

# Bolívar and Chávez - The Spirit of Radical Determination

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## 1. 'Feathers Carried by the Tempest'

In the summer of 2005 Venezuela commemorated the bicentenary of Simón Bolívar's oath, made in the presence of his great teacher, Simón Rodríguez—a man who later in Paris, well before Marx, frequented socialist secret societies and returned to South America only in 1823. Bolívar's oath took place on August 15, 1805, on the outskirts of Rome. Already the place itself—the hill of Monte Sacro—which they had chosen together for this solemn occasion, was indicative of the nature of the young Bolívar's historical pledge. For precisely on the hill of Monte Sacro, twenty-three centuries earlier, the rebellious protest of the plebeians against the patricians in Ancient Rome, under the leadership of Sicinio, was supposed to have taken place. At that time the rebellion of the Roman populace is said to have been brought to an end by the rhetoric of that notorious pillar of the established order, Senator Menenius Agrippa, who was preaching the forever familiar wisdom of the ruling classes according to which the people “not destined to rule” should willingly accept “*their place* in the *natural order* of society.”

In firm defiance of the resignatory wisdom that emanates from the successfully imposed iniquitous relations of power everywhere, the young Bolívar expressed his determination on Monte Sacro to dedicate his life to a struggle for victory over colonial domination in his part of the world. These were his words: “I swear before you; I swear by the god of my fathers; I swear by my ancestors; I swear by my honour and I swear by my homeland that I will not allow my arm to rest, nor my soul to repose, until we have broken the chains which oppress us by the will of Spanish power.”<sup>1</sup>

Bolívar never wavered in his radical determination as expressed in his oath, not even under the most adverse circumstances. The years ahead made him realize that fundamental changes had to be made not only in the international political and military power relations but, more profoundly, in the existing social order if the project of putting an end to colonial rule was to succeed. Such radical social changes included the liberation of the slaves to which his own class was vehemently opposed. Even his beloved sister considered him “crazy,” because of his unyielding insistence on *equality*.

Bolívar called equality “*the law of laws*,” adding that “without equality all freedoms, all rights perish. For it we must make sacrifices.”<sup>2</sup> All this he professed in a truly uncompromising sense. And to prove with deeds the validity of his own deeply held principles and beliefs, he did not hesitate for a moment to free all of the slaves of his own estates, in his resolve to give as broad a social base as possible to the struggle for a complete and irreversible emancipation from deeply entrenched colonial rule. In his magnificent address to the Congress of Angostura, in February 1819, he singled out the liberation of the slaves as the most vital of all of his own orders and decrees, saying that, “I leave it to your sovereign decision to reform or revoke all of the statutes and decrees enacted by me; but I plead with you to confirm the *absolute liberty of the slaves*, as I would plead for my life and for the life of the Republic.”<sup>3</sup>

This he did several decades before the vital human issue of the emancipation of the slaves could be raised and partially settled in North America. For the Founding Fathers of the U.S. Constitution never had half a concern in their mind, and even less in their heart, for putting an end to the inhuman system of slavery of which they were themselves direct beneficiaries. The terrible legacy of this fateful omission continued to assert itself in different forms for centuries, manifesting in a most tragic way even in our own days, as we could witness it in New Orleans in the wake of Hurricane Katrina.

As a necessary counterweight not only to the “Holy Alliance,” which included also Spain, but even more importantly, to the growing imperial ambitions of the United States of North America, Bolívar tried to constitute a lasting Confederation of the Latin American nations. Not surprisingly, however, his efforts directed toward that end were not only frustrated but totally nullified by the ever more powerful country of the North and its allies.

Showing great insight into the prevailing trend of historical development, reaching down to our own times, Bolívar was in the end forced to conclude that “*the United States of North America seem to be destined by providence to condemn America to misery in the name of Liberty.*”<sup>4</sup> As we all know, George W. Bush’s speeches—irrespective of who writes them—are peppered with the unctuously recited word “liberty.” All that has changed since Simón Bolívar’s days is that today the United States of North America claims to be destined by divine providence itself to treat as they please, “in the name of liberty,” not only South America but the entire world, employing even the most violent means of military aggression against those who dare to oppose their global imperial design.

Even the Anglican Bishops rejected, in a document made public on September 19, 2005, such presumption of righteousness and providential destiny as the orienting principle of U.S. foreign policy, although they—understandably but wrongly—attributed it to the influence of Christian fundamentalism. Understandably, because on that basis they could utter *ex officio* an authoritative condemnation of a “theologically misconceived” position. But wrongly, because this foreign policy orientation of the U.S. ruling classes goes back in history all the way to Simón Bolívar’s days, if not earlier. And those who like to ascribe it simply to George W. Bush’s Republican Party would be well advised to remember that it was Democratic president Bill Clinton who arrogantly declared while holding office, in full unison with his government, from Secretary of State Madeleine Albright (who kept repeating the Clintonian mantra) to Labor Secretary Robert B. Reich,<sup>5</sup> that there was “*only one necessary nation: the United States of America.*” On that count, as proclaimed by no less a governmental figure than twice-elected President Clinton, the other nations should be condemned by the “one and only necessary nation” for their totally unacceptable aspirations to sovereign decision making, without the slightest concern for democracy and liberty, as guilty of “*ethnic pandaemonium*” in the words of Senior Democratic Senator Daniel Patrick Moynihan.<sup>6</sup>

Bolívar’s “law of laws,” legal equality, was considered by him absolutely indispensable for the constitution of a society that would be politically sustainable against the powers

that internally tended to disrupt its potential development, and tried to violate and even to nullify its sovereignty in its international relations. Moreover, he insisted that “physical inequality” must be counteracted unfailingly under all circumstances, because it is an “injustice of nature.” And he was realistic enough to admit that legal equality could not do the job of correcting physical inequality beyond a certain extent and in a limited way.<sup>7</sup> Not even when the legal measures introduced by the legislators were of a fundamental social significance, as indeed his liberation of the slaves happened to be.

What was necessarily required in order to make the given social order truly viable was the transformation of the whole fabric of society far beyond even such measures as the legal emancipation of the slaves. Not surprisingly, therefore, in his groping towards the required solutions for which the historical time had not yet arrived, Bolívar encountered great hostility even in the Latin American countries to which he rendered unequalled services, acknowledged by the unique title of *El Libertador* with which he was honored at the time. Thus, outrageous as it must sound to us today, he had to spend his final days in tragic isolation.

As to his adversaries in the United States of North America, who felt threatened by the spread of his enlightened conception of equality—both internally and in the conduct of inter-state relations—they did not hesitate to condemn and dismiss him as “*the dangerous madman of the South.*”<sup>8</sup>

With a great *sense of proportion*: a virtue absolutely vital for everyone, and especially for all major political figures who have the privilege, in our societies, of making decisions which deeply affect the life of countless people, Bolívar said about himself that he was “*a feather carried by the tempest.*” This kind of assessment of one’s role in society could not be more alien to the apologists of the established social and political order who would like to render impossible the institution of any significant change, whether it is brought about by social tempests or even by slow degrees, despite the lip service paid at times to the latter. Moreover, such people are invariably engaged in the futile task of trying to *undo* the changes that have already asserted themselves in the course of historical development. Thus they continue to deny that there can be deep-seated real *causes* behind the erupting social and political tempests that carry on their wings, as Bolivarian “feathers,” the political figures who insist, with radical passion, on the necessity of fundamental social changes. And when our incurable apologists cannot altogether close their eyes to the fact of the periodic eruption of social tempests, they prefer to conveniently attribute them to “*irrationality,*” to the “acceptance by the mob of *mindless populism,*” and the like, pretending to give thereby a rational answer to the challenge they are supposed to face while in fact running away from the problem itself. They have to do that because they have absolutely no sense of proportion; nor could they ever acquire it.

