



**Only Peru and Colombia have remained conformist towards the policy of North American empire in Latin America: The Ambassador to Venezuela in Hungary Adriana Gottberg**

Karol Klobušický | 24.11.2009

In November 2009, we met Venezuelan Ambassador in Hungary Adriana Gottberg in Budapest, with whom we discussed economic and political situation in Venezuela, standard of living of its population and foreign political issues in Latin America.

**Ten years ago, in Venezuela the process of economic and political changes was initiated which is also called Bolivar Revolution. How do you asses this process after 10 years?**

Now, it has been ten years during which we have been fighting for a change in Venezuela. Now, it has been ten years since President Chávez seized power. It started yet in 1989 in terms of Caracazo. It has been a slow, long and complicated process because it took place under conditions of peace. No aggression has been used, no human rights have been violated and no social class has been attacked. The process in question was under way in stages. The first stage was the transformation of the obtained political power into economic one. We are a mono-producer country dependent on oil. Our oil industry was completely dependent on the United States of America. The US had practical control over all of our oil companies and the profits from oil extraction belonged to a very small group of people. There was no just allocation of them and therefore the rest of the population didn't have the possibility to share them. That's why there was tremendous poverty in the country. As many as 80 percent of population were poor, out of which 36 percent of inhabitants lived in extreme poverty. In 2002, following a strike in petrochemical industry which was induced by the owners and management of oil companies causing thus major economic crisis which was supposed to

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undermine Chávez, the Venezuelan people were completely clear about their objectives. They responded in a way which nobody had expected that time, neither the Government itself: they responded by much bigger support of President Chávez. This granted the President the legitimacy to assume control over oil companies. It was necessary to conduct the change. The implementation of social missions was to a large extent dependent on nationalization. Thus the first stage of the revolution process started. Its task was to change the lifestyle of those persons who had been pushed to the margins of society and to attempt to integrate them back into ordinary life: Into work and studies through education and professional growth. It was a long process because a large part of population had been omitted from the process of education for the whole of 40 years. We wanted that these people were integrated into the process of work and education. In this stage, which goes on, essential is the ensuring of professional growth of the population along with the application of right to education and access to university education as well as the application of right to healthcare.

**This means that nationalization was the basis of this process.**

This stage takes place in present day. Its basis is the surrender of the control over strategic possession into the hands of the people, which we may dub nationalization.

**Nationalization of strategic wealth is a measure typical of socialist states. In the countries of Latin America the title 21<sup>st</sup> Century Socialism is mentioned. Could you explain its relation to Marxism?**

At the beginning of the revolution it turned out that in Venezuela there are not enough theoretical bases for the creation of an alternative. When the explosion of changes started, there was a lack of people's theoretical bases because a small group of the population had

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lived in big wealth and 80 percent of the population had been poor and hadn't have access to study. The people even lacked theoretical knowledge according to which they could fight. They started to fight for what they had considered essential, namely human rights. At the beginning of the fight, there were people with various theoretical bases. 21<sup>st</sup> Century Socialism became one of the possibilities of theoretical basis for fight. Gradually, this theory developed. Of course, the world cannot agree on an unambiguous definition of problems. For explanation: In 2007, I had the possibility of taking part in an FAO meeting where the major topic was famine in the world. The participants assessed ten years of fight against famine and came to the conclusion that during this time the number of people struck by famine had not been reduced. On the contrary, by 56 million more people were dying annually in the aftermath of famine and malnutrition. This refers to the fact that capitalist regime failed. Also the model of capitalism in European countries, which is perceived more human, fails. That's why we decided to find our own way of development. At the moment we are in the first stage, namely in the stage of study and professional growth. In Venezuela we call it cadre education. We have been studying theoretical bases of various political processes trying to reach what is conceivable: for us it is socialism. We at the same time don't want to repeat historical mistakes and we don't want to follow failed theoretical and ideological bases either. President Chávez said: "We still don't have clear notion of what that 21<sup>st</sup> Century Socialism actually is." In Venezuela we start to live like humans eventually. Still more solidarity and respect has been injected into the society, not from the point of view of Christianity or another religious viewpoint, but in the sense that we are humans and solidarity is one of the basic pillars of human society and coexistence. This is reflected in political processes too. It can be seen, for instance, in the organization ALBA (Alternativa Bolivariana para las Américas). ALBA stands for real solidarity in the essence. Not only Venezuela but also other countries of Latin America are the scene of major socio-political changes. This contributes to cooperation in terms of the creation of own models of society functioning in diverse countries. We are not

