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Venezuela Fights for Freedom of Speech and Against Imperialism

US Fears Spread of Chavez Example

by Federico Fuentes

Under the banner of “For freedom of speech and against imperialism”, hundreds of thousands of Venezuelans took to the streets of Caracas on June 2 in defence of their revolution, and as a direct response to the domestic and international campaign being whipped up by Washington in the wake of the non-renewal of Radio Caracas TV's (RCTV) broadcasting concession, dwarfing all of the opposition marches that had occurred in preceding days. Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez announced: “If the Venezuelan oligarchy believe that they will stop us with their threats, with their manipulations or with their destabilization plans, forget it!”

Promising that each destabilization plan “manipulated by the US empire” would be met with “a new revolutionary offensive!”, Chavez said that “starting from today ... a Bolivarian counter-attack” would begin across the country, “in the streets, in the factories, in the universities, in the high schools, in all parts — a truly ideological, political, popular, national and international counterattack”.

When RCTV's licence to use the free-to-air Channel 2 expired on May 27, the concession was awarded to a new independently produced station, Venezuelan Social Television (TVes), to provide a national space for those previously excluded from the media. This has been used as the latest pretext for an escalating assault against the revolutionary government and people of

Venezuela. An international media war has been launched to create the mirage of a democratic protest movement mobilizing against the supposed authoritarian, anti-democratic Chavez government. Anti-Venezuela resolutions have been passed by US Congress, the European Union and the right-wing-controlled Brazilian senate.

Chavez explained that behind this latest plot by US imperialism was “the fear that the example of Venezuela will extend to other countries” — that of a revolution sweeping away the old capitalist order and laying the basis for a new, truly democratic socialist society.

Chavez’s speech on history, politics and revolutionary theory once again revealed the powerful dynamic between the organised masses and Chavez that is driving forward this revolutionary process.

Chavez reiterated the points he made after his landslide re-election last December, stating that the victory was not “a point of arrival, but rather a point of departure” for the revolution, and that this mandate had given the government the ability to drive forward its revolutionary project.

“Only 140 days have passed” since the new government’s inauguration, Chavez explained, yet a “new period has started up, accelerating the process of revolutionary transformation”. He pointed to the recuperation of state control over the oil fields in the Orinoco Belt, the re-nationalisation of the telecommunications company CANTV and six electricity companies, as well as the mammoth turnout to register interest in the new united socialist party, the PSUV (by that day, 4.7 million people had registered, reaching more than 5 million by the end of the following day when registrations closed).

The latest step in this “revolutionary acceleration” was “the expiration of the concession that the Venezuelan oligarchic elite had controlled for 53 years for its own abuse and benefits”. Chavez announced that now, “Channel 2 is liberated, it no longer belongs to the oligarchy, nor will it return to the oligarchy. Now it belongs to the Venezuelan people.” This was met with spontaneous chants of “This is how you govern”.

Urging the masses to continue consolidating the “unity of all the revolutionary currents” in order to “continue reaping victories”, Chavez stressed the centrality of the PSUV to the deepening of the revolution: “I want to use these words to insist, from within my heart, on this unitary process of the party, of all the people, the working class, the peasants, the cultural movements ... unity of the Bolivarian armed forces, unity of the Bolivarian people.”

Drawing on the “great Italian revolutionary thinker Antonio Gramsci”, Chavez outlined why this process has encountered the reaction of imperialism. Referring to Gramsci’s thesis — “a truly historic crisis occurs when there is something that is dying, but has not finished dying, and at the same time there is something that is being born but which also hasn’t finished being born” — Chavez explained that already by the 1980s, “Venezuela had entered into a historic crisis ... [today] we are in the epicentre of the crisis”.

“A good part of the years to come will form part of this historic crisis until the Fourth Republic [the pre-Chavez regime] dies definitively and the fifth republic is fully born — the socialist and Bolivarian republic of Venezuela.”

For Chavez, the Fourth Republic represented the rule of the “US empire and its lackeys here in Venezuela, the oligarchy, the bourgeoisie, the class that dominated Venezuela for 200 years”. This is the same class, he stressed, “that betrayed [Simon] Bolivar, that killed [Jose Antonio de] Sucre, that murdered [Ezequiel] Zamora”, all prominent leaders of Venezuela’s 200 years of struggle for independence.

Chavez explained Gramsci’s concept of “historical blocs” — in which a particular class manages to acquire hegemony that is expressed in structures and superstructures — in order to further draw out the class content of the battle between the fourth and fifth republics.

According to Gramsci, the superstructure of the dominant historic bloc has two levels, the political society — “the institutions of the state” — and the civil society, consisting of economic and private institutions, specifically the church, media and education system, which are used by the ruling class “to spread among the social and popular classes its dominant ideology”.

Chavez noted that one of the “great contradictions” in Venezuelan society today existed between these two factors. “We have been coming along liberating the state”, said Chavez. “Bourgeois civil society used to control” the Venezuelan state, government, legislative and judicial power, state companies, government banks, and the national budget, but “they have been losing all of that”.

Elucidating the battles that lay ahead for the Venezuelan masses, Chavez said that the bourgeoisie was retreating into its last remaining refuges in the media, church and education system.

While “we have no plan to eliminate the oligarchy, the Venezuelan bourgeois”, Chavez stressed that they must accept that the rules have changed. “If the Venezuelan bourgeoisie continues to desperately attack us, utilising the refuges it has left, then the Venezuelan bourgeoisie will continue to lose these refuges one by one!”

“This message is for the Venezuelan bourgeois class. We respect you as Venezuelans, you should respect Venezuela, you should respect the homeland, you should respect our constitution, you should respect our laws. If you don’t do this ... we will make you obey the Venezuelan laws!” Again Chavez’s comments were met with chants of “This is how you govern”.

Speaking to a solid core of his supporters, many of whom played a part during the heroic days of April 11-13, 2002, where a counter-revolutionary coup, which RCTV participated in, was overturned by a civic-military uprising, Chavez declared, “We will defeat you again”.

In response, the crowd repeated an earlier chant: “Now it’s the turn of Globovision”, referring to another of the coup-plotting private television stations.

Chavez replied that in the case of RCTV, “we had a lot of patience”, waiting for the concession to expire, “but no-one should believe that it will always be like that. A concession can expire, including before the established time. According to the law, a concession can expire due to violations of the constitution, of the laws, for media terrorism etc.”

What was necessary now was for the Venezuelan masses to continue “constructing the new historic bloc, constructing socialism, constructing the new political society ... the socialist state”. At the same, time, there was a “need to continue transforming that old bourgeois civil society”.

Chavez called on the university and high school student movements to “assume the vanguard” together with the working class, the *campesinos* (peasants) and soldiers.

Chavez finished with the now customary catch cry: “Homeland, socialism or death! We will win!”

From Green Left Weekly, June 7, 2007

Socialist Voice #175, June 18, 2007

How Women's Oppression Began, and How It Will End

By Suzanne Weiss

Based on a talk given to the Socialism 2007 conference in Toronto, April 28, 2007.

When I think about the course of my life, I am struck by how much things have changed for me—and for all women—over the course of the last half century. Through the explosive struggles in the 1960s and 1970s, women won more freedom to choose our life paths. We gained access to contraception and abortion. Our lives were no longer defined solely by marriage and children. Many women decided they had a right to a full education and to a career. Now, in some countries, including Canada, women can even marry other women!

In the 1960s, women broke the dress codes. We cut our hair short. We decided on the length of our skirts and the height of our shoes. We chose not to wear fashion hats or gloves. Business women began to wear pants to work.

Although the life of the country remains dominated by a small group of rich men, it is now common for a woman to be named to a corporate board, a cabinet, or even as Governor-General.

We now see women on TV as news anchors and interviewers. And we don't look twice when we see a woman driving a bus or subway train.

Still oppressed

And yet after all this, women are still oppressed.

In the U.S., an Equal Rights Amendment to the constitution was overwhelmingly adopted by congress in 1971, guaranteeing that "Equality of rights under the law shall not be denied on account of sex." But ratification was blocked by a well-financed campaign by right-wing forces.

The American Association of University Women reports that women now outnumber men on college campus, and get better grades than men. And, yet women earn 20 percent less than men at the same level and in the same field of work one year after college graduation. (*Toronto Star*, May 5, 2007)

Violence against women continues unchecked in Canada and the U.S. as well as across the globe. Women are apprehensive to walk alone in the evening or on a quiet street during the day. Even in the privacy of the nuclear family, many women live in a prison of brutality. According to a landmark Statistics Canada study in 1993, 60 percent of Canadian women have been victims of at least one act of physical or sexual violence since the age of 16. Subsequent surveys have revealed little change in the situation. (Statistics Canada, "The Violence Against Women Survey," *The Daily*, November 18, 1993.)

Freedom for women to work outside the home is a gain, to be sure. But for most mothers, it is not a matter of choice. Gone are the days when a working-class family could be supported on a single income. And working women still carry the full load of domestic labour—a double

working day. In British Columbia, for example, only 37 percent of women's productive time is paid work. (BC Solutions Budget 2006, Budgeting for Women's Equality)

Our society is based on the exploitation by a minority class of wealthy over a majority class of wage workers. Women face additional exploitation as a consequence of patriarchal relations that date back to the very beginnings of class society. The wealthy elite benefits from divisions along gender lines that allows them to pay lower salaries to women, or none at all.

