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## Anti-capitalism in the Contemporary Age: The Case of the United Socialist Party of Venezuela

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ANTI-CAPITALISM IN THE CONTEMPORARY AGE:  
THE CASE OF THE UNITED SOCIALIST PARTY  
OF VENEZUELA

by

WILLIAM MADDENS  
B.A. University of Central Florida 2014

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for the degree of Master of Arts  
in the Department of Political Science  
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at the University of Central Florida  
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## **ABSTRACT**

Since the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, the popularity of anti-capitalist parties around the world has fallen. However, there are still surviving anti-capitalist political parties that survived this fall. In examining these parties, it must be determined whether they have any fresh ideas to overcoming the challenges of transitioning to a socialist society, and if they have any answers to the problems that plagued past attempts at socialism. One such party that has enjoyed much electoral success is the United Socialist Party of Venezuela. When taking a look at party programs, platforms, and statements made by party leaders, it does not appear that this party has made any conscious goal to answer the questions posed by previous attempts to transition away from capitalism, nor do they appear to answer criticisms posed by scholars on the subject. The United Socialist Party of Venezuela seems to have failed to learn from history.

To my amazing wife, who never stops encouraging me to reach my goals.

## **ACKNOWLEDGMENTS**

There are a few people whom I would like to thank in helping me write this paper. First is Dr. Daniel Marien, who has been with me on this project since I began and encouraged me to pursue my interest in this area. I would also like to thank both Dr. Kerstin Hamann and Dr. Peter Jacques for feedback throughout this process, enabling improvement upon the final product.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION .....	1
Competing Ideologies .....	1
A Modernized Form of Anti-capitalist Discourse .....	4
The Soviet Experience .....	5
Going Forward .....	7
The United Socialist Party of Venezuela .....	7
CHAPTER 2: EXAMINING VENEZUELA .....	12
A Brief Political History of Venezuela .....	12
Scholarly Experts on Venezuela .....	20
Venezuela’s Chavismo and Populism in Comparative Perspective .....	20
Measuring Populist Discourse of Chavismo: Good = The Will of the People .....	21
Populist Policy: The Missions of the Chávez Government .....	23
The Missions .....	23
The Revolution in Venezuela: Social and Political Change under Chávez .....	25
Venezuela’s Presidential Elections of 2006: Toward 21 <sup>st</sup> Century Socialism? .....	25
The Venezuelan Economy in the Chávez Years .....	32
Hugo Chávez and the Bolivarian Revolution .....	35
Dismantling Democracy in Venezuela: The Chávez Authoritarian Experiment .....	38
The Political Assault on State Powers for Authoritarianism .....	39
Institutional Development Toward Consolidating Authoritarianism .....	41
Constitutional Reforms Designed to Consolidate Authoritarianism .....	41
Hugo Chávez and the Bolivarian Revolution .....	42
The Real Venezuela: Making Socialism in the 21 <sup>st</sup> Century .....	49
CHAPTER 3: CRITIQUES OF SOCIALISM .....	53
The Politics of Socialism .....	53
The Politics of Socialism .....	53
The Economics of Socialism .....	57
The Transition to Socialism .....	58
Socialism: The Active Utopia .....	60
Socialist Planning .....	63
The Economics of Feasible Socialism .....	69

Main Currents of Marxism.....	73
CHAPTER 4: METHODOLOGY .....	77
CHAPTER 5: FINDINGS .....	81
Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela’s Constitution of 1999.....	81
The Blue Book .....	94
Concrete Robinsonian Utopia.....	96
The Red Book .....	97
Hugo Chávez’s Interview with Larry King (2009).....	106
President Maduro’s CNN Interview (2014).....	108
Second Six-Year Economic Plan (2013-2019).....	110
The Program.....	112
The Fascist Coup Against Venezuela .....	114
Frontline: The Hugo Chávez Show.....	121
An Analysis of the Chávez/Maduro Economy .....	122
The PSUV and Dunn’s Criticisms .....	127
Political Criticisms of Socialism and PSUV.....	127
Economic Criticisms of Socialism and the PSUV .....	132
Transitory Criticisms and PSUV .....	133
The PSUV and Ellman’s Arguments .....	135
The PSUV and Nove’s Analysis.....	140
A Final Analysis .....	142
CHAPTER 6: DISCUSSION.....	144
Lessons Learned by PSUV .....	144
Implications.....	147
Limitations and Future Research .....	148
CHAPTER 7: CONCLUSION .....	150
REFERENCES .....	152



# CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

## Competing Ideologies

Capitalism as an economic and social system, has its own sets of issues and limitations. Many economists and political theorists have written about its limitations and failings throughout history, with Karl Marx being one of the most prolific of those critics. Capitalism is defined by Marx as a system in which the property-owning class monopolizes capital and hires workers to produce their goods and services in their factories, on their land, etc., in exchange for payment, usually in the form of monetary currency (dollars, euros, pounds, etc.) (Marx, 2010). Many individuals deem capitalism unfair and exploitative. In examining today's world, capitalism has not solved the issues surrounding inequality, or those pertaining to unemployment. This is evident by the way economists define optimal unemployment as 5% rather than 0%, which indicates that some portion of the population is always looking for work or has become disillusioned with their prospects despite still desiring employment (Harman, 2015). Thus, willing workers are deprived of the means to provide for themselves and their dependents.

Prior to World War II, global powers colonized underdeveloped countries to facilitate trade and gain access to natural resources. During the post-war period (1948-1973), more favorable economic conditions were occurring around the globe (economic growth, increased wages, etc.) Following this period, the working class within industrialized countries began experiencing stagnating income and growing inequality. Additionally, in contemporary times, multi-national corporations have located their factories in undeveloped and/or developing countries in order to make use of cheap labor (due to weaker labor laws) and natural resources, and later export their products to richer countries. Marx argued that while capitalism was a

natural stage in human development, it could not last and would eventually be replaced by a transition to socialism. Throughout this paper, the terms “socialism” and “communism” may be used interchangeably. While communism is generally understood as being the next step in human development, after socialism, it is hard to distinguish at what point socialism becomes communism, so either term may be used throughout this discussion.

Capitalism has been heavily critiqued by many for a multitude of reasons in the last century. One critique claims that capitalism appears to have certain prerequisites that must be inherently assumed in order for such a system to work. For example, poverty is often seen as being a requirement for capitalism to flourish (Harriss-White, 2006). Others are critical of capitalism’s push for individuals to adopt consumerism, turning the population into little more than a medium through which companies can distribute their goods for profit (Cole, 2010). In turn, this causes a chain reaction in which the system needs more and more capital to flourish and thus requires infinite growth in order to survive. This may have negative consequences such as environmental degradation, as more and more resources are used up to satisfy the production needs, which can lead to ecological chaos (Foster, 2002). Furthermore, critics also claim that capitalism dehumanizes much of society and sees people as little more than numbers and dollar signs to be exploited for profit (Storrs, 2000). Many have chosen to organize politically to advocate for an alternative to capitalism.

Both capitalism and socialism have very different ways of looking at political organization. Capitalism largely presupposes that the government will interfere as little as possible within the economy (Murphy, 2016). Of course, there have been many variations of capitalism over the course of contemporary history. Some would argue that the United States is based on a capitalist system (Peavler, 2017); however, not everyone would agree that it will

always remain that way (Alperovitz, 2016). Capitalism itself is a purely economic system, as is socialism, but capitalism aims to keep government involvement to a minimum when it comes to economic affairs, especially when it comes to critical sectors of the economy, such as: the rights of workers, protection of the environment, etc. On the other-hand, contemporary socialist parties claim to be in favor of workplace democracy and mobilizing the masses to bring about social change (Greenberg, 1986). These anti-capitalist parties see the need to transition away from capitalism and create a socialized economy. In order for socialism to be successful, the economy must be transformed, which requires the support of large portions of the population; meanwhile, capitalism can exist within a variety of political systems, whether they are democracies, autocracies, or some alternate mixture.

Several contemporary political parties with varying electoral success articulate an agenda for overcoming global capitalism and transitioning to a modernized form of socialism. A notable example of this is found in the United Socialist Party of Venezuela (PSUV). However, what does it mean to promote an anti-capitalist agenda after the failure of the Soviet Union and the collapse of communism as a vibrant ideology? What, if anything, have contemporary anti-capitalist parties learn from the Soviet failure? What kind of socialism do they propose to implement and how do they envision the transition from a capitalist society to a socialist one in the context of a globally inter-connected and technologically complex world of the 21<sup>st</sup> century? How do they propose to organize an economy promoting equality, solidarity, and environmental sustainability as well as efficiency, dynamism, and innovation? This research project seeks to understand these issues within the context of PSUV's leadership.

More than thirty years ago, thinkers such as John Dunn criticized the British Labour Party and other socialist movements for lacking a coherent view of the goods of socialism and

for lacking a plausible account of how to effectively transition from capitalism to socialism. Do contemporary anti-capitalism parties address these, and related concerns? These questions will be examined with a focus on a contemporary political party, that of the PUSV, which has mobilized around anti-capitalist discourses, enjoyed various degrees of electoral success, and confronted the challenges of governing.

### A Modernized Form of Anti-capitalist Discourse

It must be stated that there are other topics covered by many anti-capitalist parties that may not directly relate to the economy, such as matters of ecology and the environment, and discrimination based on race, sex, sexual orientation, etc. These are relatively new topics for debate that have become more prominent since the time of Marx. Since many political theorists were not concerned with these issues in question during Marx's lifetime, or at least these issues weren't widely debated, we cannot be certain as to what Marx would say regarding the subject or how he would integrate them into his overall idea of the emancipation of humankind from the shackles of capitalism. Various socialist parties have attempted to answer these questions throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century but have held mixed views. On questions of LGBT rights, for example, the Soviet Union itself held different positions throughout the years. Homosexuality was decriminalized in 1922 with the rise of the Bolsheviks; however, just a mere twelve years later in 1934, it was re-criminalized when Stalin came to power. It was finally decriminalized again in the Russian Federation in 1993, following the Soviet collapse. As was the case in the Soviet Union, there have been similar experiences in other socialist countries where the leadership predominantly saw homosexuality as part of the bourgeois lifestyle, and as such

LGBT rights were frowned upon, if not banned. Today, many socialist parties advocate for anti-discrimination policies and protections for citizens based on gender, sexual orientation, etc.

Socialist parties in the past were mainly concerned with economic and labor reforms that would bring about the emancipation of mankind from capitalism, or at least free the working class from oppression; however, concepts such as environmentalism were never properly addressed. Under Stalin, the Soviet Union saw a rapid expansion of heavy industry under his plan to modernize the country through industrialization. This was ramped up during the Second World War and by the shift towards a militarized economy. In the People's Republic of China, economic expansion occurred at alarming rates in the twentieth century, with little mention or regard for the environment (Albert and Xu, 2016). Many contemporary anti-capitalist parties speak much about ecology and the need for clean energy, preservation of the environment, and animal rights. Despite the rhetoric coming from anti-capitalist parties, this is a new trend and not one that has been a key centerpiece of socialist policies in the past. It will be interesting to see if these contemporary parties can merge the traditional goals of socialism with their newfound concern for the environment.

### The Soviet Experience

Communism as practiced in the twentieth century does not appear to have been a success, at least when compared to a world that Karl Marx envisioned. Marx set out to describe a mechanism in which the class system of the nineteenth century would be abolished and humankind would be emancipated and brought into a new classless society. This would result in “overcoming” or “transitioning” away from capitalism and would further the establishment of a new socialist system in which there was common ownership of the means of production, and in

which no worker was exploited by the property owners for their own gain (Marx and Engels 2012).

There are two main issues that should be addressed when examining the Soviet case: social and economic issues. On the social front, Marx and Engels (2012) claimed that they envisioned a system in which all people would be liberated from the ills of capitalism. Despite that utopian vision, nations such as the Soviet Union, as well as other communist countries, have demonstrated that human rights abuses were worse under anti-capitalist regimes than in comparable capitalist states, such as the United States and Great Britain. The Soviet Union operated on a much more authoritarian system than Marx himself would have likely preferred.

In the Soviet Union, basic goods were routinely in short supply, thus signaling that economic issues weren't properly addressed either. Nearly all industries within the Soviet Union were owned and operated by the state under a nationalized system. Marx never stated that the state itself should own or operate all industries, but rather that the workers should own and operate the means of production directly, through political action. Additionally, he advocated for these workers to seize the means of production from the capitalist class through a political revolution; however, he never directly stated that ownership should be operated through the state. State ownership was vastly more centralized and inefficient compared to the ideal system that Marx himself set out to articulate.

Some may question why the failures of the Soviet experience would be used as a comparison to contemporary anti-capitalist parties, such as the PSUV in Venezuela. The PSUV has been one of the most politically successful anti-capitalist movements to emerge since the collapse of the Soviet Union. The fall of the USSR led many to believe that broadly shared aspirations to overcome capitalism and implement socialism would disappear from the world

stage. Francis Fukuyama (2006) (first published in 1992) even titled his famous work, *The End of History and the Last Man*, in which he discusses the future in a post-Soviet world. Yet even in a post-Soviet world, the PSUV has managed to attract a significant following and maintained broad support, while also enjoying almost two decades of governing experience.

### Going Forward

So far, this introductory chapter briefly mentioned the discourse that exists regarding capitalism and discussed how this discourse has influenced contemporary anti-capitalist parties that claim to want to transition to a socialist society and overcome capitalism. The remainder of the chapter will lay the roadmap for the rest of this paper. In answering the research question posed earlier of how contemporary anti-capitalist parties would envision a transition to socialism and whether or not these parties have learned from the mistakes made by past socialist societies, this paper will be examining one of the more popular anti-capitalist parties on the political landscape today, that of the PSUV. A brief introduction to the party will conclude this chapter.

### The United Socialist Party of Venezuela

The Partido Socialista Unido de Venezuela, or United Socialist Party of Venezuela (PSUV), has been the ruling party in Venezuela for almost twenty years now, since 1999, making it one of the most politically successful socialist parties, in terms of electoral results, in contemporary times. The party controls the presidency and had controlled the legislature up until the parliamentary election of 2015, in which the opposition gained control. Despite not having full control over the legislature anymore, it still has control of the courts, the majority of the local and state governments, and still enjoys broad-based support among the citizens of Venezuela.

During the presidency of Hugo Chávez (the founder of the party), the government enacted sweeping changes in an attempt to socialize the country. PSUV states that it wants to move towards a planned economy with planned production. Many large industries have already been nationalized under PSUV, a policy which has taken root and appears to be here for the foreseeable future. Small businesses still seem to exist, though struggling, but many large private corporations have been seized “for the revolution” (<http://www.psuv.org.ve>). Additionally, the party plan states that the world has changed and that the party must embrace new ideas to advance “socialism in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.” This can be seen by the party’s determination to focus part of its platform on ecological reform. Furthermore, the party calls for an end to imperialism around the world and the spread of international socialism, and states that “Following the designation of responsibilities for the members of the board, the PSUV worked on the establishment of the State Political Teams to complete the overall structure of the organization. There began the historic challenge facing this unprecedented mass political task self-defined in its preliminary documents as democratic, anti-imperialist and anti-capitalist” (Pearson 2011; <http://www.psuv.org.ve/>).

In order to keep its promise of being a party of the people, the PSUV establishes a bottom-up, democratic method for electing party officials and establishing policy. The bottom most layer of the party are its members, of which there were about 7.6 million in 2014 ([psuv.org.ve](http://psuv.org.ve)). At the head of the party is the President of the PSUV, which remains Hugo Chávez, despite his death in 2013. The current president of Venezuela, Nicholas Maduro, takes the next step down in the leadership, beneath Hugo Chávez. While Maduro is the leader of the country, he will always remain beneath Chávez in terms of party leadership (Maloney-Risner, 2009).



In 1998, Hugo Chávez was elected to the presidency, running on an anti-establishment platform aimed at lifting up the poor. Once elected, Chávez proposed a new constitution, which was approved by voters, adding a sixth year to the presidential term and allowing re-election. The change also moved the national legislature from a bicameral to a unicameral system. This new legislative body gave the president the power to enact law by decree. Despite popular resentment of Chávez's policies, he successfully defeated a referendum vote on his presidency in 2004 by a 58% to 42% margin. In 2005, pro-Chávez forces, or Chavistas, won the parliamentary elections and consolidated into the current party (PSUV). Chávez was also reelected to the presidency in 2006, giving him and his party total control of the government. The PSUV won a much smaller victory in the legislative elections in 2010, 48% to 47%, but they were awarded a larger majority of the seats in the legislature (98 out of 165) due to electoral laws passed by Chávez. Chávez won a third term in 2012 by a 55% to 44% margin of victory, before his death in 2013.

