

Journalism, Wall Street Journal-Style

The Demonization of Progressive Leaders in Latin America

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It takes great courage to venture onto the editorial pages of the Wall Street Journal – especially on Fridays when Mary Anastasia O’Grady’s Americas column appears. This is a woman who surely will have a serious back problem one day resulting from her permanent position of genuflection to the most extreme far-right she pledges allegiance to. In her assigned role at the Journal, which includes character assassination, she can best be characterized as one of the “devil’s” disciples – to borrow a word so aptly used by a well-known “courageous man” in recent days. She proved it in her September 22 column titled In Chavez’s Crosshairs (the “courageous man” in question), and in it she outdid herself in her level of vitriol that was enough to punish all the senses of those able to get through it.

The column drips with hateful statements and is filled with lies and hostility from the opening words to the last pronouncement. This editorial writer begins by telling readers that “Fidel Castro is not far from death” which I’m sure will come as a surprise both to the Cuban leader and his doctors who seem to be indicating that Fidel is slowly recuperating from his major surgery which is quite normal for someone aged 80. She cites as her evidence “Hugo Chavez’s performance at the United Nations” which she claims was a “revolutionary” baton-passing to the “kook from Caracas, Castro’s wealthiest and keenest protege.” O’Grady apparently didn’t bother checking that the Venezuelan President’s salary at about \$24,000 is barely above the poverty level for a US family of four according to the US Census Bureau. Compare that to George Bush (responsible for Mary’s future back problem) who’s extremely wealthy and earns an annual salary of \$400,000 plus all the luxury perks that go with his office that Hugo Chavez Frias doesn’t have or even want.

But this was just for openers. O’Grady then begins another diatribe against the man who’s become her favorite target. She begins by making her only notable truthful statement describing the Venezuela leader as the “scariest speaker at the General Assembly.” She’s right, of course, because today we live in an age where the truth Chavez speaks has become a radical or even a subversive act. It would never cross this hateful woman’s mind that Hugo Chavez is one of the few world leaders willing to admit publicly what all the others know is true. For this he’s condemned in the corporate-run media and especially in columns of right wing flacks like Mary O’Grady who have no credibility or even enough knowledge of the region she reports on in her writing. It shows in what she has to say.

It helps to understand where this woman is coming from if we note where she was formerly employed. She one time worked as an options strategist for Advest, Inc., Thomson McKinnon Securities, and Merrill Lynch & Co. She also once held a position at the far-right Heritage Foundation think tank that never met a corporate-friendly policy or US-led war it didn’t support. In addition, as a journalist, she was awarded the Inter-American Press Association’s

(IAPA association of private media corporations) Daily Gleaner Award for editorial commentary and received an honorable mention in IAPA's opinion award category for 1999. With this kind of background, there's nothing surprising about O'Grady's ideology and why her writing is hopelessly biased and one-sided in favor of the Bush Administration's neoliberal Washington Consensus model now waging a "long war" against the world for total dominance and greater profits for the corporate predators benefitting from it – all at the expense of people needs being ignored.

O'Grady has lots more to say in this week's column and quickly gets into the meat it – that Venezuela represents a "pressing threat" (where) "The battleground is Bolivia, which Mr. Chavez badly wants to control so he can seize that country's natural-gas reserves and become the sole energy supplier in the Southern Cone." She goes on with the delusional notion that Chavez hopes to "seriously damage the Brazilian economy and crush Brazil's geopolitical ambitions as the leader in South America. In its place he wants to plant the flag of Venezuelan hegemony. If he gets away with it, Argentine and Chilean sovereignty would also be diminished and continental stability lost." She has lots more to say, but already she's left the reader breathless and needing to pause before going further.