Our society is based on the domination of men, and the maternal functions of women are used to justify women's degradation and inequalities between the sexes.

Women have the right to terminate unwanted pregnancies, but in many parts of Canada, there is no easy way to obtain an abortion

It is now accepted that we can raise children alone, without a husband. But the wages of working women in Canada are so low that in 2000, 56 percent of families headed by single mothers were living in poverty.

The crisis of health-care workers

I learned a lot about these problems during the last 10 years, working in the industry that provides care for elderly people. During these years, life has become more arduous for many women in Canada and the U.S.

These were the years of the Conservative government's assault on health care in the context of neo-liberalism, which included downgrading employment conditions and denying workers the right to a union.

I met hundreds of support workers in long-term care facilities, in private homes, and in hospitals. They are mainly immigrants from the Philippines, South America, Africa, and Eastern Europe. Many receive the minimum wage or less. Most are women of colour who clean, cook, and care for the sick and infirm with no fixed hours.

These women also suffer the indignities of those with the wrong religion. For example, one Christian institution did not want a friend of mine who worked there to pray in their empty chapel—because she is Muslim.

These women often have no fixed places of work and receive no benefits. They take care of strangers during the day and then come home to their second, unpaid job—housework, cooking, raising their kids, and taking care of the seniors in their own family. Many of these are single mothers who cannot find adequate daycare. "How do you do it," I often asked in awe. "What about your children?" A typical response was, "I set rules for my kids. I hope they follow them."

These women do necessary, difficult, and highly skilled work with love and commitment, under demoralizing conditions. For this they are rewarded with brutal exploitation.

This happens because the care women provide is viewed as an extension of their caring function in the family—which has low prestige and no economic value in our society. It is evident that women's housework and care giving is conceived as an inherent feature of the female make-up, and for that reason is also devalued.

The fabric of our society is based on profit, not human needs. Owners of industries, particularly in the needle trades and service industries, increase their revenues by underpaying women's traditional skills. So, women are exploited—both as workers and as women.

When women were equal

Have women always been treated with disrespect and brutality? Has society always been dominated by the will of men? Can women ever win the dignity we deserve as human beings?

To answer these questions, it's helpful to look at the role of women in history. What we find is that women were not always oppressed. In fact, women's oppression has existed for less than one percent of human existence.

The study of pre-history shows that early human societies were organized much differently from our own. Frederick Engels takes this up in his book *The Origin of the Family, Private Property, and the State*, first published in 1884. He says that when encountered by the European conquerors, the indigenous societies of North America, such as the Six Nations, produced the necessities of life through common effort, and every member was provided for on an equal basis. This early communist-type society had no coercive state apparatus, with armed men and police, to keep people subjugated. It was self-governing and democratic, and all the members were equals.

The U.S. Marxist Evelyn Reed wrote in *Problems of Women's Liberation* that the "family unit as we know it today did not then exist. Tribal society was composed of a network of clans, each one consisting of social brothers and sisters. Under this kinship system, members owed their status not to wealth or inheritance but to their clan and tribal connections.... There was no such thing as the domination of one gender over the other, just as there was no such thing as the subjugation of a wealthy class over working mass." (p. 23)

In the American colonies, a Jesuit missionary in the 1600s was reported to be stunned by the contrast between the greedy, money-crazy civilized society he had left in Europe and the generous spirit of the indigenous people among whom he had settled. He wrote:

"These savages know nothing of mine and thine, for it may be said that what belongs to one belongs to another.... They think it strange that someone should have more goods than others, and that those who have more should be more esteemed than those who have less."

When the missionary asked an Iroquois why he was so fond of children which were not his own, he answered, "Thou hast no sense. You love only your own children; we love all the children of the tribe... We are all father and mother to them." (p. 31)

Engels explained that "all societies have rested upon the twin pillars of production and procreation." In ancient times, women were both the creators of new life and the leaders in producing the material necessities of life. As a result they became social leaders of their communities. They worked together, as a collective community of producers, and were not dispersed into separate households where each individual woman is encumbered with the same tasks for her individual children.

Men had honored roles as hunters and warriors, but women developed tools, skills, and techniques at the base of social progress. From food collecting they moved on to simple horticulture and then to agriculture. In her research Reed discovered that “out of the great variety of crafts women practiced, which included pot making, leather making, textile making, house building, etc., they developed the rudiments of botany, chemistry, medicine, and other branches of scientific knowledge.” Women acquired their leading place in primitive society not simply because they were the procreators of new life, but as a result of their leading role in production, and establishment of social life.

Survivals of this era still exist. When I was visiting the Zuni people in New Mexico a few years ago, a young man told me he lived in the home of his wife’s kin. If they ever separated, he would have to leave that home. Arrangements like this, symbolic of women’s principal role, lead to such societies being termed “matrilocal” as or “matrilineal.” Sometimes they are called “matriarchal” societies.

Of course, it is important to understand that matriarchal societies did not involve women dominating or oppressing men. Women did not maintain a female version of “patriarchy.” These societies in which division of labor between the sexes did not entail or require domination of one gender over the other.

Reed states that “It is hard to say which is most distressing to the powers that be: the fact that primitive society was collectivist, egalitarian, and democratic; or the fact that it was matriarchal, with women occupying influential and respected positions in the community.” This is in stark contrast to the subordinate and degraded position of women throughout history since the division of society into antagonistic classes.

When the earliest settlers came here from Europe, they were astonished that these so-called savages would make no important collective decisions without the agreement and consent of their women.

All adults in a clan community regarded themselves as the social parents of all children, providing for them equally. In their communal society, where the patriarchal family did not yet exist, knowing who was the biological father — or even mother — was unimportant.

The downfall of women

This view of the part played by women in history is quite different, Reed remarks, “from that of the Biblical Eve who, in the later patriarchal era, was made responsible for the ‘downfall of man.’... In reality, what occurred at that major turning point in social evolution was the downfall of woman.” (*Problems of Women’s Liberation*, p. 28)

This transition began with the changes in the structure of society and the breakdown of the original economic/social system based on communal ownership.

Its dissolution first began some 6,000-8,000 years ago in the Middle East with the introduction of large-scale agriculture and stock raising. This brought about the material surpluses required for a more efficient economy and a new mode of life.

Reed explains, that “farming requires groups of people stabilized around plots of ground, tilling the soil, raising livestock and engaging in village industries. The old sprawling tribal commune began to collapse: first into separate clan, then into separate farm families often called ‘extended families,’ and finally into the individual family which we call the ‘nuclear family.’ It was in the course of this process that the father-head of the family displaced the clan as the basic unit of society.” (*Problems of Women’s Liberation*, p. 32)

It was now possible to accumulate wealth in the form of permanent surpluses of foodstuffs. That not only provided a reserve for arduous years, it also made it possible for some members of society to live from the labour of others. It meant that anyone who could gain control over the product of others’ labour could live from this surplus.

However, a new economic system developed from this that undermined and destroyed the collectivist relations. Society divided into classes, including a privileged class that lived by the labour of others. Various forms of servitude arose including slavery. Wealth was seized by theft or war and thus passed into the hands of the male conquerors. A state arose to defend these arrangements.

Under these pressures, the old communal clan-based society gradually broke down and was replaced by a new system based on the exploitation of labour and the rule of the rich. The new rulers did not want to share out their wealth among matriarchal clans; they wanted to pass it on to their sons. Thus was born the patriarchal family.

Property was owned by the individual head of the family, the father, and handed down from father to son. The father lorded it over a family composed of junior men and below them, the women children and slaves. Interestingly, the Roman term “*famulus*” means domestic slave, and *familia* is the cumulative number of slaves belonging to one man. (*Origin of the Family*, p. 68)

With the rise of the system of private property, monogamous marriage, and the family, women were dispersed, each to become a solitary wife and mother in an individual home. Woman became not only powerless, but degraded.

“Monogamy was introduced for men of wealth to give him legal heirs who would take his name and inherit his property,” Reed says. Wives were severely disciplined and punished if they broke their marriage vows. Thus violence against women was instituted into law. “Hemmed in on all sides, women became household chattels whose function was to serve the husband, their lord and master.”

“The drastic social changes brought about by the patriarchy and the class institutions of the family, private property, and the state produced the historic downfall of the female sex.” (*Problems of Womens Liberation*, p.34)

Women’s liberation

During the last century, women—and working people as a whole—have made major gains against this oppression. But as we know, the battle has not been won.

Women still suffer from domestic servitude and sexual violence. Their role as chattels and sex slaves is promoted by modern sexism, relayed by media and marketing. Capitalism profits from this servitude and, as I have described, deepens it whenever possible.

Sometimes, the language of women's liberation is used to attack women. Thus, in Afghanistan, thousands of women have been killed or victimized as a result of a Canadian-U.S. war waged on the pretext of liberating them in the "war on terrorism." These same warmakers are also slow to come to the assistance of women who are brutalized in their own countries.