With Chávez's vacancy in 2013, Venezuelan law required a special presidential election be held in order to determine a new leader. Chávez's vice-president, Nicholas Maduro, ultimately won by a 50.5% to 49.5% vote. Since then, the electoral popularity of the PSUV has been in decline, due to its increasing interference in the everyday lives of average Venezuelans. In the 2015 parliamentary elections, the opposition coalition party (MUD) won 56% of the vote and took back control of the legislature ([democracyweb.org](http://democracyweb.org)). Due to its electoral successes, other smaller parties have joined the PSUV since its formation. These have included the People's Electoral Movement (MEP), Venezuelan Popular Unity (UPV), the Socialist League (LS), among others ([aporrea.org](http://aporrea.org) 2006a; [aporrea.org](http://aporrea.org) 2006b; [aporrea.org](http://aporrea.org) 2006c). However, several

other parties with similar goals did not decide to enter into a coalition with the PSUV. One of these parties, ironically, was the Communist Party of Venezuela (Maloney-Risner, 2009).

In terms of maintaining a political system; the party and its founder, Hugo Chávez, have claimed that the PSUV is strongly committed to a democratic society, where the ordinary citizens have the power (Ghitis, 2013). The PSUV has maintained a position of lifting up the poor and defeating its opposition electorally; however, evidence (especially from recent events) demonstrates that these claims may not be accurate. The PSUV and its leadership has been accused by the opposition parties, as well as by international organizations, of being against fair democracy. The party has been accused of actions such as: rigging elections, silencing opposition members through assassinations, kidnapping, suppressing free speech, among other actions that would make the party inherently undemocratic. In fact, Freedom House ranked Venezuela as 'Not Free' in its latest ranking of Freedom in the World (Freedom House, 2017).

This paper will dive deeper into some of the aforementioned issues, as well as others in order to determine whether the PSUV is taking Venezuela down the same path as the Bolsheviks took the Soviet Union. PSUV was chosen as the subject for this paper because of the level of success it has had in terms of electoral victories and governing experience in the country. As previously mentioned, Hugo Chávez came to power in 1998 (assuming office in 1999) and he promised to govern Venezuela under the mantle of "socialism for the 21<sup>st</sup> century." With his death in 2013, then Vice President, Nicholas Maduro, ascended to power and remains in office today. This means that the PSUV has enjoyed almost uncontested power for over ten years, under that name, but over twenty since Chávez's election in 1998 and his Fifth Republic Movement. Therefore, it has been one of the most successful anti-capitalist parties to rise to power since the collapse of the Soviet Union, and this, merits a closer examination.

The rest of this paper will be divided up into six chapters. Chapter two will discuss works written by scholars who are experts on Venezuela and the PSUV. Subsequently, chapter three will discuss the relevant literature that pertains to the issue of the PSUV's claims and attempts at transitioning Venezuela to socialism. Specifically, the paper will examine the works of scholars who have written extensively on socialism, such as John Dunn, Michael Ellman, Alec Nove, and others. In this section, the hypothesis of the paper will also be discussed. Chapter four will focus on the methodology surrounding this project. Essentially, the research will consist of examining documents published by the PSUV, such as speeches, party programs and platforms, party documents, etc., and comparing them to the works of previously mentioned scholars, such as Dunn, to see if the PSUV and its leaders have had any self-reflectivity when it comes to avoiding the same issues made in previous attempts to craft a socialist society. Chapter five will take an in-depth look at the findings of this paper, and chapter six will discuss these findings versus expectations and how they answer the research question. Lastly, chapter seven will conclude the paper with a discussion of how this research contributes to the field and how it can influence future research on the topic.

## CHAPTER 2: EXAMINING VENEZUELA

### A Brief Political History of Venezuela

Before moving forward, it is important to look at the modern political history of Venezuela. In order to understand the discussion behind the topic of this paper, it is necessary that the political history be examined, at least in the contemporary age. Thus, the political history of Venezuela during most of the twentieth century onward will be discussed further.

Venezuela's importance on the global stage began in 1913, when the first oil well was established at Mene Grande, near Lake Maracaibo. During the 1920s, large-scale oil production began, and by 1929, Venezuela became the world's second largest producer of oil. Then dictator, Juan Vincente Gómez, handed over generous oil concessions to foreign oil companies and heavily favored Royal Dutch Shell and New Jersey based Standard Oil. By the 1940s, Venezuela had become the world's largest exporter of oil (Bruce, 2008).

In 1958, the leaders of the Democratic Action Party (AD) and the Christian Democratic Party (COPEI), signed the Punto Fijo pact, following the overthrow of the Perez Jimenez dictatorship. This framework set the stage for forty years of "managed" democracy, with COPEI and AD alternating their time and power. In the same year of the Punto Fijo pact, AD's Romulo Betancourt was elected President of Venezuela (Bruce, 2008).

During the 1970s, oil revenues continued to boom and in 1974, President Carlos Andrés Pérez, a member of AD, began the process of nationalizing the steel and oil industries. This stint of prosperity did not go on forever, however, and on February 18, 1983 (known as "Black Friday"), the fall in oil prices and the increasing debt caused a major devaluation of Venezuela's currency, leading to economic crisis. This event is widely considered as the moment when

Venezuela began its decline as an economic success-story into widespread poverty, which encompassed large portions of the middle class (Bruce 2008).

Tensions between the poverty stricken poor and the elite continued to rise and on February 27, 1989, mass riots known as the Caracazo erupted in Caracas, and lasted until the next day. This revolt was due to an increase in fuel prices, which occurred in part due to the IMF-inspired structural adjustment packages that were implemented by President Carlos Andres Perez, after beginning his second term in office. The military pushed back against the riots, leading to an estimated death toll ranging from 300 to 3000. Most credible human rights organizations peg the official death toll at about 396. Many on the left saw the event as the beginning of the Bolivarian Revolution in Venezuela and saw the participants as justified in their actions as a mass demonstration against a corrupt government. Bruce (2008) believes that the claim that this event was the beginning of the Bolivarian Revolution could be far-fetched, but he says it does seem to be the beginning of the end for the Punto Fijo pact. The event also helped to radicalize many within the military who saw the military's response to the events of the Caracazo as unjustified. One of these officers was Hugo Chávez.

On February 4, 1992, Colonel Hugo Chávez, along with other military officers, staged a coup against President Perez. The attempt failed, and Chávez was imprisoned for two years. During the coup attempt, Chávez made a deal in which he would surrender if he was allowed to give a one-minute address on live television. He stated to the world that his movement had only been defeated "*por ahora*," "for the time being." He became a hero in the minds of the more marginalized members of Venezuelan society and planted the seed for others who had been growing increasingly dissatisfied with the political establishment to rise up. On November 27, 1992, a second coup attempt to oust President Perez took place, but it also failed (Bruce 2008).

In 1997, Chávez's own movement, the Movimiento Bolivariano Revolucionario (Bolivarian Revolutionary Movement, or MBR-200), nominated Chávez as their candidate in the presidential election for the following year. The organization formed the Fifth Republic Movement (MVR) to be used as the political movement for the elections. On December 6, 1998, Hugo Chávez was elected president with 56% of the vote. During 1999, Chávez won three major votes that December: the call for a Constituent Assembly, the power to elect members to that assembly, and the approval of a new Bolivarian Constitution. Also, in December of that year, severe flooding and mudslides on the Avila mountain, outside of Caracas, killed thousands of people. It is estimated that between 10,000 and 15,000 people were killed.

On July 30, 2000, mega-elections held under the new constitution gave Chávez a new six-year term as president and saw to it that the National Assembly became a pro-Chávez majority, with 104 out of 165 members. The state governor makeup was also in favor (17 to 23) of Chávez. Additionally, he also had the support of roughly half of the country's mayors. In November 2001, Chávez was granted temporary powers by the National Assembly, allowing Chávez to introduce 49 new decree-laws. There were three laws in particular that seemed to threaten the old economic elite in Venezuela: 1) The Land Law, which promised land reform; 2) The Hydrocarbons Law, that brought to a halt any attempts to privatize the state oil company, PDVSA, and also limited royalties to foreign operators; 3) The Fisheries Law, which favored smaller fisheries. It was these three laws that spurred the attempted coup against Chávez in 2002 (Bruce 2008).

On February 25, 2002, Chávez appointed a new board of directors to PDVSA, attempting to take control of the oil company from the old elite and limit access to foreign oil companies. On April 9, 2002, the major business association, Fedecamaras, and the CTV trade union, joined

forces with AD to close PDVSA and initiated a strike. On April 11, those who opposed Chávez, conducted a march on the presidential Palace of Miraflores in support of the decision to close PDSVSA. They were met by counter-demonstrators in favor of Chávez, and ultimately violence ensued. Rooftop snipers killed approximately 19 demonstrators, including individuals on both sides. TV channels, linked to the Chávez's opposition, broadcasted the event, claiming that the events were caused by armed Chávez supporters. These actions have been heavily criticized and labeled as altered footage by the media stations, after further investigation showed that the armed Chávez supporters were trying to defend other Chávez supporters from sniper fire. These events led to the rebellion of members of the military high 44 command and many broadcasted a statement removing themselves from the alleged "governmental oppression", demanding that Chávez resign. According to Bruce (2008), there is strong evidence to support the claim that these videos, calling for Chávez's resignation, were created before the shooting event had occurred. Later that night, members of the military stormed the Miraflores Palace and delivered a resignation letter for Chávez to sign. Chávez refused and was subsequently arrested and imprisoned on an island, which serves as an offshore military base. The military then announced that Chávez had agreed to resign. Again, according to Bruce (2008), there is strong evidence to support the claim that there was collusion involving US military attaches and CIA officers stationed in Caracas.

On April 12, 2002, the military rebels named the head of Fedecamaras, Pedro Carmona, as the head of the new transitional government. Carmona then suspended the 1999 constitution and dissolved the National Assembly; however, by this time, word began to leak out that Chávez had not officially resigned. As word spread of Chávez's false resignation, his supporters began to mobilize in poor neighborhoods in Caracas and held a demonstration outside the Miraflores

Palace. Tens of thousands of protesters surrounded the palace, demanding Chávez be reinstated as president. Military members and commanders loyal to Chávez, also began to mobilize. It was rumored that the military members of the opposition considered forcing Chávez into exile or killing him if he continued to refuse to sign the resignation letter. Once junior officers guarding Chávez heard of this, they attempted to shield Chávez from such actions. By the end of the day, the interim government fell apart and the palace guard, still loyal to Chávez, announced that if Carmona and the coup plotters did not vacate, then they would open the gates and allow the pro-Chávez demonstrators to flood the palace. The interim government surrendered and left, and later that evening, Chávez was flown back to the palace and the coup attempt had ended (Bruce, 2008).

From December 2002 to February 2003, the opposition called for a strike or a lockout of the oil industry, this impacted the economy and the opposition demanded that Chávez resign. This stoppage lasted for nine weeks and ended when a popular mobilization of oil workers attempted to keep the industry partially working. Groups of soldiers also worked to keep transport and food supplies moving. Once the strike ended, the government fired 18,000 PDVSA managers, technicians, and administrators who had taken part in the strike. This is the only purge that the Bolivarian government has undertaken, according to Bruce (2008). Months after the lockout, oil revenues began to recover, and the government began implementing its health and education Missions with the aid of personnel and technology sent from Cuba in exchange for oil. The urban land committees also began providing community involvement in these Missions around this period in time (Bruce, 2008).

The opposition began to campaign on a referendum on Chávez's presidency in 2003.



They took advantage of the provisional recall votes that were made possible by the 1999 constitution. In May, the government agreed to proceed, but there were months of disputes regarding how to collect signatures to support the opposition's recall referendum. The recall referendum was held on August 15, 2004, and Chávez won a clear victory. This was the third attempt made by the opposition to unseat him from power. Later that year, in October of 2004, supporters of Chávez won all but two state gubernatorial elections and won a majority of the mayors' seats in regional and local elections (Bruce, 2008).

Following the election, in November 2004, Chávez met with the new mayors and governors to discuss the ten objectives of the next phase in the Bolivarian Revolution. In January 2005 Chávez signed a new decree on land reform, aiming to eliminate the large estates in Venezuela, bring justice to the rural population, and increase the ability of the country to grow its own food. One such practice that was developed during the subsequent months by the party was that of expropriating companies, with the first example ALCASA, the state-owned aluminum plant (Bruce, 2008). In January of 2005, Chávez spoke at the World Social Forum and openly declared, for the first time, that only a revolution can overcome capitalism's inequalities and that socialism is the solution. Furthermore, in May of 2005, Chávez discussed the need of workers to enact co-management policies in their workplaces.

In December of 2005, the opposition boycotted the parliamentary elections, handing Chávez supporters a clear takeover of the National Assembly. In April of 2006, the National Assembly passed the Law on Communal Councils. This was an act aimed at building a communal state. Essentially, the main idea was to form council structures, such as communes, communal councils, communal cities, etc., as a bottom-up structure for self-administration.

These councils would then cooperate in order to gradually replace what Chávez claimed to be the bourgeois state with a communal state (Azzellini, 2013).

Chávez won his third presidential election in December 2006 with 63% of the vote. He utilized his victory as evidence for his claim that the country clearly supported the move toward socialism (Bruce, 2008). The following month, Chávez outlined the "five motors" of the revolution that should push Venezuela towards the transition to socialism. They included items such as, the enabling law he used to renationalize CANTV, the main telecommunications company, and the Caracas electric company. When it comes to "motors," they can best be thought of as steps that would need to occur in order for the Bolivarian Revolution to be successful. One motor was the previously mentioned enabling law, giving the president the power to enact law by decree. Constitutional reform was another motor. The third motor was a national educational campaign known as "Lights and Morals." The fourth was "The New Geometry of Power," and aimed at reorganizing the country's political structure. The creation of communal power was the final motor. Each of these motors were designed to interact with one another to move the country towards socialism (Carlson, 2007).

In May 2007, the government took majority control of oil projects in the Orinoco Belt, which Chávez claimed to have furthered national sovereignty over the country's oil industry. That same month the government also refused to renew the franchise of RCTV, which was one of the television channels accused of promoting the failed coup attempt in 2002 (Bruce, 2008).

In August 2007, Chávez implemented additional reforms to the Bolivarian Constitution. These were intended, he claimed, to continue the transition in to socialism. Within these proposals, there was a clause to remove presidential term limits, which would have allowed Chávez to run for re-election in 2012. On December 2, 2007, the proposed changes failed to win

in a national referendum, which marked Chávez's first defeat in any election since winning the presidency in 1998; voters ultimately rejected the proposals by a slim margin (Bruce, 2008).

In April 2008, Chávez renationalized the large SIDOR steel plant after a 15-month-long conflict between the workers of the plant and the Argentine-based owners, who owned a 60 percent stake in the plant (Bruce, 2008). By 2012, all owners had been compensated on the agreed upon sum by the Venezuelan state industry holding company, CVG (Daugherty, 2012). In 2008, Chávez also announced plans to nationalize the Bank of Venezuela. In March 2010, Chávez condemned the online social media site, Twitter, and stated that the "Internet cannot be Free." Later in December, Chávez signed a law known as the "Ley Resorte," giving the executive branch control over online content. Additionally, Chávez also devalued the Venezuelan currency 17% against the US dollar for "priority" imports and 50% for non-essential items. The government unveiled plans to increase expenditures by \$15 billion over 5 years and boost electricity production. In April 2012, the government extended price controls on basic goods to battle inflation. Despite these controversial actions, in October of 2012 Chávez was re-elected to a fourth term as president; however, he died in March of 2013 leaving his Vice-President, Nicholas Maduro, to assume the presidency.

In April 2013, Maduro won the special presidential election and was able to remain in office. In September 2013, massive electric power cuts left 70% of Venezuelans without electricity. That same month, Maduro expelled three US diplomats, accusing them of allegedly orchestrating the power outages. By the following year, inflation had hit a level of 60% and it was speculated that Venezuela could default on its debts. In November, Venezuela was forced to import crude oil for the first time in order to keep up with demand. In January 2015, inflation reached 64 percent and the government reacted by introducing a ban on lining up overnight at

supermarkets. By February, the government had devalued the currency by 69% and by December, the opposition parties had gained control of the legislature in parliamentary elections. In February 2016, President Maduro devalued the currency further, in order to stem an economic crisis. As a result, thousands turned out to protest Maduro and the government the following September. From April to July 2017, several people died participating in protests against Maduro. During this period the opposition leader, Leopoldo Lopez, was also moved from prison into house arrest. Despite the souring of his government, Maduro secured another electoral victory in winning the most recent presidential election in May 2018. Will Maduro keep his grip on power as the country slides further into economic chaos? What does this mean for the future of the country and Bolivarian Socialism? Venezuela and the PSUV will remain an interesting case for scholars and the international community to pay attention to moving forward.

### Scholarly Experts on Venezuela

#### Venezuela's Chavismo and Populism in Comparative Perspective

"For some scholars and policymakers, Chavismo is the greatest threat to representative democracy in the South American region and the greatest challenge to U.S. interests in Latin America since the end of the Cold War. For others, Chavismo embodies hope for social justice and an end to the legacy of colonialism in Latin America and the rest of the developing world. Yet most of us are still unsure of what exactly the movement is" (Hawkins, 2014). Hawkins describes a problem that many academics face, including within this project, when analyzing the governance of Hugo Chávez and the PSUV. It seems that on the surface, there is not a clear indication of what Chávez wanted for Venezuela, at least in terms of concrete policy proposals.

This problem is made more evident when other scholars cannot seem to ascertain any kind of meaningful conclusions.

