

CHAPTER 3

CHAVEZ'S POULISM AND PERONISM IN COMPARISON

Chávez's populism has great impact on the domestic policy with numerous social programs in supporting and resolving the needs and demands of his people. "Venezuela's domestic policies depend on a strong, independent foreign policy that leads toward a multipolar world."¹ The domestic supports by pursuing a populist policy of Venezuela's government, give Hugo Chávez an outstanding role in the international venue. This chapter will provide the basis of influence of Hugo Chávez through the *Bolivarian Missions* in gathering the domestic support. Consequently it gives Chávez leverage to stand out in the international arena and craft Venezuela to a strong independent foreign policy, later considered in this paper as anti-Americanism.

The ideological roots of the Bolivarian Revolution can be traced to a diverse sort of intellectual sources, though the core of the political ideology comes from within the wealth of Venezuela's own cultural history. Bolivarian political ideology derives directly from the works of three long-dead Venezuelans: Simon Bolivar, Simon Rodriguez, and Ezequiel Zamora. Chávez christened the contemporary, ongoing democratic revolution "Bolivarian" in honor of Bolivar (1783-1830), a renowned military strategist and intellectual known in Venezuela as "*El Libertador*."²

¹ Chesa Boudin, Gabriel Gonzalez, and Wilmer Rumbos, *The Venezuela Revolution* 100 question - 100 answers (USA: Thunder's Mouth Press, 2006), p.31.

² *Ibid.*, p.8.

Not only was the work of these thinkers formative for Chávez, but he also draws on a diverse range of historical figures – including Mahatama Gandhi, Martin Luther King Jr., Jesus Christ, Che Guevara, Karl Marx, Jose Marti and countless indigenous leaders from Venezuelan history and Latin America as a whole.

Chávez created a nationalist model of endogenous development, or development from within, and defense of national sovereignty within Venezuela while working internationally toward an independent foreign policy based on enabling equitable global development and empowering poor countries to face their primary struggle: poverty. To meet these goals, Chávez argues it is necessary to have a multipolar rather than unipolar system of world power, an argument that often pits him against the U.S government.³

A. Bolivarian Missions

The missions are extraordinary social campaigns through which the Venezuelan government is attempting to address its citizens' most pressing needs and demands. "The government developed the mission in an attempt to enact participatory democracy on the ground in order to accomplish campaign promises in areas such as health, education, food, housing, and employment, without reliance on the flattening and corrupting institutions and influences of bureaucracy."⁴

³ The Venezuela Revolution, pp.8-9.

⁴ Ibid., p.65.

The impact of the missions, unlike most other government programs or macroeconomic reforms, is highly visible.⁵ For instance in the educational mission, while people may not understand how inflation and foreign currency reserves impact their purchasing power, anyone can appreciate what it would be like for someone illiterate to hear a knock on their door being invited to attend their first class, in their own neighborhood, and to receive a small government stipend to ensure they do not abandon their course of study due to the lack of resources.

There are numerous social programs which are part of Bolivarian Missions as follows:

1. Mission Barrio Adentro

This mission was founded on April 16, 2003, as a health program with fifty-eight Cuban doctors, and has since extended to the whole country. Some twenty thousand Cuban and Venezuelan doctors, dentists, and sports trainers attend to the health needs of nearly seventeen million Venezuelans – or approximately 70 percent of the country’s population – at no direct cost to the patients. From the beginning through first quarter of 2005, Barrio Adentro had registered more than 148 million consultations. “Each doctor in the program has over 100 different medicines at his or her disposal for the most common ailments and diseases. Each doctor attends to a daily average of twenty patients, and each

⁵ The Venezuela Revolution, p.66.

dentist, just over eleven patients per day. All in all, Mission Barrio Adentro receives roughly two million visits per week and has an annual operating budget of 5\$ billion.”⁶

Barrio Adentro, as its name implies, is a mission based in the barrios where the poorest Venezuelans live. Essentially, it is a massive public health plan whose goal is to provide primary medical care and services. “It offers twenty-four-hour-a-day medical attention – including consultations and medicines at no cost to the patients.”⁷ This social program is an attempt to provide for the sectors of society that have historically been excluded from a public health-care system that further deteriorated the poor Venezuelans.