The capitalists justify their crusade by attacking Islam, including by branding it an "anti-woman" religion, as if women were not equally oppressed in societies whose dominant religion is Christianity, Judaism, or Hinduism.

The capitalists invoke "women's rights" to attack women's freedom of choice. For example, there are now moves to restrict women's right to wear a hijab, or shawl in public spaces, which many progressive Islamic women wear not in submission but in defiance of imperialism. So we are back to reactionary dress codes that directly undermine the right of women to choice in such matters.

Women want an equal partnership with men in building a society where all human beings are valued. In this struggle, it will become more evident that the entrenched prejudice against women will not be eliminated until we remove the fundamental reason for its existence—the profit system (capitalism) and class society.

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Socialist Voice #176, June 24, 2007

Vilma Espin, 1930-2007: A Heroine of the Cuban Revolution, A Builder of a New Society

- **Statement of the Communist Party of Cuba**
- **Vilma's Struggles, by Fidel Castro Ruz**
- **The builder, from its foundations, of a new society, by Marta Rojas**

Statement of the Communist Party of Cuba

(June 19, 2007) With profound sorrow, the leadership of our Party and State announce that Comrade Vilma Espín Guillois, a heroine of the clandestine struggle, an outstanding combatant of the Rebel Army and an untiring fighter for the emancipation of women and the defense of the rights of children, passed away in Havana on Monday, at 4:14 p.m., after a long and painful illness.

Vilma was born in Santiago de Cuba on April 7, 1930 in a family that very early on cultivated the values and ethics that would distinguish her. From a young age she assumed political and revolutionary positions, actively participating in student demonstrations following the coup d'état carried out by Batista in 1952.

From that time, she was an inseparable collaborator of Frank Pais, joining organizations founded by him in the struggle against the tyranny, until the members of what was then called the National Revolutionary Action joined the ranks of the 26th of July Movement.

The doors of her home were opened to protect the comrades who attacked the Moncada Barracks persecuted by troops of the bloody oppressor regime. After finishing a post-graduate course in the United States and as the struggle entered a new stage, Vilma, following the directions of the leadership of the Movement, stopped in Mexico to meet with Fidel, receiving instructions and messages. Under the direct orders of Frank, she took part in the armed uprising of Santiago de Cuba on November 30, 1956, in support of the expeditionary force arriving on the *Granma* yacht. Following that important action she converted her home into the headquarters of the revolutionary movement in Santiago de Cuba.

A member of the National Leadership of the 26th of July Movement, just before Frank Pais was assassinated, she was named the Provincial Coordinator of the clandestine organization in what was then the eastern province of Oriente, a role that she carried out with particular skill and bravery, facing constant danger and persecution, until she joined the Rebel Army in June 1958, becoming the legendary guerrilla fighter of the Frank Pais Second Western Front and the effective coordinator of the clandestine movement of Oriente.

Upon the triumph of the Revolution in 1959, and immersed in various tasks assigned by Fidel, she headed the unification of women's organizations and the setting-up of the Federation of Cuban Women (FMC). She tirelessly led the organization until the last minute of her life.

She was a member of the Central Committee of the Party from its foundation in 1965, which was ratified in all of its Congresses. At the Second Congress of the Party in 1980 she was elected substitute member of the Politburo. At the Third Party Congress she was promoted as a full member of the leadership, a responsibility she held until 1991. She was a member of the National Assembly since its first legislature and a member of the Council of State since its constitution.

Vilma presided over the National Commission of Prevention and Social Attention from its creation and the Commission of Children and Youth, as well as the Commission on Women's Equal Rights of the National Assembly of People's Power.

Her name will be eternally linked to the most significant conquests of Cuban women in the Revolution and as one of the most important fighters for the emancipation of women in our country and throughout the world.

For her merits, she received many awards and national and international orders, among them the honorary title of Heroine of the Republic of Cuba.

According to her wishes, Comrade Vilma Espín will be cremated. Her ashes will be deposited in a ceremony that will be strictly for her family, and burial will be with military honors, at a time that will be announced later, in the Mausoleum of the Frank Pais Second Front, with the remains of other heroic combatants of the Front, in which she was one of its most outstanding members.

In her memory, our people, with profound feelings of sorrow, will render a heartfelt homage at the Jose Marti Memorial in Havana and at the Salon de los Vitrales, at the base of the monument to Antonio Maceo, in her native and heroic city, Santiago de Cuba, beginning at 9 a.m. and lasting until 5 p.m., today, June 19. At the same time, homage will be paid to her throughout the rest of the provinces.

In her honor, the leadership of the Communist Party and Cuban State has decided to observe a solemn ceremony at the Karl Marx Theater, today at 6:00 p.m., headed by leaders, the National Leadership of the FMC and the provincial Secretariats of this women's organization, as well as women of the capital and representatives of the diverse sectors of Cuban society.

Vilma's Struggles

by Fidel Castro Ruz

(June 20, 2007) Vilma is dead. Even though the news was expected, it was still an impact. Out of respect for her delicate health condition, I never raised her name in my reflections.

Vilma's example today is more necessary than ever. She devoted her entire life to the struggle for women's rights when in Cuba most women were discriminated against as human beings, the same as in the rest of the world, with only the honorable revolutionary exceptions.

It was not always this way throughout the historical evolution of our species, leading her to fulfill the social role befitting her as a natural workshop where life is forged.

In our country, women came out from under one of the most horrible forms of society, that of a Yankee neo-colony under the aegis of imperialism and its system, where everything that the human being is capable of creating was turned into merchandise.

When what has been defined as the exploitation of man by man started far back in history, the mothers and children of the dispossessed bore the brunt of the burden.

Cuban women used to work as domestic servants, or in luxurious shops and bourgeois bars, selected for their good looks. Factories assigned them the simplest jobs, the ones that were the most repetitive and worst paid.

In education and healthcare — services provided on a small scale — their indispensable cooperation was as teachers and nurses who had only been offered basic training. The country, 2,009.92 miles from end to end, only had one higher education center located in the capital and later, several faculties in university campuses in two other provinces. As a rule, the only young women who could study there were those from the most affluent families. In many activities, the presence of a woman was not even dreamed of.

For almost half a century, I have been witness to Vilma's struggles. I cannot forget her presence at the meetings of the July 26 Movement in the Sierra Maestra. She was eventually sent by the movement's directorate to carry out an important mission on the Second Eastern Front. Vilma did not shrink from any danger.

After the triumph of the Revolution, she began her ceaseless battle for the rights of Cuban women and children, which led her to found and lead the Federation of Cuban Women. There was no national or international forum too distant for her to attend in defense of her assailed homeland and of the noble and just ideas of the Revolution.

Her gentle voice, steady and timely, was always listened to with great respect in Party, State and mass organization meetings.

Today women in Cuba make up 66 percent of the technical work force of the country, and they take part, in the main, in almost all the university degree courses. Previously, there were hardly any women involved in scientific activities, since science and scientists did not exist, but exceptionally. In this field as well, today women are in the majority.

Revolutionary duties and her immense work load never prevented Vilma from fulfilling her responsibilities as a loyal wife and mother of several children.

Vilma is dead. Long live Vilma!

The builder, from its foundations, of a new society

By Marta Rojas

Vilma has died. She has moved on to another category of the beloved. We are still struggling with the certainty of her death, after her stoic battle for life – which, in reality, has belonged for

many years now not just to her but also to Cuba – and for whatever just idea that appealed to her in any part of the world; a life that she lavished wherever she thought it could be useful.

Vilma Espín Guillois is now a revolutionary icon, something that her simplicity never allowed her to even imagine, because one of her great personal and revolutionary virtues was that: modesty.

An exponent of the valor and intelligence of the vanguard women who emerged in the Centenary Generation has departed this life. One single detail will permit us to discover that her revolutionary activities unfolded during that historic time, the year of the centenary of José Martí. Specifically, when the student Rubén Batista died in Havana from injuries sustained in a student demonstration honoring the bust of Julio Antonio Mella, desecrated with impunity, on January 10, 1953. Like all of those young people who would later follow Fidel, she had spoken out against the perfidious military coup of March 10, 1952 perpetrated by Fulgencio Batista, although it is disagreeable for us, in these initial paragraphs dedicated to Vilma, to mention the name of the individual who led that cruel blow and established a bloody dictatorship.

Vilma, a pleasant and profound conversationalist, recounted one day that after that March 10, the first demonstrations began in the streets of her hometown of Santiago de Cuba — she did not mention that she was one of the organizers; in one of the first, if not the first, she took to the streets to protest the death of Rubén Batista. She told how on that occasion, a symbolic funeral was held in Santiago, and that action ended in a veritable battle against the dictator's thugs. The idea had been to take flowers to the cemetery, but it ended in the young revolutionaries taking shelter in cafés, throwing sugar bowls at the police.