In this spirit the broadly distributed weekly, the *Economist*, refuses to give any meaning at all to the expression “Bolivarian Revolution,” despite the fact that the political leadership of Venezuela, in conjunction with its consistent references to the unfinished project of Simón Bolívar’s age, is engaged in setting in motion a far-reaching

transformation of the country. Indeed, it is a transformation which continues to reverberate across the continent and generate significant rejoinders also in other parts of Latin America. With a deliberately insulting intent *The Economist* puts always in sarcastic inverted commas the word “Bolivarian”—as if anything Bolivarian should be considered self-evidently absurd—in place of seriously addressing the issues themselves which it wishfully tries to dismiss without any argument. The inverted commas are supposed to do the job of refutation, in the form of an aprioristic disqualification of the ongoing developments in South America, pretending to provide in this peculiar fashion an irrefutable proof. However, the only thing the editors of the *Economist* can prove by the painfully repetitive use of their sarcastic inverted commas is their own venomous mindlessness. Being totally subservient to the interests of the U.S. ruling circles, as the self-appointed propagandists of the annual Economic Summit ritual held in Davos, they seem to think even today that Bolívar was nothing more than a “*dangerous madman of the South.*” In the same spirit in which they try to characterize (and peremptorily dismiss) also those who are determined to bring his project up-to-date.

Yet, the truth of the matter is that lasting radical achievements can only be built, *cumulatively* and in a consciously sustained way, on the meaningful appropriation of the progressive tradition which preceded the ongoing attempts and kept pointing in the same direction, despite all adversity. Neither the nature of what can be really built upon, and thereby positively appropriated, nor the long-term overall direction of humanity’s historical development itself can be chosen arbitrarily. Our social universe is overburdened with immense problems, both as regards the ever intensifying explosive inequalities inherited from the past and the increasingly untenable encroachment of capital’s mode of social metabolic reproduction on nature, threatening us with ecological disaster. These are the reasons why the conservative and reactionary attempts to *reverse* the direction of historical time are in the end condemned to failure, in that they are *structurally incapable* of producing cumulative achievements, whatever the successes which they can temporarily impose on society—due to the prevailing but ever more *unstable* relations of power which bring to the fore more and more repressive forms of control even in formerly democratic countries—at the cost of great suffering inflicted upon hundreds of millions of people. Neither evasion nor intensified repression can do their intended job indefinitely. For both of them are *prodigally and catastrophically wasteful* in the longer run. The tremendous problems of our social universe must be confronted sooner or later in their *substantive* dimensions, as opposed to the *formal camouflage of democracy and liberty* which we are all familiar with.

As we know only too well, the historical tempests which carry feathers like Simón Bolívar can temporarily die down without fulfilling their original promise. The objectives set by even the most distinguished historical figures can be realized only when their time truly arrives both in an objective and in a subjective sense. Despite his tragic isolation in the end, Bolívar’s contribution to solving some of the greatest challenges of his time, and in a well identifiable sense also of ours, is monumental, as was that of José Martí in Cuba who followed in his footsteps. We cannot succeed without consciously building on the legacy they have bequeathed to us as a task for the future, redefined in the present in accordance with the prevailing circumstances. In his appeals to the people on some vital

occasions Bolívar had put into relief his conviction that “The day of America has arrived and no human power can delay nature’s course guided by the hand of Providence.”<sup>9</sup> Toward the end of his life he was forced to concede that, tragically, the day of America, as he had envisaged it before, had not yet arrived.

The principal impediment in this respect was the sharp contrast between the political unity of the Latin American countries advocated by Bolívar and the deeply adversarial/conflictual constituents of their social microcosms. Given the fact that their social microcosms were torn by internal antagonisms, even the noblest and most eloquent appeals to political unity could work only while the menace presented by the Spanish colonial adversary was acute. But by itself such menace could not remedy the internal contradictions of the given social microcosms. Nor could the situation be radically altered by Bolívar’s far-sighted identification of the new danger quoted above. Namely, that “the United States of North America seem to be destined by providence to condemn America to misery in the name of Liberty.” A danger even more strongly underlined, in the same spirit, by José Martí sixty years later.<sup>10</sup> Both were as realistic in their diagnoses of the dangers as they were generous in advocating an ideal solution to humanity’s grave problems. Bolívar proposed bringing all nations of humanity harmoniously together by making the isthmus of Panama the capital of our globe, in the same way “as Constantine wanted to make Bisantium the capital of the antique hemisphere,”<sup>11</sup> and Martí when he insisted that “*patria es humanidad*,” humanity is our homeland.

But when these ideals were formulated historical time still pointed in the opposite direction: towards the frightful intensification of the social antagonisms and the horrendous blood-letting of two world wars arising from those antagonisms. Moreover, the concomitant threat in our days is even greater than ever before. Indeed, it is *qualitatively* greater, because today nothing less than the very survival of humanity is at stake. Naturally, that does not make the long advocated ideals themselves obsolete. Quite the contrary, it can only underline their growing urgency. Nevertheless, it remains as true today as it was in Bolívar’s time that one cannot envisage the sustainable functioning of humanity’s social *macrocosm* without overcoming the internal antagonisms of its *microcosms*: the adversarial/conflictual constitutive cells of our society under capital’s mode of social metabolic control. For a cohesive and socially viable macrocosm is conceivable only on the basis of the corresponding and humanly rewarding constitutive cells of interpersonal relations.

Today the historical circumstances are fundamentally different from the time of Bolívar’s triumphs and ultimate tragic defeat. They are different in that the intervening social and historical development has put on the agenda the realization of the once denied objectives in a twofold sense. First, by opening up the *possibility* of instituting a potentially harmonious macrocosm on a *global* scale, beyond the devastating conflicts of past inter-state confrontations which had to culminate in the ravages of imperialism. It is this possibility which the World Social Forum is trying to stress in its recurrent appeal: “Another world is possible.” The second aspect of the same proposition is inseparable from the first, removing the vagueness of all talk confined to *possibility* alone. For if the possibility in question does not indicate a degree of *probability and necessity*, it cannot

mean anything at all. In our present context the advocated cohesive and globally sustainable social macrocosm—in sharp contrast to all wishfully promoted but unrealizable capitalist propaganda about neoliberal “globalization”—is inconceivable without theoretically defining and practically articulating the constitutive cells of social interchange in a *genuine socialist way*.

This is how *possibility* and *necessity* are combined in a dialectical unity in our present day, historically specific, social universe. *Possibility*, because without overcoming the structural determinations of capital’s irreconcilable antagonisms—for which the socialist project had arisen in the course of humanity’s historical development—it is quite futile even to dream about instituting a globally sustainable social universe. And *necessity*—not some kind of mechanistic fatality but a literally vital and irrepressible need—because the annihilation of humankind is our destiny if in the course of the coming few decades we do not succeed in *totally eradicating capital* from our established mode of social metabolic reproduction. The principal lesson of the Soviet implosion is that we can only expect capitalist restoration if defining socialism in terms of the overthrow of the capitalist state is substituted for the much more fundamental and difficult task of eradicating capital from our entire social order.

