.

Speaking in a national broadcast Tuesday, Gaddafi claimed that “western media” was transmitting false information and exaggerating the number of deaths. He argued that the “youth” protesting in Libya were being manipulated by the United States, who he claimed wants to desta-

bilize the country in order to establish a pretext for an invasion of Libya.

To date there have been no official Venezuelan government statements put out or made to the press regarding the massacre of Libyan protestors.

During the protests in Egypt this month, Chavez criticized U.S. “meddling” in the issue, and expressed solidarity with the “Arab world”. The Venezuelan government “desires peace and we’ll be with you, Arabic brothers”, he said.

He emphasized that the “sovereignty of these countries [Egypt and Tunisia] be respected” because “declarations are coming from Washington and from other countries in Europe...it’s shameful...to see the interference of the United States, wanting to take control”, he said.

DISTORTING RELATIONS

The false rumors regarding Gaddafi fleeing to Venezuela come as many opinion articles published by a range of private media both within Venezuela and internationally, have also suggested that the wave of protests in the Middle East against various dictators, monarchies, and repressive governments, could fireball into Venezuela.

The Miami Herald, in an article Monday, claimed, “With dictators toppling like dominoes across the Middle East, Venezuela’s president-for-life, Hugo Chavez, is signaling worry about his own despotic rule”.

However, the parallels to Venezuela remain absurd, as President Chavez is a democratically-elected head of state who still enjoys over 60% popularity. Venezuela also has a thriving, vibrant democracy with a healthy opposition, which is not repressed or silenced by any means.

In 2009, Libya named a football stadium after Hugo Chavez, and recently, during a visit to Venezuela, Gaddafi presented Chavez with a Bedouin tent. Also in 2009, while Chavez was visiting Libya, he commemorated the 40th anniversary of the Libyan “revolution” with Gaddafi. There, Chavez expressed his support for African unity. Libya and Venezuela, as oil-producing nations, are both members of OPEC (Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries) and have had long-standing, good, solid relations, well before Chavez won office.

T/ Tamara Pearson

www.venezuelananalysis.com

‘Anonymous’ may attack Nicaragua, Venezuela govts over Libya

A source within hacker activist group Anonymous told Antiwar.com that media and government targets within Nicaragua and Venezuela may be hit within days, due to rhetorical support for Libyan dictator Muammar Gadhafi.

Tuesday, Nicaraguan President and former Sandinista rebel group leader Daniel Ortega “expressed solidarity” with

Gaddafi’s “revolution”.

“I have been speaking with Gaddafi on the telephone...he is again fighting a great battle, how many battles has Gaddafi had to fight”, said Ortega. “In these circumstances they are looking for a way to have a dialogue, but defend the unity of the nation, so the country does not disintegrate, so there will not be anarchy in the country”.

In Venezuela, *TeleSur* took no official line on Libya but in a 10-minute segment Monday night, only commentators sympathetic to Gaddafi were interviewed by an “impartial” host. All said that Gaddafi had done a lot for the Libyan people and the unrest is being provoked and funded by Western “imperialists”. These themes were later echoed in a rambling speech by

the dictator himself on Libyan state television.

President Chavez has not himself said anything at all about the Libyan situation or about Gaddafi, which places into question why his government would be targeted by Anonymous.

The Anonymous source said this could leave both Latin American states’ governments open to DDoS attacks, which would shut

them down for a period of time. They may even be hacked.

Libyan state websites were attacked this week by Anonymous members. As of right now, the central bank’s site is not functioning. The Internet in Libya has not officially been shut off, as it was in Egypt, but there is evidence of internal interruption.

T/ Jeremy Sapienza

Industry and agricultural production advance in Venezuela

Enormous gains have been made in Venezuela's domestic industries during the past decade under the Chavez administration, aiding the country in decreasing dependence on the oil industry

High-level members of the Venezuelan Executive Cabinet involved in the advancement of domestic industry, agriculture and tourism presented their annual reports to the nation's congress and the Venezuelan people last Tuesday, spelling out the gains that the government has made in the productive sectors in 2010.

The reports were the latest in a series of presentations made by President Hugo Chavez's cabinet members this month in accordance with the nation's constitution, and were marked by important gains in the areas of industry and agriculture.