That episode would be sufficient to include Vilma among the heroic revolutionary combatants of the Centenary Generation. Interestingly, during Rubén Batista's final moments at the Student Clinic in Calixto García Hospital, another Santiago native, Renato Guitart, met Fidel, and later became one of the advance party of the revolutionary movement that assaulted the Moncada Garrison that year. And during that action, the young Vilma, hearing the shots without knowing what was happening, affirmed to her father in their home on San Jerónimo Street that the Moncada was being attacked. A few hours later, it was confirmed. Later, nothing would intimidate her from approaching one of the garrison's posts and asking the impossible, to be able to see the heroes. The response left her and the other women with her with no alternative other than to quickly retreat and even so, two of them were arrested. Her intuition and swift reactions allowed her to escape on a city bus and lose herself in the city until she was able to return home without being identified. The heroic clandestine combatant was emerging in the Heroic City.

During those days of horror, Santiago de Cuba took in, with an attitude of solidarity, the combatants pursued by Batista's soldiers, who had already murdered dozens of young people in the dungeons of the Moncada. Vilma's house, too, was open to take in and protect any of those heroic participants in the attack who sought refuge.

Acción Revolucionaria Oriental (Eastern Revolutionary Action), an organization created by Frank País, was the first that Vilma joined, as an active founder, after the assault on the Moncada. Later, it became the future 26th of July Revolutionary Movement where she would

develop her talents as an organizer and combatant. The M-26-7 carried out the broadest and most daring range of tasks. It was a channel for her deep patriotic, social and humanistic sentiments. She herself reiterated on various occasions that in the initial years of her revolutionary youth, there were two events that deeply moved her: the Moncada attack on July 26, 1953, and History Will Absolve Me, making her realize that Fidel was a valiant leader and a man of ideas, with a consistent political development and great firmness of revolutionary principles.

And she – who was she? A young woman who was capable and educated in the broadest sense of the word. Her vocation and scientific interest, in the service of industrial development, joined with her love for the arts: music, song, painting and ballet, mainly. But she was also enthusiastic about sports, hence her successful performance as volleyball player and captain of the team at the University of Oriente. In addition, she was a fervent follower of José Martí, and she nourished her knowledge, in great detail, of the campaigns of the Mambí forces and the revolutionary intransigence of Antonio Maceo. Conversations with Vilma on these subjects were always marvelous, and not because of any bookish knowledge, but in terms of her sentiment, which was contagious given her communicative style. In her soft tone, with the cadence of her voice, loved and respected, she was capable of providing a fresco of our history, whether of the anticolonial struggles for independence, or as a republic, from the days of Julio Antonio Mella.

Her education began at home. She was born in Santiago de Cuba on April 7, 1930, into a well-to-do family. She could have been a simple “society” girl, but the education she received, together with her own sentiments and personality, made her a revolutionary leader. Her parents were generous and friendly people, understanding with their children —six— and left a trail of affection and respect among everyone from any background who knew them. In Santiago, Espín was referred to as the honorary consul of France, whose home was open to Haitian immigrants, so discriminated against by the elite society of that time. They brought up their children under the influence of their own example of austerity, human sensitivity and respect, without any type of barrier due to social, racial or religious background. Their children grew up according to the way they were and their personal inclinations with respect to choosing higher education, friendships, political positions and social and cultural activities.

For Vilma, once she was a mother, it was not difficult to create a home with similar characteristics, an exemplary one.

Education was always a premise in her home, and Vilma chose to study a scientific discipline in college: chemical/industrial engineering. Very few women were enrolled in that major. She conquered it magnificently, graduating on July 14, 1954, without neglecting her participation in the cultural and sporting events that she enjoyed at the University of Oriente, including her active participation in the University Choir. Upon graduating, she became one of the two first women chemical-industrial engineers in Cuba. That same year, she traveled to the United States for postgraduate study at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, in Boston. When she finished her course, she asked for instructions from the leadership of the 26th of July Movement, and the response was for her to head for Mexico to meet with Fidel and bring his orders and messages back to Cuba. That was the moment when the Granma expedition was being organized.

That was how Vilma's student life ended and her complete commitment to the Revolution began, without any time to exercise her solid training as an engineer.

Under the orders of Frank País, she participated in organizing the armed uprising of Santiago de Cuba that took place on November 30. She was a pillar in that essential action, planned to coincide with the arrival in Cuba from Mexico of the Granma expedition under the leadership of Commander Fidel Castro Ruz. Her serenity, courage and movement capability distinguish the role played by Vilma.

In January 1957 that the enemy detected her, and her home, which had become the headquarters of the Movement, was searched for the first time. Vilma had led a march of mothers in mourning, protesting the many murders committed by the dictatorship in a face-to-face confrontation with Batista's thugs, many of whom were the notorious torturers and merciless murderers of the prisoners in the Moncada and whose criminal records had continued to grow.

There is one event in the history of the Revolution that is known all over the world. Vilma is present in it.

It was in February 1957 that Fidel summoned the clandestine leadership of the 26th of July Movement to a meeting in the Sierra Maestra mountains, and drafted a manifesto to the people of Cuba, informing them of the creation of the Rebel Army and the purpose of its struggle. It was also at that time that the transcendental interview of Fidel by U.S. journalist Herbert Mathews took place, demonstrating to the world that Batista government was lying when it said the revolutionary leader was dead. Vilma was present at the meeting and actively participated in carrying out the orders that Fidel gave Frank País; later, she went completely underground.

She was subsequently designated a member of the National Leadership of the 26th of July Movement, and shortly before Frank País was assassinated, the essential "Déborah" [her clandestine name] was appointed as the movement's coordinator in Oriente province, a task she carried out until June 1958. The danger of her situation as head of clandestine revolutionary missions became unsustainable, requiring a change of location for her struggle, and she joined the Rebel Army, becoming the legendary guerrilla fighter in the Frank País 2nd Eastern Front, commanded by Raúl Castro Ruz.

Déborah, Alicia, Mónica, were the names she used while operating underground, and she became Mariela, the brave and efficient rebel combatant, charged during the month of July 1958 with tasks supporting the leadership, related to the process of returning a group of U.S. citizens who had been kidnapped. Later, she was assigned – among many other responsibilities – with attention to and organization of the clandestine movement in the eastern municipalities located in the vast territorial expanse of the Rebel Army's 2nd Front. That was essential, given that those areas provided indispensable logistical support for ensuring combat actions. As with every task she carried out in her life, she carried this one out conscientiously.

Builder Of A New Society

In the early days of the triumph of the Revolution, Vilma and Raúl married. At a time like this, 45 years ago, Déborah, their firstborn, was one of the first to enter, as one infant more, the Los

Compañeritos Day Care Center on the ground floor of the Ministry of Labor. The Federation of Cuban Women (FMC) had already been created (August 23, 1960) and the task of organizing Day Care Centers was given by the Revolution to the FMC under the direction of Wilma Espín. Prior to that, likewise in the early days of the Revolution—in 1959 – still wearing campaign uniform, as Déborah, Vilma was involved in various tasks as a leader of the 26th of July Movement, and a group approached her with the idea of exchanging ideas and – so as not to left behind – to make Revolution by working voluntarily. She took that concern to Fidel who, with his brilliant vision of the role of women in society and history, saw the importance of a social movement that would include half of the Cuban population.

In 1959, Vilma created and presided over the Auspices Committee in order to participate in the 1st Latin American Congress for the Rights of Women and Children, convened by the International Democratic Federation of Women. This congress took place in Santiago de Chile. It was a platform that would serve as a base for unifying all the existing revolutionary women's groups at that time.

In Cuba the work never stopped. Vilma knew how to lead and thus created cadres that would form a broad platform to take the organization to the farthest corners of the island and from there be nourished by grass-roots women who, up until then, had never participated in the country's social and political life.

On August 23, 1960, after intensive preparatory work nationwide – in rural, mountainous or swampy areas – the Federation of Cuban Women was officially created (FMC). During the first 15 months of work, the nascent organization, still embryonic, had mobilized women en masse for the construction of schools and hospitals; to collect up and take care of unsupported children wandering the streets at the triumph of the Revolution; to improve living standards in the so-called “destitute” barrios; and other social tasks.

Vilma was elected president of the FMC by its founding assembly, a position ratified at every FMC Congress, from the first in 1962 to the seventh in 2000.

The history of the FMC is an important part of Vilma's life. Although she did not exercise her career as an industrial engineer, she had a voice in programs of the Revolution of a technical or economic nature. But her central task was political and social in the widest sense.

The initial tasks of the new organization were to promote educational, ideological and cultural training for women. Campesino women arrived in Havana from the Sierra Maestra and other remote areas and took classes in hairdressing and dressmaking. At least to start off with, every woman would have a sewing machine. There was a meeting in Sports City. The jubilation was extraordinary; it was the incipient beginning of a road that took thousands of campesino women to a different life, one of full participation in the country's economy.

In the wake of those courses the most humble women were offered other studies as the first forms of participation outside of the home. Those women, who had never left the narrow family environment, discovered a new world. Vilma was one of Fidel's most enthusiastic collaborators in promoting knowledge and cultural education and, logically, she began with literacy teaching. Thus she was a member of the National Literacy Commission and placed the new mass

organization at the center of the colossal battle waged for all the people. With that goal fulfilled, others were taken on, such as the follow-up, battles for sixth and ninth grade and classrooms for adult education, all of them filled with women. Vilma's work was not passive. Someone like her who, at risk of death, drove all over Oriente province in tasks as a clandestine combatant, or walked through the streets on difficult functions as a member of the M-26-7 National Directorate, couldn't spend her time behind a desk. Thus Vilma toured the entire country, and took part in mobilizations with grass-roots delegations. She attended to women who were part of the Rebel Army and young people incorporated into defense tasks.