#### Measuring Populist Discourse of Chavismo: Good = The Will of the People

Hawkins (2014) cites that Chávez and his movement claim to know the will of the people. They use this "knowledge" in order to implement their own policies and programs. "The content of Chavismo's revolutionary program has changed considerably over time and, even with its current emphasis on classic socialist objectives of economic transformation, has a certain improvised feel; the government's most recent six-year plan (the *Proyecto Nacional Simon Bolivar: Primer Plan Socialista*) is all of 45 pages long, one-third the length of its previous non-socialist plan from 1999" (Hawkins, 2010). However, as stated by Hawkins, much of this "knowledge" appears to be either improvised or seriously lacking in any concrete form. Despite this observation, PSUV continues using this improvised manifesto as a launchpad, arguing that since they know what the people want, and what is good for the people, then this gives them the right to do what is necessary to reach their goals, despite any protests from the opposition. Thus, taking a very dictatorial approach to governing. This is the functional equivalent to the concept of the dictatorship of the proletariat.

Coercing the opposition media is something that Chávez's movement has been accused of doing, despite the constitution of 1999 including the term "truthful information" as a right of the people. This has paved the way for the Supreme Court to uphold laws passed by the government aimed at cracking down on opposition media. Chávez has even justified such practices stating "We now know there are a lot of people who are complaining: You have to be tougher on the media, you have to get them to fall in line." At this point I think the only path left

open to us is coercion, in the judicial-legal sense” (Hawkins, 2010). This is very disconcerting coming from a movement that claims to champion democracy, as they appear to be attempting to silence any critics of the government.

Apart from the efforts to crack down on the media, it is important to review how communist ideals evolved in Venezuela under the regime of Chávez and the PSUV. “In early interviews after the coup in 1992, Chávez declared that he was 'neither a Marxist nor anti-Marxist,' and criticized both orthodox Marxism and the communist experiments of the 20th century” (Hawkins 2014, p. 1). In his early days, Chávez was careful to distance himself from the historical baggage associated with communism and socialism, especially since he never mentions either, but instead promotes a program recognized as the “Tree of Three Roots” which was based on the ideals of Venezuelan revolutionary thinkers. Even in 1995 when pointedly asked during interviews about his socialist tendencies, he is careful not to directly ascribe to this ideology but rather aligns himself with the “original Bolivarian Alternative Agenda first issued in 1995 and consistently uses the phrase ‘democratic revolution’” instead of socialism. However, in the mid-2000s, Chávez radically changes his rhetoric and begins intertwining Bolivarian ideals with those of Marx. He even goes as far as to select a communist cabinet member and defend his choice by stating “‘I too am a Trotskyite’”. This dramatic change could potentially indicate that the Tree of Three Roots ideology might have been underdeveloped and as such Chávez chose to instead borrow from a well-developed socialist theory. Hawkins (2014) seems to indicate that Chávez attempted to shift his politics from a more moderate stance to a more radical leftist one. The alternative is that Chávez was merely shifting his politics in order to gather more support, or because he himself does not know what his own movement represents.

This seems to indicate that Chávez experienced an ideological evolution, incoherence among his ideas, political improvisation, lack of reflectivity, or some combination thereof.

### Populist Policy: The Missions of the Chávez Government

"There are many historical instances of this kind of populist government; some buy into radical prescriptions for a command economy and/or collective forms of ownership, while others adopt heterodox or structuralist perspectives that retain the principle of private capital and emphasize less intrusive, temporary forms of government regulation and investment." "Classic populist movements in Latin America such as Peronism and Velasquismo, while much more openly critical of the communist left because of its ties to the Soviet Union, also offered redistributive policies, experiments in state ownership, and an ethic of social justice that resonated with socialist programs and preempted parties of the left, although they clearly stopped short of wholesale expropriation and redistribution of assets" (Hawkins, 2014).

### The Missions

As Chávez continued to implement his "socialism for the 21st century" his government began identifying what they believed to be the socioeconomic needs of the Venezuelan people. With this in mind they began to develop the first Missions, which later served as the foundation for the parties six-year plan. Their overarching goal in creating the Missions, was to satisfy a party objective of eliminating poverty by the year 2021, and as such they named this the Christ Mission. The creation of the Missions was scaffolded by the creation of a robust network of "local health committees, small organizations consisting of neighborhood volunteers who were charged with caring for the facilities, staffing the clinics, and providing citizen feedback." On the

surface the programs provided individuals with the opportunity to gain new skills in the traditional subject areas (i.e., math, science, language, and history); however, delve deeper and you would find that the curricula were infused with “Marxist nationalists language and Bolivarian philosophies of the revolution.” These were intended to encourage individuals to participate in the Missions and be a driving force for the economic cooperatives (Hawkins, 2014).

There were three initial missions created by the administration: *Barrio Adentro*, which sought to provide free and high-quality healthcare by increasing the number of primary care doctors and constructing additional healthcare facilities around the country; *Robinson*, which was a literacy campaign aimed at teaching reading, writing and arithmetic to the underprivileged adult population; and *Ribas*, which provided further secondary education to adults. Initially, these missions were a great success and they achieved significantly positive results. The success of these programs led to Mission *Habitat*, which was aimed at reducing the housing shortage in Venezuela. The government set a target of 150,000 new homes by the end of 2006, but only reached a target of 35,000. The economic downturn in Venezuela, beginning in 2005, limited the funding that the government had to fund additional mission programs (COHA, 2011).

Despite the push for education at the center of these programs, the party’s intentions weren’t entirely altruistic in nature. While furthering an individual’s education would enhance their earning potential and help them achieve other life goals, the government also sought to incentivize these individuals into “participating actively in the government’s project for socioeconomic transformation.” One example can be seen in the mission statements given to doctors, who were encouraged to act as “transforming agents of the socioeconomic reality of the individual”. They were instructed to focus on prevention and improvement of living conditions,



and most importantly to ensure that direct access to healthcare was provided to those with the greatest need. It is interesting to note that both the members of the opposition and the guilds originally refused to partake in the new healthcare initiatives. This ultimately led to the government deciding to staff the Barrio Adentro medical Mission with medical students from Sucre, which completely sidestepped and ignored medical students from the other Venezuelan medical schools. As inflation reached a new peak in 2007, the government aggressively persecuted the private hospitals, often times threatening them with expropriation and “calling their profits ‘the evil of capitalism.’” As the nation was faced with extreme shortages, the government went a step further and ordered warehouses to be raided, and the nationalization and expropriation of companies responsible for making key elements or producing raw ingredients. Were all of these events any indication of the future of Chavismo? Well according to Hawkins (2014), "All of this hints at a change in discourse from 'the will of the people' to 'the good of the party,' from a reified collective that is used to a collective that stands outside the people and the people must honor and serve”.

### The Revolution in Venezuela: Social and Political Change under Chávez

#### Venezuela's Presidential Elections of 2006: Toward 21<sup>st</sup> Century Socialism?

#### Venezuela's Presidential Elections of 2006: Toward 21st Century Socialism?

According to López -Maya and Lander (2011), the voters of Venezuela saw Chávez as a legitimate leader and this was evident during the recall referendum in 2004, when voters decided to keep him in power. A valid claim was made that his legitimacy was further reinforced by the beneficial international market for petroleum during the recall period (Hawkins, 2014). The Chávez administration used oil profits to fund many of its social projects throughout the country.

The poor stood to benefit the most from these programs and as such, may have been inclined to support Chávez in larger numbers, fueling his winning of the recall elections and giving the appearance of legitimacy to the rest of the world.

At the end of a petroleum strike in early 2003, the Chávez administration began a new round of social programs, the so-called Missions, to uplift those in need in the areas of childhood education, healthcare, and adult literacy. Land rights were given to the urban population, in the so-called barrios, in the hopes of raising their standards of living. Interestingly, this seems to have been done by presidential decree, known as decree 1,666 (Hawkins, 2014). It seems somewhat undemocratic that these programs would have been implemented under presidential decree rather than being voted on by the legislature. Even though these programs were intended as noble causes, these actions did a disservice to the democratic ideals spoken by both Chávez and his party on multiple occasions. Despite there being evidence to support the claim that the legislature would have sided with Chávez and obstructed any possibility of debate amongst supporters and the opposition, legislation by presidential decree illustrates the decay of the democratic process in Venezuela.

Another important area of discussion is the reorganization of the national petroleum company, PDVSA. After the 2003 oil strike, it was alleged by Chávez that the opposition attempted to sabotage the oil industry by physically damaging oil refining equipment. In response to these allegations, Chávez's administration ordered the complete reorganization of PDVSA and thousands were fired. The management of PDVSA was admittedly allied with the opposition to Chávez, and as such, losing control of PDVSA dealt a significant blow to their tools for protesting against Chávez's presidency. One could make the case that by stripping the opposition of control of PDVSA and by firing many employees who were committed to the

opposition, Chávez was paving the way for only those loyal to him, and his regime, to maintain positions of importance within the government (Hawkins, 2014).

The opposition withdrew from the parliamentary elections in 2005, meaning that they were completely left out of the national legislature for the 2006-2010 session. They claimed that the electoral process was undemocratic and that it unfairly benefited pro-Chávez forces. Additionally, they claimed that the vote would be skewed in favor of Chávez and that it would not be a fair and democratic election. This argument seems somewhat counter-intuitive, even though the process might have been unfair and skewed toward Chávez, what benefit does the opposition get from sitting out the election? This ultimately acted as a self-fulfilling prophecy in which the loyalists were sure to win. It is understandable why many would not want to participate in a system that is seen as rigged, since participation might be seen as giving legitimacy to an illegitimate system, but surely a few candidates from the opposition would have stood a chance and been elected to the legislature to be used as a thorn in Chávez's side (Hawkins, 2018).

Since 2005, Chávez has floated the idea of "21st century socialism", as the new direction that the Bolivarian project should take. There has been much uncertainty as to what Chávez meant by this term. Many conjured up thoughts of the government confiscating land and expropriating property. Some even welcomed these ideas, while others saw it as a threat to private property and a move towards the model employed by Castro's Cuba. This theme was also used in the electoral campaign; however, there is no substantive discussion of the meaning of the term "21<sup>st</sup> century socialism" made by Chávez and his movement. There seemed to simply be a form of a cult of personality surrounding Chávez (Lopez-Maya and Lander, 2011).

Another move made by the Chávez administration to reform the political system was the seeming reclassification of what it meant to be a political party. The constitution regulated that interest groups be redefined as "organizations with political ends." It also required these organizations to hold internal elections for directing their agencies and choosing their candidates to go on to run in popular elections. The government also had the power to regulate and limit private funding to any organization with political ends and eliminated public funding for them, furthering the idea that Venezuela was becoming undemocratic. While limiting of funding could make sense in terms of preserving democracy against wealthy and corporate interests, reclassifying any organization with political ends as a political party seems a step too far. Essentially any organization that makes a political statement could be seen as a political party and this could be regulated as such. Ultimately, the evidence suggests that this was likely a way for the government to justify stifling and regulating organizations that were opposed to its rule and thus, further consolidating the nation into a one-party state (Hawkins, 2014).

The 1999 constitution also requires that the directors of the National Electoral Council (who oversee elections) and their substitutes be independent. Three members must be proposed by civil society, one by the faculties of juridical and political science in the national universities, and the other by the citizen power branch of the government, which includes the Office of the Prosecutor General, the Office of the Defender of the People or General Ombudsman, and the Office of the Comptroller General (Ramirez, 2006). This appears to be a reasonable requirement. Three of the five members are voted on by the people, one is chosen by academic experts in the field of government, and the final one is chosen by the government directly. However, in the event that the government becomes dominated by one party, one of the five members will always represent the government and voters may only have the choice of three members who support the

Chávez regime, as the government now has the ability to regulate political parties. This would leave only one member as a potential person from the opposition, and even then, the government has the power to remove people from positions in the universities. This could give an unfair advantage to this candidate as well, meaning total domination of the National Electoral Council by the current party (Hawkins, 2014).

It is legally mandated that the Venezuelan electoral system be automated. Voters must vote using electronic voting machines that store their votes until they are submitted to collection centers and tallied. The notion that this sort of system would be implemented by a government that is already struggling to appear legitimate and democratic is ludicrous at best, since it could have the inverse effect of making them seem less legitimate in the eyes of their critics. While there are clear advantages to using an electronic voting system, such as the ease of counting the results and the speediness of knowing who actually won the election, this creates a system that could be more easily tampered with than a paper-ballot system where any tampering could be more visually apparent (Hawkins, 2014).

In 2006, Chávez announced the beginning of a phase in the political process leading toward "a socialist and revolutionary participatory-democratic model." He argued that there were only two choices in the upcoming election, that of himself and President Bush of the United States, who he compared to the devil. This seemed like a way to delegitimize the opposition and compare them to puppets of a foreign government. Furthermore, he affirmed that if the opposition tried to do anything to tamper with the votes during the election, "the shot is going to come out of the butt end of the rifle." Maybe this is not in the right context, but it would appear that Chávez was calling for violence if the opposition attempted to influence the elections in their favor. Of course, even if the opposition would have won the elections in a fair and democratic

manner, many Chávez supporters would still believe the elections to be rigged, because they have been conditioned for years to believe that the opposition does not operate fairly and are plotting to overthrow Chávez; a notion that was further substantiated by the 2002 coup attempt (Hawkins, 2018).

An important point in the theme of Chávez's campaign going forward was the role of private property. In December 2006, the then mayor of Caracas, announced the planned expropriation of the main golf courses in the city. The national executive, through the vice president no less, expressed disagreement with these plans and called for a judicial solution to the matter. However, Chávez specifically never expressed disagreement over the idea and his position on the matter was never clarified. Around the same time, Chávez introduced another portion of his new idea on a live television program. He argued specifically that there should be a single party for the revolution. He made the argument that the twenty-five or so organizations that supported him, should come together under a single party. Critics immediately began to compare this "new" idea to the single-party system in Cuba. The government of course denied this notion and claimed that the loyalist parties should come together, but that a single-party state was not being proposed. Still, many Chavistas felt each party should be allowed to democratically decide whether to join a single party for the revolution as proposed by Chávez.

Interestingly, the Chávez campaign attempted to distance itself from symbolisms of socialism. The campaign decided to reduce its use of the color red and combined it with other colors, specifically blue. This produced some discontent and disagreement among Chavistas. In the beginning of November 2006, the president of PDVSA and the Minister of Energy and Petroleum, Rafael Ramirez, emphasized the commitment of the company and all of its employees to the Bolivarian revolutionary project. He said the company should be "roja, rojita,"

or "red, very red." A recording of the meeting was made public and President Chávez stated that he supported the minister. He said, "the petroleum workers, like the members of the National Armed Forces, are in this process... and if they don't like it they can go to Miami" (Hawkins, 2014). This is very interesting, on the one hand you find the campaign staff who made the decision to reduce the sole use of the color red, historically the color used to symbolically represent socialist and communist parties. On the other hand, there were members of Chávez's inner circle, and even Chávez himself, indicating that they wanted to make the government redder and they wanted to ensure that all members of the government were committed to the revolution.

Towards the end of 2006, Chávez announced a constitutional reform that would drive the society towards socialism. This seemed to increase tensions, especially after August, when the specific contents of the proposal to change the constitution became known. The amendment was rejected by the voters in December, which dealt a blow to Chávez's momentum, as he had not lost an election as of yet in which he featured himself, his allies, or his ideas. Until then, anything pro-Chávez had won in an election. Of course, this was in large part due to the abstention rate among Chavistas. The total abstention rate in this election was 44 percent, a marked increase from previous elections. The reasons for this decrease in participation could be attributed to the fact that Chavistas were comfortable with the idea that Chávez's proposals would win. Conversely, participation could have also been affected by the disagreements that had been taking place between Chavistas on the idea of presidential power. This new constitutional amendment would have given even greater powers to the president. While some supporters who saw Chávez as being "for the people" would have supported this amendment, others who were

voting for Chávez for his ideas or for the simple fact that he was not the opposition, would not want to see increased presidential power (Hawkins, 2014).

During the presidential campaign of 2006 and the constitutional referendum in 2007, Chávez made statements addressing the need for "21st century socialism." However, in the beginning Chávez did not make it clear what was meant by the phrase. There were no concrete ideas or proposals put forward. Chávez announced that he intended to form a commission to evaluate, formulate, and open a debate about the details of the proposed constitutional reform. He argued that it would strengthen the socialist project and this project was qualified by him as "native, indigenous, Christian, and Bolivarian" (Hawkins, 2014). Over the next few months, Chávez began to clarify his idea and the more radical elements of the plan appeared to come together. The factions that represented Chávez coalesced into a single political party, the United Socialist Party of Venezuela (PSUV). From this point onwards, Chávez made the case that he wanted to drive society towards socialism using the "five engines." One of these he argued was constitutional reform. This radical language inflamed both the opposition and the more moderate members of the Chavismo movement itself. This was evident by their expressed discontent with the idea of a coalesced party (Hawkins, 2014).

