

Wall Street Journal's Looking Glass World

Biased media coverage on Venezuela

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She's at it again on the Journal's editorial page in her June 4 article called "The Young and the Restless," subtitled "Is this the beginning of the end for Hugo Chavez?" The writer is self-styled Latin American expert Mary Anastasia O'Grady always getting top grades in vilification and disinformation but failing ones on regional knowledge and legitimate journalism.

This time she may have overstepped. Her article wreaks with disinformation, outright lies, and most disturbing of all - incendiary commentary straddling the tipping edge of inciting insurrection. She can get away with it because she represents elitist interests and the Journal's editorial view supporting the Bush administration's fixation on ousting Hugo Chavez by any means, including through violence. It doesn't matter that Chavez was just reelected again in December by a near two to one margin or that he's admired and loved by the great majority of Venezuelans. They're unperturbed and/or supportive of his shuttering RCTV's VHF Channel 2 overshadowing that issue being used as a pretext for suspicious violent street protests, mainly in Caracas. More on that below.

It's clear O'Grady will fit right in if the Journal's controlling Bancroft family succumbs to greed selling out to Rupert Murdoch's wooing. That prospect's got Journal employees apoplectic. They're scrambling through their union seeking an alternate buyer willing to grant what Murdoch never will - journalistic independence and what's left of the paper's tattered integrity. Those ideas are anathema to how he views journalism, and he's not shy saying it.

Australian-raised author Bruce Page wrote about him in his new book, "The Murdoch Archipelago," calling him "one of the world's leading villains (and) global pirates." Murdoch is clear, according to Page. He wants his journalistic empire to be a privatized "state propaganda service, manipulated without scruple and with no regard for truth (in return for) vast government favors such as tax breaks, regulatory relief, and monopoly" market control free as possible from competitors having too much of what Murdoch wants for himself. The problem is he usually gets his way. Unless Journal employees stop him, the WSJ's independence and status as a legitimate publication are over. Under Murdoch control, no distinction will be made between real news, editorial opinion and agitprop, and no views will be tolerated, henceforth, contrary to Mr. Murdoch's. That's how he operates throughout his media empire - take it or leave and find another line of work.

The way O'Grady writes, she's not on board with other staffers against the Bancroft family sellout. Murdoch will love her views, may give her more latitude and maybe more space as well. Let's hope she's disappointed, that Journal employees retain their independence, and Journal readers keep what they now have free from the venomous claws of the villainous

king of media moguls.

On June 4, O'Grady was warming up for the Murdoch era, but her circuits were crossed, and she's straddling a dangerous line. Despite her claim or hope, it's not the end of Hugo Chavez in a nation where two-thirds of the people adore him and all but the "sifrino" well-off 15 - 20% want no one else as president. They plan keeping him as long as he wants the job regardless of O'Grady's delusional musings. She might also try getting her facts straight, hard as that is for her.

She wrote "As tens of thousands of antigovernment student protestors poured into the streets of Caracas last week and national guard troops used tear gas and rubber bullets against them, many observers were asking whether....Chavez had finally met his Waterloo."

Sorry Mary. Your count needs fine-tuning and your commentary an explanation of what really went on, why, for whose benefit, and who's behind it.

For starters, a moderately large protest march took place in Caracas May 28 after Radio Caracas Television's (RCTV) VHF Channel 2 went off the air at midnight May 27. A much larger crowd of supporters dwarfed the opposition, unmentioned in O'Grady's column. A new public TV station, TVes, went on the air immediately, mandated by the Venezuelan Constitution to do for all Venezuelans what RCTV never did serving corporate interests alone.

RCTV lost its operating license because it broke the law and continued flaunting it openly. It playing a leading role instigating and supporting the aborted April, 2002 coup against President Chavez mass public support on the streets helped overturn. At year's end, it conspired again in the economically devastating main trade union confederation (CTV) - chamber of commerce (Fedecameras) lockout and industry-wide oil strike. It cost state oil company PDVSA an estimated \$14 billion from lost revenue and willful sabotage of its facilities. In January and late May, this writer twice wrote about these events detailing how RCTV flaunted the law, especially in an article titled "Venezuela's RCTV Acts of Sedition."