Vilma Espín gave special attention to women's military training, including their incorporation as professionals in the Revolutionary Armed Forces. No task on that front could be more complex for a woman who did what she did, pursued by the brutal dictatorship of Fulgencio Batista, the unconditional servant of U.S. imperialism.

As a cornerstone of the unity of women all over the world in favor of revolutionary causes, internationalism is fundamental and would find in Vilma a promoter and participant in every action in that context. The revolutionary war in South Vietnam for its liberation and the equally heroic resistance of the then Democratic Republic of Vietnam in defense of its sovereignty in the face of the merciless U.S. aggression, had in Vilma an effective collaborator, as did members of women's movements in Asia, Africa and Latin America. To that end, among other things, she created the Fe del Valle Cadres School, currently the FMC Further Education Center.

Her struggle to attain an understanding of gender equality began in the early days of the triumph of the Revolution. With that objective, she headed the great ideological battle that was being waged in the country to eliminate the retrograde effect of culture inherited from the past on gender roles, with its consequent prejudices, erroneous beliefs, traditional sexual stereotypes and taboos, in order to make real the revolutionary principles that condemn every kind of discrimination of a social, ethnic, gender, religious, sexual orientation origin and any other expression of inequality or pejorative treatment.

The list, still brief, of the values of this revolutionary woman who has just died, demonstrates to us that we should take into account the great loss we have suffered. However, the knowledge of her thoughts, actions and projection will be a school for actively continuing her example.

The organizations, national and international projects in which Vilma personally participated throughout the history of the Revolution are numerous.

Someone like her who was so capable and creative in an underground revolutionary organization was just the same in a legislative organization. It is not about a list of responsibilities.

However important these may have been, the valid point is the work she carried out in her duties, whether as a deputy at the National Assembly and member of the Council of State, the highest governmental organization in the country, or as part of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Cuba, of which she was a founding member and at the Second Congress (1980) became a reserve member of the Political Bureau. At the 3rd Congress, she was promoted to effective membership, a responsibility she carried out until 1991.

A special chapter should be dedicated to her duties of a diplomatic nature, or those connected to foreign relations on all continents at different times and at the head of Cuban delegations.

Family Environment

As has been mentioned above, in 1959 Vilma and the then Commander Raúl Castro Ruz, head of the Frank País 2nd Eastern Front and, from October 1959, minister of the Revolutionary Armed Forces, were married. They raised a family currently consisting of four children and eight grandchildren. Vilma always trusted in the value of setting an example for the education and raising of children, and was consistent with this principle in the education and raising of her own children. She was a mother, friend and comrade. Her children and grandchildren love her and will continue to love her, admire her and will continue to admire her; even more so now, for her legacy: the wisdom she possessed in creating harmony, the most just and humane sentiments, with a steely strength of character and her revolutionary intransigence in the defense of important decisions, in defending the principles and the work of the Revolution, both with respect to great tasks and in important day-to-day work.

Vilma Espín Guillois was an exceptional Cuban woman; a representative of the most elevated human values dedicated with creativity and passion to her homeland, to the Revolution that she lived from her heroic and risky beginnings with Fidel's leadership; to her family, and to all our people, with the generosity that distinguishes all great men and women.

Hasta siempre Vilma, the builder, from its very foundations, of a new society.

Socialist Voice #177, June 24, 2007

Review: *Cowboy in Caracas*

Charles Hardy. *Cowboy in Caracas: A North American's Memoir of Venezuela's Democratic Revolution*. Curbstone Press, Willimantic, CT. 2007. 145 pages

Reviewed by Derrick O'Keefe

For admirers and critics alike, the polarized discussion around the radical political process unfolding in Venezuela in recent years has often taken the form of a debate over the motivations of the country's fiery president, Hugo Chavez. Whether he is cast as a demagogue, a dictator, or as a heroic saviour of the poor, the argument about what is known as the Bolivarian Revolution inevitably seems to get reduced to an argument about the man who infamously called George W. Bush "the Devil" from the pulpit of the United Nations.

Missing in the action of this battle of Bush vs. Chavez – which is the title, in fact, of a new account of "Washington's War on Venezuela" by U.S. lawyer and activist Eva Golinger – is the context that gave rise to what is today arguably the world's most radical and significant political movement. The world knows precious little about Venezuela before Chavez, who was first elected in December 1998. And that's where Charles Hardy's unique new book, *Cowboy in Caracas*, comes in.

The writer of this North American's memoir of el proceso and the years predating Chavez's explosion onto the scene, Hardy is not your typical foreign correspondent, nor a mere revolutionary tourist.

The author, in fact, as a Catholic priest working for the Maryknoll missionaries, lived for years in Nueva Tacagua, one of the teeming poor barrios on the hills that surround the Venezuelan capital. There for a number of years in the late 1980s, Hardy shared the reality of the poor majority.

In those years, respectable foreign commentators lauded Venezuela as a stable democracy and reliable supplier of cheap oil, and the desperate poverty was invisible. Hardy brings it out into the light. Along with his co-habitants of cardboard walled tenements, he describes enduring torturously scarce clean water, a total lack of sewage, and little to no access to health care, education and meaningful employment. Hardy's privilege, as an American, allowed him to escape the barrio one day a week, and thus to observe some of the arrogance and racism of Venezuela's elite.

His status as a Man of God may have helped him escape death during el Caracazo in 1989. A forgotten episode that took place several months before the Tiananmen Massacre in China, the police and armed forces savagely repressed protests and riots against a series of unpopular neo-liberal austerity measures. During these dangerous days, Hardy risked his neck to keep residents of Nueva Tacagua alive. It is estimated that as many as 3000 died during el Caracazo. But in those days the seeds of a new Venezuela were planted. Among those outraged by the bloodshed, and galvanized to rebellion, was a young army officer named Hugo Chavez Frias.

Charles Hardy left Caracas in the early 1990s, only to return a couple years later, no longer as a missionary. He has stayed and observed with great hope the popular movement that has so angered the rich of Venezuela and, indeed, the powers-that-be throughout the world.

To get an idea about where the country is heading, this book is a good place to start. His memoir serves as a useful reminder that the historic events of today haven't emerged merely from the exhortations of a charismatic politician. Instead, the Bolivarian Revolution can better be understood as the long overdue expression of the hopes of millions of people who are no longer resigned to their fate and without hope.

Socialist Voice #178, June 25, 2007

They Will Never Have Cuba!

by Fidel Castro Ruz

June 17, 2007

I hope that no-one says that I am gratuitously attacking Bush. Surely they will understand my reasons for strongly criticizing his policies.

Robert Woodward is an American journalist and writer who became famous for the series of articles published by *The Washington Post*, written by him and Carl Bernstein, and which eventually led to the investigation and resignation of Nixon. He is author and co-author of ten best-sellers. With his fearsome style he manages to wrench confessions from his interviewees. In his book, *State of Denial*, he says that on June 18, 2003, three months after the Iraq war had begun, as he was on the way out of his White House office following an important meeting, Bush slapped Jay Garner on the back and said to him:

“Hey, Jay, you want to do Iran?”

“Sir, the boys and I talked about that and we want to hold out for Cuba. We think the rum and the cigars are a little better...The women are prettier.”

Bush laughed. “You got it. You got Cuba.”

Bush was betrayed by his subconscious. It was in his mind when he declared what scores of dark corners should be expecting to happen and Cuba occupies a special place among those dark corners.

Garner, a recently retired three-star general who had been appointed Head of the Post-War Planning Office for Iraq, created by secret National Security Presidential Directive, was considered by Bush an exceptional man to carry out his war strategy. Appointed for the post on January 20, 2003, he was replaced on May 11 of that same year at the urging of Rumsfeld. He didn't have the nerve to explain to Bush his strong disagreements on the matter of the strategy to be pursued in Iraq. He was thinking of another one with identical purpose. In the past few weeks, thousands of marines and a number of US aircraft carriers, with their naval supporting forces, have been manoeuvring in the Persian Gulf, a few miles off the Iranian territory.

It will very soon be 50 years since our people started suffering a cruel blockade; thousands of our sons and daughters have died or have been mutilated as a result of the dirty war against Cuba, the only country in the world to which an Adjustment Act has been applied inciting illegal emigration, yet another cause of death for Cuban citizens, including women and children; more than 15 years ago Cuba lost her principal markets and sources of supply for foods, energy, machinery, raw materials and long-term low-interest financing.

First the socialist bloc collapsed followed almost immediately by the USSR, dismantled piece by piece. The empire tightened and internationalized the blockade; the proteins and calories which were quite well distributed despite our deficiencies were reduced approximately by 40 percent;

diseases such as optical neuritis and others appeared; the shortage of medicines, also a result of the blockade, became an everyday reality. Medicines were allowed to enter only as a charitable act, to demoralize us; these, in their turn, became a source of illegal business and black-market dealings.