It is quite impossible to be engaged today in the great historic task of capital’s eradication, positively oriented toward a sustainable future, without activating the full resources of the spirit of *radical determination*, in tune with the requirements of our age, as Bolívar did it the way he could under the circumstances of his own time. It is indeed true that the time has actually arrived for the realization of the Bolivarian objectives in their broadest perspective, as President Chávez has been advocating them for some time. This is why capital’s propagandists who use the term *Bolivarian project* in sarcastic inverted commas can only make fools of themselves. *Historical continuity* does not mean mechanical repetition but *creative renewal* in the deepest sense of the term. Thus, saying that the time has arrived for the realization of the Bolivarian objectives, in the spirit in which they must be brought up to date under our own historical conditions, with all their intensifying urgency and clearly identifiable significance also for the rest of the world, means precisely that a *socialist* sense must be given to the envisaged radical transformations, if we really care about instituting them. The major speeches and interviews of President Chávez—in which he puts into relief the dramatic alternative of “*socialism or barbarism*”—make all this very clear today.<sup>12</sup>

The task of radical renewal is by no means confined to Latin America. The social and political movements of the European left, as well as of North America, are also in need of a major reassessment of their past and present strategies, in view of their painful defeats in the last few decades. The clearly identifiable social and political ferment in Latin America, going back to the time of the Cuban revolution and manifest across decades in many different parts of that continent, not least in Venezuela, has much to say about the fundamental question of “what is to be done?” Precisely for that reason we must open our eyes to and express our solidarity with the creative renewal of the Bolivarian tradition in Venezuela in the last two decades. Unfortunately, far too little is known about the recent past of this movement outside Latin America, despite the direct relevance of some of its

main tenets for all of us. Thus, before turning to the question of our present day prospects of development, in the final section of this article, I reprint in the next section, without any change, what I wrote in 1993 on the Bolivarian project, five years before the watershed presidential elections in Venezuela,<sup>13</sup> and published in the Autumn of 1995 in chapter 18 of *Beyond Capital*, “Historical Actuality of the Socialist Offensive.”<sup>14</sup>

## **2. Radical Critique of Politics by Hugo Chávez in 1993**

The critique of the parliamentary system from a radical perspective did not begin with Marx. We find it powerfully expressed already in the eighteenth century in Rousseau’s writings. Starting from the position that sovereignty belongs to the people and therefore it cannot be rightfully alienated, Rousseau also argued that for the same reasons it cannot be legitimately turned into any form of representational abdication:

The deputies of the people, therefore, are not and cannot be its representatives; they are merely its stewards, and can carry through no definitive acts. Every law the people has not ratified in person is null and void—is, in fact, not a law. The people of England regards itself as free; but it is grossly mistaken; it is free only during the election of members of parliament. As soon as they are elected, slavery overtakes it, and it is nothing. The use it makes of the short moments of liberty it enjoys shows indeed that it deserves to lose them.<sup>15</sup>

At the same time Rousseau also made the important point that although the power of legislation cannot be divorced from the people even through parliamentary representation, the administrative or “executive” functions must be considered in a very different light. As he had put it, “in the exercise of the legislative power, the people cannot be represented; but in that of the executive power, which is only the force that is applied to give the law effect, it both can and should be represented.”<sup>16</sup>

In this way Rousseau, who has been systematically misrepresented and abused by “democratic” ideologues even of the “socialist jet-set” because he insisted that “*liberty cannot exist without equality*”<sup>17</sup>—which therefore ruled out even the best feasible form of representation as necessarily discriminatory/iniquitous hierarchy—had put forward a much more practicable exercise of political and administrative power than what he is usually credited with or indeed is accused of doing. Significantly, in this process of tendentious misrepresentation, both of the vitally important principles of Rousseau’s theory, usable in a suitably adapted form also by socialists, have been disqualified and thrown overboard. Yet the truth of the matter is that, on the one hand, the power of fundamental decision-making should never be divorced from the popular masses. The veritable horror story of the Soviet state system, run against the people by the Stalinist bureaucracy in the name of socialism in the most authoritarian fashion, conclusively demonstrated this. At the same time, on the other hand, the fulfilment of specific administrative and executive functions in all domains of the social reproductive process can indeed be *delegated* to members of the given community, provided that it is done under rules autonomously set by and properly controlled at all stages of the substantive decision-making process by the associated producers.

Thus the difficulties do not reside in the two basic principles themselves as formulated by Rousseau but in the way in which they must be related to capital's material and political control of the social metabolic process. For the establishment of a socialist form of decision making, in accordance with the principles of both inalienable rule-determining power (i.e., the "sovereignty" of labor not as a particular class but as the universal condition of society) and delegating specific roles and functions under well defined, flexibly distributed, and appropriately supervised rules would require entering and radically restructuring capital's antagonistic material domains. This is a process which would have to go well beyond what could be successfully regulated by considerations derived from Rousseau's principle of inalienable popular sovereignty and its delegatory corollary. In other words, in a socialist order the "legislative" process would have to be fused with the production process itself in such a way that the necessary *horizontal division of labor*—discussed in chapter 14 of *Beyond Capital*—should be complemented by a system of self-determined *co-ordination* of labor, from the local to the global levels.

This relationship is in sharp contrast to capital's pernicious *vertical division of labor*, which is complemented by the "separation of powers" in an alienated and on the laboring masses unalterably superimposed "democratic political system." For the vertical division of labor under the rule of capital necessarily affects and incurably infects every facet also of the horizontal division of labor, from the simplest productive functions to the most complicated balancing processes of the legislative jungle. The latter is an ever denser legislative jungle not only because its endlessly multiplying rules and institutional constituents must play their vital part in keeping firmly under control the actually or potentially challenging behavior of labor, watchful over limited labor disputes as well as safeguarding capital's overall rule in society at large. Also, they must somehow reconcile at any particular temporal slice of the unfolding historical process—to the extent to which such reconciliation is feasible at all—the separate interests of the plurality of capitals with the uncontrollable dynamics of the totality of social capital tending toward its ultimate self-assertion as a global entity.

In a recent rejoinder with Rousseau's critique of parliamentary representation, Hugo Chávez Frias, the leader of a radical movement in Venezuela—the *Movimiento Bolivariano Revolucionario* (MBR-200)—writes in response to the chronic crisis of the country's sociopolitical system:

With the appearance of the populist parties the suffrage was converted into a tool for putting to sleep in order to enslave the Venezuelan people in the name of democracy. For decades the populist parties based their discourse on innumerable paternalistic promises devised to melt away popular consciousness. The alienating political lies painted the "promised land" to be reached via a rose garden. The only thing the Venezuelans had to do was to go to the electoral urns, and hope that everything will be solved without the minimal popular effort.... Thus the act of vote was transformed into the beginning and the end of democracy.<sup>18</sup>

The author of these lines stands the second highest in popular esteem in Venezuela (second only to Rafael Caldera) among all public figures, embracing all walks of life,

way above all aspiring party politicians. Thus he could easily win high public office if he so wanted, which refutes the usual argument that people who criticize the existing political system only do so because they are unable to meet the arduous requirements of democratic elections. As a matter of fact Hugo Chávez at the time of writing (in 1993) rejects the “siren song” of political opinion formers—who try to pacify people by saying that there is no need to worry about the crisis because there is “only a little time” to go to the new elections—for very different reasons. He points out that while the usual political advice calls for “a little more patience” until the election scheduled a few months ahead, “every minute hundreds of children are born in Venezuela whose health is endangered for lack of food and medicine, while billions are stolen from the national wealth, and in the end what remains of the country is bled dry. There is no reason why one should give any credence to a political class which demonstrated towards society that it has no will at all to institute change.”<sup>19</sup> For this reason Chávez counterposes to the existing system of parliamentary representation the idea that “The sovereign people must transform itself into the object *and the subject* of power. This option is not negotiable for revolutionaries.”<sup>20</sup> As to the institutional framework in which this principle should be realized, he projects that in the course of radical change,