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Marxist, Leninist or other dogmatists. We are in quest for our own models. It is also important to enable the solidarity to handicapped persons, to persons with certain handicap and to understand that they are also people and they have right to participation. It doesn't matter whether a human feels like a labourer, a farmer, a campesino etc. Lots of new organization dealing with this issue arose. Essential is the organization of women, organization of students, organization of handicapped, organization of labourers and all of them have to organize themselves because they feel that they have right to achieve something, achieve a change in their favour, and achieve the possibility of civil participation. This is the fundamental thought: participation of people.

**Despite the results presented, Venezuela has a lot of problems. One of the distinct problems is the corruption. How does the president and the government deal with this problem?**

It is pretty difficult. It is not Cuban revolution, but a revolution with massive financial sources coming predominantly from oil. As I have already said, the people didn't have strong theoretical bases and one has to take into account the people who were a part of various Venezuelan political parties during decades, most of which were rightist. In the environment of these people there was high corruption rate. People who were a part of political processes in the past have also entered the ongoing process. Many of them do it because they have the will to become revolutionaries, however, to become revolutionaries for a large number of "liquid money" that Venezuela has. This fact is one of the explanations of high corruption. The basis is to create a new generation of people because this has been a long-lasting and complex problem, which we try to solve. Many anti-corruption measures have failed. That's why it is crucial to change the ethics and implement new ethics for the next generation. Previous generation will have completely different political stances. Venezuela is a young

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country where generations alternate quickly. We are a country held by the young, we alternate each other and we are already old generation in fact. The only hope we have is that the ethics of the new generation will be different. That is the most essential thing, influence on new generation: so that it has other values and that it won't be contaminated by old methods which used to be here during previous years. Corruption, embezzlement... This won't change overnight. We have to wait for a new generation of people who will head political processes in the future. The reason is that all other possibilities have failed so far.

### **Strong economic problems linger on in Venezuela. What's the cause?**

Remember the poverty issues. It is important to remove real poverty. It is the principle of "integration of the excluded", integration of poor people on the margins of the society back into the system. Yet a few years ago 80 percent of population were poor. Poor people were excluded from the society, they didn't have access to education or health service. Out of these 36 percent were extremely poor, i.e. they even didn't have access to food. We integrate this group not only through money but also by means of overall improvement of the standard of living of the citizens. The Bank of Independent People (Banco del Pueblo Soberano) provides the people with loans with advantageous conditions. The people can ask for a loan and attempt to establish a company or a farm in order to contribute to production. But this is not the very problem. The problem is the money. The problem is the social exclusion. The people simply don't know how... They don't know how to work, how to participate in civil life. When we started social missions, the main reason was to teach people how to do it. Many people couldn't write and read. They were illiterate. The principle is to give the people the possibility of professional as well as ethical, humane and political growth. We want to ensure dignified life for the people. This we attain first and foremost through education. That requires self-discipline and civil responsibility, that is fundamental. People have the



possibility to get soil, but what is the soil for if they don't know how to till it? Unfortunately, there is a group of people nowadays who aren't capable of creating intellectual or manual values owing to economic exclusion from the society. If we manage to integrate these people back and raise them, then many problems will be solved. The problem is not the living, there is enough money. However, if the people don't know how to build a house, where to go to buy a flat, money is useless for them. They must be obliged to study and shape themselves. This has always been subject to criticism on the part of private media controlled by certain opposition part of the society: they say we distribute money to people who don't want to work. It is not that they don't want to work. They cannot work as they aren't educated. First and foremost, we have to educate them and therefore they receive wages like every labourer. They pay a certain part of the money for studies anyway. They will be returned the money after completing their studies. Thus discipline at work as well as in terms of the study is built. It is a very slow process and therefore the critics say that we don't progress. For us, however, this is not small but large progress, because we don't expect the result to come with this generation. We expect the results of the construction of 21<sup>st</sup> Century Socialism in the future generation. To achieve this, the people must be intellectually more mature, educated and well-versed. That'll be the generation which will live in socialism.