During his address before the National Assembly, Land and Agriculture Minister, Juan Carlos Loyo, reported that since President Hugo Chavez came to power in 1999, agricultural production has surged by 44 percent in the country, reaching a total of 24.6 million tons of food a year.

Milk production has seen an increase of 68 percent while staples



such as black beans and corn have seen their production doubled.

According to Minister Loyo, the greatly expanded production of corn has meant "not only supply for the corn flour industry built by the revolution, but also for the private corn industries".

Corn flour, the most important Venezuelan food item, is the basic ingredient in a range of local dishes including arepas and empanadas.

IMPROVING NUTRITION

Over the years, the government has been working to augment its processing capacity in order to provide the population with uninhibited access to the commod-

ity through its subsidized commercial food network.

Loyo pointed out that these efforts, along with other agricultural initiatives, have meant that the average yearly caloric intake of Venezuelans has increased by nearly 1 thousand kilocalories over the past 12 years, translating to greater nutrition for residents.

The Minister also highlighted a new measure called Plan Coffee which "has delivered 300 thousand land titles to coffee producers" in the country to stimulate the crop's production and encourage young farmers to stay in countryside and produce for the nation.

"1,186 homes for coffee producers have been built and 7,375 kilometers of agricultural roads have been upgraded", he noted.

TECNOLOGICAL ADVANCEMENT

Venezuela's Minister for Science, Technology and Intermediate Industry, Ricardo Menendez, also presented his report on Tuesday to the National Assembly.

According to Menendez, the amount of Gross Domestic Product being invested in science and technology has risen by 500 percent since President Hugo Chavez came to power, leading to important advances in resident's access to computers and the internet.

"We believe deeply in the socialist vision of society. It's fundamental to transform a rentier economy to a work culture that comes from our hands...from telecommunications and from all those who are working to make Venezuela productive", he declared.

OPPOSITION SABOTAGE

During Menendez's speech, the right-wing Venezuelan opposition continued with its disruptive and anti-democratic antics by attempting to prevent the Minister's presentation through heckling and generally disrespectful behavior.

The conservative representatives were protesting earlier statements made by socialist congresswoman Cilia Flores who, after praising the national government for resolving the hunger strike adopted by a group of students outside the Organization of American States building in Caracas, accused the opposition of lacking patriotism.

"Today we can say that peace, democracy and full freedom triumphed", Flores said with respect to the end of the hunger strike, which students used to request the explicit intervention by foreign bodies in Venezuelan affairs.

"Our call is for members of the opposition to be a little more nationalist" when dealing with internal problems, Flores stated.

T/ Edward Ellis
P/ Agencies

Venezuela: cracking down on identity crimes

According to the Venezuelan government, its identity and passport organization, Saime, has dismantled fourteen groups dedicated to falsifying documents, and arrested 270 citizens for extorting Saime clients.

The director of Saime (Administrative Service of Identification, Migration, and Immigration) Dante Rivas, speaking on private television channel Televen said that of the 270 citizens, 191 were Saime workers.

The arrests are part of the Plan

War against Corruption, Rivas said. Saime has been carrying out the plan since 2009.

One recent example of such arrests given by Rivas was of a gang on Margarita Island, made up of three Saime workers and two International Police (Interpol) officers who "extorted foreign citizens who were in the country illegally. They visited them in their homes and demanded large amounts of money in order to not deport them", Rivas said.

He added that Venezuela did not have a policy of deporting foreigners, except when they are committing crimes in the country.

Rivas also pointed out that Saime had simplified what were previously very complicated processes for obtaining identification and visas, and has also acquired high-level technology and security measures, in order to reduce the number of clients, client waiting time, and identity crimes. Also, previously many

applications could only be made in the head office in Caracas, but these can now be made at the various offices around the country.

Mobile Saime "tents" also travel around the country to suburbs, rural areas, schools, communal councils, hospitals and prisons.

Rivas urged clients to personally carry out their requests and avoid paying huge fees to third parties, to not permit extortion, and to denounce any illegal situations.

Corruption is identified by Venezuelans as one of the main problems with the current, and previous governments. According to Saime, it has provided identification cards to 436,573 people so far this year, and conducted 240,287 passport application appointments. In 2010, 4,325,063 people received their identification cards, and 1,228,155 had passport application appointments.