Inevitably, the “special period” struck. This was the sum total of all the consequences of the aggression and it forced us to take desperate measures whose harmful effects were bolstered by the colossal media machine of the empire. Everyone was awaiting, some with sadness and others with oligarchic glee, the crumbling of the Cuban Revolution.

The access to convertible currency greatly harmed our social consciousness, to a greater or a lesser degree, due to the inequalities and ideological weaknesses it created.

Throughout its lifetime, the Revolution has taught the people, training hundreds of thousands of teachers, doctors, scientists, intellectuals, artists, computer engineers and other professionals with university and post-graduate degrees in dozens of professions. This storehouse of wealth has allowed us to reduce infant mortality to low levels, unthinkable in any Third World country, and to raise life expectancy as well as the average educational level of the population up to the ninth grade.

By offering Cuba oil under favourable terms of payment at a time when oil prices were escalating dramatically, the Venezuelan Bolivarian Revolution brought a significant relief and opened up new possibilities, since our country was already beginning to produce her own energy in ever-growing amounts.

Concerned over its interests in that country, the empire had for years been planning to destroy that Revolution, and so it attempted to do it in April 2002, as it will attempt to do again as many times as it can. This is why the Bolivarian revolutionaries are preparing to resist.

Meanwhile, Bush has intensified his plans for an occupation of Cuba, to the point of proclaiming laws and an interventionist government in order to install a direct imperial administration.

Based on the privileges granted to the United States in Bretton Woods and Nixon’s swindle when he removed the gold standard which placed a limit on the issuing of paper money, the empire bought and paid with paper tens of trillions of dollars, more than twelve digit figures. This is how it preserved an unsustainable economy. A large part of the world currency reserves are in US Treasury bonds and bills. For this reason, many would rather not have a dollar crisis like the one in 1929 that would turn those paper bills into thin air. Today, the value of one dollar in gold is at least eighteen times less than what it was in the Nixon years. The same happens with the value of the reserves in that currency.

Those paper bills have kept their low current value because fabulous amounts of increasingly expensive and modern weapons can be purchased with them; weapons that produce nothing. The United States exports more weapons than anyone else in the world. With those same paper bills, the empire has developed a most sophisticated and deadly system of weapons of mass destruction with which it sustains its world tyranny.

Such power allows it to impose the idea of transforming foods into fuels and to shatter any initiative and commitment to avoid global warming, which is visibly accelerating.

Hunger and thirst, more violent hurricanes and the surge of the sea is what Tyranians and Trojans stand to suffer as a result of imperial policies. It is only through drastic energy savings that humanity will have a respite and hopes of survival for the species; but the consumer societies of the wealthy nations are absolutely heedless of that.

Cuba will continue to develop and improve the combative capacities of her people, including our modest but active and efficient defensive weapons industry which multiplies our capacity to face the invaders no matter where they may be, and the weapons they possess. We shall continue acquiring the necessary materials and the pertinent fire power, even though the notorious Gross Domestic Product as measured by capitalism may not be growing, for their GDP includes such things as the value of privatizations, drugs, sexual services and advertising, while it excludes many others like free educational and health services for all citizens.

From one year to the next the standard of living can be improved by raising knowledge, self-esteem and the dignity of people. It will be enough to reduce wastage and the economy will grow. In spite of everything, we will keep on growing as necessary and as possible.

“Freedom costs dearly, and it is necessary to either resign ourselves to live without it or to decide to buy it for its price”, said Martí.

“Whoever attempts to conquer Cuba will only gather the dust of her soil soaked in blood, if he does not perish in the fight”, exclaimed Maceo.

We are not the first revolutionaries to think that way! And we shall not be the last!

One man may be bought, but never a people.

Fate decreed that I could survive the empire’s murderous machine. Shortly, it will be a year since I became ill and, while I hovered between life and death, I stated in the Proclamation of July 31, 2006: “I do not harbour the slightest doubt that our people and our Revolution will fight until the last drop of blood.”

Mr. Bush, don’t you doubt that either!

I assure you that you will never have Cuba!

Socialist Voice #179, June 25, 2007

Another Argument for the Manifesto

by Fidel Castro Ruz

June 24, 2007

Why did I once claim, in one of my reflections, that Bush had authorized or ordered my death?

That phrase may appear ambiguous and vague. Perhaps it would be more accurate, though even more confusing, to say that he both authorized and ordered my death. Allow me to explain immediately:

The denunciation surrounding his plan to assassinate me was made before he snatched an electoral victory from his opponent through fraud.

As early as August 5, 2000, I denounced these plans in Pinar del Rio, before a vast congregation of combative citizens who had gathered there for the traditional July 26 festivities, held in that province, in Villa Clara and Ciudad de La Habana in recognition of their merits that year.

Attempts to identify those responsible for the hundreds of plans to assassinate me meet with a shroud of secrecy. All direct and indirect means have been used to bring about my removal. Following Nixon's morally forced renunciation Ford forbade the participation of government employees in assassination schemes.

I am convinced that Carter, bound by ethical convictions of a religious nature, would never have ordered any such action against me. He was the only U.S. president who had a gesture of friendship towards Cuba in several important areas, including the establishment of the U.S. Interests Section in Cuba.

I don't know that Clinton ever ordered my death, so I cannot accuse him of such an action. Unquestionably, he showed respect for the law and acted with political savvy when he accepted the judicial decision that called for the kidnapped child's return to his father and closest relatives, a decision by then backed by the overwhelming majority of the U.S. people.

However, it is also a fact that, during his administration, Posada Carriles hired Central American mercenaries to place bombs in the hotels and recreational centers of cities like Havana and Varadero in order to strike at Cuba's economy, hit by the blockade and the special period. The terrorist had no reservations about declaring that the young Italian tourist who perished in one of the explosions was "in the wrong place at the wrong time", a phrase Bush repeated recently like the line from a poem. The money and even the electronic materials used to assemble those bombs were provided by the Cuban American National Foundation (CANF), which distributed the handsome sums at its disposal through shameless lobbying with members of different parties at the U.S. Congress.

At the close of 1997, the 7th Latin American Summit of Heads of State and Government, which I was obliged to attend, was to be held on Isla Margarita, Venezuela.

On October 27 that year, a vessel called “La Esperanza” was en route to Isla Margarita. While sailing very close to Puerto Rican coasts, it was intercepted by a patrol boat of the Coast Guard and Customs Service of that occupied island on suspicion of drug trafficking. On the vessel were four Cuban-born terrorists carrying two 50-calibre Barrett semi-automatic assault rifles with infrared-guided telescopic sights, capable of delivering precision rounds to armor-plated vehicles and planes in mid-air or about to take off or land from a distance of over a thousand meters, and 7 boxes of munitions.

The semi-automatic rifles were the property of Francisco José Hernández, Chairman of the Cuban American National Foundation. The yacht “La Esperanza” was the registered property of José Antonio Llamas, one of the directors of that counterrevolutionary organization. Recently, the latter declared that CANF had purchased a cargo helicopter, ten ultra-light, remote-controlled planes, seven ships and abundant explosive materials, with the express aim of executing terrorist actions against Cuba. The organization also had another yacht at its disposal, the “Midnight Express”, which, according to Llamas, was to transport the Chairman —the head of heads— Mas Canosa to the island, where he would declare himself President after Fidel had been assassinated and his government overthrown.

American officers in Puerto Rico had no choice but to turn the four crew members over to the courts. In Venezuela, Posada Carriles was to coordinate the execution of the plan. He was expected to arrive there at any moment.

Could U.S. authorities, who generated and provided the Foundation with public funds and million-dollar businesses, have been unaware of these facts?

In December 1999, the detainees were acquitted by an indulgent jury, for “lack of evidence”. The rigged proceedings were manipulated by Héctor Pesquera, corrupt FBI officer who was later rewarded with the directorship of FBI headquarters in Miami and was a key figure in the arrest of the five Cuban anti-terrorist activists in Florida.

The notorious Cuban-American mafia was preparing for the November 2000 presidential elections. Both parties were contending for its support, for the Florida state could tilt the balance. The chieftains, of pure Batista stock, were the experts in committing fraud.

In the address I mentioned above, I literally said, among other things:

“The so-called Republican Convention has just come to an end. It was held in none other than the city of Philadelphia, home to the famous 1776 Declaration of Independence. Actually, (...) those slaveholders who rebelled against the British colonial rule did not abolish the disgraceful practice of slavery —which remained in effect for almost a whole century longer (...).

“(...) the first announcement made at the Republican Convention just held in Philadelphia under the leadership of the party’s illustrious candidate, [in violation of major international agreements], was the plan to considerably raise the military budget for research and development, and the construction of an antimissile shield to cover the

entire nation with a radar network that could detect enemy missiles en route to U.S. territory and shoot them down in mid-air.

“Those holding these views are unable to understand that such a policy would meet with the overwhelming opposition of the rest of the world, including Europe. That, like a magnet, it would bring together all those nations threatened by a strategy that would leave them helpless against the United States. A new, dangerous and extremely costly arms race would immediately follow and nothing could prevent the proliferation of nuclear arms and other weapons of mass destruction.”

