

Wall Street Journal Gives Hugo Chavez A Mixed Review

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In contrast to its one-sided stance on Hugo Chavez, the June 16 Wall Street Journal had an interesting article on US based activists in Boston, New York, San Diego, Miami, Cincinnati and other cities around the country forming Bolivarian Circles and other groups supporting the Chavez government. But it couldn't do it without taking its usual swipe at the Venezuelan leader beginning with the front page article's title: Move Over Che: Chavez Is New Icon of Radical Chic. That's WSJ language intending to demean in its headline rather than use a proper one to reflect what their story was about.

It then used its opening paragraph (which many readers never go beyond) to convey a flavor of invective before getting into the heart of a story worth telling but not without some slaps at Chavez interspersed along the way. It referred to the president's "fiery" rhetoric (never mentioning its honesty) saying it wins him few friends in Washington while never explaining the one place on earth Hugo Chavez will never have friends in high places is in the nation's capitol. It also accuses Chavez of becoming a "revolutionary hero nearly on a par with Che Guevara and Fidel Castro," that he uses his nation's oil riches to "prop up Mr. Castro's regime," and that "His dream is to spread the Venezuelan brand of socialism across Latin America."

Journal writers are masters of half-truths and distortion that goes along the the paper's policy of being hostile to any government not in line with the neoliberal Washington Consensus (wreaking havoc wherever it spreads) and not fully subservient to US wishes. Nothing in their article explains that the Bolivarian Revolution is a true participatory democracy where the people have a say in how the country is governed; that the lives of the majority poor have benefitted enormously by an impressive array of essential social programs and services unimaginable in the US; that Hugo Chavez aids his neighbors (Castro included who aids Venezuela in return) and doesn't threaten war or sanctions against them; has no secret prisons; no illegal political prisoners or illegal detentions; doesn't practice torture; doesn't ethnically cleanse neighborhoods to aid corporate developers; and never suspended the constitution even after a coup d'etat, mass street riots and a crippling US-instigated oil lockout and shutdown. It's even working to clean up and change a many decade-long legacy and systemic climate of corruption and inefficient state bureaucracy and is making slow progress against great odds that would challenge any leader.

When it comes to reporting even a good story about Hugo Chavez, the Journal has to ruin it by taking their usual jabs and getting their facts wrong in the process. It went on to claim a "darker side" in the Bolivarian circles within Venezuela stating they help the "government identify opponents, who are then denied remedial education and other government

services.” It reported this was what two US academics found in a study they conducted that may have been funded by the Bush administration to report results in line with its own policy and rhetoric. Bush officials also may have bought off some so-called “Human rights groups” which the Journal writer says claim Chavez is “dangerously centralizing (his) power, emasculating Venezuela’s judiciary and threatening press freedom.” It sounds more like those groups were misquoted and are talking instead about what’s happening inside the US as the Bush administration consolidates its power, is systematically stripping away sacred constitutional freedoms and is moving the country dangerously closer to a full-blown police state. Hugo Chavez is doing just the opposite in Venezuela, but you won’t learn that on the pages of the Wall Street Journal or from their so-called sources.

Nonetheless, the Journal reported an inspiring story of ordinary US citizens wanting to spread the message of what, if fact, is happening in Venezuela. It’s heartening to learn about groups forming around the country that hopefully may grow in size and whose activities may be able to counter the hostile commentary from high level US officials and the complicit and stenographic corporate media. It’s quite surprising to read on the front page of the WSJ a quote many in the US would agree with, but we’d never expect to see it in print in any major US newspaper. It’s by a Chavez supporter in Olympia, WA who says “My political belief is that the US is a horrendous empire that needs to end.” Another supporter said he formed an Oregon Bolivarian Circle because of his outrage over the 2002 US led failed coup against the Venezuelan leader. He went on to explain he and his Venezuelan-born wife make annual trips to the country and are impressed by Chavez’s efforts to provide (free) health care and education for the poor (who never had it before he was elected). He then added that he “couldn’t understand why the US press didn’t see it his way,” so he and others in his Circle began to sponsor pro-Chavez movies, college lectures and rallies. This gentleman actually appeared on one of President Chavez’s five hour Sunday call-in television programs “Alo Presidente” and was called “brother” by the president.

The Journal went on to report on other groups including one in Philadelphia that has produced three pro-Chavez videos including one about supportive oil workers who helped the state-owned oil company keep operating despite a crippling anti-Chavez strike that began in December, 2002. It also explained that the US based groups get no funding from the Venezuelan government and instead operate strictly on their own and do it to “help us counteract the campaign that there isn’t freedom of expression in Venezuela,” according to the country’s US ambassador Bernado Alvarez.

Overall, the Journal today was unusual in that it was both in and out of character in the way it reports on the Chavez government. On the one hand, it showed Hugo Chavez has loyal supporters inside the US working to spread the truth about his government and Bolivarian Revolution. But at the same time, the flavor of invective was strong, in line with the Journal’s usual one-sided stance, and it ended up spoiling what otherwise would have been a fine effort. Wouldn’t it be nice if one day the WSJ doffed its empire-friendly garb and told it like it is, fully and honestly. Apparently that’s too much to expect from the newspaper of record for corporate America that never lets the truth get in the way of their one-sided support for the US empire and interests of capital. In spite of it, the spirit of the glorious Bolivarian Revolution is uplifting and inspiring. It’s powerful, spreading and in the end won’t be derailed by Journal writers or other enemies of those on the side of social equity and justice.

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