T/ Tamara Pearson
www.venezuelananalysis.com

New law protects Tenant Rights

Politically empowered residents from all over the country have pushed forward a new housing bill in the Venezuelan Congress aimed at harmonizing rental relations in the country and protecting the rights of tenants from arbitrary evictions by landlords

The proposed Tenancy Law (Ley de Arrendamiento Inmobiliario) would set legal standards to prevent egregious price hikes in rental properties and disallow landlords from removing tenants without the latter having first obtained new housing arrangements.

It also makes all rental properties destined for housing to be "of general public interest", giving the Executive Branch the authority to implement legal mechanisms in order to "guarantee all citizens the ability to enjoy the human right of dignified living conditions".

The measure comes as the government has committed itself to solve the housing shortage in the country, which is estimated at about 1.5 million.

According to Congressman Dario Vivas, although the proposed law is intended to protect vulnerable sectors of the population from being pushed into homelessness, "it's not about a confrontation between different parties".



In contrast, Vivas explained on Monday, "it's about trying to avoid these types of conflictive situations so that people aren't forced out of their homes".

"In this relationship, each party has his/her rights and therefore, both have to be respected. No private property will be seized as norms are established which will permit the fulfillment of certain rights", the congressman assured.

"PUEBLO LEGISLADOR"

The new bill has come about through one of Venezuela's unique law-making mechanisms known as the Legislator of the People (Pueblo Legislador), which gives

community members the right to propose legislation directly to the country's congressional body, the National Assembly. With the support of 0.1% of the electorate, the equivalent of approximately seventeen thousand people, residents can put a piece of proposed legislation in front of congress for consideration, debate and vote.

The Tenancy Law is an example of this legal mechanism and was originally proposed during a meeting held by Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez and a group of organized housing activists known as the Metropolitan Tenants Network in the capital of Caracas earlier this year.

On January 17, the Venezuelan Supreme Court put an injunction on forced evictions and last Sunday, thousands of Venezuelans from around the country visited stalls in different local plazas to add their signature in support of the bill.

Leonela Hernandez, an activist from the Tenants Network in the state of Yaracuy was on hand in the Plaza Bolivar of the city of San Felipe to help collect signatures for the new law.

"This an initiative that comes completely from the people. Through the Legislator of the People we're going to back this Law", she said.

Hernandez also pointed out that an explanation of the proposed bill and the Supreme Court's injunction is being made available for all those seeking more information.

"We're providing free legal advice to all the tenants and landlords in the state of Yaracuy who have rental properties, whether they be urban or suburban", she noted.

With the support of the country's dominant political force, the United Socialist Party of Venezuela (PSUV), the signatures in support of the bill have far surpassed the required seventeen thousand, making the presentation of the initiative to the National Assembly imminent on March 2nd.

"We, as the people's legislators and as spokespersons for the country are joining with all the inhabitants that want to make this law a reality in order to defend the interest of those who have been excluded", said Blanca Eekhout, Congresswomen of the PSUV and Second Vice President of the National Assembly.

Given the PSUV's support of the measure and their majority in the National Assembly, all accounts indicate that the bill will easily pass the legislature and be signed into law by President Chavez.

"The struggle of the people are our struggles and this party is carrying out the true revolution", Eekhout said.

**T/ Edward Ellis
P/ Agencies**

Venezuelan Oil Minister rules out changes in oil supply

The Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) has not planned to hold a meeting in the short term to discuss the Middle East's instability and its impact on oil production and consumption since oil trade has remained stable, declared Venezuelan Minister of Energy and Oil, Rafael Ramirez in an interview this week.

He added that OPEC countries have enough oil stored, thus ruling out any possibility of shortage in the oil market.

"We (OPEC) think there is no change or disruption in oil supply. The great oil-consuming

countries store large reserves. There is a lot of oil stored and I do not think there is going to be a deficit", Ramirez explained.

Likewise, he stressed that Venezuela produces 3.01 million barrels of oil per day and the goal for next year is to increase that production to 3.49 million per day, so the sustained investment policy maintained by Petroleos de Venezuela SA (PDVSA) in recent years is necessary.

"We have made investments, otherwise, it would be impossible to keep the pace of asset growth, which exceed US \$145 billion", he said.