Federal state electoral power will become the political-juridical component through which the citizens will be depositories of popular sovereignty whose exercise will thereafter really remain in the hands of the people. Electoral power will be extended over the entire sociopolitical system of the nation, establishing the channels for a veritable polycentric distribution of power, displacing power from the centre towards the periphery, increasing the effective power of decision making and the autonomy of the particular communities and municipalities. The Electoral Assemblies of each municipality and state will elect Electoral Councils which will possess a permanent character and will function in absolute independence from the political parties. They will be able to establish and direct the most diverse mechanisms of Direct Democracy: popular assemblies, referenda, plebiscites, popular initiatives, vetoes, revocation, etc.... Thus the concept of *participatory* democracy will be changed into a form in which democracy based on popular sovereignty constitutes itself as the *protagonist* of power. It is precisely at such borders that we must draw the limits of advance of Bolivarian democracy. Then we shall be very near to the territory of *utopia*.<sup>21</sup>

Whether such ideas can be turned into reality or remain utopian ideals cannot be decided within the confines of the political sphere. For the latter is itself in need of the type of radical transformation which foreshadows from the outset the perspective of the “withering away of the state.” In Venezuela, where in many parts of the country as much as *90 percent of the population* demonstrates its “rebellion against the absurdity of the vote through its electoral abstention,”<sup>22</sup> the traditional political practices and the apologetic legitimacy use to which the “democratic electoral system” is put—falsely claiming for the system the unchallengeable justification of a “mandate conferred by the majority”—no condemnation of vacuous parliamentary paternalism can be considered too sharp. Nor can it be seriously argued that high electoral participation is itself the proof of actually existing democratic popular consensus. After all, in some Western democracies the act of voting is compulsory and may in fact add up in its legitimacy

value to no more than the most extreme forms of openly critical or pessimistically resigned abstentionism. Nevertheless, the measure of validity for subjecting to the necessary radical critique the parliamentary representational system is the strategic undertaking to exercise the “sovereignty of labor” not only in political assemblies, no matter how *direct* they might be with regard to their organization and mode of political decision making, but in the self-determined productive and distributive life-activity of the social individuals in every single domain and at all levels of the social metabolic process. This is what draws the line of demarcation between the socialist revolution which is socialist in its *intent*—like the October Revolution of 1917—and the “*permanent revolution*” of effective socialist transformation. For without the progressive and ultimately complete transfer of material reproductive and distributive decision making to the associated producers there can be no hope for the members of the postrevolutionary community of transforming themselves into the *subject* of power.

### 3. Prospects of Development

As we can see from the quotations presented in the previous section from Chávez’s *Pueblo, Sufragio y Democracia*, the continuity in calling for a sustainable socialist transformation in our days, in the spirit of radical determination, is most remarkable. And rightly so. For after so much struggle and so many sacrifices devoted all over the world, across centuries, to the cause of human emancipation, it is even more emphatically true today than ever before—in the midst of the deepening structural crisis of the capital system which threatens our very survival—that “the sovereign people must transform itself into the object *and the subject* of power. This option is *not negotiable* for revolutionaries.” A truth firmly stressed in his 1993 pamphlet by Hugo Chávez Frias, five years before his election to the presidency.

Without such transformation, in the deepest and most enduring sense of the term—which means nothing less than the necessity to acquire *conscious control* over their conditions of existence by the social individuals—the old order of hierarchical domination is bound to reassert itself even against the best intentions of radical change. This is what puts on the historical agenda with undeniable urgency the question of socialism in the twenty-first century: A form of socialism in which—and through which—the people cannot only *become* but also *remain* the sovereign subject of power in every domain. Only in that way is it possible to successfully face up to the immense challenges and ever increasing dangers of our time. Definitely, there can be no other way.

The social and intellectual ferment in Latin America promises more for the future in this respect than what we can find for the time being in capitalistically advanced countries. This is understandably so, because the need for a truly radical change is that much more pressing in Latin America than in Europe and in the United States. For the endlessly promised solutions of “modernization” and “development” proved to be empty promises, and for the people at the receiving end of the actually adopted policies a complete failure. Thus, while it remains true that socialism as an alternative social reproductive order must qualify as a universally viable approach, embracing also the most developed capitalist areas of the world, including the United States, we cannot think of this problem in terms

of a time sequence in which a future social revolution in capitalistically advanced countries must take precedence over the possibility of radical change everywhere else. Far from it. For given the massive inertia generated by capital's vested interests in the privileged capitalist countries, together with reformist labor's consensual complicity in their self-serving development, a triggering social upheaval is much more likely to take place in the not too distant future in Latin America than in the United States and in Western Europe, with far-reaching implications for the rest of the world.

In an interview, in January 2003, the Brazilian national daily, the *Folha de São Paulo*, asked me the question: "What is your opinion about the parallels traced between Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva and other Latin American leaders, such as Fidel Castro and Hugo Chávez?" This was my answer:

The parallels are far-reaching, despite the obvious differences between the circumstances under which these radical leaders came to occupy their present position as heads of their respective governments. The parallels are dominant because they forcefully underline that the whole of Latin America is in need of a most profound, truly radical, change....President Lula's landslide victory followed—by no means unconnectedly—the clamorous collapse of all attempted forms of accommodation in Argentina; a country considered for a very long time the unsurpassable model for Latin America. And when we speak about the three radical leaders: Lula, Fidel Castro and Chávez, we should not forget President Allende, who also attempted to introduce radical change in his country, and had to perish for it. No doubt, those who refuse to contemplate the very idea of meaningful change will continue to try to wipe out the time of Latin American radical leaders appearing on the historical stage. But equally beyond doubt, such leaders are bound to arise, again and again, for as long as the profound social and historical reasons for their arrival are not positively attended to.

Evidently, we can now add to the list of radical Latin American leaders the name of Evo Morales who was elected to the presidency of Bolivia with a massive vote in the December 2005 elections. His campaign was followed with great expectations by the long exploited popular masses of his country, especially because he was promising to carry out a far-reaching *Bolivarian Revolution*. The overwhelming support he received on account of his promised program is itself a clear indication of the strong desire in Bolivia for a radical change. Naturally, in the light of painful past disappointments in other parts of Latin America it remains to be seen how far Evo Morales can meet the expectations of his people, under undoubtedly very difficult circumstances which should not be ignored by anyone.

But whatever might be the verdict on that score, what we can be absolutely certain about is that more and more radical political leaders are bound to come forward in different parts of the Latin American continent as time goes by, including the countries in which the radical forces suffered some major disappointments in the recent past as a result of their governments' craven accommodation to U.S. political and financial dictates. They are bound to come forward in response to the deepening crisis of their societies as well as of the global capital system in general, with unavoidable commitment to instituting a

viable alternative even against the most hostile obstructionism from abroad and against the grave structural problems inherited in their own countries from the past. Only the articulation and intensification of a radical alternative anchored in the broad masses of the people, with an uncompromising strategy pressing for a truly comprehensive transformation of society, can promise a way out of the now all too obviously paralyzing maze of contradictions.

Naturally, it would be an illusion to expect a linear ascending development in this regard. We must soberly face the fact that the adversaries of socialism have enormous resources at their disposal for protecting capital's deeply entrenched power. This is the *negative* dimension of the great historical challenge we must face. At the same time, the *positive* requirement of a lasting success is even weightier. For the elaboration of viable socialist strategies, as well as the successful articulation and consolidation of the corresponding organizational forms both internally and on the international plane, remain a fundamental challenge for the future. Due to these reasons, real setbacks and even major relapses cannot be excluded, no matter how great the need for positive solutions and how promising the initial achievements.