No government should tolerate seditious acts, especially from its broadcasters able to reach and influence large audiences. Chavez, however, was tolerant letting RCTV's VHF Channel 2 continue on-air until its license expired. His National Telecommunication Commission (CONATEL) then, with full justification, refused to renew it. RCTV broke the law and flaunted the public trust. But it wasn't silenced and is still able to broadcast through cable and satellite where media like CNN in the US thrive. It even set up huge public screens in upscale neighborhoods airing its programming for street viewers there. Shuttering Channel 2 isn't a free speech issue. It's a public trust and responsibility one. In how he governs, Chavez respects that as his duty to all Venezuelans. RCTV consistently failed on all counts. Yet, it got off with a wrist slap.

The protests continued, nonetheless, on Monday with several thousand students from several universities demonstrating in central Caracas. Pro-business newspaper El Universal and other reports said violence broke out between demonstrators and police after students threw rocks at a government building. The police acted to stop it they as they should, but not as O'Grady wrote making it sound like a military assault.

About 200 students also burned tires and boxes blocking traffic at Plaza Brion in the Chacaito neighborhood, then again attacked a government building. Police were forced to

use tear gas and perdigones, or plastic shrapnel, in response with protestors throwing with rocks and bottles.

Protests continued for several days with opposition media channel Globovision falsely reporting demonstrations were peaceful and police attacked without provocation. It's this kind of reporting, common on Globovision and other corporate media channels, that made Chavez speak out on national television May 29 warning Globovision specifically he will act against it if its violence-inciting reports don't stop. He did what any responsible leader must to maintain law and order saying he won't tolerate privately run media or public officials openly inciting violence and chaos in the country.

What Venezuela's National Assembly did allow is something unimaginable in the US where democracy is more illusion than fact. It invited students on both sides of RCTV's shuttering to debate it before a full session of congress. When they came June 7, it highlighted what's evident on the streets - the sharp class divide showing students from elitist families in the protests while the great majority of ordinary Venezuelans, benefitting from Bolivarianism, opposing them.

The National Assembly forum was held June 7. Each side showed up with a list of 20 speakers, but things didn't go as planned. Protesting student representatives came, then left after the first pro-government speech saying nothing after its leader's comment that protests would continue. It proved free expression isn't the issue at all as, given the chance to make their case to congress, student agitators chose not to do it.

When exposed to the truth in a public forum, their hypocrisy imploded. It can't stand against Chavez's commitment to participatory democracy at the grassroots, true respect for free and open expression, and support for free quality education at all levels. His government just increased access to it further by eliminating university entrance exams and raising teachers' salaries, according to the Chronicle of Higher Education. It's part of an effort to give children of the poor and working class equal access to what those of the well-off always had.

Made-For-Media Staged Street Protests

We've seen this scheme on the streets play out before. It preceded the aborted 2002 Venezuelan coup with Washington's dirty hands all over it. US administrations often pull these stunts as a tactical way to incite trouble, at times having something more devious in mind like ousting a sitting government it's become expert doing. Often when it happens anywhere, you can bet on two things:

— The ruling government isn't a US client state. That means it's unwilling to sacrifice its own sovereignty to that of the lord and master of the universe.

— Secondly, Washington's dirty hands are all over it, and no stunt is too underhanded to use, including murder. Unconfirmed reports indicate seven or more Chavistas have already been killed in the violence.

Past May Be Prologue

On August 19, 1953, a Washington-orchestrated CIA implemented coup ousted the democratically elected Mohammed Mossadegh Iranian nationalist government whose

“crime” was challenging US-UK corporate interests. Masterminding CIA’s Operation Ajax was Theodore Roosevelt’s grandson Kermit. It took him two attempts to do it, and key making it work involved bribing Iranian military officers and engineering street protests like what’s ongoing now in Venezuela, mainly in Caracas. Venezuelans should take note of the Iranian experience. Following the coup, the US reinstated Shah Reza Pahlavi to power ushering in his 25 year reign of terror leading to the 1979 revolution ousting him.

Mossadegh was lucky staying alive. He died in 1967 at age 82, but lived under house arrest in his hometown of Ahmad Abad. Chavez won’t likely fare as well if a US coup against him succeeds. He won’t be tried in a staged kangaroo court trial like Saddam and then hanged. Washington won’t let him survive that long realizing it erred in 2002 when it had a chance to eliminate him and didn’t. This time it will, Chavez knows it, and possibly we’re witnessing the latest US attempt to do it using RCTV’s shuttering as a pretext.