The mission of Mission Barrio Adentro is to build stronger, healthier communities through free, preventative health care for all Venezuelans. One of the means to that end is that doctors, dentists, and the rest of the medical staff move into the neighborhoods where the doctors can work and at the same time try to blend in with the community, and then living and interacting with their patients on a daily basis. “This mission works around the idea of preventative health care, which is developed in the context of the environments in which poor Venezuelans actually live and with an emphasis on education, sports, culture, and social security.”⁸

The government recently began developing Mission Barrio Adentro II, which extends the free health care beyond primary care to include specialized procedures thereby meeting the specific needs of people’s illness. The initial clinics set up under this second phrase of Barrio Adentro have X-ray facilities, ultrasound, optometry clinics,

⁶ The Venezuela Revolution, p.67.

⁷ Ibid., p.66.

⁸ Ibid.

intensive-care centers, and so on. “The government is 40 percent of the way to meeting its goal of six hundred comprehensive diagnostic centers and an equal number of rehabilitation centers, along with thirty-three high-tech clinics. Barrio Adentro II is intended to provide the best medical care, on a par with Venezuela’s top private clinics, for free.”⁹

Though the program is wildly popular, many Venezuelans have criticisms of it. They complain that the program is “Cubanizing” Venezuela because most of the program’s medical professionals are Cuban nationals.¹⁰ Some young medical students complain that it is taking the jobs away from Venezuelans, though the Venezuelan doctors and dentists who share the program’s vision for free universal health care have all been offered jobs in the mission.

2. Bolivarian school : Mission Robinson and Mission Sucre

“The Bolivarian Schools are the educational component of the government’s social justice campaign.”¹¹ “The creation of the Bolivarian Schools began well before the first of the educational missions was founded.”¹² The goal of this mission was not only to build new schoolhouses throughout the country, but also to create a new educational system for students from the first through the sixth grades.

The Bolivarian Schools were born as the government began building schools based on a new vision for public education. Under President Chávez, the new

⁹ The Venezuela Revolution, p.67.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ibid., p.68.

government committed itself to making public schools truly free.¹³ As the schools are built, there is a focus on improving the physical space as a requirement for quality education, and on improving the conditions for education – including guaranteeing all students’ basic supplies, uniforms, breakfasts, lunches, and snacks. In poor families where the lack of resources to pay for matriculation fees, uniforms, supplies, transportation, and food had often led students to abandon their studies, these changes greatly extend educational opportunities and serve as incentives to keep kids in schools.¹⁴

The impact of the Bolivarian Schools has been so great that thousands of older public schools – and even a few private schools – have incorporated themselves into the Bolivarian education system. Nonetheless, the process of founding new Bolivarian Schools has slowed dramatically since the project’s inauguration, and critics argue that many schools change their names to incorporate the word “Bolivarian” while changing nothing else.¹⁵

The education missions were developed through the Ministry of Education and Culture, with financing and logistical support from a range of state-owned companies and other ministries. These missions represent a key part of the Venezuelan government’s broader policy of social inclusion and participatory democracy. “Illiteracy and lack of access to education at every level exemplify the enormous social divide in Venezuela.”¹⁶

Mission Robinson was founded in July 2003 to combat illiteracy, which had hovered at around 6 percent, or 1.5 million adults. More than 2 million adults had never

¹³ The Venezuela Revolution, p.68.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid., p.69

finished primary school; those numbers are extremely high for a country with Venezuela's resources. In its first two months alone, Mission Robinson enrolled 100,000 students. As word of the mission spread, it continued to grow, so that by April 2005, 1,406,000 Venezuelans had learned to read and write; on October 28, 2005, the government declared Venezuela "illiteracy free."¹⁷ Mission Robinson was so popular that graduates of the government decided to open Mission Robinson II so that the graduates of the original literacy mission could go on to finish their primary education through the sixth grade. The government also founded Mission Ribas for all those Venezuelans who had yet to receive their high school diploma, no matter how old they were.