In Brazil the radical wing of the working-class movement, both in the trade unions and in the political parties, played a crucial role in putting an end to the U.S.-sponsored military dictatorship well over two decades ago. In that way it also inspired some radical movements elsewhere in Latin America. Moreover, subsequently the Workers' Party scored a major electoral success with Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva's rise to the presidency. And yet, despite some undeniable tangible achievements in limited areas, capital's long established order in Brazil succeeded in remaining firmly in control of the overall societal reproduction process, marginalizing its opponents also in politics, to the great disappointment of the popular forces in all parts of the country. Understandably, therefore, the socialist militants in Brazil are compelled to argue today that there is still a long way to go before the inherited constraints of the organized historical left—which tended to be confined in *every* capitalist country to a political space and role thoroughly compatible with the mode of operation of the old order—could be considered to have been significantly altered, let alone to have been overcome on a lasting basis.

But even so, notwithstanding all identifiable and potential setbacks, it would be quite wrong to paint a pessimistic picture as regards the prospects of overall developments, concerning the continued viability (or not) of the capital system in its entirety. For it is very important to stress that despite capital's bewildering successes in the last two decades in different parts of the world, especially in the former societies of "actually existing socialism," the forces working for the institution of a radically different social order have found encouraging manifestations in several parts of the "geopolitical backyard" of the United States, including not only Venezuela but also the militants who continue to defy the most uneven odds which still favor the established order in Columbia.

Moreover, it is also of great significance that the radical social movements in different parts of the world, no matter how relatively weak they might be for the time being, are

determined to shake off the historically generated but by now most anachronistic organizational limitations of the traditional political left. For they cannot accept any longer the easy explanation that the failure of some cherished past strategies, together with the corresponding implosion experienced by the socialist movement, was accidental or simply a matter of personal betrayals. Realizing that a critical—and self-critical—reexamination of some important past strategic and organizational assumptions is called for under the present historical circumstances, they are engaged in a painful but necessary process of reorienting their forces. They are trying to do this in order to be able to implement in action not only the necessary negation of the existent but also the positive dimension of a sustainable *hegemonic alternative*. It is important to stress this circumstance so as to counter the ubiquitous propaganda of the established order which continues to claim its permanent triumph over its erstwhile socialist adversaries.

When Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher—the devoted ideological and political adherent of neoliberalism in Britain—succeeded in defeating the British miners’ one-year-long strike by ruthlessly deploying against the strikers the full economic and police resources of the capitalist state, with a far from negligible helping hand by the Labor Party itself (despite the fact that at the time the Labor Party was still in opposition) she boasted that she had “*seen off socialism for good.*” This statement was a preposterous presumption, even if it seemed to be confirmed by the British Labor Party’s eager capitulatory transformation into “New Labor”: the “friend of business” in the words of its leaders, and preferably of big business at that. In reality the relatively easy spread of neoliberalism from the 1970s onwards was not simply a British phenomenon but an overwhelming international development, extending in one way or another over the whole of our planet.

What is even more important to stress in this respect is that the ruthless enforcement of the main tenets of neoliberalism virtually everywhere—on the face of it astonishingly even in the societies of “actually existing socialism,” as they were called once upon a time—was not at all the manifestation of capital’s irresistible revitalization and permanently secured health in the direction of the future. On the contrary, it was made necessary by the onset of the system’s *structural crisis*, due to the dangerously *narrowing margins* of sustainable *capital-expansion*. To this qualitatively new structural crisis capital could only respond by assuming an ever more aggressive posture.

Accordingly, in the course of its development in the last three decades, capital had to claw back the “concessions” of the welfare state earlier granted to labor—for which it did not have to pay anything at all at the time when the Welfare State came into being, since the alleged “concessions” were part and parcel of the dynamics of the postwar period’s undisturbed and highly profitable capital-expansion. The redefinition of the established order’s strategic orientation in the spirit of callous neoliberalism was both the practical implementation of the ever more exploitative and repressive policies dictated by capital’s harshly authoritarian turn and its cynical ideological justification.

Indeed, what makes these facts much worse for capital’s devotees is that it is not possible at all to claim that through its openly authoritarian stance neoliberalism actually succeeded in solving the system’s structural crisis by opening the doors to a new phase of

healthy expansion, as repeatedly promised but never realized. The fact that in recent years the dominant powers of global capital had to go as far as to engage in most aggressive and catastrophically wasteful adventures, including the practice of unleashing genocidal wars—cynically and hypocritically in the name of “democracy and liberty”—from which there seems to be “*no exit strategy*”<sup>23</sup> (to use the mildly critical words of even the system’s supporters), demonstrates the utter failure of the attempted remedies and the significant worsening of the crisis itself.

Another dimension of the same problem directly concerns the prospects of development of labor as the structural antagonist of capital. In contrast to all talk about the claimed “integration of the working class,” what we find in actuality is a total misrepresentation of the—undoubtedly accomplished—capitulation of labor’s traditional *political leadership*, which is treated as the necessary and forever unalterable integration of the working *class itself*. In other words, this capitulation of labor’s bureaucratic leadership is falsely characterized as the irreversible integration of the one and only social force capable of offering a hegemonic alternative to the rule of capital. A rule which is no longer sustainable—because of its increasingly destructive inner determinations on a lasting basis.

Admittedly, the British Labor Party’s capitulatory transformation into “New Labor” was by no means an isolated phenomenon. Some parties once upon a time well to the left of British Labor—for instance the Italian and the French Communist Parties—suffered in the same period an equally negative fate. The apologists of the established order celebrate all such metamorphoses in the same way as they greeted the successful imposition of neoliberalism everywhere. That is, as the welcome evidence of the capital system’s enduring revitalization and, consequently, as the unchallengeable triumph of the arbitrarily proclaimed wisdom according to which “*there is no alternative.*”

However, nothing could be a more myopic misreading of these events and developments which stand and fall together. The historical evidence itself points in the opposite direction not despite but, paradoxically, precisely because of the fact that the traditional mainstream forces of the left in many countries subordinated themselves unreservedly to the dictates of capital in structural crisis. For the truth, uncomfortable though it must be to the defenders of the existing order, is that even the most slavish accommodation of traditional labor leadership—devoid of a viable strategy of its own ever since the well over a century old, but now revealingly abandoned, vacuous slogan of “evolutionary socialism”—is quite unable to remedy the situation. In this sense the most disturbing truth is that nothing seems to work even in the shortest term under the present historical circumstances in obviating the intensification of capital’s socioeconomic aggressiveness and its direct extension into *growing state violence*.

What actually happened through the imposition of neoliberalism, with the most active contribution of reformist labor itself in several countries—in Britain already under the Labor Party’s chief minister of economic affairs in Harold Wilson’s government, Dennis Healy, who instituted the first round of savage neoliberal policies well before Margaret Thatcher—was the irrevocable removal of the “grand illusion” according to which *class*

*accommodation* and *gradual reform* were the only answers to society's grave *structural* problems.

Projecting the necessary solution in this way—that is, by postulating the elimination of the capital *system's* grave *structural defects* through temporarily feasible and conjunctureally limited *gradual tinkering*—was, of course, a *contradiction in terms* right from the beginning. Naturally, this circumstance sealed the fate of “evolutionary socialism,” although it took a long time before the promises of that mystifying approach had to be openly abandoned even by its leading proponents. As it is painfully obvious today—also through the humiliating failure of the most accommodatory strategies of reformist labor seen in all history—in the real world, class accommodation and gradual reform were no answer at all to the established *social structure's* increasingly serious *systemic* problems. Nor could they ever be.