That’s how things played out in Chile in 1973 when Nixon, Kissinger and CIA ousted and murdered democratically elected Salvador Allende ushering in 16 years of fascist rule under General Augusto Pinochet. It began with Nixon “making the (Chilean) economy scream” leading up to CIA-instigated destabilization and bloody military coup on another September 11. Prior to it, the anti-Allende disinformation campaign championed “freedom of the press” with CIA money given right wing daily newspaper El Mercurio for anti-government propaganda. Washington also orchestrated an international disinformation campaign against the Allende government smearing his socially democratic administration similar to what’s happening now against Chavez on the same issue of free expression and the media.

Back to the Present

It wasn’t surprising US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice used the June Organization of American States (OAS) general assembly to lash out at Chavez on the RCTV issue calling on OAS to investigate the state of freedom of expression in Venezuela. Without a touch of irony, she championed “Freedom of expression, freedom of association and freedom of conscience” in a democracy. She neglected to mention her own government openly defiles democracy saying challenging its policies is unpatriotic or even treasonous with George Bush stating “Either you are with us, or you are with the ‘terrorists.’ “

Bush had more to say in Prague en route to the G-8 summit in Germany saying “In Venezuela, elected leaders have resorted to shallow populism to dismantle democratic institutions and tighten their grip on power.” The shameless US Senate agreed passing a resolution denouncing Chavez and supporting RCTV – another example of how complicit the Democrat-led Congress is with Bush’s imperial agenda.

Various human rights organizations, like Human Rights Watch, have been co-opted as well joining in this outrageous attack. So did Reporters Without Borders with a long record ignoring real abuses and denouncing phony ones all too often. Then there’s the notorious (US) National Endowment of Democracy (NED) that’s funded and operated to subvert what it claims to stand for and has an ugly record doing it. It works with CIA doing overtly what the spy agency does sub rosa – helping to oust democratically elected leaders unwilling to be submissive US clients.

Peru’s Alan Garcia serves the elite so his lawlessness was ignored when he pulled the operating licenses of two TV stations and three radio stations. The likely reason was their support for a strike Garcia opposes because, unlike Chavez, he’s subservient to Washington

and no democrat.

Summing up, what's playing out on Venezuela's streets is part of a made-in-Washington attempt weaken Hugo Chavez through a phony trumped up scheme denouncing him for opposing free expression, using RCTV's shuttering as the pretext. This writer even got one unconfirmed report elitist university professors ordered their students to the streets in protest or get failing grades in their courses if they refused. It's likely true, so many in the protest crowds weren't there for conviction, but fearing retribution in class if they demurred.

Chavez supporters, however, aren't being quiet although their actions go unreported in the US and Venezuelan corporate media. Chris Carlson (from Venezuela) wrote in Venezuela Analysis June 1 that "Organizations, journalists, students, activists and intellectuals in Venezuela accused the national and international media of waging a campaign against Venezuela" as part of destabilization efforts over the past few days...."the RCTV protests and media coverage of them have a hidden agenda directed by the United States and their Venezuelan allies to destabilize the country."

Carlson continued saying over 600 social organizations attended a May 31 press conference in Caracas. They signed a document rejecting the "imperial interference to destabilize and overthrow the Bolivarian government" citing interference by CIA. They also supported Chavez's shuttering of RCTV and revealed evidence from documents obtained that Washington (through NED) paid RCTV and Globovision journalists to incite street violence on-air that could result in deaths hoping to discredit and weaken Chavez. They further claimed RCTV and Globovision systematically "called for subversion, chaos, fascism, terrorism, and assassination" acting as "spokespersons for foreign interests" - namely the Bush administration. Its ultimate objective is to "overthrow and assassinate President Hugo Chavez," they said.

Pro-Chavez students joined in denouncing the corporate media smear and violence inciting plan saying "We, the university students, denounce....the destabilization plan....promoted by the private media (serving) the national and transnational elite.....We repudiate (lies) to alter the public order and peace" to create conditions like April, 2002 and the 2002-03 industry lockout and oil strike.