Mission Sucre provides for postsecondary studies for those who never had access to universities due to space limitations, lack of resources, or the closed, exclusionary admission policies of most Venezuelan universities. "In 2003 and 2004, this mission, which includes the newly founded UBV, with campuses throughout the country, enrolled some 100,000 new students. On the other end of the education spectrum, Plan Simoncito supports preschool education and day care."¹⁸

This series of educational missions is intended to provide ad hoc responses to the particular educational needs of Venezuelans, no matter their educational background. The higher-level missions often serve graduates of the lower ones, so that there are actually some people who set out to overcome their illiteracy through Mission Robinson I, went on to finish their primary education with Mission Robinson II, are now earning their high school equivalency through Mission Ribas, and are hoping to enroll in Mission

¹⁷ The Venezuela Revolution, p.69.

¹⁸ Ibid., pp.69-70.

Sucre. “Students enrolled in the educational missions who require government support for their studies are given monthly stipends of roughly \$100 to enable them to complete their education.”¹⁹

3. Mission Habitat

In Venezuela, especially in Caracas, substandard housing is a serious problem that impacts not only the poor but also professionals and members of the middle class who have a stable monthly income. The statistics are telling: Venezuela lacks an estimated 1,600,000 needed housing units, and some 900,000 existing units have been condemned. Most of the condemned housing units are shantytowns known as *ranchos*.²⁰

Lack of housing is a dramatic indication of poverty because it destroys the social fabric vital to any community or family. To begin to combat the problem, the government put forward a housing mission, Mission Habitat, which includes a series of plans to address the paucity of housing. The most general of these plans was the creation of the Ministry of Habitat and Housing, which coordinates all of the state’s housing policies and projects.

4. Mission Vuelvan Caras

This mission, founded on January 18, 2004, was designed to fight unemployment, and thus, more generally, poverty.²¹ This mission is a key component of

¹⁹ The Venezuela Revolution, p.70.

²⁰ Ibid., pp.70-71.

²¹ Ibid., p.72.

Venezuela's endogenous development, based on the country's capabilities and needs. This mission provides support and training for millions of Venezuelans in a range of service and production jobs, with an emphasis on the development of cooperatives. "New cooperatives are supported with "cavalry" grants as they get off the ground and ideally go on to form self-sufficient parts of a market economy. The government has already authorized more than 315,000 grants for participants in this mission."²² Mission Vuelvan Caras is thus a sort of school for technical training and the development of cooperatives. The mission gives cooperatives preferential credit ratings and priority for state contracts, both of which significantly enhance their ability to compete in a market economy.²³

5. Mission Mercal

Mission Mercal is dedicated to addressing another of the most basic and pressing problems facing Venezuela's poor: hunger. "The broader strategic objective of this mission is national food security. Food security means that the Venezuelan government wants to guarantee its population sovereignty and avoid dependence on food imports."²⁴

"Mission Mercal supports domestic food production but primarily focuses on maintaining an affordable supply for consumers."²⁵ While many of the products offered in Mercal are also commercial and can be found anywhere in the world, the government has developed its own line of basic foodstuffs such as rice, beans, lentils, sugar,

²² The Venezuela Revolution, p.72.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid., pp.72-73.

²⁵ Ibid., p.73.

powdered milk, cooking oil, and so on. The packaging used on the government's line of foods is not designed to attract the consumer's eye or to sell more products, but rather to inform the average citizen of their rights and responsibilities; each package includes quotes from the constitution, with practical explanations in the form of comics.²⁶

6. Mission Guaicaipuro

Mission Guaicaipuro was founded on "October 12, 2003, the National Day of Indigenous Resistance,"²⁷ with the goal of redressing some of the wrongs institutionalized through the theft of indigenous land and the enslavement of native peoples beginning under the Spanish colonial government. The mission may play an important role in the government's efforts to fulfill its constitutional obligations to provide indigenous peoples with equal rights in a multiethnic and multicultural society.

Venezuela has a population of approximately 500,000 indigenous people, and it is one of the most impoverished, marginalized groups in the country. In light of the wide range of problems facing indigenous peoples, Mission Guaicaipuro combines the activities of all the other missions and focuses their services in indigenous communities. According to Ministry of the Environment and Natural Resources Jacqueline Faria, leader of the presidential commission on mission Guaicaipuro, one of its primary goals is to survey and title indigenous land. Depending on the particular traditions and needs of the community, the land titles are collective, community titles, rather than individual.²⁸

²⁶ The Venezuela Revolution, p.74.