The root cause of aggressive neoliberalism is the dangerously narrowing margin of undisturbed capital-expansion and conflict-attenuating growth, and thereby the system's ever more constrained ability for managing without destructive adventurism its major structural problems, notwithstanding the active complicity of formerly reformist labor on the side of neoliberal capital. All this underlines the severity of the crisis of our time and the total absurdity of all talk about “seeing off socialism for good.” For undisturbed *capital-expansion*—in conjunction with *conflict-attenuating growth*—and the unchallenged *submissive accommodation* of reformist labor to capital's rule are two sides of the same coin.

Once the road to undisturbed and sustainable capital-expansion is narrowed and ultimately blocked by the deepening structural crisis of the system, the principal motivating force for labor's willing self-accommodation is bound to be weakened as the facts begin to sink in. This is so even if at the beginning of such a downward spiral. The leadership of reformist labor—which never had any other conception of socioeconomic improvement than the grateful acceptance from capital's benevolent hand of a larger slice of society's “growing cake”: a proverbial cake once blindly assumed to be of an *eternally growing* kind—tries to do everything it can in order to mitigate the negative and ultimately destabilizing consequences of capital's failure to “deliver the goods.” It adopts an unreservedly and humiliatingly obsequious position toward capital, in the vain hope of successfully contributing to the system's revitalization and healthy functioning. And it does this in the unholy spirit of “there is no alternative” to maintain the established socioeconomic and political order. Naturally, under such circumstances the tired old mantra of “left-Keynesianism” is recited again and again. But there can be nothing to confer reality upon it.

Thus, both the permanence of neoliberalism (often associated even with the grotesque pseudo-theory which preaches the happy “ending of history” at the welcome moment of the arrival of neoliberalism) and the proclaimed absolute necessity of labor's eternal self-accommodation are nothing more than disorienting *optical illusions*, projected much to the convenience of the established order. They are temporarily reinforced from two directions. On one side, by neoliberalism's understandable positive embrace of its new-

found ideal interlocutor, capitulatory labor. And on the other side, by self-accommodating labor's need for a somewhat mythically aggrandized (powerful but "reasonable" and benevolent) adversary, promoted to the status of a veritable "partner" who is now respectfully described as the "producer of wealth," despite the increasing parasitism of its now dominant dimension: speculative finance capital. This is done by reformist labor in order to justify before its electoral followers its open complicity with the perpetuation of the harshly exploitative order as it stands. It is by now not in the slightest embarrassed about having abandoned its erstwhile reformist aspirations for "gradual change" toward a once promised equitable alternative order—on the today even more vacuously proclaimed ground that "there *cannot be* any alternative."

In reality, however, the vital need for a *hegemonic alternative* to capital's rule has appeared on the historical agenda. For all known modalities of reformist accommodation, across one hundred and thirty years of history (from the time of the "Gotha Programme"), failed to make the slightest lasting impact on the grave contradictions and inhumanities of the capital system. This state of affairs could be maintained, notwithstanding the system's antagonisms and inhumanities, for as long as capital could impose itself—when possible with the help of productive achievements, when not by naked force—as the unchallenged controller of societal reproduction. But precisely this is what is becoming extremely problematical in our own time. Extremely problematical indeed partly because even capital's most authoritarian posture, coupled with reformist labor's by now totally submissive accommodation to it, fail to produce the promised healthy economic expansion. And even more importantly, because the ongoing aggressive adventurist developments unmistakably put into relief capital's perilous drive towards humanity's destruction, irrationally in the interest of the established reproductive order's survival at all cost, to which capital truly *cannot conceive*, let alone *concede*, any alternative.

Following the "line of least resistance" is, by definition, always much easier than fighting for the institution of a really feasible hegemonic alternative. For the latter requires not only active commitment to the cause chosen by the participants but also their acceptance of likely sacrifices. This is the greatest asset of our adversaries, underlining the vital importance of the elaboration and implementation of viable political and social strategies in order to counter the significant positional advantage of institutionalized inertia. For the necessary removal of the disorienting optical illusions mentioned above—namely the absolute permanence of neoliberalism and of labor's beneficial self-accommodation to it—is not possible, in one respect, without full awareness of how high the stakes for securing humanity's survival really are in our time, and in the other respect, without a practical engagement in the required fundamental transformation of the existing social order in its entirety, in the spirit of *radical determination*.

Tinkering here and there, in our time, leads absolutely nowhere. It can only reinforce the positional advantage of those who are now in control of the historically anachronistic capital system. In other words, countering with success the mystifications of neoliberal invincibility actively sustained by accommodatory labor is not simply a question of ideological enlightenment. The battle cannot be won on the terrain of political persuasion alone, since consistently critical convictions often coexist with practical powerlessness.

Lasting success is feasible only through the organizationally sustainable mobilization of the great masses of the people for the realization of an *all-embracing hegemonic alternative* to the established mode of social metabolic reproduction.

The spirit of radical determination today is inseparable from a firm commitment—as required by the need to confront the dangerous historical developments—to the institution of the envisaged hegemonic alternative to capital’s increasingly adventurist and destructive rule. This is why President Chávez repeatedly stressed both the inescapability of the dilemma of *socialism or barbarism* in our time, and the corresponding necessity to engage in the only feasible form of successful action: a sustained *strategic offensive*, given the magnitude and the literally vital urgency of the historical task. In his intervention at the January 2003 World Social Forum, in Porto Alegre, he rightly warned against the harmful temptation of allowing to turn the worldwide meetings of the emerging major social movements into annually ritualized *folkloric events*. And he repeated the same warning at the January 2006 World Social Forum in Caracas, insisting that such transformation of the potentially radical social movements into a “*touristic/folkloric encounter would be terrible, because we would be simply wasting time, and we have no time to waste*. I believe that it is not given to us to speak in terms of future centuries...we have no time to waste; the challenge is to save the conditions of life on this planet, to save the human species, to change the course of history, to change the world.”<sup>24</sup>

In this sense, in order to meet the radically new historical challenge of our time which puts into question the very survival of humanity, the original Bolivarian project is necessarily modified in two of its fundamental dimensions. In the first respect, the required qualitative change directly affects the all-important question of *equality*, and in the other respect, it must address the unresolved dilemma of even the greatest and most radical political thinkers of the Enlightenment, including Rousseau (who was in many ways the unsurpassable model for Bolívar himself). Namely: how to overcome on a lasting basis—or at least how to bring to a common denominator sustainable for an unavoidable period of transition—the conflicting and potentially disintegration producing interests at work in society.

It goes without saying, these two fundamental dimensions of a historically workable solution to humanity’s great dilemmas—which appeared in their first utopian formulations thousands of years before the age of the Enlightenment, but remained always frustrated and sidelined ever since those early days—are closely intertwined. For it is unthinkable to overcome the potentially most disruptive, indeed explosive, contradictions and mutually exclusive interests perpetuated by the long established antagonistic social structure without finding a viable solution—in a *substantive way*—to the historically up to the present intractable problem of equality of which every form of (in principle reversible) legal enactment can only scratch the surface. And vice versa: it is inconceivable to find a *substantive*, and thereby *legally non-reversible*, solution to the seminal issue of equality, upon which all of the other commendable social values rest—in Bolívar’s memorable words “from all freedoms to all rights,” including justice—without permanently relegating to the historical past the conflicts and antagonisms necessarily

generated and reproduced in one form or another by the structurally/hierarchically entrenched and safeguarded *substantive* (and not just legally codified) social relations.