In addition, he highlighted that the Venezuelan government is making important investments to support the oil industry. Last year, 1.2 billion oil barrels of gasoline were produced and 400,000 were exported per day.

In order to encourage gasoline saving, he said that they will work to replace diesel with gas in thermoelectric power plants and fight gasoline smuggling.

For instance, "in the state of Tachira (southwestern Venezuela) we can save 11 million liters of gasoline and nearly 9 million in La Guajira (northwestern Ven-

ezuela)", explained the Venezuelan oil and energy minister.

The price of the OPEC Basket (made up of 12 oil blends) placed above \$100 for the first time in two and a half year, reaching \$100.59. This information was announced in a statement released on Tuesday by the organization.

This benchmark is a compilation of the prices revised on Monday, when tensions intensified in Libya. This country is one of the major exporters of the OPEC. The price of the basket reached \$99.08.

This is the first time the OPEC Basket surpasses the figure of

\$100 since September 2008. That same year on July 4, the basket had reached a record price of \$140.73.

The OPEC Basket includes the different oil blends produced by the organization: Saharan Blend (Algeria), Girassol (Angola), Oriente (Ecuador), Iran Heavy (Iran), Basra Light (Iraq), Kuwait Export (Kuwait), Es Sider (Libya), Bonny Light (Nigeria), Qatar Marine (Qatar), Arab Light (Saudi Arabia), Murban (United Arab Emirates) and Mery (Venezuela).

T/ AVN

Venezuelan students end hunger strike

A 23-day hunger strike by a group of opposition-linked Venezuelan students at the Organization of American States (OAS) headquarters in Caracas came to an end on Tuesday after they agreed to a dialogue roundtable with the government. In these conversations both parts will discuss the cases of former officials found guilty—except those prosecuted for serious violations of human rights—for various crimes, who the students allegedly consider were unfairly arrested.

One of the protesters, Lorent Saleh, member of the anti-Chavez group Juventud Activa Venezuela Unida (JAVU), which has received heavy training and funding from US agencies, announced they will meet with officials of the Venezuelan government next Tuesday to discuss their petitions.

Representatives of the Executive Branch, attorneys and family members of the former officials who are being prosecuted or have already been condemned in Venezuelan courts will participate in the meeting to analyze the cases.

Saleh said that the students will visit the La Planta prison, located in Caracas, together with the Minister of Interior and Justice, Tarek El Aissami, where some accused officials are detained.

El Aissami entered into discussions with the students last



Thursday, February 18, while visiting them at their strike location to check on their health and attempt dialogue.

HUMAN RIGHTS RESPECTED

"We went to the OAS headquarters to dialogue with the young students; it was a respectful and frank dialogue, we discussed several issues", said El Aissami during a press conference last week. "I let them know that during the

government of President Chavez in Venezuela human rights have been respected as never before", he added. El Aissami also highlighted that the young protesters did not know some of the citizens they were defending nor the cases for which they were prosecuted.

Since the hunger strike started, the government has sought to create conditions for dialogue with the protesters to evaluate their demands, rejecting external pres-

ures seeking to create a destabilizing scenario and meddling to take advantage of this group of students, explained El Aissami.

The former hunger strikers are demanding the liberation of who they consider "political prisoners" in Venezuela, a group which includes individuals prosecuted and tried in the Venezuelan legal system for crimes including corruption, murder, terrorism and human rights violations.

The alleged "political prisoners" claimed by the young protesters include: former police officers Juan Bautista Guevara, Rolando Guevara and Otoniel Guevara, condemned to 30 years in prison for the violent killing by car bomb of Federal Prosecutor Danilo Anderson; former commissioner José Alberto Sánchez Montiel (alias Mazuco), sentenced for the assassination of Claudio Macías; Felipe Rodríguez (alias "El Cuervo,") sentenced to over 20 years in prison for the bombing of the consulates of Spain and Colombia in Caracas in 2003; and Alejandro Peña Exclusa, accused of allegedly trafficking weapons and plots to commit crimes. Others include Biagio Pilieri, Asdrubal Rolando Lugo, and judge María Lourdes Afiuni, who have charges of embezzlement of public funds, corruption, abuse of power and facilitating escape from justice.