### The Venezuelan Economy in the Chávez Years

Weisbrot and Sandoval (2007) state that public sectors of real GDP in Venezuela decreased towards the end of 2009 and into the beginning of 2010. This was a clear indication that the government did not adopt the necessary counter-cyclical policies, and that the government may have even adopted pro-cyclical policies. This is an interesting take on the economic decline of the period. Many left-wing organizations typically argue for economic programs that encourage



demand during times of economic hardship. This usually takes the shape of stimulus programs in which the government attempts to inject money directly into an economy in order to spur growth and get the economy back on a healthy track. According to the data presented in this book, the government of Venezuela may have even adopted policies that had the opposite effect of spurring demand, which is quite unusual of a government that claims to be on the left-wing of the political spectrum.

As previously mentioned, in 2007 the government nationalized the telecommunications company, CANTV, as well as some of the country's electricity generation. The government claimed that these actions were necessary for advancing the country towards the goal of "21st century socialism." The government also took control of a majority stake in its joint ventures with foreign oil companies in the Orinoco basin. This was seen as a negative move for Venezuela's investment climate and for its economic future. Weisbrot and Sandoval (2007), however, state that these moves need to be put into perspective. The telecommunications sector had been nationally owned in the past and was not privatized until the 1990s. These nationalized companies were also fully compensated for their assets. AES Corporation's chief executive, Paul Hanrahan, even said, "I think this deal is a fair one," and that negotiations had "respected the rights of investors." While this is only one specific example of a company that accepted the terms of nationalization, it does show that the government was at least fair to certain companies throughout the process, and that there was not an incident involving the violent seizure of property that often comes to mind when one thinks of a socialist government's expropriation of property.

At the time of Weisbrot and Sandoval's writing (2007), the Venezuelan government's move toward increased state involvement in the economy did not involve large scale nationalizations or anything approaching that of a planned economy. As mentioned before, the government had not

even increased the public sector's share of the economy. Public spending stood at 32.6% of GDP in 2008, below many capitalist countries in Europe, such as France (49%) or Sweden (52%) (Weisbrot and Sandoval, 2007). However, it can be argued that France and Sweden can be classified along more social democratic lines than fully capitalist countries. The authors argue that there is still plenty of room for both private and public investment. Of course, that was written sometime before 2011, and as such this thus not necessarily reflect the current economic crisis that Venezuela is undergoing.

Weisbrot and Sandoval (2007) argue that the government needs to provide a sufficient stimulus, or it could face a prolonged recession or stagnation. They argue that reducing inflation and stabilizing the domestic currency seem to be the most important economic challenges facing the country other than growth in the short run. In the long run, diversifying the economy away from its dependence on oil is also a major challenge. Today, Venezuela continues to struggle with the diversification process, and with the sharp decline in oil prices, falling sharply in mid-2014 and regaining moderately since 2016 onwards, the country's dependence on oil does not seem to be a viable future for a stable Venezuelan economy.

Ultimately, Weisbrot and Sandoval's (2007) findings argue that the Latin American region is increasingly gravitating towards practical alternative economic models as opposed to the failed policies of the last three decades. The countries such as Venezuela, who continue to seek these models, will inevitably drift further away from the United States. For a critical analysis, it seems that this will not be the case if Venezuela continues to rely on its oil supply as the backbone of its economy. The United States is still the world's largest consumer of oil and as such, will probably continue to be a consumer of Venezuelan oil for the foreseeable future. Therefore, it is crucial for Venezuela to continue its relationship with the United States as they continue purchase

its oil. China is the world's second largest consumer of oil and is also a viable customer for Venezuelan crude, however it remains to be seen how significant the Venezuela-China relationship will be in terms of re-establishing Venezuela's oil economy.

### Hugo Chávez and the Bolivarian Revolution

Richard Gott (2011) writes his book with a somewhat pro-Chávez slant. At times it is more pronounced and at other times it is more subdued. He addressed the different colonial revolutionary leaders of Venezuela and how they inspired Hugo Chávez and aided his rise to power. There were a handful of key revolutionary colonial Venezuelan leaders that inspired Chávez: Simon Bolivar, Robinson Crusoe, Simon Rodriguez, and Ezequiel Zamora. These leaders, especially Zamora, were critical of oligarchs and their aim was to free the peoples of Latin America from the shackles of authoritarianism that existed under the Spanish oligarchy. Chávez was heavily influenced by Bolivar's writings. If we were to examine the actions taken by Chávez and the Venezuelan government, Bolivar's ideals would appear as the strongest driving force behind Chávez's ideals and actions. Additionally, Gott (2011) mentions that the political elite had run Venezuela for most of the second half of the twentieth century and they were known as the ancient régime or old regime. There were two political parties that ruled Venezuela since the inception of the 1961 constitution. Those two parties were COPEI and Acción Democrática, which had become unpopular with the majority of the population by the 1990s.

For many decades in Venezuela, there has existed a major socioeconomic conflict between the rich and the poor. In 1989 there were major riots that took place in the capitol of Caracas. Known as the Caracazo, the lower classes living on the mountainside overlooking Caracas flooded the city, claiming that they were revolting against an elite political and

economic class that was ignoring their needs. Chávez, seeing the anger swelling within the lower class, decided to attempt a coup to overthrow the government in 1992 and failed. He was then imprisoned as a result. Gott (2011) does well to describe the riots and the attempted coup on the side of the poor and Chávez but does not describe the events as they unfolded through the eyes of those on the opposite side leaving room to question his impartiality.

Following the coup attempt made by Chávez in 1992, he was sentenced to prison in Yare. From here he continued to run his operations and during this time, there was a rise in the popularity of the left-wing party, La Causa R, which became a major party advocating for the reform of the then current political order within the country. This party was eventually incorporated into Chávez's United Socialist Party. In 1998, Chávez ran and was elected to the Presidency. Chávez conducted his political operations in a bizarre way according to some who have studied his history. This may further indicate how popular the man was among the citizens and how his ideas were already permeating the country at the time. He was essentially allowed to conduct political operations from within prison, after attempting an illegal military overthrow of the government. Whether or not the actions he authorized while in prison to his followers were peaceful or not, it still seems odd that his conversations would not have been restricted and monitored, as he did essentially commit treason against the state. It is also peculiar that he was pardoned only a few years later. It could not have been a popular move with those who saw Chávez as a traitor. Although it could have appealed to a large demographic that supported Chávez and this may have been seen as a concession to them to prevent any further uprisings like the Caracazo. Clearly those who supported Chávez were in the majority. Otherwise, the only explanations for his overwhelming success would be that the 1998 election was rigged, or that

Chávez's opponents must have been so unpopular that the majority of the country would support Chávez instead. The entire 1998 election seemed to be anything but usual.

Early in Chávez's first term in office, during 1999, Chávez sought to create a new constitution. The new constitution was put to a referendum vote and was adopted. Among the new sweeping changes, was the change to the country's name from the Republic of Venezuela to the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela. According to Gott (2011), there were sweeping reforms within the new constitution that reformed the judiciary, gave expanded rights to indigenous peoples, and aimed to create a new society, formed upon equality. It was also at this time that the opposition began to awaken. The largest opposition to Chávez at this time, first came in 2001 with the opposition from the old trade unions. This appears similar to the Soviet experience.

The opposition began to become vocal in 2001, and in 2002, when there was an attempted military coup against Chávez. It ultimately failed, and Chávez was restored to power within a few days. This was a risky mistake made by the opposition. One that would eventually give more sympathy to Chávez from his supporters and even those who did not necessarily support him but supported democracy. It also looked poorly on the international stage. Gott (2011) claims that the large media organizations within Venezuela conspired with the military in order to overthrow Chávez. Chávez, in response to this, placed the media organization on notice, and from then on frequently described them as part of the opposition and the enemy. In 2002 there was also an economic coup conducted by the opposition against Chávez. The chief tool that the opposition attempted to use against Chávez was the shutdown of PDVSA, the state oil company. Ultimately the plan failed. Again, this was seen as poor planning on part of the opposition and it ultimately handicapped their cause rather than wounding Chávez's. Finally, there was a third attempt at removing Chávez through a recall referendum in 2004. This

ultimately failed, and Chávez remained in power. Gott (2011) claims that the recall referendum was an unconstitutional attempt to remove Chávez from power. This does not appear to be true, since recall referendums were written into the 1999 constitution as a legitimate way for the people to remove a political figure from office. According to other sources, Chávez lost that recall vote, based on the criteria set forth in the 1999 constitution, but the supreme court changed the rules and criteria that Chávez needed in order to succeed and remain in power.

From his writings, it is clear to see that Gott (2011) demonstrates a heavy bias in favor of Chávez and his policies; however, his book was published in 2005 before the death of Chávez and the economic crisis that Venezuela is currently undergoing, as such it would be interesting to see if Gott's position has changed given the new evidence. His bias is more clearly visualized when he writes about the manner in which the 1999 constitution was formed through a constituent assembly, which has been deemed by others as unconstitutional, and how the rules were altered in 2004 to impact the recall referendum. Gott clearly paints a more positive picture of Chávez compared to members of the opposition or even someone who would remain neutral on the subject.

#### Dismantling Democracy in Venezuela: The Chávez Authoritarian Experiment

Juxtaposed to Gott, stands Brewer-Carías (2010) whose writings are at times slightly biased against Hugo Chávez and his regime; however, his arguments do offer a well-documented account as to why the actions of Chávez were authoritarian in nature, as opposed to democratic, despite Chávez's claims that he was in favor of democracy. This first-hand account from Brewer-Carías, who is a professor of law at the Central University of Venezuela and a member of the Academy of Political and Social Sciences of Venezuela, as well as the Vice President of

the International Assembly of Comparative Law, provides us with further insight into the process that Chávez utilized to dismantle democracy in Venezuela. His thoughts are critical as he was one of the members of the Constituent Assembly that was tasked with forming the new constitution in 1999. Ultimately, he became the only one out of four members the voted against it, fearing that it was riddled with authoritarian clauses.

#### The Political Assault on State Powers for Authoritarianism

In his writings, Brewer-Carías (2010) argues that the call for a constituent assembly and the formation of a new constitution in 1999 was unconstitutional in nature, because it was a document based on authoritarian principles rather than democratic ideologies. Furthermore, the process was flawed from the beginning since nothing in the 1961 constitution would have allowed for a constituent assembly to be called to change the constitution without first having a referendum on the matter. Therefore, it is understood that the 1999 constitution was created by an unconstitutional process and in essence was the first authoritarian act committed by Chávez and his regime. It is important to note that this argument is baseless if taken out of context, and as such we must contextualize this claim by studying the effects that this process and the new constitution had on Venezuelan institutions and its democracy. In fairness, one could argue that the U.S. Constitution was formed through an unconstitutional process and against the will of the parent country and some of its constituents; however, this did not give way to an authoritarian institution, nor could you describe the U.S. founding fathers as authoritarian tyrants. However, events in Venezuela unfolded differently than in the U.S. An early example of the possibility of democratic erosion, can be found in the 1999 constitution, where the document undoes much of the decentralization that had taken place under the 1961 constitution, thus opening the door for

authoritarianism. Brewer-Carías, argues that there is no such thing as decentralized authoritarianism and that while centralization does not necessarily equate with authoritarianism, the infrastructure put in place through centralization makes an authoritarian system much easier to implement.

The new constitution abolished the National Congress and created the National Assembly, effectively giving the national legislature more control over the state and the municipal governments, as well providing the judiciary with more power. While on the surface these actions could be interpreted as authoritarian, they alone do not necessarily make it so, it is what a government does with its power that may constitute authoritarianism. It is also important to note that while these reforms, conducted at the beginning of the Chávez's administration, may have laid the foundation for authoritarianism and the decay of democracy in Venezuela, they were not inherently authoritarian themselves.

Another step towards authoritarianism can be found within the 1999 constitution, where it states that constitutional rights can only be exercised through statutes. Democratic constitutions generally claim that individuals have certain rights that the state cannot take away, without modifying the founding constitutional document. The 1999 constitution essentially gives the government the power to do so at will. As such, the constitution has been interpreted to give the state almost unlimited control over all affairs, especially the state's economy by allowing undemocratic policies like the seizure of property without compensation. During 2006-2007, the government appropriated assets of the private enterprises related to the oil industry. In 2008-2009, the government nationalized the iron and steel industries, the cement industry, and all industries related to hydrocarbons. It also gave reservation to the state of all petrochemical activities. These activities prompted initial suspicions that the government might be setting the



stage for a system in which the state controls the means of production. In 2007, Chávez attempted to reform the constitution again, this time openly shying away from democracy and guiding Venezuela in a socialist direction. This referendum was defeated but it has alas been implemented by the government, regardless of the opposition, and sanctioned by the judiciary.

#### Institutional Development Toward Consolidating Authoritarianism

Brewer-Carías (2010) continues to argue that the government was essentially given the power to remove state officials at will, therefore, giving the executive a monopoly on power without any real system of checks and balances. During this time, the government effectively abolished the government at the state levels, leaving only the federal government and municipal levels of government. By taking these actions the government managed to undermine the democratic bedrock of the country, thus effectively destroying the federation that had previously existed, while still vehemently claiming that nothing had inherently changed. At this time, the power of the population to participate in the appointment of officials to the judicial system was also stripped, and by default, the judiciary came under the control of the executive.

#### Constitutional Reforms Designed to Consolidate Authoritarianism

Under Chávez's policies, the state became completely centralized and the treasury came under the purview of the executive. Representative democracy was eliminated at the local level and the notion of unlimited terms in office by the president was established, even though it had been defeated as part of the 2007 referendum. Civil society no longer had any participation in nominating state officials. At this point between 2006-2009, the Chávez regime began to establish a socialist ideology within the country, a practice reminiscent to the beginnings of a

Soviet-style system. Chávez went as far as directly claiming that he wanted to establish a state on Marxist principles (Brewer-Carías 2010). It was during this time that economic freedom was removed as a constitutional right, as well as the right to property. The elimination of rights and suspension of rights during an emergency was also adopted. In essence the government gave itself the power to create a new constitution and have the power to violate it or amend it based on their own interpretations and self-interest. It is evident that once Chávez faced defeat during the 2007 referendum, he and his government would need to find alternative ways to seek more power in order to guide Venezuela towards the “socialism of the 21<sup>st</sup> century”.

Brewer-Carías (2010) seems to make a strong and valid case as to how Chávez’s consolidation on power has created an authoritarian system in Venezuela. Whether the people voted for it or not, is irrelevant. Constituents at times can vote for authoritarianism, even if it is not in their best interest or if they are just inherently ignorant about the potential for erosion of democratic ideals, ultimately their actions don’t make the regime any less authoritarian. Unfortunately for the people in Venezuela who do not support authoritarianism, the regime has stripped away democracy in its quest for a more authoritarian system, and as such these constituents are left having to find alternative means, outside of the traditional democratic processes, to demonstrate their opposition.

### Hugo Chávez and the Bolivarian Revolution

Cannon (2010) conducted an in-depth study of the presidency of Hugo Chávez in the context of theory on populism in an attempt to present an objective point of view. Many have claimed that Chávez was an authoritarian populist, but this has been mainly argued by the opposition, who possess a concerted bias. Cannon outlines the theory of populism and describes

how Latin Americans have been increasingly turning to populism in order to carry out their political aspirations. He argues that there is a nationalist component to populism, primarily when it comes to economic policy. Historically, economic populism has ignored the consequences of debt spending and fiscal irresponsibility, which led to economic crises throughout much of Latin America in the 1980s. Interestingly, populism usually results from economic, or political and social crises. Historically, democracy has not worked well in Latin America due to the high prevalence of populism, especially economic populism which has favored authoritarianism, if that authoritarianism resulted in economic success. Cannon makes the argument that populism will favor authoritarian leaders over democratic leaders, if the former produces a stronger economy with greater opportunities than the latter. This seems like a strong argument put forth by Cannon, especially when examining the cases of economic populism and nationalism. Latin America has been influenced by foreign countries, especially the United States, and it can be easy to see how the population to these countries could turn to populism as a way to overhaul their political and economic systems in order to form a new one that they feel will represent them better.

In Venezuela in particular, the 1980s was not a good decade for the country. According to Cannon (2010), the country experienced social fractures along racial lines and economic inequality. During this time, those who felt that they were underrepresented within Venezuela were looking for ways that they could increase their share of the pie. Cannon states three key reasons as to why the Venezuelan government failed to establish itself among the population as the legitimate ruler of the state. The first was related to the economy. Venezuela has historically been dependent on oil revenues. Due to the oil shocks and the government's failure to diversify its investments in the 1980s, government revenue declined sharply. This meant that spending on

social programs decreased, angering the population. The second factor was related to political issues. The government of Venezuela failed to respond effectively to the challenges and economic emergencies of the 1980s. Finally, the class/race discrimination in Venezuela during this time led to large resentment by the poor racial minorities within the country, thus sparking social resentment against the rich, European groups. It can be inferred that the sudden loss of social safety nets and public programs, coupled with racial tensions and economic distress would anger the Venezuelan people, especially those in marginalized communities who may have heavily relied on government assistance.