In the deepest sense of the issues at stake, the two fundamental dimensions of humanity's great dilemmas are one and the same, distinguishable partly because this is how they were treated in past political discourse. And more importantly, they must be distinguished for the purpose of elaborating the practically feasible as well as lasting—and now historically both possible and necessary—solution to society's explosive contradictions. However, today, in the light of past disappointments, we must be aware of the greatly complicating fact that in their innermost substance they are inseparable. For it was due to the socially determined past disregard of their substantive inseparability that even the noblest intentions for overcoming the violations of equality through legislative reform (which may well be necessary as a vital first step under determinate historical circumstances)<sup>25</sup>—leaving at the same time the entrenched *substantive structural hierarchies* in place in society—had to suffer major reversals sooner or later.

We have to recall in this respect that for Bolívar equality was “*the law of laws*” because “without equality all freedoms, all rights perish. For it we must make sacrifices.” Defining the problem in this way was Bolívar's direct appeal to the spirit of *enlightenment and morality* in his fellow legislators. As he had characterized the two cardinal requirements of a politically viable form of legislation, in his Address before the Congress of Angostura: “*Morality and enlightenment are the poles of a Republic; morality and enlightenment are our primary necessities.*”<sup>26</sup> Although this was an undoubtedly valid formulation of some vital political guiding principles in their given social setting, Bolívar's way of defining the problem of equality as *legally enacted equality*, dependent on the enlightened insight and moral sympathy of his fellow legislators (many of them in fact quite unwilling to make the stipulated sacrifices), had inevitably imposed strict limitations even on Bolívar's radical approach. Indeed, the qualifications expressed by him on some occasions indicated, at least by implication, his awareness of the social limits of the actually accomplished level of equality.<sup>27</sup> After all, even the legal emancipation of the slaves could be subsequently cancelled out by a variety of legally devised pseudo-contractual alternatives, which cynically retained many features of former slavery, including the brutally enslaving arrangement called “indentured labor”; not to mention the *substantive triumph of wage slavery* everywhere, glorified in the annals of liberal political economy as “free labor.” And another sobering note: under the circumstances prevailing in Bolívar's lifetime in Latin America, even the degree of social and political radicalism advocated by him proved to be far too much to many of his contemporaries.

As regards *substantive equality*,<sup>28</sup> its realization is undoubtedly the greatest and the most difficult of all historic tasks. Accordingly, real advancement in the direction of substantive equality becomes feasible only when the *objective material conditions* of its realization—including society's historically achieved *positive productive potentiality*—are appropriately matched at the level of ideas and values. The latter may well be called the *spiritual conditions* of overcoming the age-old, for thousands of years structurally well-entrenched, social hierarchies which have been reinforced by the most problematical

culture of *substantive inequality* even in the writings of some very great intellectuals of the progressive bourgeoisie.

Given these circumstances, success is feasible only if some vital conditions are historically satisfied. For on the one hand, the “equitable distribution of misery,” in the absence of favorable material requirements, cannot be socially sustained as a condition of normality for any length of time. On the other hand, the pretended achievement of “material abundance”—i.e., the pernicious myth of “the affluent society”—cannot solve absolutely anything if a genuine dedication to mutually beneficial solidarity (and associated values) is missing, for whatever reason, from the individuals’ conception of productive advancement. That is true irrespective of how high the available level of technological and scientific knowhow might be under the circumstances. For in the absence of values which enable the all-round development of rich individuality, in place of the nowadays dominant antagonistic competitiveness, all fetishistically celebrated material abundance is invariably transformed into never to be eliminated *scarcity*, and thereby the self-justifying vicious circle of wasteful “progress” toward the irrational conversion of ever greater *productive potentiality* into *destructive reality* can go on unhindered until a global catastrophe brings it to a halt.

This is the point where we can see the demarcation line separating us from the past in which concern with equality could only be pursued, even by the most enlightened statesmen, as a legally defined (and confined) political objective. This had to be the case also when the issues at stake were carrying important social connotations, such as the formal liberation—but by no means the actual socioeconomic emancipation—of the slaves. The radical novelty of our conditions of existence in the present historical epoch is that there can be no lasting success in the struggle for humanity’s survival without the establishment of a *social order* based on *substantive equality* as its central orienting principle on the terrain of both *production* and *distribution*.

This is so because capital’s incorrigible *destructiveness* affects in our time every single facet of our life, from the irresponsible wastefulness of profit-oriented productive pursuits to the suicidal degradation of nature as well as the irreversible exhaustion of its vital reproductive resources, and from the dehumanizing mass production of “superfluous people,” in the form of chronic unemployment, to the most extreme varieties of current military adventurism. This might be seen together with the outrageous justification of nothing less than the use of nuclear weapons by the dominant imperialist country, the United States, done not only retrospectively, with regard to the unforgivable deed against the people of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, but in a most sinister way also in relation to the future. In this sense the traditional advocacy by capital’s personifications “to think the unthinkable”—in their self-congratulatory spirit which claims the virtues of successfully accomplished “productive destruction”—finds its ultimate realization in a form in which *contemplating and threatening the destruction of humanity*, absurdly in the interest of the ruling socioeconomic system’s survival at all cost, is *legitimated* as a necessary *strategic objective* by capital’s most powerful state formation.

At the root of all of these destructive manifestations we find the insurmountable imperatives arising from the established order's self-perpetuating *structural hierarchies* which necessarily exclude any comprehensive *rational alternative* to capital's mode of social metabolic control. Naturally, considerations of substantive equality cannot conceivably enter capital's framework of decision making when the fundamentals are at stake. This makes the structural crisis of our system of social reproductive control uniquely acute at the present historical juncture, indicating at the same time the only feasible way of overcoming it. For the destructive determinations of the established order, erupting everywhere on a devastating scale with earlier inconceivable gravity, now call for a fundamental *structural change* in the interest of humanity's survival.

Since *structurally enforced inequality* is the all-important defining characteristic of the capital system without which it could not function for a single day, the institution of the required *fundamental structural change* makes it necessary to produce a *substantively equitable alternative* as humanity's only viable future mode of social metabolic control. Moreover, there could not conceivably be a higher stake for human beings than securing and safeguarding the survival and positive advancement of humankind by instituting a humanly fulfilling order of *substantive social equality*, which under the present conditions is not an *abstract possibility* but a *vital necessity*.

For this reason the forces dedicated to this great historic task can pursue the realization of their objective with rationality fully on their side, confident of the complete justification of the values advocated by them in their struggle against imperialism, monopoly, and oppression, in sharp contrast to their adversaries. Truly, we live in an age that might be called the clash of imperatives, although by no means "the clash of civilizations." For the critical confrontation of our time asserts itself as the imperative for creating an equitable and sustainable social order—i.e., an order which is historically sustainable precisely because of its innermost determination as equitable in all of its substantive dimensions—as against capital's insurmountable imperatives of destructive self-preservation. In view of the nature of the issues involved and the urgency of their pursuit, there has never been an even remotely comparable prospect for turning into reality the age-old advocacy of substantive equality as the primary determination of human interchange.

In this sense also the reasons for the chronically unresolved question of how to overcome on a lasting basis the conflicting and potentially disintegration-producing interests at work in society must be reexamined. The answer given in the past even by the most enlightened statesmen, including Bolívar, was to politically *balance* the diverse social forces, so as "to maintain the *equilibrium* not only among the members of the Government but also among the different fractions constituting our society."<sup>29</sup> In the end such strategy had to turn out to be fragile even in its own terms of reference, resulting in periodic convulsions and reversals in its political setting despite the fact that what was at stake concerned only the partial redefinition and redistribution of the *relative share* of the diverse social forces in the structurally given power relations. However, the hierarchical structural parameters of the given social order were themselves not questioned. On the contrary, they had to be taken for granted by the orienting principles of "*balancing*" and "*equilibrium*."