²⁷ Ibid., pp.74-75.

²⁸ Ibid., p.75.

7. Mission Miranda

This mission is a part of the Venezuelan military reserves. In Venezuela, the military reserves are composed of inactive members of the military as well as people who were never part of the military but have signed up to form part of the reserves. “Mission Miranda incorporates all these people into a training program that includes academic as well as physical training. The reserves are also assigned to work projects to support social programs and to defend national sovereignty.”²⁹

Mission Miranda is representative of the efforts to bridge the civilian-military divide in accordance with the constitution, which stipulates that reservists should, among other responsibilities, contribute to civilian life through participation in social-development projects. The idea of creating new military reserves is about expanding the army and increasing the military’s capacity to fulfill its new social welfare and economic responsibilities. Previously, reservists fulfilled their duties outside their home state, now they continue to be a part of their community as they work to develop it. While this clearly makes for a much healthier relationship between the military and the people, it has been criticized as an attempt to militarize the country from the municipal level up.³⁰

These are the Bolivarian Missions which give Chávez support to whatever he is doing. The people of Venezuela give Chávez support and also constituent. In return, Chávez gives Venezuelan people a better life through Bolivarian Missions by providing education, health care, poverty, food security, military reserve, housing and so on. By

²⁹ The Venezuela Revolution, p.75.

³⁰ Ibid., p.75.

gaining trust to run the country, Chávez has a legitimate standing point to pursue his ideology into practicalities.

After having domestic support, Chávez starts moving to a regional path. Chávez has pushed for regional integration in order to gain regional balance of power, for the Latin American countries to be united. In other words, Chávez tries to pursue Simon Bolívar dreams of regional integration. Chávez starts with allying with his old friend, Castro of Cuba. He moved to strengthen ties with Argentina and Brazil in opposing FTAA – the U.S. proposal – with the reason that this economic integration will only suppress and dominate Latin America countries while serving U.S. interests. Consequently, to counterbalance the U.S. influence, especially in trade, Chávez has joined Mercosur, a trading group, along with Argentina, Brazil, Paraguay and Uruguay to block the U.S.-led proposal to restart talks on the FTAA. In its place, Chávez put forth the vaguely defined Bolivarian Alternative for the Americas³¹ (ALBA). Besides these, Chávez has tried to launch Petrosur, a regional energy security.

The following part will introduce another populism in Latin America, particularly in Argentina, with the leading role of Juan Perón and will point out the difference between Chávez and Perón populism.

³¹ Michael Shifter, “In Search of Hugo Chávez,” *Foreign Affairs* 85 no. 3 (May/June, 2006): 53.

B. Peronism

Perón was the dominant figure in Argentine politics from 1943 through his death in 1974. Perón was elected president in 1946 with the slogan “Braden or Perón” (Spruille Braden was then the U.S. ambassador to Buenos Aires).³²

When the military intervened in 1943, the regime came to be dominated by a colonel serving as Secretary of Labor, Juan Perón, who went on to build a formidable political base through support from the rapidly growing union movement. Perón’s mobilization of the working class had an enduring effect on Argentina’s political system over the next four decades.³³

From 1943-1945, Perón’s basic strategy for winning power was to rally the urban classes, especially the proletariat, against the *estancieros* and foreign business. But the intense nationalism of Perón’s movement attracted the support of groups from both the extreme right and left of the Argentine political spectrum, and this was to give Peronism a hybrid, not to say schizoid character, which would contribute to policy incoherence and internecine feuding, thereby preventing the movement from generating a truly unifying vision of national destiny.³⁴

To reinforce his rhetorical onslaught on the twin pillars of the free-trade export-economy, Perón used his position as Ministry of Labor to settle industrial disputes

³² Jorge G. Castaneda, “Latin America’s Left Turn,” *Foreign Affairs* (May/June, 2006), <http://www.foreignaffairs.org/20060501faessay85302/jorge-g-castaneda/latin-america-s-left-turn.html>.