If O'Grady stuck to the facts instead of specializing in her brand of poisoned rhetoric, she would know Hugo Chavez is a positive force in the region and beyond and has been a unifier, not a divider or exploiter. He's pursued his own Bolivarian Alternative for the Americas (ALBA) progressive alternative to the corrupted neoliberal WTO/IMF/World Bank model O'Grady champions. It's a comprehensive plan for Latin American integration aiming to develop "the social state" benefitting everyone, not just the privileged elite O'Grady swears allegiance to. It's based on the principles of complementarity, solidarity and cooperation among nations – just the opposite of the exploitive practices O'Grady likes to think work best. She's right if she means for the corporate giants that can only grow and prosper at the expense of ordinary people everywhere. Hugo Chavez has a different vision. Instead of trying to subjugate Bolivia, Brazil and Argentina, Venezuela has joined with these nations in the Southern Common Market customs union known as Mercosur. In doing so, Chavez expressed hope that this trade block would "prioritize social concerns (ahead of) the old elitist corporate model" that puts profits ahead of people needs. These are the facts Mary O'Grady ignores as reporting them would expose all the other lies she's written for years. It would also likely get her fired for not sticking to the party line she's paid to do.

Her article continues by referring to the opposition in Venezuela as "democrats," recounting her distorted version of how they tried to remove Chavez in their 2004 recall referendum (aka US-directed coup by other means) and failed. Chavez blew the opposition away with about 58% of the vote in an election judged free, open and fair but which O'Grady characterized as "clocked in state secrets" – no doubt because the wrong candidate won convincingly. She claimed exit polls showed Chavez was "badly beaten" but the "chavista-stacked electoral council declared him the winner." She fails to identify what exit polls she's referring to or who conducted them. The reader can only conclude they're either ones she dreamed up for this column or they were fraudulent ones conducted by the oligarchs in the country that have everything to gain if Chavez is ousted by any means.

This woman doesn't know when to quit. She then contends "Mr. Chavez boasts he was democratically elected and foments hatred against his neighbors, including the US (and) the non-aligned movement (intends) on going nuclear." She doesn't explain she's referring to Iran, a country that's a signatory to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), is in full

compliance with it, and has every legal right to develop its commercial nuclear industry which is all it's doing according to all available evidence. She then again stresses that chavistas are putting a "blitz" on Bolivia "to make that country a (hydro) carbon copy of Venezuela."

Next, however, comes her best shot and one of her least accurate. She makes the audacious claim that Evo Morales (her other favorite target) "rose to executive power by first using violence to bring down two constitutional presidents and then forcing a new election, which he won." She doesn't explain that Juan Evo Morales Ayma (known as Evo) was a leader of Bolivia's cocalero movement or loose federation of coca leaf-growing campesinos. He's also the leader of his Movement for Socialism Party (MAS which means more). In both capacities he's been a champion of progressive change in his country and organized peaceful protests in 2005 in the capitol La Paz that forced the resignation of President Carlos Mesa who served the interests of capital and ignored the needs of his people. This is what O'Grady calls violence - courageous resistance to repression and intolerance. Evo Morales was elected president of Bolivia in December, 2005 in an election controlled by the opposition because the people were so fed up with business as usual they defied all expectations turning out in large numbers to convincingly elect the only man they would entrust to rule their country.

Morales isn't O'Grady's kind of president because he wants to serve all his people and not just the elite few who've always had things in Bolivia their way. So she says "He dreams of an indigenous, collectivist Bolivarian economy under the thumb of an authoritarian government" while falsely claiming most Bolivians are "entrepreneurial." She may be right if she leaves out the indigenous majority (about 70% of the population) most of whom are poor and always had been disenfranchised until now. She accuses Morales of being "coached" by Hugo Chavez who's helping him institute progressive policies and programs which O'Grady rails against - because they're people-friendly and bad for the corporate interests she represents. She stresses Bolivia under Morales "could use some help from the international community....to weaken Evo." But she ends her weekly hate-column by coming back to her favorite target and public enemy number one in her eyes - Hugo Chavez - by trumpeting the notion that it's "clear....doing nothing while Mr. Chavez seizes power on the continent is not an option." It has all the sound of a call to arms to remove President Chavez by force or any other means despite the fact that he's the leading democrat in the hemisphere and beloved by the great majority of his people who will never tolerate a return to the ugly past of rule by the repressive oligarchs they'll never again accept.

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