By contrast, today the radical questioning of the structural parameters of the established social system is on the order of the day. For, evidently, even the most skillful political balancing of the social forces under the rule of capital cannot undertake the task of instituting the required *fundamental structural change*, no matter how acute the need for it, as happens to be the case today. This is why only the consistent pursuit of the objective to establish a social order of substantive equality can match up to the historical challenge in our time, under the conditions of the capital system's irreversible structural crisis.

As we have seen above, toward the end of his life Bolívar was forced to concede that, tragically, the day of America, as he had envisaged it before, had not yet arrived. Today the situation is very different, due to a number of major determinations. In other words, Bolívar's "day of America" has arrived in the sense that the age-old conditions of Latin America's quasi-colonial domination by the United States cannot be perpetuated in the future. In this regard the interests of the socioeconomically as well as politically effective national sovereignty of the Latin American countries fully coincide with the necessary drive for overcoming national grievances everywhere, since the long prevailing national domination of many countries by a few imperialist powers has become an irremediable historical anachronism.

This new historical condition cannot be undone by the fact that the former imperialist powers, and above all by far the most powerful of them, the United States of America, are trying to turn back the wheels of history and *recolonize* the world. Their design to such end is already visible in the way in which they have recently undertaken some devastating military adventures under the pretext of the so-called "war against terror." Indeed, the new panacea of the most aggressive powers is that embarking on what would in fact amount to a blatant re-colonizing venture—in Africa and South East Asia, as well as in Latin America—is declared by them to be the essential condition of success of their cynically righteous "war against international terror" in the "new world order." But they are bound to fail in this enterprise.

In the past, many attempts aimed at rectifying justifiable national grievances were derailed by the pursuit of chauvinistic strategies. For, given the nature of the problems at stake, the repressed *national* interests cannot prevail at the expense of the viable social objectives of some other nations, thereby violating the required *fully equitable international conditions* of inter-state relations. Thus, the far-sighted historical validity of the Bolivarian project, pressing for the strategic unity and equality of the Latin American countries not simply against the United States but within the broadest framework of the envisaged harmonious international association of all (see note 11), could not be clearer. Indeed, by realizing their social and political unity based on their solidarity, the Latin American countries can play a pioneering role today, in the interest of the whole of humankind. None of them can succeed in isolation even negatively, against their powerful antagonist in North America, but together they can show a way forward to all of us in an exemplary way. For only the historically appropriate renewal and consistent pursuit of the strategy capable of bringing the national and the international dimensions of social interchange to their positive common denominator everywhere, in the spirit of radical determination, can solve the grave structural crisis of our social order.

## Notes

1. Bolívar quoted in John Lynch, *Simón Bolívar: A Life* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006), 26. Note: The translations from Bolívar in this piece are by the author and differ slightly from previously published English translations cited in this article.
2. Simón Bolívar, *Selected Works* (New York: Colonial Press, 1951), 2:603.
3. Bolívar, *Selected Works*, 1:195.
4. Bolívar, *Selected Works*, 2:732; Lynch, Simón Bolívar, 264.
5. Clinton's Labor Secretary, Robert B. Reich—a former Harvard University Professor—advocated the forceful adoption of “*positive economic nationalism*” by his own country. See his book, *The Work of Nations* (New York: Vintage, 1992), 311.
6. Moynihan proclaimed in an authoritarian way that democracy is not “a universal option for all nations” in his book, *Pandaemonium* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 169.
7. Bolívar, *Selected Works*, 2:737.
8. Referred to in the speech made by President Chávez, “La Revolución Bolivariana y la construcción del socialismo en el siglo XXI,” XVI Festival Mundial de la Juventud y los Estudiantes, Caracas, August 13, 2005.
9. Bolívar quoted in Lynch, *Simón Bolívar*, 126.
10. José Martí, *La Revolución de 1868* (La Habana: Instituto del Libro, 1968).
11. Bolívar, *Selected Works*, 1:119.
12. See in particular: “Hay que ir organizando un gran movimiento continental,” a speech delivered at the Universidad Nacional de Asunción, República de Paraguay, on June 20, 2005, and “La Revolución Bolivariana y la construcción del socialismo en el siglo XXI,” delivered in Caracas on August 13, 2005. For an important recent interview see Manuel Cabieses: “¿Qué diferenciaría al socialismo del siglo XXI de aquel socialismo que se derrumbó? / ¿Dónde va Chávez?,” published in *Punto Final*, no. 598, August 19, 2005.
13. On December 6, 1998, Hugo Chávez Frias was elected president of Venezuela in the first round of the elections, with a resounding 56.24 percent of the vote. Thus all the other candidates put together had to content themselves with no more than 43.76 percent of the vote cast.
14. The pages reprinted here constitute section 18.4.3 of *Beyond Capital*. Section 18.4 of chapter 18 is entitled “The need to counter capital’s extra-parliamentary force,” pp. 709–12 of the first English edition, pp. 815–19 of the Spanish edition (*Más allá del capital*), and pp. 827–31 of the Brazilian Portuguese version (*Para além do capital*).
15. Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *The Social Contract* (New York: Everyman’s Library, 1993), 78.
16. Rousseau, *Social Contract*, 79.
17. Rousseau, *Social Contract*, 42.
18. Hugo Chávez Frias, *Pueblo, Sufragio y Democracia* (Yara: Ediciones MBR-200, 1993), 5–6.
19. Chávez, *Pueblo, Sufragio y Democracia*, 9.
20. Chávez, *Pueblo, Sufragio y Democracia*, 11.
21. Chávez, *Pueblo, Sufragio y Democracia*, 8–11.
22. Chávez, *Pueblo, Sufragio y Democracia*, 9.
23. Rather the opposite, in that always new military targets for the allegedly crisis-solving pursuit of unashamedly aggressive “*preemptive wars*”—to be waged against

countries ranging from Iran and Syria to North Korea and other arbitrarily designated members of the so-called “Axis of Evil”—are repeatedly advocated by the most reactionary political leaders of the global hegemonic imperialist power, urged on by their even more extremist backroom boys, thereby wishfully but quite absurdly projecting as the necessary beneficial solution the dictatorial imposition of a mode of action which could only aggravate the system’s problems to the point of a catastrophic global explosion.

24. Hugo Chávez, “Closing Speech at the Sixth World Social Forum,” January 27, 2006.

25. For instance, when a radical political leader is brought to the position of heading the government of his or her country by an electoral process—to be followed by the establishment of a Constitutional Assembly—and not by an all-embracing social and political revolution. It is enough to think in this respect of the contrast between Venezuela and Cuba.

26. Bolívar, *Selected Works*, 1:192.

27. Felipe Larrazabal, *Vita y escritos del Libertador*, vol. 2, (Caracas: Ediciones de la Presidencia de la República, 2001), 76–77.

28. See “The Challenge of Sustainable Development and the Culture of Substantive Equality,” my lecture delivered at the Cultural Forum of the Latin American Parliaments’ “Summit on the Social Debt and Latin American Integration,” held in Caracas, Venezuela, July 10–13, 2001; published in *Monthly Review*, vol. 53, no. 7 (December 2001), 10–19.

29. Simón Bolívar, *An Address of Bolívar at the Congress of Angostura* (Washington, D.C.: Byron S. Adams, 1919), 34; See also Bolívar, *Selected Works*, 1:191.