The political youth groups involved in the protests are closely linked with Venezuelan opposition parties and have received extensive funding and training from US agencies, such as USAID, the National Endowment for Democracy (NED) and Freedom House, in recent years.

T/Agencies
P/Agencies

WikiLeaks: Uribe authorized "clandestine operations" in Venezuela

Ex-Colombian President Alvaro Uribe authorized "clandestine operations" against leftist FARC guerrillas in Venezuelan territory, according to a 2006 confidential US diplomatic cable published Wednesday by the daily *El Espectador*.

The cable, one of thousands provided to the Bogota paper by WikiLeaks, shows that the conservative Uribe, who governed from 2002-2010, gave the authorization at a time of friendly relations between his government and that of leftist Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez.

According to the diplomatic dispatch, Uribe was "under no illusions about Chavez" and saw "Venezuela's polarizing, anti-US focus as a serious problem".

Nevertheless, the Colombian president preferred "to manage President Chavez rather than confront him" and worked "to



maintain a positive bilateral atmosphere, using joint energy projects and trade to create incentives to moderate Chavez's behavior".

But according to *El Espectador*, "the US Embassy's classified re-

port makes it clear that Uribe's emphasis on engagement over confrontation left open the option of carrying out armed operations in Venezuela to protect Colombia from terrorist attacks".

Citing the cable disseminated by WikiLeaks, the paper noted that the former president authorized "clandestine cross-border operations against the FARC as appropriate, while trying to avoid a repeat of the crisis generated by the capture of FARC official Rodrigo Granda in Caracas in 2003 (sic)".

Granda, a member of the guerrilla group's International Commission, was captured on Dec. 13, 2004, in Caracas in a clandestine operation arranged by Colombian authorities. He was immediately taken across the border and later to Bogota.

The incident increased tensions between the ideologically opposed governments.

Granda was later released on June 5, 2007, after French President Nicolas Sarkozy persuaded Uribe to do so as part of efforts to secure the release of Franco-

Colombian politician Ingrid Betancourt, who was eventually rescued from her FARC captors in a Colombian military operation in July 2008.

The US Embassy cable cited by *El Espectador* stated that Uribe used an "outwardly conciliatory approach" to "create the political space to permit clandestine cross border operations against terrorists and narco-traffickers when required".

The cable also cited Uribe adviser Jose Obdulio Gaviria as saying of the former president's strategy: "We are the perfect hypocrites".

The dispatch was one of roughly 16,000 cables that WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange provided *El Espectador* publisher Fidel Cano early this month in London.

T/EFE

What are the tasks of Revolutionary Communication?

“(...) I’ve had occasion to observe many times how powerful organizations with a powerful press broke apart under the impact of events, and how, on the other hand, small organizations with a technically weak press transformed themselves in a short time into historic forces”.

– Leon Trotsky

ASSUMING THE CHALLENGE

Without understanding, in depth, what a Revolution is, it will be difficult to understand the dialectic of its communicational tasks. There is no correct practice without correct theory. A revolutionary situation has its own contents, rhythms, and priorities determined by force, and advances, that the working class wins to expropriate power from the bourgeoisie. Revolutionary communicational tasks can’t come from pure subjectivity, punditry, from a few “enlightened ones”, priorities are derived from the objective necessities of each front in combat against capitalism. Content, emerges from class struggle. It doesn’t hide it.

These necessities are democratically detected and the concrete, as well as the subjective, is taken into account, with the revolutionary idea that the truth serves to elevate the level of conscience, to perfect the struggle and guarantee the triumph of permanent revolution. In a situation of clear class confrontation, in which the dispute does not admit euphemisms, and the evidence of a war is overwhelming, revolutionary communication media have a supreme role as organizing tools to help multiply the revolutionary forces beginning with establishing a common program of emancipatory action. Not one resource can be wasted. Not one minute can be lost. The best ideas are emancipatory ideas.