Cannon (2010) also looks at the methods Chávez used to gain power in Venezuela. He argues that Chávez used both democratic and authoritarian methods in order to gain political power and prioritized these in order to implement economic and social policies to increase popular support in these areas. Chávez argued that furthering political participation within these processes would lead to increased democracy. Cannon further examines these claims and concludes that increased economic and political participation by the population may or may not lead to further democracy, since it does not appear to lead to democracy as it is understood today. Democracy today, in much of the world, is based on the representative model, which attempts to prevent the mob rule caused by participatory democracy, or tyranny of the majority. The model that Chávez sought to implement utilized mob rule in order to increase his base of support by providing the people with a false sense of importance fueled by their participatory role. Despite Chávez's attempts to label the process as a participatory democracy, many critics including Cannon, aren't entirely certain whether this constitutes a democratic process. Instead they claim that the process appears to be a path toward an authoritarian structure which utilizes majority support as the justification.

Cannon (2010), does an excellent job of laying out a comprehensive view of the socioeconomic policies of the Chávez government through 2007. There were essentially four phases that the Chávez government went through: 1) A moderate period (1999-2000) - emphasizing political power over socioeconomic. 2) A more radical state (2001-2004)- characterized as anti-neoliberal in nature, ruling out privatization and confronting the opposition. 3) A new economic model in 2005 weakened the opposition as they were defeated in their different insurgent attempts to remove Chávez and through a rise in oil prices. 4) A new phase in the 2006 presidential elections based on economic and organizational changes made possible by the constitutional changes proposed by Chávez. Chávez's plan set out to confront neo-liberalism within Latin America as he saw it. Many have seen this done in an anti-democratic way. Examining Cannon's analysis and looking at the Chávez government's policies more closely, it seems Cannon is correct in his articulation of the different phases that the Chávez government has implemented on the economic front. Chávez began his presidency taking a moderate tone when it came to economic affairs. As he solidified his power, his policies began to take a more leftward turn, and arguably more authoritarian. While the policies may be authoritarian in nature, the question still remains if they were implemented in an undemocratic way. The claims made by Cannon will have to be reviewed to see if this is the case.

Cannon (2010) conducts a comparative case study of the presidencies of Chávez and Fujimori in Peru in an attempt to determine whether Chávez's policies were democratic or authoritarian in nature. Initially, Cannon concedes that Chávez gained power through more democratic means than Fujimori. First, Chávez had a legitimate opposition, something that is required in a democratic society. Secondly, Cannon argues that the existence of political parties being protected in Venezuela is a clear sign of democracy, as this is an important check on

authoritarianism. Chávez's government saw the value in having political parties and coalitions. Thirdly, Chávez relied on the support of the majority. Fourth, the opposition was stronger than Chávez. Like Cannon, we must ask ourselves, how can a country that has a stronger opposition and respects the existence of political parties be classified as authoritarian? While Cannon's arguments are strong, Chávez's rise to power and immediate consolidation of his legitimacy does hint at the beginnings of an authoritarian system. One drawback to Cannon's analysis, is that it was only conducted up until 2007; however, since then we have observed further consolidation of power, the death of Chávez, the Maduro presidency, and the hyper-inflation and economic crisis that Venezuela is currently facing. Since 2007, more analysis of Chávez and his methods has been conducted, as well as on the policies the government has enacted. While Chávez did allow for opposition, he sharply criticized them and made it harder for the opposition to participate in the political process. Despite favoring coalitions between parties, we can assume he encouraged them as he also stood to benefit from these practices. As was seen with the creation of PSUV, Chávez's party has brought almost every leftist party in Venezuela within its orbit, forming one super-party to rule the left within Venezuela.

There are two main consequences of populism, especially in Venezuela, according to Cannon (2010). On the positive side, he argues that it results in increased participation and democratization. On the negative side, there exists disregard for the democratic institutions and a lessening of the reliance on those institutions to govern. Cannon argues that populism will not help to alleviate the problems in Latin America. There are two reasons for this: First, democratic institutions in Latin America have inherently been weak and have low levels of legitimacy due to social cleavages in the region. Even through populism, it will be hard to reduce these cleavages. Second, these institutions are the product of democratization. If an institution is created to

maintain these social cleavages, they can be inherently undemocratic, as such some of these institutions must be dismantled in order to increase democracy.

Looking at populism historically, it can be argued that it has had mostly negative effects, at least in modern times. As mentioned earlier, participatory democracy has often led to tyranny of the majority, something representative democracy has tried to prevent. This is eloquently explained in the Federalist Papers by James Madison where he states that the advantage of a representative democracy is that oppression by the majority is mitigated by factions, which are groups of minorities who in turn provide a check for the majority. From looking at the case of Venezuela, it appears that populism has overall had negative effect politically and economically, decreasing political rights for the opposition and allowing government spending to spiral out of control, putting the economy on a path to ruin and tarnishing the countries global and geopolitical reputation (Cannon, 2010).

Cannon's (2010) final analysis has to do with Venezuela's foreign policy, its successes and its contradictions. In the latest development plan (at the time of publication -2007), Venezuela had three key foreign policy objectives: 1) Strengthen national sovereignty by accelerating the conformation of a regional geopolitical bloc and multipolar world; 2) Diversify political, economic, and cultural relations according to the establishment of areas of geo-strategic interest; 3) Deepen fraternal dialogue between people's, the respect for freedom of thought, religion, and self-determination. According to Cannon, it seems that Chávez has been more successful in these endeavors than one might expect. He argues that Chávez has made Venezuela more relevant within Latin America and deepened relations with other Latin American states. Cannon also argues that Chávez has fostered important economic relationships with other states, such as China and Russia. Finally, Cannon argues that while Chávez may not further his cause

by lambasting his opponents and critics, he has been a proponent of increasing human rights and decreasing inequality in Venezuela and abroad.

Despite Cannon's (2010) initial assertions regarding Chávez's success in the realm of foreign policy, we must be cautious and remember that his assessment of these policies culminated in 2007. In order to assess the current foreign policy environment in which Venezuela is operating in, we must take a comprehensive look at the foreign policy successes and failures of the last 20 years, but most importantly focus on the post 2006-2007 era when Venezuela began to officially strive for socialism. First, while national sovereignty may have been strengthened under Chávez, many of his former allied states have turned on the Venezuelan government and have accused it of abusing human rights. Second, while political and economic rights may have been implemented within Venezuela on paper, there are still widespread human rights abuses occurring on the part of the government or its allies. Finally, the Chávez government has shown that it is not in favor of freedom of thought or economic self-determination. The political rights of the opposition have been curtailed and such abuses of power have been bolstered with claims by the government that the opposition has planned attempts to overthrow the Chávez government or that they are domestic terrorists. The government has also begun encroaching on every facet of the economy, forcing almost all citizens to rely on the government to meet their daily needs. This is not what one would call successful economic strategy for a developing nation.

Cannon (2010) seems to admire Chávez for attempting to use populism in a positive way to truly bring about economic and social equality to the people of Venezuela. He argues that while there are rampant problems within the government, such as: corruption, mismanagement, etc., these are things that the Chávez government may be able to still fix in order to bring about a



truly successful populist state. Cannon argues that it remains to be seen whether the Chávez government will address these concerns and how they will be carried out. Overall, Cannon makes valid points regarding Venezuela and impartially details the possible legitimate justifications for why the population turned to populism under Chávez. The country as a whole, had chronic problems by the mid-to-late 1990s, especially the lower classes. They saw a savior in Chávez, who initially appeared to be a moderate thinker, and whose approach at tackling the problems facing the country vastly differed from the attempts tried by previous administrations. However, it seems that Cannon was too optimistic about the Chávez presidency. Whether or not it was Chávez's intentions to take Venezuela down the road of authoritarianism, it appears that the country has been on that path for some time, and unfortunately, no end seems to be within sight.

### The Real Venezuela: Making Socialism in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century

We must understand what is meant by Chávez's phrase "21st century socialism," before examining the proposed policies and their effects on the country. The policies introduced by Chávez were aimed largely at lifting up the poor within society. He claimed to want to transition society to socialism, but how would this transition take place? This is a question that Bruce (2008) claims must be asked and admits that even the left is not fully equipped to answer this. He argues that the process by which Venezuela was to transition to socialism has never been fully articulated. On this particular matter we must agree with Bruce, and take it further by asking the following questions: How does Chávez see a transition to socialism? How will it be carried out?

Chávez preached throughout his political campaigns, and in his plans for the country, about giving greater power to the people, including economic power. Bruce (2008) shows that

Chávez's plans were criticized, as early of 2004, for not giving enough power to the people below and giving too much power to those above when it came to economic planning. This stood in stark contrast to what Chávez had been advocating since his election in the late 90's. Bruce (2008) contends that there exist some issues with Chávez's plan to move towards agrarian socialism in Venezuela. One of Chávez's plans called for the establishment of agricultural cooperatives in order to assist citizens in being able to earn a living working within the agricultural industry, which would also assist the country in producing additional good to meets its demands. However, some of these cooperatives were plagued with a number of issues, including the lack of appropriate funding. Advanced funds were also being paid out under a favoritism system based on patronage. Bruce personally visited the Bella Vista cooperative farm, which was supposed to represent a model farm for the future of agrarian socialism. He found that there was little activity actually taking place and was informed by members of the co-op that of the original 200 members, less than 100 remained, and fewer than 20 had actually turned up to the farm on that particular day. This particular cooperative had been struggling. It had lost a large amount of its crops due to poisoning of the fields by previous farmers and the inability to sell their produced crops, which spoiled. The members argue that they need additional assistance from the government. If the government cannot provide assistance to these agrarian cooperatives, then how can it justify the continuation of such an experiment?

One of Chávez's central plans that he proposed for Venezuela was the creation of socialist enterprises. The goals of this plan were to increase workplace democratization and to create a new economic developmental model, which would assist in transitioning the economy to socialism. This plan consisted of restructuring the production model to produce goods based on what people needed and of creating a workplace that was beneficial to workers in terms of

overall working conditions. Bruce (2008) argues that the move toward workplace democratization is not really going anywhere at the moment. This is due to a discrepancy between co-management, along with workers' control, and the regulations that come from the government. Unfortunately, there is no workplace democracy at the moment if orders are being handed down to the workers from the state. He argues that it is similar to bourgeois capital control, only that the state is the one in control, versus the bourgeois.

In Bruce's (2008) final section of his book, he again argues that the idea of communal councils has not really been effective for the country, and that success has been very limited. This has been seen mainly in the poor barrios (neighborhoods) in Venezuela. One specific citizen that Bruce questioned believes that the communal councils are really only in on these national projects for the money that comes from government financing. She argues that whenever the funds dry up or additional funding is not granted, the councils disband and move on, leaving the citizens alone to coordinate their work to complete the projects. She argues that many citizens believe that this is the fault of the National Assembly for making reforms to Chávez's original plans, and that instead his original plans should have been implemented without the revisions.

At the time of his writing, Bruce (2008) concludes that the creation of PSUV in 2007 could force Venezuela in one of two directions. The country could either continue to democratize, and the ideals of Chávez could be handed down to an organized party that would become a large force in the future of the country; or, leadership will continue to rely on the communal councils to manage economic projects, depriving the cooperatives and workers of workplace democracy and co-management that Chávez called for. It seems that at the time of writing this paper, 2018, that the latter has occurred. Chávez died in 2013, leaving Nicholas Maduro to fill the role as president and party leader of PSUV. There have been many debates and

disagreements within the party and government about where to go next, especially with the economic and political chaos that has been getting progressively worse over the last decade.

There is still much literature that could be examined on the issues of Marxism, economic planning, and political and economic situations facing Venezuela today; however, the literature presented in this section provides a comprehensive snapshot of the background needed to discuss the findings of the paper. It is important to understand both the discussions revolving around Marxism and socialist planning, as well as what political scholars have outlined about the Bolivarian Revolution. The following section will focus on discussing the literature surrounding the socialist model and will address issues such as the politics of socialism, the economics of socialism, the transition into socialism, and many other core issues necessary for understanding and answer the research question presented at the beginning of the paper.

## CHAPTER 3: CRITIQUES OF SOCIALISM

Before diving in and discussing the Venezuelan case as it related to the research question, the relevant literature on Marxist and socialist theory must be examined. There have been many scholars who have written on Marxist and socialist theory, some criticizing it wholly, some defending it, and some arguing that, like most things, there are positive and negative features. Work by scholars who have also extensively studied the Venezuelan case must also be examined. This section will look at both scholars on the issue of socialism and those who have written about the situation in Venezuela.

### The Politics of Socialism

In the *Politics of Socialism*, John Dunn lays out a case for why traditional socialism has failed and argues that contemporary socialist parties do not have an answer to how they will effectively overcome capitalism and establish a socialist state. While Dunn argues that capitalism is not a perfect, or even a fair system (even by a long-shot), it is preferable to any socialist system that has been attempted. Dunn's overall argument can be broken down into three areas: 1) the political organization of socialism, 2) The economic organization of socialism, and 3) the transition to socialism from a capitalist system. Each of these areas will be discussed further.

### The Politics of Socialism

Dunn (1984), argues that socialism presumes that humanity can keep all societal goods, whole eradicating all societal bads. Of course, as human beings, it can be argued that this is not possible as it is not human nature to be purely "good". While it can be regarded as a noble effort to rid all ills from society, humanity is not perfect, and ills will always exist. Dunn argues that

certain ideas of socialism contradict themselves. One such contradiction is the socialist conception of the good. What is it? Can this good be realized and are its components even compatible? Socialism seeks to extend equality to all domains in an ideal way. What is valuable needs to be determined, what needs to be improved needs to be improved upon to the best of society's ability (Dunn, 1984).

Furthermore, he argues that revolutionary socialism will either lead to an undemocratic and tyrannical system or an inefficient one. Gradual socialism will be allowed by the elites insofar as it does not threaten their interests. Once it does, it will either be stopped through legislative or even violent means (Dunn, 1984). Revolutionary socialism is not preferable in the sense of conflict avoidance as such, revolutionary socialists seek peace and a conflict-free society as an end goal. How can a revolutionary claim to want peace, but use violence to get there? How can a society guarantee they will not use that violence for further goals down the line? Instead, Dunn argues that reformism seems to be a better route, as it is a more stable path to socialism when compared to revolution. The process of reformism teaches patience, two steps forward, one step back, and offers good lessons along the way. Limitations are to be expected; however, it does not compare to revolutionary socialism which is likely to lead to disappointment when it fails (Dunn, 1984). However, Dunn does concede that reformism can lead to pushback and losses as well. This is evident in the 1983 British general elections between the Labour and Conservative parties (Dunn, 1984).

Dunn (1984) claims that democracy has its limitations. In a capitalist society, students may be taught in schools that their system is the most effective, and the media, public or private sectors will continue to reinforce this belief system. The private media will especially be hostile towards socialism and speak favorably of capitalism. The electorate cannot be blamed for their

failure to choose socialism when there aren't many alternate options, and the credibility of some politicians can be called into question (Dunn, 1984). Electoral choice is typically between the lesser of two evils. Not all societies want to lead themselves. The British, for example, are content to be ruled by a party of the elite. They are protected by the ruling party and gain other advantages by allowing others to govern. This could be troubling to Marx's theories, as this sentiment is also a typical occurrence in many other countries. This is crucial because socialism detests hierarchy, according to Dunn. They are incompatible, as long as a political hierarchy exists, it is hard for there to be socialism (Dunn, 1984).

For socialism to take hold and succeed, it would take support from a larger portion of the industrial working class. In order for the working class to be accepted into the party, it must commit to being part of the party and to fight for its interests. The party would also have to be open to a self-awareness process, where it would need to recognize and admit what is not working, as take responsibility for coming up with practical ideas for solving political problems, according to Dun (1984). Dunn argues that political identity would no longer be necessary in a socialist system, since all would work for the good of the party. It seems that individuality, at least to an extent, would cease to exist. The party claims to be the people and the people claim to be the party, but is it true? Dunn says no. A party apparatus existing as the state apparatus cannot protect both the interests of the state and the working class all of the time (Dunn, 1984). Of course, it can be argued that this is not true, imagine that the state wanted to enact a trade deal that promoted free trade between two states. This could in theory affect workers in a negative way. The working class would thus be opposed to such a deal that would harm them and benefit the state. In this case, the state and the people are at odds, and the party must choose which to support (Dunn, 1984).

According to Dunn, parties should not have dictatorial power in socialist states. Who decides what human priorities should be? How can the government decide for every single citizen what is right and wrong for them? It cannot and should not attempt to try. He also argues that politicians need to know how to rule, and they need to have a program that is better than the one that existed before it, otherwise what would be the point of transitioning? Their ability to provide a better alternative to what existed before is the ultimate indicator of whether the working class will be motivated to sustain the new endeavor or call for revolution (Dunn, 1984).

Socialists see all other socialist societies as being the same, “Essentially all of them will be governed under the same rules”. Dunn states that this is not possible and that socialists need to look to the failures of the Soviet Union and acknowledge such failures (Dunn, 1984). While two or more socialist states can have similar goals, not all their goals and methods of governing will line up. Different states will have different challenges and interests.

A single party state, being a socialist party, does not allow for open debate and criticism of problems within the system. Additionally, politicians cannot be held accountable in single party socialist states because there are no other alternatives in an election. When a politician makes a mistake in a liberal democracy, they can at least be voted out of office, according to Dunn (1984). It is important to note that undemocratic socialism will completely erode the trust of the public, eventually if not sooner. Furthermore, if socialism attempts to take control of an existing system and impose its will on the people, this may not prove to be an advantageous strategy since the people may resist such a change. In this way, socialism must gain the trust of the people and if not risk failure. According to Dunn (1984), socialist governments may fail to see the need to modify or reform their systems. This means that if their socialist control over the economy is not working, they are NOT likely to reform to a more efficient system. In the end,



politicians (socialist or otherwise) will work to satisfy their own goals, whether or not these goals are in the best interests of the public.