Wall Street Journal O'Grady's Role in Washington's Scheme to Destabilize Chavez's Government and Oust Him

O'Grady writes a weekly "Americas" column for the Journal's hard right editorial page at times extreme enough to make a Nazi blush. Once Murdock arrives, it's hard imagining how much worse it may get, but he has a way of surprising for the worst. It may not be long finding out how bad. Imagine Fox News on every WSJ page or more O'Grady's making them even worse.

In her June 4 column, O'Grady writes: Chavez is "An avowed Marxist....in the process of destroying his country....he is also an international menace....using his oil wealth to sow revolution, a la Fidel Castro, in South and Central America (and) a dear friend of the Iranian government. Most of Latin America....has his number, and it would be hard to find a democrat in the Western Hemisphere who wouldn't cheer his retirement and the return of checks and balances in Venezuelan government."

Space won't allow a proper and thorough denunciation of this line of vitriolic, hateful rot.

Understanding what's really happening in Venezuela under Chavez and his relations in the region and beyond requires only flipping this rhetoric on its head to know the truth. Read "Hugo Chavez's Social Democratic Agenda" by this writer to get the facts in detail, not O'Grady's agitprop fiction. It explains the Chavez agenda comparing it to Washington under George Bush who's no democrat, unlike Chavez who's a model one. And that's the problem as Bush neocons see him as their greatest of all threats - a good example that's spreading and must be stopped.

O'Grady continued saying "film footage....featured unarmed university students....caught in clouds of tear gas, being chased and beaten by helmeted jackboots, and fired on with water cannons. (They were spurred) by eight years of property confiscations, the jailing of government adversaries and the manipulation of voter rolls and elections (but now) the attack on free speech hit a nerve and sent them to the streets." The resistance movement "focus(es) on freedom and calls to end the dictatorship....with polls showing more than 70% of Venezuelans opposed to the closing of RCTV....(there's) simmering discontent in the economy as well (with) Venezuelans no better off than....eight years ago (before Chavez). Food shortages are growing....A perfect storm may be brewing."

Again, turn all this on its head to know the truth - the exact opposite of what O'Grady writes, and it's shameful she's allowed to get away with it. Sadly, that's the state of the dominant US media that's right out of Orwell with war being peace, freedom being slavery, and ignorance being strength. O'Grady's pathetic writing alone proves it. Journalism it's not.

She continues saying "Chavez has fallen from grace and a majority of Venezuelans now want him gone (but he won't likely) go down without a fight." He has built up support inside the military, armed a street militia and refined intelligence tactics using Cuban personnel....(He) no longer feels it necessary to keep up the appearance of a democracy." No comment needed except to say O'Grady got one thing right. Chavez does have support in the military also infiltrated with rogue elements opposing him. She ends her hate piece practically calling for insurrection saying Chavez won't relinquish power voluntarily as O'Grady practically demands. But "Given his failing popularity, a showdown, sooner or later, is more than probable."

O'Grady writes these articles from an elitist perspective. Her background is from earlier Wall Street and extremist Heritage Foundation employment before joining the Journal. She's now tasked to write black propaganda for the imperial government in Washington she pledges fealty to. No matter it's a near-fascist administration building a military colossus, waging war on the world, shredding civil liberties at home, and destroying the social state to pay for it - an agenda O'Grady champions winning awards writing about it.

Mirror opposite of what O'Grady writes, the great majority of Venezuelans want none of it. They had it for generations under repressive rule till Chavez was elected in December, 1998 and took office in February, 1999. Under him, social democracy bloomed, and the great majority of Venezuelans benefit under it in ways Americans can't imagine. They'd be outraged to learn they lack essential social benefits (in the richest country in the world) all Venezuelans have - because of Hugo Chavez's dedication to all the people, not just the privileged under democracy US-style.

In Venezuela, it's the real thing, although still a work in progress undoing generations of governments of, by and for the rich and well-off alone. No longer, and people like O'Grady denounce it because it works so well shaming the state of things in America she won't

reveal. She can keep railing, but facts, in the end, trump rhetoric, and Venezuelans have them. They need only cite their daily lives in socially democratic Venezuela compared to how things were in the past. They're not about to go quietly into the night letting that be lost. They fought for it once. If threatened, they'll do it again, sending a message to others - you, too, can have this. Just go for it, including in America where the need is greater than ever under George Bush.

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