Many people are quick to set themselves up as messianic intermediaries, ready to rewrite the commandments of reformism, taking advantage of the media. One has to stay alert, reformists



are a chameleon-like poison that drain stealthily in more than a few places. Some disguise themselves as “erudites” and travel the world pontificating a “revolutionary” knowledge pulled from their saliva (or from some elite bourgeois manuals). There are also the jealous, the mediocre, the petulant and the traitors that infiltrate revolutionary fronts to sow confusion while they milk some privilege or appointment obtained through trickery. One must be very careful. Everything that doesn’t help to guarantee, accelerate, and entrench the Revolution, in the short, medium, and long term... must be submitted to open discussion - by all media. This is an inescapable repertoire of content.

It’s indispensable to try to use all the languages necessary to make visible and palpable the triumphs of the revolution that are the fundamental source of moral fortitude. With revolutionary happiness, humor, [and] imagination in order to not repeat the bourgeois pattern of stultified discourse. It’s indispensable to communicate problems, armed with the most proactive self-criticism and the most consensual programs of advance. Elevating revolutionary morals and ethics is vital. To enrich responsibilities and assure creativity to win the territory of content, invigorate formal experimentation, and amplify reception with dialectic feedback. [sic] There’s no time to lose. Emancipatory content demands its place in the battle of ideas.

Some object to certain revolutionary communications for being “officialist”. They believe that some revolutionary media get carried away with “propaganda” tasks and forget self-critical tasks. It is a valuable debate that can’t remain two sides talking past one another but, on the contrary, must become a tool, of debate and work, constantly open. But don’t confuse the bourgeois concept of “propaganda” with the revolutionary urgency of making visible our achievements in order to fortify battle morale. No bourgeois advertising evangelical is going to silence us no matter how scientific or holy they proclaim to be. The contents of revolutionary communication are conceptual achievements whose mission,

beyond elevating the level of conscience, lies in multiplying itself dialectically. And that requires networks and planned systems.

The battle of Revolutionary communication is waged, in one of its phases, principally against the ideology of the dominant class that has metastasized in the entire fabric of social relations. It’s a very difficult struggle that allows no rest. We find it everywhere. We see it in our pleasures and our beliefs, it’s in our education and culture, it’s in our traditions and imaginations. Capitalism’s ideologic plasma has even inoculated its gravedigger’s thinking so that he laments the moment of the hangman’s death. That’s called alienation and it’s now become big business- a terrible problem. But the most arduous part is a creative revolution that must contribute to the foundation of a new universe of ideas, emotions, enthusiasms and morale... emancipated and emancipating. And in this framework one of the most arduous and neglected tasks has been the Revolution of Content.

Our communicative battles are asymmetric. We lack training, we lack organization, and we lack unity. We’re clear on who the class enemy is, we know the damage that it has caused, we know that it must be expropriated and defeated, and we know that we can’t lose the communication battle. We know that this struggle must be waged internationally. We know that only the workers will save the workers. We know much and we’ve done little - for now. Why haven’t we been able to defeat them yet, if we are the majority? Because, in terms of communication, we’ve also got to emancipate the emancipators. This is a top priority task - all hands on deck.

It wouldn’t be a bad idea if every day, in an orderly manner, each revolutionary carried out their socialist responsibility to disseminate ten news items about the achievements of the Revolution; the achievements of the working class. We must become communication combatants on a daily basis. Pay attention to the content. Let’s not let the adversary set the agenda.

T/ Fernando Buen Abad Domínguez
Translated by Rich Potter

OPINION

Labor's last stand?

Class war in Wisconsin



Enter Governor Scott Walker. A month into office, he was keen to establish himself as the new sheriff in town by reprising in the state of Wisconsin a simulacrum of Ronald Reagan's presidency. Painting by numbers, Scott Walker, following Reagan's first stroke, took on labor. But Walker's Patco moment (the busting of the Air Traffic Controller's union) has proved an overreach. Walker, who presents himself in a way that could be right out of Frank Capra's central casting, may find that following Reagan's recipe produces different results today. After 30 years of economic decline, workers in the United States are recognizing the bankruptcy of these policies and are fighting back.

We have all seen the figures. While the American economy has grown the past three decades, labor has taken it on the chin. Meanwhile, CEOs and those in the FIRE sectors have seen their incomes grow by multiples, often subsidized at taxpayer expense, even as their reckless actions have left economic chaos in their wake. The whole while, labor has been repeatedly lectured that they are to blame for the country's economic crisis and that the rich must capture ever more rents for the economy to prosper. Even if you don't like it, workers are told, invoking Margaret Thatcher, "there is no alternative".