### **What is the system of the social support of university students like in Venezuela?**

For young Venezuelans as well as for politically educated foreign students there is a scholarship project. The institution called Fundayacucho provides university scholarships thanks to which more than 300,000 students study all over the world, but also 300 foreign students from China, France, Germany, Spain etc. in Venezuela. We start to cooperate also with Hungary. The aim is to shape the human of future generation.



**What is the current illiteracy rate like compared to the period prior to the rule of Hugo Chávez?**

At the moment, we have zero illiteracy rate in Venezuela. Before, it amounted to 10 percent. However, functional illiteracy, which is much more difficult to beat, lingers on. We believe that also by means of further education missions we will succeed in removing this kind of illiteracy as well in the course of time – through primary education missions Robinson. Afterwards the people may progress to secondary or undergraduate education.

**Dispute over US military bases in the territory of Colombia is the burning issue. What does this dispute consist in and what measures does the Venezuelan Government take in this connection?**

The sources of the problem are in the political model of Colombia, which emerges from the interest of North American empire. The main issue of the United States is that it has been losing influence in the region. It has lost its military bases in Ecuador and sees that Latin American integration continues in a very positive sense. ALBA is a strong integration model and it has been growing stronger day by day. If it destroys the integration model, it will have power. At the moment, however, they have been losing power due to the integration process. It is also necessary to point out that links of Latin American countries with China and Russia, which have major influence on the region, have been turning firmer. Latin America is a region very rich in natural wealth. We have minerals, largest fresh water supplies, oil, earth gas... It is not interested in people, it is interested in this wealth. However, it has been losing practically its power over this wealth now. Only Colombia and Peru, which are conformist towards the policy of the empire, remained. They have been working on the so-called Colombia Plan (Plan Colombia). They search for possibilities how to maintain influence



exploiting thus the countries of South America. That's why it has been decided that it will be suitable to deploy the 7 bases in the territory of Colombia. What is the problem for us? They think that it will be scot-free for all who will work on the bases. On the other hand they will have better possibility to intervene through aviation. Colombia may ask the US for intervention whenever. Finally, in our opinion there is the interference with peaceful coexistence in the region. Obviously, its goal is not the fight against drugs, the goal is definitely the pre-emptive war. It can attack us for any reason arguing by fight against drugs.

**In the region of Central and Eastern Europe there are several governments which declare its leftist character, including the Hungarian or Slovak one. What is the collaboration of the Venezuelan Government with these governments, or rather, with political parties declaring their leftist character like?**

Yes, there are governments which declare themselves leftist, but they don't cultivate relations with Venezuela. This is the case of Hungary too. They don't have open and positive relation to Venezuela. Although they do as if leftist, they conduct the interests of the United States in reality. The United States know how to control political parties in the EU. It does so primarily through International Monetary Fund loans in poorer countries. Nevertheless, Venezuela tries to change relations in the world, which used to be connected exclusively with the United States before. For Venezuela, it is more important to forge links with smaller countries, which are based on other values and better equality. Equal, humane and just relationship. As far as Hungary is concerned, we are about to sign a treaty on cooperation in the field of education. Hungary can send teachers, uphold universities etc. Venezuela can supply energies since oil is our biggest wealth. It is actually the only thing we can export. Other things, which are produced by us, are intended for covering the needs of own inhabitants. We have to import most of goods. The only commodity meant to export is oil and many agreements with various

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countries are based on it. With those interested. Venezuela comprehends that the relation with the world is not monopoly. Links are not forged forcibly. We wish equal links with other countries.