Socialism forces adherents to defend their ideas' merits. The typical socialist response is that it is simply better than capitalism. While this may or may not be true, socialists often fail to successfully state why this claim is in fact valid, and often avoid discussing where their ideas are flawed (Dunn, 1984). Many adherents of true socialism cling to its tenets religiously. Dunn calls them fideist believers in socialism. This will, according to them, bring about a change in society that brings out the best qualities in people and subverts the undesirable qualities. Given human nature this cannot happen. Vices will exist within a humane society and the fact that socialists think this is not the case is simply naïve. If anything, socialism in practice has inspired unspeakably brutal actions committed in the name of socialism (i.e. labor camps, mass killings, etc.) (Dunn, 1984).

### The Economics of Socialism

Socialism is critical of the capitalist mode of production but does very little to fix these issues in practice. According to Dunn, there has not really been as large class struggle as Marx has stated existed. States that are already economically/politically successful under liberal democracies are less likely to advocate for socialism as they have more to lose if it fails. Democracy only works if all sides do not have much to lose; however, democracy may lead to stalemates and may not work in a socialist system (Dunn, 1984).

According to Dunn, socialism has already proven not to be as efficient as market capitalism in allocating resources. How would a socialist society reallocate resources that are already owned by the elite? Confiscation and redistribution of existing wealth would cause

further resentment between the haves and have nots. The culture around ‘work’ may also be different among members of society. A society in which everyone must work to eat leads to inherent problems. What is the definition of work? Who decides who gets to eat? Conversely, capitalism can succeed in states where there is an abundance of resources, even when an economy is doing poorly, and the masses become disillusioned with the economic system. When there are economic downturns in states with less resources and a mixed-economic system, the masses are more likely to blame the capitalist side of things. The more social services there are, the more strains are placed on capitalism, making it less efficient. Opponents then blame it for those failures (Dunn, 1984). Ultimately, a market economy is better suited to respond to these types of changes. Overall, socialism has been less successful than capitalism. When compared, capitalism has actually been more successful in modern times than Marx would have ever predicted. Many see socialism as a simple attempt to reign in the bad qualities of capitalism, however others believe that socialism is an overcorrection for the failures of capitalism (Dunn, 1984).

### The Transition to Socialism

Nobody knows for sure how the transition to socialism can be sustained once it has been achieved, and previous cases have only proven to be a disaster. Kampuchea and the Soviet Union are hardly what early socialists had in mind when they envisioned the socialist utopia. All past attempts in socialist politics have failed. Work has changed in definition in recent years and labor does not carry the same distinction of pride and worth that it used to. Workers do not feel as united and this makes a socialist system less likely to succeed (Dunn, 1984). According to Dunn, it is much easier to criticize the bad things about capitalism, while still not offering concrete ways in

which socialism would be a better alternative. Rather, socialists prefer to offer socialism simply as a replacement capitalism. Perhaps this occurs because true socialism has only been realized in the works of Marx, and it is still unclear as to what true socialism would look like when properly implemented by a government (Dunn, 1984).

Who would lead a “true socialist” society? How should such a society be organized? Dunn claims that a society that is free of the worries of capitalist societies would come to find new topics to argue about, such as how a society, a truly socialist society, should be developed. Under “true socialism,” the invisible hand of the market would be subverted to economic planning, which has proven to be an inefficient and authoritarian system. Socialism claims to replace capitalism for a better system, yet at best it has only demonstrated its ability to equalize it, at worst it has proven to be inferior, if not brutal (Dunn, 1984).

Socialism supposes that a transition to socialism will be a final step in human history, where no economic conflict will occur. Dunn (1984), offers that this may be a pipe dream as it is human nature to evolve and to actively seek to change and improve the system. This would inevitably result in changes to a ‘socialist’ system which may or may not make it ‘less socialist.’ Additional gray areas arise if you consider what would happen to two consenting individuals who want to engage in a capitalist transaction, is this unjust? If so, is a socialist response that uses overt action to prevent such a transaction from occurring more just? (Dunn, 1984). Furthermore, socialism can easily have the capacity to address its failures, but does that mean that it should or that it is more morally defensible? The challenge of socialist societies in the late twentieth century has been those of intellectual powers. It is known that states have the material capability to enact socialism, but can they run such a society more effectively than a capitalist one? How does such a society address complaints and critiques? A liberal democracy at the very least forces socialist

leaders to seek out the consent of the population that they wish to move towards socialism. In modern liberal democracies, only a small percentage of the population has expressed a desire to do so (Dunn, 1984).

The criticisms of socialism have been more effective at preventing its rise than the criticisms of capitalism. Future socialist, or even community societies, will have to address the intellectual failures of socialism if they are to have any hope of achieving a successful socialist society. Dunn believes that as of right now, socialism can only succeed under force, fraud, and with a little bit of luck. He ascertains that yes, capitalism is flawed, but why would society replace it with an even more flawed system such as socialism? After all, socialism fails to comprehensively address its own blemishes and contradictions. While capitalism also has several shortcomings, they are well-known and generally accepted as faults by scholars and subscribers of the model alike. Despite these faults, efforts are consistently underway to reform capitalism for the better. Current socialism does not attempt to address these issues (Dunn, 1984).

### Socialism: The Active Utopia

Zygmunt Bauman's (1976) ideas stand in stark contrast to those of Dunn (1984) would. In his book, *Socialism: The Active Utopia*, he writes that there is more to utopia than unrealistic dreams. Utopia is typically used as a dirty word when discussing ideal models for societies, such as socialism. He says that utopias have historical roles. For example, one can claim that libertarianism is the utopia for the right-wing in the United States, and that it has indeed been active in shaping U.S. history.

Bauman (1976) argues that the functions of utopias are to relativize the present. The first function of utopias suggests that their mere existence gives the society "the ability to think of

alternative solutions to the festering problems of the present". Bauman goes as far as to claim that these utopias are ultimately necessary as they act as a catalyst for historical change.

Second, utopias are those aspects of culture, "in which the possible extrapolations of the present are explored" (Bauman, 1976). The question utopias seek to answer is: What may I hope? Third, "utopias split the shared reality into a series of competing project-assessments." Utopias are always committed to specific groups, as such they represent the group's experience and invariably partisan yearnings (Bauman, 1976). It is important to note that while more traditional perspectives discuss the future in terms of the "probable", utopias strive to contextualize the future in terms of what is 'possible'. Fourth, "utopias do exert enormous influence on the actual course of events... utopias enter reality not as the aberrations of deranged intellects, but as powerful factors acting from within that is the only substance of reality, motivated human action..." (Bauman, 1976, p. 16). "This 'activating presence' of utopia in human action is also the only way in which the content of the utopia may be put to practical tests and examined for its degree of 'realism.' There is no method which allows us to establish in advance the truth or untruth of utopia, for the simple reason that the fate of utopia, which hinges in a considerable measure on the occurrence of an inappropriately massive social effort, is not determined in advance. Any inventory of supporting and hindering factors is bound to be incomplete without the decisive, yet unpredictable, constituent of an adequate human action. Therefore the 'realism' or 'practicability' of a utopia may be discovered (or more, appropriately, secured) only in the course of action. By summoning such action, utopia sets in motion the forces which may bring it to pass: declaring its programmer as 'utopian' in the lowly sense we discussed at the outset appears in this light as one of the means by which this 'practical verification' of utopia can be prevented" (Bauman, 1976, p. 17).

Bauman (1976) asserts that notwithstanding the precedents in Plato, utopias belong to the modern world because they share in the attitude of remaking the world to suit human purposes and human good rather than passively accepting the world as it is. "It was only this idea of perfectibility which paved the way for utopia" (Bauman, 1976, p. 19). Bauman goes on to state, "the Jacobin is the one to declare that men have a history, but a history which can be consciously directed to the greater benefit of its subjects; and that man is not only perfectible, but perfectible enough to rise to the level at which he will be able to set the pattern for his own perfection" (Bauman, 1976, p. 21).

From here, Bauman (1976) turns to the discussion of utopia and how it relates directly to socialism. He argues that there is a historical location of socialism. There are two main areas to examine within the discussion of modernity as conceived by Bendix: impersonalism and plebicitarianism. The role of formal equality is in this modernity.

According to Bauman (1976), most observers have tried to describe socialism by referencing the blueprint that society socialists are seeking to establish. He terms this approach the "logic of blueprints." Bauman wishes to focus on the logic of blueprints – the needs and blueprint production within a capitalist environment. He argues that there are three antinomy structures in the socialist utopia: freedom versus equality, state versus community, and historical determinism versus human action. By embracing the Marxist conception of the transition to socialism, with its emphasis on inevitability, German social democracy could define a concrete agenda with only a tenuous relation to the end it was supposed to serve. In other words, social democracy could practice reforms within capitalism while talking of overthrowing capitalism one day by virtues of the "power of the laws of history" (Bauman, 1976, p. 63). This poses a

question we must ask: Is this confidence in the historical necessity of the end of capitalism still operative in contemporary anti-capitalist parties?

### Socialist Planning

Ellman (1989) writes in his book *Socialist Planning*, that since the 18th century, a central feature of liberal economics was the belief that a market economy that was decentralized was far more efficient than a state managed economy. It has since been argued, that market economies have both positive and negative effects. Marxists have of course been in favor of central planning, arguing that it solves both the problem of the anarchy of production, which may produce too many or too few goods, and the division of labor based on class. Ellman argues that in order to examine a centrally planned state economy and compare it to that of a market economy, these socialist states' historical experiences need to be considered, as well as the need to catch up with more industrially advanced countries, especially in terms of military power.

Ellman (1989) argues that the traditional model of central planning is not really economic planning in the Marxist sense. He argues that it is governed by political dictatorship and has shown to be highly wasteful and inefficient, demonstrating problems that are criticized as being inherent with market economies. Furthermore, he argues that an important part of Marxist-style central planning is to serve rational needs, which he says the traditional model does not do. When it comes to the process of economic reform, Ellman (1989) has stated that it is a long and difficult process with outcomes that are uncertain. He argues that there has never been the establishment of a successful and stable economic system anywhere that is based on economic reformism. The reform process is highly interested with economic outcomes within the economic system and of economic policy and of the economic environment. Ellman also argues

that reforms are not necessary in order to have high living standards and a successful welfare state, if the economic conditions are right. It is important to observe what economic criteria are being used to determine economic success. Political factors are also important when examining the reform process. Does the state being examined have a sense of entrepreneurship, market socialism, ownership of private property, etc.? Central planning in countries undergoing economic reforms is going to differ from planning that is done under the traditional model for a number of reasons. The economic reform model focuses on the greater use of indirect centralization, greater stress on macro-economic issues, and a reduction in scope. Ellman also argues that an important political issue that planning raises during reform is the democratization of planning.

According to Ellman (1989) Marxists have traditionally held the view that peasant farming is not a viable way of organizing agriculture. Marxists have claimed that socialist agriculture has four distinct advantages over that of capitalist agriculture: 1) It prevents rural exploitation, 2) It allow the use of available labor and other resources in a rational way, 3) It assists in rapidly increasing the marketed output of agriculture, and 4) It helps transfer resources for investment to industry from agriculture. Within countries that have experimented with collectivization, a number of problems have occurred. For example, there has been the absence of the postulated economies of scale, labor incentives, taxation of collective farms, inequality, and the use of administrative methods. Based on these issues, Ellman argues that the third and fourth advantages of socialist agriculture argued by Marxists are not valid. It also shows that the first advantage ignores inequalities in power and the lack of social control over how decisions are made. The second advantage, while sometimes true, is often false. Problems with this model eventually led countries like Poland, Hungary, China, and the former Yugoslavia to abandon this



model in favor of different models, such as the technocratic model. The technocratic model focuses on a mix of private and collective farming. The practice of establishing collectivization has also differed among countries. In the former USSR, for example, the coercive model was used. While this did lead to an increase in the marketed output of basic wage goods and the urban labor force, it created a semi-feudal system and resulted in high costs for low output. This led to the USSR's abandonment of the practice in 1953. Similarly, the Maoist model of collectivization was abandoned by China between 1979 and 1984 for the same issues. Hungary implemented the technocratic model, which solved the output issue, but led to political, commercial, technical, and social problems. Ellman argues that all of the models are not ideal for a country aiming to rapidly grow agricultural output and increase equality. Whether or not collectivization is successful, depends on a number of factors, just as it does in private agriculture. Socialized agriculture can result in year to year changes in output, which creates political and economic instability.

Ellman (1989) also discusses labor planning, which in state socialist countries is concerned with facilitating the fulfillment and the over-fulfillment of the national economic plan by ensuring that the required types of labor are available for the right quantities and places that they are in demand. This involves developing the labor force, ensuring full employment, providing adequate distribution of employment, and ensuring efficient utilization of labor. There are three methods commonly used: administrative, economic, and moral with labor balance being the main instrument. The positions of workers in state socialist countries, with respect to improving qualifications, work hours and intensity, social security, security of employment, and availability of employment, compares quite well with those figures found in capitalist countries. Workplace safety figures have been hard to estimate, but due to lack of records available from

the former USSR, it is generally assumed to be poor. Ellman argues that no progress has been made under state socialism to create a better, more humane form of the organization of labor. State socialist countries have simply copied what capitalist countries have done and eliminated the ability of workers to form unions, making them worse off in some cases than in capitalist countries.

The Marxist view of incomes is that once the revolution has been completed the goal is to eliminate parasitic incomes, and to base income on work performed (Ellman, 1989). The ultimate objective, however, is to have income distributed based upon need. State socialist countries have defined income planning typically as having the following features: price controls, the planning of foreign trade, elimination of large property incomes, compulsory arbitration, national job evaluation, uniform regional net advantages, production mindedness of trade unions, full employment, a government formed of the proletariat, and a non-permissive approach to breaches of labor discipline. Ellman believes that due to poor record keeping, comparisons of income policies between capitalist and socialist countries cannot be accurately compared to make a determination on differences in inequality. Income planning also takes on different roles in each economy. In capitalist countries, income and wealth generally determine consumption, while in socialist countries, political position generally determines the ability of consumption. Income distribution cannot simply be compared between two countries alone to determine whether capitalism or socialism is superior in this area. For example, socialist China's income distribution compared to capitalist Western Europe would clearly show an advantage for Europe in this field. However, capitalist Mexico would rate much more poorly against China. Ellman argues that the main reasons that inequality still persists in state socialist countries has to

do with the division of labor, family, sexual division of roles, and the role of the state within state socialism.

Ellman (1989) turns next to planning of consumption, which he claims has varied greatly over time and between countries. The most common method has been that of norms, which he claims is useful, but has two weaknesses. He states these are: an arbitrary nature of norms and the feature of substitutability. Norms are generally implemented by quantity and price adjustment. Quantity is typically used in the traditional model. Price adjustments may not be politically effective and may fail to establish an equilibrium in the consumer goods market. Under state socialism, shortages of goods and long lines in front of stores are common. This is a major problem in current Venezuela. The causes for this are due to an imbalance in the state sectors of the macro-economy, imbalance in prices, the behavior of planners, the organization of the distribution sector, and the partial or total elimination of feedback mechanisms found in capitalist countries. Shortages and long lines have major implications for income distribution. While senior political officials are given access to special goods that may be in short supply, the general population is left to suffer with low supply and high costs. This leads to the inability for the economy to satisfy all consumer needs and creates the existence of a large unofficial (i.e. black-market) economy. There are three ways to deal with shortages: economic reform, monetary reform, and rationing. Ellman claims that the transition from capitalism to state socialism has had both positive and negative effects on consumption. For example, data suggests that state socialist countries have a higher level of access to public goods and a lower access to private goods. The opposite is true in capitalist countries.

The capitalist international division of labor typically leads to a rapid expansion of trade and economic growth, according to Ellman (1989). However, it also leads to vast income

inequality and inefficiency. State socialism attempts to capture the advantages of capitalism in this field, while eliminating the shortcomings. Ellman argues that state socialist countries have been unable to create a suitable replacement, and that their model is actually worse than the capitalist alternative. We should observe that the socialism in one country model that was employed by the USSR before 1945 and in China during 1960-1978, worked during those periods, but it cannot be relied upon as a model for countries that interact together as a group. In order to get around this issue, the socialist imperialism model was created, but was largely abandoned. The international planning model focused around the conflict between static comparative costs and the industrialization of formerly undeveloped countries, national competition, and the imperfect socialization of the productive forces. The USSR was unable to implement the multilateralism model while it still clung to the traditional model. The economic integration model, which was being explored by the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance (CMEA), suffered from a number of limitations, according to Ellman. The system groups countries based on hegemonic power, as such it cannot include a state socialist country, such as China, that is not dependent on another state socialist country, such as the USSR. It lacks appeal to countries that are jealous of other countries' independence. The inability to introduce multilateralism has restricted technical progress and trade. Many member states are dissatisfied with the model. Ellman states that the traditional model has caused an adverse effect on the share of hard currency exports in the national income. He claims that shortages of goods generate a "perverse" behavior by planners and leads to the underestimation of the importance of marketing. Establishing an international economic order that can combine efficiency, growth, and equity, is still a problem waiting to be solved.