³³ Mark P. Sullivan, “Argentina: Political and Economic Conditions and U.S. Relations,” *CRS Report RS21113* (October, 2006): 2, <http://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/row/RS21113.pdf>.

³⁴ Edwin Williamson, *The Penguin History of Latin America* (UK: Penguin Press, 1992), p.466.

in favor of unions, so long as the leadership pledged its political allegiance to him. Perón also won enormous popularity by introducing a range of welfare benefits for trade unionists.³⁵

Even when Perón was ousted by the military in 1955, Peronism, as a political movement, survived despite attempts by the military and anti-Peronist sectors to defeat it. After his ouster, a series of civilian and military governments ruled until 1973 when Perón was reelected to office after 18 years of exile. Just a year later, however, Perón died. He was succeeded by his second wife Isabel, who had little political experience. Economic and political chaos ensued, with political violence surging and Argentina experiencing its first bout of hyperinflation. As a result, the military intervened once again in 1976, but this time ruled directly until 1983, when it fell into disrepute in the aftermath of its failure in the Falkland Islands (Islas Malvinas) war with Great Britain in 1982. It was during this period that the military conducted the so-called “Dirty War” against leftists, guerrillas, and their sympathizers, and thousands of Argentines “disappeared.”³⁶

Perón's ideas were widely embraced by a variety of different groups in Argentina across the political spectrum. Perón's personal views would eventually become a burden on the ideology; his anti-clericalism did not go over well with upper class Argentinians. Perón's public speeches were consistently nationalist and populist. It would also be difficult to separate Peronism from corporate nationalism. Perón nationalized Argentina's large corporations, blurring distinctions between corporations and

³⁵ The Penguin History, p.467.

³⁶ “Argentina: Political and Economic,” 2.

government. At the same time, the labor unions became corporate themselves, relinquishing the right to strike in agreements with Perón as Secretary of Welfare in the military government from 1943-45. In exchange, the state was to assume the role of negotiator between conflicting interests.³⁷

Peronism was a populist movement whose social and political composition changed over the years, although generally it attracted strong labor support. Perón led the movement in an authoritarian manner, but believed in the value of mass mobilization and allowed local groups a degree of autonomy during his years in exile.³⁸

All in all, Perón was a pragmatic figure, and through the course of his long career his views would frequently change. His ideology was nevertheless marked by some constants, including:

- Strong authoritarian centralized government, with strict control of opposition forces.
- Freedom from foreign influences.
- A third way approach to economics which purported to be neither socialist nor capitalist, but to incorporate elements of both in a corporatist manner.
- The combination of nationalism and social democracy

³⁷ *Answer.com Dictionary Online*, s.v. "Peronism,"
<http://www.answers.com/topic/peronism>.

³⁸ *Ibid.*

What has distinguished Chávez's populism from other populist leader in this case comparing with Perón is that Chávez's populism has regional impact – unity of Latin America countries. Chávez tries to pursue a regional integration by implementing international populism. Chávez has taken full advantage of a confluence of favorable factors – “lots of money, Latin America's political disarray, U.S. disengagement from the region, widespread hostility to bush administration”³⁹ – to construct alliance throughout the Western Hemisphere and beyond. Chávez has skillfully managed to establish himself as a global and regional leader, using oil money and brash anti-Americanism to attempt to construct a counterweight to U.S. power.

This regional integration attempt has never been found in any other populist leader. Chávez's close friendship with Castro has been integral to this project. In exchange for Cuban teachers and doctors, Chávez furnishes the financially strapped island some 90,000 barrels of oil a day. Chávez's aggressive oil diplomacy has also enhanced his influence. In 2005, Chávez inaugurated Petrocaribe, under which Venezuela will provide 198,000 barrels of oil a day to 13 Caribbean nations with “soft” financing for up to 40 percent of the bill. Chávez has also given high priority to the countries of the continent's southern cone, especially Argentina and Brazil, which are central to his plan launch Petrosur, another regional energy initiative.⁴⁰

³⁹ “In Search of Hugo,” 52.

⁴⁰ Ibid.