I dared predict these events seven years before Bush’s recent visit to the Albanian capital, which was the subject of one of my reflections.

I continued my address as follows:

“The authors of the plan know very well that slightly more than half the American people, who are still confused and insufficiently informed about this complex issue, believe that to be the most suitable solution in the interest of the country’s peace and security. However, the adoption of this extreme position by the Republican candidate vis à vis any other more sensible or reasonable proposal from his opponent would present him to voters as the strong, farsighted, tough guy that the United States needs to confront all imaginary or real dangers. This is the good news they sent out from Philadelphia to all of the peoples on Earth”.

This was still well before witnessing the occupation of Afghanistan and the plans to unleash a war against Iraq.

I proceeded to denounce Bush’s program vis-à-vis Latin America:

“What does this smart platform have to offer Latin America and the Caribbean in particular? There is a phrase that says it all: “The next American century should include all of the Americas.” This simple statement means no less than the proclamation of the United States’ right of ownership over Latin America and the Caribbean.

“It later adds: ‘In concert with the Congress, (the president) will work with key democracies (...) and –above all– Mexico.’ (...). Particularly striking is the phrase that reads: ‘...and –above all–Mexico’ since that is a country they robbed of half its territory through an unjustifiable, expansionist war. Their obvious intent is to begin with the economic annexation and full political subordination of that country to the United States and then do likewise with the rest of the countries in our region, imposing a free trade agreement essentially favorable to U.S. interests, from which not even the tiniest Caribbean island could escape. They mean, of course, the free circulation of capital and commodities, not the people!

“As expected, the highly biased Philadelphia platform devotes a substantial part of its section on Latin America to Cuba: ‘Our economic and political relations will change when the Cuban regime frees all political prisoners, legalizes peaceful protest, allows opposition political activity, permits free expression, and commits to democratic

elections.’ For the authors of this demagogic abomination, freedom and democracy mean an outdated, corrupt system in which it is money alone that decides and elects, and in which a presidential candidate is nominated, with lightning speed, as the heir to a vacant throne”.

“Another wire story reports that: ‘The platform, aside from active support for the enemies of the Revolution, includes the broadcasting of news from the United States to the Caribbean nation.’ That is, they intend to keep up with the filth spewed against Cuba by subversive radio stations located in U.S. territory; they will persist in the outrageous use of the name of José Martí—a name that is glorious and sacred to our people—in official U.S. government broadcasts directed against Cuba”.

“[At a press conference, U.S. legislators of Cuban descent euphorically squealed]: ‘This is unprecedented language. Never before has the Republican Party made such a broad commitment”’.

“To top off the mountain of garbage contained in the Republican platform, it is finally stated: ‘Republicans believe that the United States should adhere to the principles established by the 1966 Cuban Adjustment Act, which recognizes the rights of Cuban refugees fleeing communist tyranny”’.

“The prestige of the imperial policy will so crumble that not even its dust will remain. We will systematically denounce and demolish one by one, its hypocrisy and lies. They obviously have absolutely no idea what kinds of people have been forged in these 40 years of Revolution.

“Our message will reach all corners of the Earth, and our struggle will serve as an example. The world, ever more ungovernable, will fight until hegemony and the subjugation of peoples become totally unsustainable.

“Whoever is elected leader of the empire should not ignore that Cuba demands the total removal of the murderous Cuban Adjustment Act and the criminal pieces of legislation that bear the notorious names of Torricelli and Helms-Burton as well as the genocidal blockade and economic war. It should be noted that those who have authored, promoted and enforced these laws and policies are guilty of the crime of genocide, as defined and condemned by international treaties signed by both the United States and Cuba”.

“They must not forget that although no lawsuits have been filed so far demanding compensation for moral damage—and this compensation could be substantial—the U.S. government already owes the Cuban people over 300 billion dollars for the human damage resulting from its mercenary invasion by the Bay of Pigs, its dirty war and many other crimes”.

“They should not entertain any illusion regarding Cuba’s stance if relations between the United States and our country ever become as normal as those currently existing with other socialist countries like China and Vietnam. We will not remain silent in the face of any crime, aggression or injustice committed against other peoples. Our battle of ideas

will not cease as long as the current imperialist, hegemonic and unipolar system is still in place and remains a scourge of humanity and a mortal threat to the survival of our species.

“A growing number of millions of Americans are becoming aware of the horrors of the economic and political order imposed on the world”.

“The Cuban Revolution does not merely confide in the moral integrity and patriotic and revolutionary spirit of its people, and in the survival instinct of the human species, whose very existence is threatened. It also believes and confides in the traditional idealism of the American people that can only be led into unjust wars and shameful aggressions through vulgar deceit. Once demagoguery and lies are definitely exposed and defeated, the world will find excellent allies in the American people. This is what happened in the case of the repugnant war that cost the lives of millions of Vietnamese and over 50,000 young Americans. A more recent example is the American people noble support of a little boy and a Cuban family, victims of a brutal crime perpetrated by a band of criminals who, after having taken advantage of that country’s hospitality, ended up showing their hatred and frustration by trampling and burning the U.S. flag.

“The changes in U.S. policy toward Cuba must be unilateral because the U.S. leaders have unilaterally imposed the blockade and economic war against Cuba”.

“From here, from this province where the Bronze Titan ultimately crowned, in Mantua, the colossal feat of the invasion he had begun in Mangos de Baraguá, we say to them: You fools! Do you not understand that Cuba is impregnable, that its Revolution is indestructible, that its people will never bow down or surrender? Do you not realize that our patriotism and internationalism are as deeply rooted in our minds and hearts as the imposing mogotes of Pinar del Río are in the volcanic rocks of this part of an island that is called Cuba and is surrounded today by the halo of having successfully endured almost 42 years of blockade and aggression by the most formidable power that ever existed?

“We are defended by the strength of our prestige and the example we have set, the indestructible steel that is the justice of our cause, the inextinguishable fire of our truth and our morale as well as the double trench of stone and ideas that we have built which is unassailable.

“That is why, Mr. Bush, if you finally become the leader of what no longer is and can no longer be called a republic but rather an empire, then, in the spirit of an honest adversary, I suggest that you leave aside the euphoria and fever of your Convention, and reconsider your position in order to avoid the risk of becoming the tenth American president to come and go watching with sterile and unnecessary bitterness a Revolution that will not bow down or surrender and that can never be destroyed.

“I am very much aware of what you have recklessly told your close and indiscreet friends in the Cuban-American mob: that you can solve the problem of Cuba very easily, in clear reference to the methods used in the sinister era when the Central Intelligence Agency was directly involved in assassination plots against our country’s leaders. Because I do

not share this narrow view of the role of individuals in history, I urge you not to forget that for every one of the revolutionary leaders you may decide to so remove, there are millions of men and women in Cuba who are capable of taking their places and altogether there are far more of them than you could ever remove, or that your immense political, economic and military power could ever defeat.”

I believe this long reflection is yet another argument in support of what I expounded on in the Manifesto for the People of Cuba.

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Venezuela and the International Struggle for Socialism

By Roger Annis and John Riddell

Roger Annis and John Riddell are the editors of Socialist Voice.

The dramatic advances of the Venezuelan revolution, and the alliances it has forged with other insurgent peoples and governments resisting imperialism, are creating an historic opportunity to strengthen international anti-imperialist collaboration and rebuild the revolutionary socialist movement worldwide.

Venezuela's Bolivarian revolution is still in its early stages. Yet as it moves forward, it will—like the Russian revolution of 1917 and other great revolutions of the 20th century—become a test for all tendencies in the workers movement, dividing those who identify with and defend real-world revolutions from those who remain in sectarian isolation.

Venezuela's presidential elections in December 2006 delivered a solid mandate for the country's advance toward socialism, in the form of a 63% majority for President Hugo Chávez. A mass movement of workers and farmers has set the goal of socialism and is using governmental power to take decisive steps in that direction. This is creating the most favourable conditions in several decades for socialist advance on a world scale. Socialist Voice aims to link up with other forces internationally to support this development and learn from it.

During the past year, the Venezuelan people and government have moved on many fronts to secure democratic rights and national sovereignty. They have nationalized basic utilities and energy resources that were privatized under preceding regimes. They have implemented measures that enable small farmers to gain secure access to the land. They have created new popular institutions, including "Communal Councils," projected as the first step toward a new state structure based on popular and working-class movements. On the directly political level, the United Venezuelan Socialist Party (PSUV) is being formed with the goal of enabling rank-and-file activists to take part in controlling and directing the struggle for socialism on a national level. Millions have responded to the call of this new party to join it, and they are pressing to make this party their own.

Venezuela's revolution has been internationalist to its very core, devoting great energy and resources to reinforcing movements for sovereignty in the entire Global South, while winning the acclaim of tens of millions across Latin America. It has allied with socialist Cuba. It has moved energetically to aid and defend the indigenous-based government in Bolivia. It has brought urgently needed aid to the Haitian and Nicaraguan peoples. And it has extended its solidarity with countries in the Mideast that are victims of imperialist war and occupation.

