

Panicky Bush slinks away from Chavez

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The easiest way to understand the institutional bias of western media is to analyze reporting from the developing world. The economic summit in Mar Del Plata, Argentina, provides an excellent opportunity to evaluate the coverage and decide whether such partiality exists.

Although tens of thousands of working people came to protest George Bush and his suspiciously-named “free trade” economic policies; they were invariably smeared by the corporate media as “Leftists” or “radicals”; eliminating the possibility that they were simply concerned citizens participating in the democratic process. This is the familiar tactic of the media to marginalize ordinary people whose interests don’t correspond to those of the ruling elite.

“Latin America’s radical leftists took to the streets on Friday,” Jack Chang breathlessly reported for Knight Ridder, but all the other news outlets invoked the same disparaging language.

The main target at the event was Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez, a leader who is invariably slandered by the media with the monikers “leftist firebrand”, “radical president” (Financial Times) or fiery, populist president (NY Times). At some point in every article, Chavez is lumped together with Fidel Castro or Che Guevara in a conspicuous attempt to dismiss him as an anti-American troublemaker. In fact, Chavez was among the first countries to come to America’s aid following Hurricane Katrina, offering doctors, medicine and oil to the devastated region. No major media source publicly credited him for his charitable contributions.

Chavez, of course, is guilty of redistributing some of Venezuela’s prodigious oil wealth to the poor and needy of his country. This has made him an imminent threat to the entrenched oligarchy and their teammates in the media.

“We are creating a great political body in the south, and not only geographically,” Chavez opined. “This is the great task of our region, to create a consensus of ‘the south’ that will bring better lives to all our people.”

Chavez’s innocuous comments were vilified in most of the reports as inciting anti-Americanism or, worse still, “subverting democracy in his country”. (Knight Ridder) In fact, it is the rising tide of democracy in South America that has Washington so concerned. Chavez has captured the imagination of the common man and is pointing to a way out of the neoliberal policies that have kept Washington’s boot placed firmly on neck of southern hemisphere economies for 20 years.

“We’ve come to bury FTAA,” Chavez roared to the capacity crowd. “I even brought a

shovel”.

The Venezuelan president’s remarks were enthusiastically applauded by the thousands in the crowd who chanted back, “Fascist Bush, You are the terrorist”.

Chavez was flanked by antiwar activist Cindy Sheehan and former footballer Diego Maradona. Maradona added to Chavez’s stinging repudiation of free trade by calling Bush, “human rubbish.” (This was only reported in one outlet; the Australian based News.com) Like many Argentines, Maradono believes that the US policies precipitated Argentina’s economic meltdown which left 40% of the population living in poverty.

Most of the articles failed to report this crucial fact which contextualizes the negative sentiment that many in the south feel for America. It has nothing to do with the “fiery oratory” of Chavez, but a clear grasp of the devastating effects of US free trade policies.

The majority of Latin Americans are now opposed to the creation of a free trade region in the Americas. They are also against the repayment of the foreign debt and the growing threat of US militarization. They are increasingly frustrated with the increasing disparity of wealth between rich and poor as well as with rising unemployment.

Again, none of these factors has anything to do with Chavez who is mistakenly held responsible for inciting hatred of America.

Chavez has, however, been a unifying figure who has shared his oil wealth with other countries in the region and created an alternate economic model, Mercosur, which challenges the US’s dominance in the hemisphere. It was a stunning blow to the Bush team when free trade loyalist Vicente Fox announced at the summit that Mexico would be joining Mercosur.

Chavez’s comments only added insult to injury:

“The planet is being destroyed under our own noses by the capitalist model, the destructive engine of development. Every day there is more hunger, more misery, thanks to the neo-liberal, capitalist model.”

The rejection of FTAA is a mainstream position emerging from the political awakening of the people themselves. Simply put, the methods applied by the Washington Consensus have been tried and have failed rather spectacularly. The new majority doesn’t want to “destroy local industry, roll back social safety nets and labor protections”, destroy the environment, or prolong America’s supremacy in the region.

“We have come to bury FTAA because it’s an old project of the imperial eagle that from the beginning planned to sink its claws into Latin America,” said Chavez.

The media coverage of the summit obscured the details that would have provided the necessary background for understanding the rage at Bush’s appearance. The event was framed as a “showdown” between Chavez and Bush. Even on this superficial level the corporate media demonstrated its deftness at tip-toeing around what really took place. As Reuters pointed out, the strutting Texan, who exudes confidence and courage behind a phalanx of security guards and concertina wire, “carefully avoided” Chavez while the world

waited with baited-breath.

“Carefully avoided”!?!

“This summit is not about Hugo Chavez,” one Bush advisor said defensively. “This is not news.”

But, of course, it is news. And, when the word gets out that the boastful Bush slinked out of Argentina rather than face his arch-rival, it will be very big news indeed.

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