In concluding his argument, Ellman (1989) discusses the experience of socialist planning from the standpoint of two issues raised at the beginning of his discussion: the creation of a higher mode of production and the need for less developed countries to catch up. He concludes that state socialist countries have failed to create a higher mode of production than that of capitalist countries. On the issues of catching up, Ellman points to periods where the USSR and China made rapid economic gains, but that more capitalist countries, such as Japan and the East Asian NICs, had made much more progress. Ellman argued back in 1989 that China and the former USSR might never catch up to the US in terms of economic power, but that the USSR could match the US at least militarily; however, this is no longer true since the collapse of the USSR in 1991. Additionally, China appeared to be rocketing toward the US during the 1990s and early 2000s. While this has slowed somewhat, it remains to be seen if China will catch the US economically and militarily, despite China appearing to move toward a more capitalist based system.

### The Economics of Feasible Socialism

Alec Nove (1991) heavily discusses the interpretation of Marx's work in the opening section of his book, *The Economics of Feasible Socialism: Revisited*. He argues that taken literally, Marx's works are not enough to efficiently plan an economy. Economies are complex and have complex supply chains. For example, one cannot simply state that they will plan a factory to construct cars and that the only task needed is to construct the car. There are millions of branches of actions that must take place in order to finish the final product. Just to name a few, you would need to make tires, which would need to be sourced from rubber, which would have to be harvested from rubber trees, which would need to be cut down by workers, who

would need manufactured tools to chop down those trees, etc., etc. One could go on and on in many directions, and that is just with producing a car! Economies, especially modern global economies are too complex to be centrally planned. Nove states that Marx may very well have known this and that his works were not really meant to be taken as an exact blueprint for how a society should be organized, but that his work was mainly concerned with criticizing capitalism more than actually advocating for a specific plan with which to replace it. One does not necessarily have to come up with an alternative when criticizing a particular problem. In fact, Nove states that Marx even said not to fall into the trap of using dogmatism when advocating for his ideas. His ideas were not meant to be interpreted so rigidly as some have done.

Furthermore, Nove (1991) seeks to discuss the ideology of the Soviet Union's form of Marxism, chiefly to ask what that ideology was. Is the ideology of the state dependent on what the founders of that state believed and advocated for, or is it what the state actually does? Nove argues that it is the latter, and notes that many critics of the Soviet Union would agree. Many advocates of revolution in Russia in the early twentieth century claimed that they wanted to establish a Marxist state. Marx advocated increased democracy, expanded workers' rights, and an overall sense of society that was less oppressive for the common person; however, the Soviet Union became anything but. The former USSR did not have a free press, was largely hostile to trade unions, and had pseudo-elections at best. Nove argues that you must judge a state's ideology by the actions it takes, since what is communicated by its founders and its actions can be contradictory. He argues that the Soviet Union is far from what Marx would have been in favor of and that it failed to interpret and carry out the true goal of Marxist socialism.

There have been many attempts throughout history to conduct reforms within socialist countries in order to make the system work better. There are three main cases that Nove (1991)

discusses: Yugoslavia, Poland, and China. He essentially states that the socialist experience in every country is different. There are other social issues that can affect how economic issues develop within a country. Factors such as culture and history can play an important role. In Yugoslavia, the government attempted to liberalize the system somewhat and introduced some very small protected markets into its system. The system is known as 'worker self-management' and relies on a mixture of small private markets and a variety of government price controls, import restrictions, exchange rate variations, etc. Nove argues that this was an inefficient system and could not work today. However, at least there was an attempt to reform a system that had clearly not been working for Yugoslavia beforehand. The Polish case was much more of a disaster and gave way to the collapse of the socialist government there. The economy went into a state of stagnation with output falling sharply, resulting in shortages of food and other goods. This gave rise to the 'Solidarity' movement, which advocated for a change in government and a more liberalized economy. The communist-led government was not able to introduce reforms fast enough and the Solidarity Party won massively in elections. Once in power, the new government instituted sweeping reforms aimed at moving toward marketization. In China, Nove argues that certain aspects of the implementation of socialism have had similar problems to that in other countries, but that there have also been some challenges that have arisen due to China's unique history and culture. Until Mao Zedong's death, much of China's system was based on ideology, rather than pragmatism. After Mao's death in the 1970s, China began to undergo major economic reforms under Deng Xiaoping. This new direction was aimed at rapidly industrializing and modernizing China. China saw a drastic increase in its economic development, and it is something that is still being observed today. The reforms have allowed China's economy to

flourish. According to Nove, every socialist state's approach to economic management and economic reform is completely different.

In the fourth section of the book, Nove (1991) sets out to discuss how the transition to socialism from capitalism is different for each state. States also have historically focused on different goals when installing a socialist government. He argues that some transitions to socialism can be violent, which would most likely occur in poorer countries, while richer countries would see a more democratic transition. Different factors can also affect how that state manages its economy and what type of economy it focuses on. Nove uses the example of OPEC. If a country has an abundance of crude oil and is a member of OPEC, then it is better positioned to focus its economic development on that industry. If a country has no oil reserves at all, then it really does that country no good to invest in methods aimed at the exploration and extraction of oil. Countries also differ on things such as tax rates, consumption, level of industrialization, price policies, whether to collectivize, etc. All of these factors and more can determine how a state transitions to socialism and how it structures and operates its economy. Nove argues that because of this, there is no way to create a one-size-fits-all approach when creating a socialist economic model. Ultimately concluding, that no two countries are alike.

In his final pages, Nove (1991) claims that there can be a feasible form of socialism. While he argues that all attempts at socialism have essentially failed thus far, especially in the Soviet case, he argues that a form of socialism can exist that is economically efficient, fair, and is not politically oppressive. He argues that ideas such as 'perpetual revolution,' which is seen in China and even seemed to be advocated for by Chávez in Venezuela, should not be utilized. Instead, he advocated for a system he calls, 'perpetual reform.' Throughout the entire book, Nove argues, that countries have different cultures, needs, and experiences, and because of this, each



country needs to find its own path toward a socialist system. There is no way to create a single system that will work for every country. He also agrees that there needs to exist a healthy level of debate between socialists and anti-socialists so that neither side ever secures total control. Opposition allows for reform and in order for socialism to work, Nove argues that it must be open to modifications as society continues to evolve and progress into the future.

### Main Currents of Marxism

Leszek Kolakowski (2005) heavily critiques socialism in his three-volume work, *Main Currents of Marxism: The Founders, the Golden Age, the Breakdown*. An ex-Marxist himself, each of his volumes discusses a different phase in the historical timeline of Marxist socialism. Here, we will discuss some of his critiques in brief detail.

There were strong criticisms of Marx and his theories long before major communist revolutions came to fruition. Mikhail Bakunin was a Russian anarchist who was a strong critic of scientific socialism (Kolakowski, 2002). He argued that if a communist revolution were to occur in the way that Marx had laid out, the elites and intellectuals would end up ruling over everyone. Bakunin argued, that the level of oppression would be on a scale never seen before in human history. Additionally, he was very suspicious of universities and argued that intellectuals would use predetermined schemata to rule over individuals' lives (Kolakowski, 2005). Bakunin wrote in *Statehood and Anarchy*, that some way or another, Marxism would lead to the minority governing over the majority. He stated, "But, the Marxists say, this minority will consist of the workers. Yes, no doubt – of former workers, who, as soon as they become governors or representatives of the people cease to be workers and start looking down on the working masses from the heights of state authority, so that they represent not the people but themselves and their

own claim to rule over others. Anyone who can doubt this knows nothing of human nature..." (Kolakowski, 2005, p. 206). In some respects, Bakunin was right. In many communist countries, especially the Soviet Union, a small group of people (i.e. the Politburo) ruled over the masses (Kolakowski, 2005).

The idea of what Marxism was supposed to be took a sharp turn towards despotism during the time of Joseph Stalin. Stalin developed a "cult of personality," which solidified control of the country in one person's hands. This also happened with Mao, the Kim family, as well as other communist dictators. Later communists claimed that this was an accident, however, it history says otherwise. Stalin reformed the idea of Marxism, combining it with the theories of Lenin and rebranding it as Marxism-Leninism. Under Stalin, the equation of Marxism-Leninism became: truth = the proletarian world-view = Marxism = the party's world-view = the pronouncements of the party leadership = those of the supreme leader is wholly in accordance with Lenin's version of Marxism (Kolakowski, 2005, p. 792). Stalin was regarded as the personification of a system which irresistibly sought to be personified. Stalin argued for "socialism in one country" and advocated for the idea of perpetual revolution. The revolution was an ongoing and never-ending process that must occur in order to weed out and eliminate threats to the revolution itself. This is the idea that resulted in the purges that Stalin conducted to remove "enemies" from within (Kolakowski, 2005).

Within the Soviet Union, as well as other communist countries, anything that attempted to show communism in the wrong light was eliminated. There was a belief that anything that subverted the cause of the revolution must be wrong, and therefore must be destroyed by force if necessary. Under Stalin, this resulted in enforced collectivization, faking of statistical results to make production look more efficient, and even the execution of statisticians that presented

results that Stalin did not like. This ultimately resulted in the purging of anyone who disagreed with Stalin. As a result, Stalinization was to be spread throughout the world, as a matter of Soviet foreign policy. This was an ideological war between communism and other ideologies.

Communism was promoted in film and literature in an attempt to inspire patriotism and loyalty.

When it came to issues within science, again, whatever side showed the communist ideology in the right way, was to be regarded as the correct answer. Einstein's theory of relativity was initially rejected by the Soviets as a flawed Western idea and Western science was to be regarded as wrong. This led to the Soviets even questioning genetics at one point (Kolakowski, 2005).

After Stalin's death, there was a major shift within the Soviet Politburo to reform itself so as to never let another Stalin-like figure come to power. This process was known as de-Stalinization and was conducted using such tactics as revisionist history. Marxism as a major ideology did not last very long. Less than half a century after Stalin's death, Marxism was abandoned by much of the former communist countries when the Soviet Union collapsed in 1991. Kolakowski states, that Marxism has been used as a justification by many leaders and regimes to carry out acts in any way they desired, with some being worse than others. Ultimately, the Marxist experiment had failed, and making it one of the greatest fantasies that mankind had had (Kolakowski, 2005).

One last important idea mentioned by Kolakowski (2005), is his explanation for why Marxism has been used as a prop for authoritarian regimes rather than a liberating ideology. Kolakowski argued that Marxist socialism has become equivalent to a religion, with its own set of fanatics. When studying Marx, some of his followers took his ideas as scientific fact, rather than theory or as philosophical statements. Thus, they used this presumed scientific knowledge to claim that they knew socialism was the inevitable next step in human development. Socialist

and communist and socialist regimes attempted to subjugate any ideas that showed their ideology in a negative fashion. The Soviets even went as far as to denounce scientific knowledge such as genetics and the Theory of Relativity. Anything that appeared to be contrary to Marxist doctrine was to be 'edited' to make it more in line with the ideology of the state. From what can be examined throughout the history of Marxism, adherents have been led to believe that Marxism is always right. It has been taken literally as scientific fact, rather than an idea whose opinions are to be debated. Anyone who disagrees with the 'fact' of Marxism is simply trying to subvert the revolution as a bourgeois conspirator. Marx did not intend his ideas to be hostile or to oppress and tyrannize people, but that is what it became due to misinterpretation and the open-endedness of the theory left in the wake of Marx's death. Kolakowski puts it best when he states, "From the viewpoint of the history of Marxism, Maoist ideology is noteworthy not because Mao 'developed' anything but because it illustrates the unlimited flexibility of any doctrine once it becomes historically influential" (p. 1204).

All of these theorists discussed thus far may not agree on whether or not socialism is feasible, but they would all likely agree that nothing has ever materialized that would receive approval from Marx. Past attempts at socialism have failed and have not produced a system that has been politically or economically fairer than capitalism, while mitigating its own set of limitations and issues. In chapter five, these ideas will be examined alongside statements made by the PSUV and its leaders in order to determine if they have learned from the mistakes made by their predecessors and to effectively answer the research question posed by this paper.

## CHAPTER 4: METHODOLOGY

This paper presented the following research questions earlier in the introduction: What can it mean to promote an anti-capitalist agenda after the failure of the Soviet Union and the collapse of communism as a vibrant ideology the world over? What, if anything, did contemporary anti-capitalist parties learn from the Soviet failure? What kind of socialism do they propose to implement and how do they envision the transition from a capitalist society to a socialist one in the context of a globally inter-connected and technologically complex world of the 21<sup>st</sup> century? This paper seeks to use a qualitative analysis of the case of the PSUV in Venezuela and make a more general interpretation of other current contemporary anti-capitalist parties. In examining the literature written by scholars of Marxism and on the country of Venezuela, this paper hypothesizes that contemporary anti-capitalist parties have not learned from the failures of the Soviet experience, especially in the case of Chávez and the PSUV. However, future research needs to be conducted in order to get a more comprehensive and generalizable answer to this question.

The method utilized to examine the Venezuelan case was that of reflexive practice. While we will refer to this approach conceptually as a method, it is not a “method” in the traditional sense of scientific research. According to May and Perry (2014), it is a way of thinking of critical ethos. It can be thought of as “ideas about ideas.” The role is to aid interpretation, and representation of ideas. There are two different approaches to reflexive practice: endogenous and referential reflexivity. Referential reflexivity, which was utilized for the purposes of this paper, takes place where the production of accounts meets contexts of reception, where the purpose is to render events, experiences, and conditions intelligible by meeting of points of view. Essentially,

what this method allowed the us to do was to breakdown the arguments presented by Hugo Chávez, Nicholas Maduro, and forces within the Venezuelan government, and analyze them for contradictions and errors, and determine if they had reflected on past attempts to implement similar socialist programs, such as in the Soviet Union.

When analyzing this case, there are several standards of judgement that need to be used to speak to the failure or success of the PSUV's political project. There are three criteria that are used: 1) Conformity to liberal democracy: these include things such as following the rule of law, independence of the judiciary, legislative rule, respect for individual rights of assembly and opinion, freedom of the press, and government accountability to citizens through free and open elections; 2) The ability of the project to pull the poor out of poverty without spreading scarcity (i.e. making everyone else poor); 3) The ability to foster technological innovation in the economy, particularly in the oil and agricultural sectors. The leadership of PSUV would use similar qualifiers. While their leadership could claim success, one could easily distinguish their own theoretical standards of judgement from what has actually occurred in the country.

This paper looked at relevant documentation, speeches, writings, etc., created by members of the Chávez and Maduro regime, and compared them to the arguments made by Dunn, Ellman, and Nove, regarding Marxist socialism and socialist planning, in order to determine if the Venezuelan government has thought about how it wanted to implement socialism, and if so, how did it avoid past mistakes made by the Soviet Union and other socialist governments, if it avoided them at all.

The paper has hypothesized that the Venezuelan government, through the PSUV, has not reflected on these issues, but analysis of sources discussed must be undertaken. There are a total of eight sources that will be examined within this paper: 1) The 1999 Venezuelan Constitution;

2) A book written by Hugo Chávez titled, *El Libro Azul* (The Blue Book; 3) *Libro Rojo* (Red Book), the PSUV's founding document stating its beliefs, goals, and plans for how to achieve socialism; 4) Chávez's 2013-2019 economic plan, which was released by Chávez during the 2012 presidential elections; 5) A book titled *The Fascist Coup Against Venezuela*; 6) An interview conducted by CNN's Larry King with President Hugo Chávez in 2009; 7) An interview conducted by CNN's Christiane Amanpour with President Nicholas Maduro in 2014; 8) The PBS Frontline documentary of Hugo Chávez titled, *Aló Presidente*, released in 2008. These sources will then be compared with the arguments on socialism and socialist planning made by Dunn, Ellman, and Nove, discussed earlier in Chapter three.

In comparing some of the chief arguments made by scholars previously listed, Dunn argues that socialism cannot be sustained, even if it is reached. He also argues that socialism creates a political hierarchy that is inherently undemocratic. Furthermore, socialist political parties often begin to argue for a one-party state and promote the idea of dictatorial power by a single party, claiming that they know how to rule better and know what is good for the people. Dunn also argues that the Soviet experiment was a terrible failure and that any future socialist movements should heed the failures of the Soviet case and look for solutions to issues that caused those failures, so as not to repeat the same mistakes.

Ellman (1989) adds to this argument by stating that socialist planning is ultimately not as efficient as a market economy in a number of ways. He concedes that there are some slight advantages to a state planned socialist economy, but that those benefits do not outweigh the costs and that while still suffering from inefficiency, capitalism overall has a much better track record than state planned socialist economies. Nove (1991) argues that the Soviet ideology is not the same as what Karl Marx would have envisioned when formulating his theories. Soviet style-

Marxism was far too brutal to be anything close to resembling emancipation of human-kind, which was Marx's goal. Kolakowski (2005) even states that Marx never envisioned a socialist revolution occurring within agrarian societies such as Russia and China, and predicted that they would happen in more developed, industrialized, and imperial countries, such as Great Britain and the United States. This paper will take the time to address all of these issues in the context of the Venezuelan case.