This past week, however, public workers surprised everyone, including themselves and their union leadership. The rank and file took the lead in these demonstrations and forced their often conservative teachers' union leadership to follow. Last Tuesday, teachers in the capitol announced their intention to hit the streets and take their students with them. In Milwaukee, Wisconsin's biggest city, teachers defied calls from school administrators and their unions to stay on the job. They marched on Madison last Wednesday in such numbers that their union leadership was forced to follow. Thus, 35 state school districts closed, as teachers and other public workers trekked to Madison in the thousands.

Frankly, most protests the past few decades, while led by well-intentioned organizers, have been tedious. We turn out for good causes, but would rather be somewhere else, and we have secretly (and sometimes openly) doubted the effectiveness of the whole exercise. Not this time. For veterans of protests in recent decades, this had an entirely different vibe. The scene has been simultaneously creative, good-humored, joyful, peaceful, yet angry. There were no spokespersons for this movement. People organized themselves, made decisions on the ground, and acted on them – with their actions and instincts proven right by subsequent events.

The scope of the movement is broad. Students and teachers and other public employees have been joined by firefighters and cops – whose collective bargaining rights are not, in fact, under immediate threat and are therefore there out of a remarkable solidarity. Together, they have embraced each

other in a new alliance that has put the history of these 1960s antagonists aside. In this new world, cops deliver food and coffee to student protesters on the floor of the Capitol rotunda. Firefighters, arriving in their soot seasoned gear or Scottish kilts, bellow on their bagpipes and sound their support for their public employee and student brethren. Wrapping themselves in the flag – and who else can do it without looking cynical or silly? – firefighters have returned this powerful symbol to organized labor.

By Saturday, the numbers had swelled to over 60,000, while the governor's Tea Party supporters could muster only a few thousand. This despite having billionaire financiers like the Koch Brothers creating astroturf websites, such as "Stand for Walker", imploring Wisconsinites to hit the streets in support of the governor.

For all this good energy and success, however, all is not well. Labor is seriously divided. The political right has invested hea-

vily in turning private sector employees against their public sector counterparts. And, it has worked. After three decades of war on private sector unions, only 7% of non-public workers are protected. Predictably, this has translated into an almost complete erosion of their previously held health and pension plans they once enjoyed.

Today, US private sector workers have been reduced to Japanese-like long hours. Their health plans consist of HMOs providing substandard care, often having to navigate numbing bureaucracies, only to be told "coverage denied". They no longer have employer-paid pensions. Most are now on their own when it comes to retirement. Or if lucky, they may have a generous employer that gives half towards a 401k plan that merely feeds traders on Wall Street, while never delivering enough returns actually to fund their retirement.

In short, it has been a return of the mean season. Briefly, in 2008,

this frustration was directed against the Republicans. Yet, the Democrats delivered no tangible gains for labor since taking power then, and now, the right has helped steer working-class anger away from Wall Street and back to Main Street's teachers and public employees. Deftly executed, private sector workers without benefits now blame workers who do have them as the cause of their deprivation. Instead of seeing the gains unions can deliver, private sector workers now take the lesson that these gains have somehow been taken at their expense – all the while ignoring the trough-feeding that continues unabated on Wall Street.

The new class war, as it is actually perceived, is not between workers and capital, but between private and public sector workers, with the fires generously stoked by the billionaire Koch brothers and rightwing money generally. One can only imagine Mr Burns of the Simpsons hatching such a scheme in caricature of capital; but this is real, and few seem to recognize the irony as they play out their scripted parts.

Monday's public holiday was likely the last of the big protests this week. Protests in the tens of thousands are not sustainable. Public workers are under pressure from their employers and teachers' unions to return to work. If Governor Walker refuses to compromise, the only weapon left in labor's arsenal is a general strike. Nobody knows if sufficient resolve exists to launch one. This movement began with Scott Walker's actions and will likely end with them. Whether labor takes this next step toward a general strike depends on his actions in the coming days and whether he will seek compromise or further inflame workers by attacking their democratic right to organize.

Walker, the son of a preacher, has always been blind to shades of grey. His past actions suggest a fundamentalist path ahead.

- Jeffrey Sommers

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