The Bolivarian movement in Venezuela explicitly counterposes its concept of socialism, based on grassroots initiatives and leadership, to the bureaucratic system that led to the downfall of the Soviet Union.

A breakthrough in anti-imperialist leadership

It is important not to exaggerate the gains of the Venezuelan process or to project onto it our own hopes and goals. The revolution is now unfolding within the framework of a struggle against imperialism and for national sovereignty and democratic rights. Capitalism still dominates the Venezuelan economy, shaping the daily existence of working people. Capitalism is now balanced against the growing power of working people, and this uneasy coexistence could continue for some time.

The decisive battleground in the world democratic and anti-imperialist struggle remains the Middle East. The imperialist wars in Iraq and Afghanistan intertwine with the confrontation with Iran, the escalating war against the Palestinian people, and the increasingly explosive conflicts in Lebanon. The imperialists feel growing pressure either to carry out retreats they can ill afford or to undertake new military adventures that could be ruinous for them as well as humanity. Opposition to the war against Mideast peoples is the most urgent task of world solidarity. The course of this great battle will largely determine how far Venezuela's working people can advance before they must confront decisive conflicts with imperialism.

In many regions of the world, including in parts of the Mideast, we see encouraging progress toward new or stronger anti-imperialist organizations and leadership. By far the most important gains in this respect have been registered in Venezuela. It is therefore no surprise that Venezuela's bold stand against the Empire and neoliberalism won acclaim from anti-imperialist activists in the Mideast who were gathered at the March 2007 antiwar and anti-imperialist conference in Cairo, Egypt. (See *Socialist Voice* #122) Venezuela, in alliance with Cuba, is providing leadership to the world struggle against imperialism and reawakening hopes for socialism among the world's oppressed.

Reshaping the socialist movement

The initial steps toward formation of the new party, the PSUV, have provoked a heated debate among socialists in Venezuela. Divisions have appeared in every major political current in the Bolivarian movement, separating those who favor support for the new party and those who wish to abstain from it. The founding of the new party offers revolutionary forces the possibility to unite against bureaucratic and patronage-ridden political machines and against left sectarianism. It is a creative process that deserves support. The advance in Venezuela will put socialist currents internationally to the test in similar fashion.

Venezuela is an economically dependent and relatively poor country. It has not yet achieved a political and economic transformation in favour of workers and farmers as fundamental as what was achieved by the Russian and Cuban revolutions of the last century. Yet the Venezuelan process is marked by high vision and solid achievement. And its impact is magnified by the fact that it reverses a long downturn of struggles and follows the shattering of Stalinism on a world scale.

For many years, working-class and progressive movements internationally have been on the defensive. The movement in Venezuela provides an opportunity to link up with the power of a living revolution and to win a new generation of fighters inspired by its example. It confirms the need for movements of working people and the oppressed to struggle for political power.

The example of Venezuela, combined with the rise of struggles in other regions dominated by imperialism and the emergence of new anti-imperialist leadership forces across Latin America, the Middle East, and elsewhere, provides an impetus for anti-imperialist unity everywhere. New forces inspired by Venezuela will move into action, both in defense of the Bolivarian revolution and in heightening anti-capitalist resistance in their countries. Currents that are able to learn from Venezuela will find that they share a broadening area of agreement as well as an effective banner for recruitment.

Socialist forces internationally, now divided into many weak and isolated currents, will have a chance to gain new energy and find new areas of agreement with each other and with forces from broader resistance movements. Those that identify with the advancing revolution will find a basis for growing collaboration and fraternal ties.

The role of *Socialist Voice*

When *Socialist Voice* was launched in 2004, its editors sought to provide a vehicle for “Marxists and other working-class fighters to forge new links across longstanding organizational barriers and rediscuss their tasks in a dynamic and changing context.” We quickly defined a focus: solidarity with the resistance in the Middle East and with the Venezuelan and Cuban revolutions. *Socialist Voice* supporters have sought to expand our understanding through sharing in responsibility to build these and other solidarity movements.

In the present process of anti-capitalist discussion and regroupment, *Socialist Voice* is guided by three central ideas:

1. The example of Cuba and Venezuela

Revolutionary socialist politics today rests on a body of working-class experience going back to the time of Marx and Engels and including, as its central element, the Russian Revolution and the early Soviet republic. Today we are witness to two revolutions that demonstrate what working people can achieve through the exercise of political power: Cuba and Venezuela. These two peoples, acting in concert, are now the vanguard of a popular upsurge across much of Latin America and the Caribbean.

The Cuban socialist revolution, now half a century old and struggling to recover from the blows of Soviet collapse and the U.S. blockade, continues as an outpost of militant opposition to imperialism and of solidarity with the world’s oppressed peoples. The Cuban communists provide Marxist leadership for the world struggle for liberation and human survival. Socialists have an elementary duty to defend Cuba—actively and militantly—against the ongoing U.S.-led blockade and subversion. This entails defending the institutional framework that has enabled Cuba to survive—including its government, armed forces, and instruments of state economic control and planning.

It is no accident that the Cuban communists were the first to perceive the potential of the Bolivarian movement in Venezuela and offer it effective support. Many socialists elsewhere responded skeptically, emphasizing the ways in which this movement deviated from traditional models. Among socialists, fraternal criticism is always in order. But the leadership around Hugo

Chávez has so far shown more wisdom than its left critics internationally. Revolutionary socialists, like all anti-capitalist fighters, must study and learn from the lessons of the Venezuelan experience and the experience of Cuba with which Venezuela is so closely allied..

2. Mass action—the only road forward

In imperialist countries such as the U.S., UK, and Canada, the last 25 years have been a period of retreat for most working-class and social movements. Capitalism still appears buoyant and revolution seems a distant prospect. Conditions are far removed from the type of acute social crisis that led to the Bolivarian upsurge in Venezuela.

Yet world capitalist development is marked by increasing political and economic instability and growing class antagonisms, thus hastening conditions for working-class upsurge in imperialist countries. The main lessons of the Venezuelan process are fully applicable to workers' struggles in imperialist countries:

- As Venezuela and Bolivia have shown, electoral victories based on deep-going popular upsurges can advance a revolutionary process. However, lasting political and social change happens only when massive mobilizations of the exploited and oppressed are the driving force.
- Fundamental social change cannot be enacted by capitalist state bureaucracies. Popular movements themselves must take the lead in their implementation. The struggle must uplift all sectors of the oppressed and strengthen their capacity to participate and lead.
- The advance of the anti-capitalist movement requires not just a national strategy but international solidarity and collaboration, support for national liberation struggles, and support for the liberation struggles of indigenous peoples at home and abroad.
- Far-reaching challenges to capitalist power will invariably lead the ruling-class minority to use force, to subvert democratic rights, and to use such abhorrent practices as torture to maintain its control. This can only be parried by the concerted power of mass movements.
- A rising anti-capitalist mass movement will require the building of unified revolutionary parties in each country to lead the struggle to establish and defend a workers' and farmers' government.

3. For inclusive, non-sectarian action

The long period of downturn in working-class struggles in Canada, the U.S., and UK has strengthened tendencies among many socialist currents to give their narrow organizational needs priority over the needs of common struggle. Attempts are often made to impose on united fronts an “advanced” program that would in fact narrow their political breadth. Too often, solidarity committees become limited to the group exercising control and its immediate friends.

Against this trend, the socialist principle of united front requires that all currents that support a progressive goal unite around the common interests of the broader struggle.

Such movements can not only strengthen progressive social struggles; they can also give leadership in their field of activity to the working-class movement as a whole and help clear the road to revolutionary unity.

Socialist Voice argues for labour unity in militant action. *Socialist Voice* supports all movements through which working people begin to assert their existence as a social class independent of the bourgeoisie and imperialism. Based on this common activity, *Socialist Voice* seeks to expand fraternal discussion and collaboration with other currents in the resistance, with the ultimate goal of a unification of revolutionary socialist forces.

Tasks and objectives

The goals outlined here are not unique to *Socialist Voice* — they are shared in whole or in part by other currents and activists in Canada and elsewhere. By placing these goals at the centre of its activity, *Socialist Voice* seeks to help lay the basis for unification of forces that are marching down this road and for the building of an effective and broadly based revolutionary organization.

Socialist Voice views other anti-capitalist currents not as opponents but as allies, real or potential, which can contribute materially to building a revolutionary socialist movement. *Socialist Voice* seeks to take advantage of the unifying logic of Venezuela's revolution to build bridges to currents from which we are divided by differences in political history, practice, culture, and theory, and to join forces with the many activists in labour and anti-imperialist movements inspired by Venezuela's example of popular revolution.

We invite those who agree with the concepts outlined here to join us in the discussions and preparation and circulation of publications that make up *Socialist Voice*.

International Discussion An international discussion on the significance of Venezuela's revolution has drawn contributions from socialists around the world. It was initiated by Socialist Worker (Aotearoa / New Zealand). Contributions to that discussion can be found at their website. An account of the issues in the discussion, including a summary of various participants' arguments, appears in the June 22 issue of *Green Left Weekly*.