Finally, the reason for choosing this method over other methods must also be addressed. Taking a qualitative approach to this subject is the most logical approach when examining the topic and the ways in which it will be covered. A quantitative approach would have been feasible had this paper been measuring specific figures, such as economic output, unemployment, national income, GDP, etc. However, this paper focuses on qualitative aspects of the PSUV party in Venezuela and as such, simply analyzes general figures that can be discussed without the need of statistical analysis. A qualitative approach allowed us to research more fluid concepts within the Venezuelan case such as, political ideology a qualitative concept that cannot be easily quantified or measured in a statistical way. Additionally, the method selected allowed us to draw from original sources and review each claim independently before reaching a conclusion. This practice allowed for the examination of ideas and allowed the us to critique them and compare them to other ideas. The arguments made by the scholars referenced earlier and that of Chávez, Maduro, and the PSUV, were fully evaluated for to identify overarching ideas and discrepancies. In the next section, the paper will comprehensively analyze the aforementioned documentation in this section utilizing the Referential reflexivity method. Additionally, the next section will provide a final analysis of the Venezuelan case.



## **CHAPTER 5: FINDINGS**

### Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela's Constitution of 1999

In examining the Bolivarian Revolution, it is important to look at what Chávez's government is founded upon, which is the new constitution passed by referendum in 1999. This section will focus on that documentation, that has been translated into English by Jefri J. Ruchti for the Constitute Project, which is an organization that maintains an updated list of national constitutions from around the world. The entirety of the document will not be discussed here. There are many sections of the document that, while important, are not important as other sections. The document is quite large and other papers and books could be written inspecting each piece closely. The aim of this paper is to examine multiple documents and sources of information, and so the most important pieces will be discussed.

The 1999 Constitution is made up of the preamble, followed by the first title, which discusses the fundamental principles. Title two discusses the geographical spaces and political division. Title three discusses duties, human rights, and guarantees. Title four discusses public power. Title five discusses the organization of national public authority. Title six discusses the socioeconomic system. Title eight discusses the protection of the constitution. The final title, nine, discusses constitutional reforms. Following the nine titles there is a section of a sole derogation provision. There is then a list of eighteen temporary provisions with the document concluding with the final provision.

Article 51 of the constitution is where it really starts to become relevant for the purposes of this paper. Article 51 states that, "Everyone has the right to petition or make representations before any authority or public official concerning matters within their competence, and to obtain

a timely and adequate response. Whoever violates this right shall be punished in accordance with law, including the possibility of dismissal from office." Article 52 states, "Everyone has the right to assemble for lawful purposes, in accordance with law. The State is obligated to facilitate the exercise of this right." Article 53 states that "everyone has the right to meet publicly or privately, without obtaining permission in advance, for lawful purposes and without weapons. Meetings in public places may be regulated by law." These three articles taken together state that Venezuelans are guaranteed the right to assemble for political (and other) reasons. It has been documented that the current government has responded to very large political rallies within the capital with force in order to disband them. Could these instances be a violation of Venezuela's own constitution by the government?

Articles 57 and 58 are the next to bring up an interesting point of discussion. Article 57 states that, "everyone has the right to express freely his or her thoughts, ideas or opinions orally, in writing or by any other form of expression, and to use for such purposes any means of communication and diffusion, and no censorship shall be established. Anyone making use of this right assumes full responsibility for everything expressed. Anonymity, war propaganda, discriminatory messages or those promoting religious intolerance are not permitted. Censorship restricting the ability of public officials to report on matters for which they are responsible is prohibited." Article 58 states that "communications are free and plural, and involve the duties and responsibilities indicated by law. Everyone has the right to timely, truthful and impartial information, without censorship, in accordance with the principles of this Constitution, as well as the right to reply and corrections when they are directly affected by inaccurate or offensive information. Children and adolescents have the right to receive adequate information for purposes of their overall development." These two articles, while sounding fair, have been

somewhat violated by Chávez, at least in spirit. The Chávez government has targeted those who disagree with the government, such as opposition leaders, and have accused them of being terrorists and promoting violence. They have attempted, and successfully, held members of the opposition in prison on these charges. It has never been fully proven that these opposition members have condoned violence. It can be argued that there have probably been cases where citizens who support the opposition have or have at least threatened to carry out violence against the government or its supporters, however, how can the leadership of the opposition be held accountable for what a supporter does, if they were not directly ordered to do it? For example, it would be highly unfair for the US Democratic Party leadership to be held responsible and jailed for the shooting of US Congressman Scalise in 2017, by an individual that was allegedly a supporter of the party. On the issue of communications, the constitution claims that communications are always free, and that information is not subject to censorship. However, the government has blocked websites and increased surveillance on the internet (McCarthy 2017). Chávez has also publicly condemned Twitter and announced laws, such as the Resorte Law, to further restrict freedom on the internet.

Article 67 states that "all citizens have the right of association for political purposes, through democratic methods of organization, operation and direction. Their governing organs and candidates for offices filled by popular vote, shall be selected by internal elections with participation of their members. No financing of associations for political purposes with State funds shall be permitted. Matters relating to the financing of and private contributions to associations for political purposes shall be regulated by laws, as shall the oversight mechanisms to guarantee propriety as to the sources and handling of such funds. Law shall regulate as well: political and election campaigns, the duration thereof, and spending limits with a view pursuing

its democratization. Citizens, on their own initiative, and associations for political purposes, shall be entitled to participate in the electoral process, putting forward candidates. The financing of political advertising and election campaigns shall be regulated by law. The authorities of associations for political purposes shall not enter into contracts with organs in the public sector." Article 68 states that citizens have the right to demonstrate, peacefully and without weapons, subject only to such requirements as may be established by law. The use of firearms and toxic substances to control peaceful demonstrations is prohibited. The activity of police and security corps in maintaining public order shall be regulated by law." Again, the constitution states that all citizens have the right to association for political purposes, but the government has been accused of harassing members of the political opposition, as well as jailing key opposition members on charges of terrorism, often without trial or evidence. Furthermore, the government has used tear gas on protesters, in direct violation of the constitution (BBC 2017).

Article 72 states, "All magistrates and other offices filled by popular vote are subject to revocation. Once half of the term in office to which an official has been elected has elapsed, a number of voters constituting at least 20% of the voters registered in the pertinent circumscription may extend a petition for the calling of a referendum to revoke such official's mandate. When a number of voters equal to or greater than the number of those who elected the official vote in favor of the revocation, provided that a number of voters equal to or greater than 25% of the total number of registered voters have voted in the revocation election, the official's mandate shall be deemed revoked, and immediate action shall be taken to fill the permanent vacancy in accordance with that provided for in in this Constitution and by law. The revocation of the mandate for the collegiate bodies shall be performed in accordance with the law. During the term to which the official was elected, only one petition recall may be filed." This somewhat

backfired on Chávez, as there was an attempted recall vote on his presidency that took place in 2004. Chávez handedly won that election and was able to maintain his position in power, however, that enough of the population voted for the recall is significant. Chávez might have thought that the recall provision would never be used on him. It appears the recall provision could have been a tool for the government to have voters who were supporters, rally against politicians from the opposition, and vote to recall them from office. This would have paved the way for more pro-Chávez candidates to be elected to office.

On a side note, as a matter of social policy, Article 77 states that "marriage, which is based on free consent and absolute equality of rights and obligations of the spouses is protected. A stable de facto union between a man and a woman which meets the requirements established by law shall have the same effects as marriage." It is ironic that Chávez claims that he wanted a government founded on equality, yet when it comes to marriage, the 1999 constitution restricts and defines marriage in a way that is unequal and excludes some members of society. This could be due to the fact that the country is heavily Catholic, and the church does not officially recognize same-sex marriage. This is not to say that all Catholics are opposed to same-sex marriage, as many are in support of legalization around the globe, the fact that the 1999 constitution would deny equality to a certain group while basing itself on equality is interesting.

Article 82 states, "every person has the right to adequate, safe and comfortable, hygienic housing, with appropriate essential basic services, including a habitat such as to humanize family, neighborhood and community relations. The progressive meeting of this requirement is the shared responsibility of citizens and the State in all areas. The State shall give priority to families, and shall guarantee them, especially those with meager resources, the possibility of access to social policies and credit for the construction, purchase or enlargement of dwellings."

Article 83 states that "health is a fundamental social right and the responsibility of the State, which shall guarantee it as part of the right to life. The State shall promote and develop policies oriented toward improving the quality of life, common welfare and access to services. All persons have the right to protection of health, as well as the duty to participate actively in the furtherance and protection of the same, and to comply with such health and hygiene measures as may be established by law, and in accordance with international conventions and treaties signed and ratified by the Republic. Article 87 states that "all persons have the right and duty to work. The State guarantees the adoption of the necessary measures so that every person shall be able to obtain productive work providing him or her with a dignified and decorous living and guarantee him or her the full exercise of this right. It is an objective of the State to promote employment. Measures tending to guarantee the exercise of the labor rights of self-employed persons shall be adopted by law. Freedom of work shall be subject only to such restrictions as may be established by law. Every employer shall guarantee employees adequate safety, hygienic and environmental conditions on the job. Articles 90 through 97 establish that workers have additional rights, such as maximum working hours, a livable wage, guaranteed pensions, forming unions, and bargaining collectively. All of these rights enshrined into the 1999 constitution prove to be very important. The constitution seems to be mandating some basic tenets that would be advocated for by socialist societies, or at least in social democratic countries. However, even in many non-socialist countries, even when there is generally a belief that workers should be guaranteed fair pay and that all citizens should receive healthcare, very few actually have it in their constitutions as a legal requirement that the state provide these services for its citizens. Putting them in a constitution makes it harder to remove them if they do not work out, compared to simply passing

a law. This is further followed by articles 102-112 which details the rights of education and to sports and recreational activities.

Chapter seven of the constitution lays out the economic rights of the population, arguably the most important part to focus on in this paper. Article 112 states, "All persons may devote themselves freely to the economic activity of their choice, subject only to the limitations provided for in this Constitution and those established by law for reasons of human development, security, health, environmental protection or other reasons in the social interest. The States shall promote private initiative, guaranteeing the creation and fair distribution of wealth, as well as the production of goods and services that meet the needs of the populace, freedom of work, enterprise, commerce, industry, without prejudice to the power of the State to promulgate measures to plan, rationalize and regulate the economy and promote the overall development of the country." Article 113 bans monopolies and promotes competition in the economy. Article 114 states that "economic crime, speculation, hoarding, usury, the formation of cartels and other related offenses, shall be punished severely in accordance with the law." This is article somewhat ironic because Venezuela is a member of OPEC, which could be argued as one of the most powerful cartels in the world. Article 115 states that "the right to property is guaranteed. Every person has the right to the sure, enjoyment, usufruct and disposal of his or her goods. Property shall be the subject to such contributions, restrictions and obligations as may be established by law in the service of the public or general interest. Only for reasons of public benefit or social interest by final judgement, with timely payment of fair compensation, the expropriation of any kind of property may be declared." Article 116 states "Confiscation of property shall not be ordered and carried out, but in the cases permitted by this Constitution. As an exceptional measure, the property of natural or legal persons of Venezuelan or foreign nationality who are

responsible for crimes committed against public patrimony may be subject to confiscation, as may be the property of those who illicitly enrich themselves under cover of Public Power, and property deriving from business, financial or any other activities connected with unlawful trafficking in psychotropic and narcotic substances." Article 117 states that "all persons shall have the right of access to goods and services of good quality, as well as to adequate and non-misleading information concerning the contents and characteristics of the products and services they consume, to freedom of choice and to fair and dignified treatment. The mechanisms to guarantee these rights, the standard of quality and quantity for goods and services, consumer protection procedures, compensation for damages caused and appropriate penalties for the violation of these rights shall be established by law." Article 118 states that "the right of workers and the community to develop associations of social and participative nature such as cooperatives, savings funds, mutual funds and other forms of association is recognized. These associations may develop any kind of economic activities in accordance with the law. The law shall recognize the specificity of these organization, especially those relating to the cooperative, the associated work and the generation of collective benefits. The state shall promote and protect these associations destined to improve the popular economic alternative. Interestingly, many of these articles do not seem to be much different from what would be expected from a social democratic country rather than a socialist or communist regime. However, it has not been followed to the letter in recent years. The Chávez and Maduro governments have both been responsible for the seizure of property without just compensation, or any compensation in many cases. This could have been justified under article 116, if a property-owner was found guilty of a crime, however it appears that if it was used as a justification for property confiscation, it was used falsely or at very loosely.



Title six describes the public power. Article 145 states that "public officials or employees serve the state, and not any partisan interest. Their appointment and removal shall not be determined on political affiliation or orientation. A person who is in the service of the Municipalities, the States, the Republic, or any other State public or private juridical persons, shall not be permitted to enter into contract of any kind with them, either directly or through any interposed person, or as representative of another, with such exceptions as may be established by law." It has been claimed that some public officials have been targeted by the government for being members of the opposition. If this is true, it would be in direct violation of the constitution. In fact, the oil strikes that occurred and the lockout of PDVSA should be protected by the constitution, and the firings of those employees who went on strike should not have occurred. Do these firings seem to be in violation of the constitution? Depending on the actions taken during the strike, then it could. If the employee simply went on strike and did not break any laws or damage property, and were fired for simply striking, then that would constitute a violation of the right to strike.

Section five has to do with international relations. Article 153 states that "the Republic shall promote, and encourage Latin American and Caribbean integration, in the interest of advancing toward the creation of a community of nations, defending the region's economic, social, cultural, political and environmental interests. The Republic shall have the power to sign international treaties that implement and coordinate efforts to promote the common development of our nations, and to ensure the welfare of their peoples and the collective security of their inhabitants. To these ends, the Republic may transfer to supranational organizations, through treaties, the exercise of the necessary authorities to carry out these integration processes. In its policies of integration and union with Latin America and the Caribbean, the Republic shall give

privileged status to relations with other American countries, striving to make this a common policy throughout our Latin America. Provisions adopted within the framework of integration agreements shall be regarded as an integral part of the legal order in force and shall be applicable directly and with priority over internal legislation." This article sounds very much like Venezuela is advocating for the creation of a supranational organization within South America, much like the European Union. Title nine concerns the socioeconomic system. Article 229 states that "the economic regime of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela is based on the principles of social justice, democratization, efficiency, free competition, protection of the environment, productivity and solidarity, with a view to ensuring overall human development and a dignified and useful existence for the community. The State, jointly with private initiative, shall promote the harmonious development of the national economy, to the end of generating sources of employment, a high rate of domestic added value, raising the standard of living of the population and strengthen the economical sovereignty of the country, guaranteeing the reliability of the law; the solid dynamic, sustainable, continuing and equitable growth of the economy to ensure a just distribution of wealth through participatory democratic strategic planning with open consultation." Article 303 states that "for reasons of economic and political sovereignty and national strategy, the State shall retain all shares of Petroleos de Venezuela, S.A. or the organ created to manage the petroleum industry, with the exception of subsidiaries, strategic joint ventures, business enterprises and any other venture established or coming in the future to be established as a consequence of carrying on the business of Petroleos de Venezuela, S.A." This seems to be part of Chávez's plan to "re-nationalized" PDVSA, by ensuring its placement into the constitution. Articles 305-307 argue that the state will provide for the development of agriculture and that this will be done with subsidies and additional taxation if necessary. Article 308 states

that "the State shall protect and promote small and medium-sized manufacturers, cooperatives, savings funds, family owned businesses, small businesses and any other form of community association for purposes of work, savings and consumption, under an arrangement of collective ownership, to strengthen the country's economic development, based on the initiative of the people. Training, technical assistance and appropriate financing shall be guaranteed." Article 309 states that "typical Venezuelan crafts and folk industries shall enjoy the special protection of the State, in order to preserve their authenticity, and they shall receive credit facilities to promote production and marketing. Article 310 declares that "tourism is an economic activity in the national interest and represents a high priority in the country's strategy of diversification and sustainable development. As part of the foundation of the socioeconomic regime contemplated by this Constitution, the State shall promulgate measures to guarantee the development of tourism. The state shall see to the creation and strengthening of a national tourist industry." Article 316 states that "the taxation system shall seek a fair distribution of public burdens in accordance with the taxpayer's ability to pay, taking into account the principle of progressive taxation, as well as protection of the national economy and raising the standard of living of the population, the foundation therefore being an efficient system for the collection of taxes. Again, many of these articles are things that could be seen in some social democracies, but the fact that Venezuela necessitates them in the constitution seems to be taking them a step further.

The final section of the constitution that will be discussed is the eighth title, which provides for protection of the constitution. Article 337 states that "the President of the Republic, at a meeting of the Cabinet of Ministers, shall have the power to decree states of exception. Expressly defined as such are circumstances of a social, economic, political, natural or ecological nature which seriously affect the security of the Nation, institutions and citizens, in the face of

which the powers available to cope with such events are insufficient. In such case, the guarantees contained in this Constitution may be temporarily restricted, with the exception of those relating to the right to life, prohibition of incommunicative detention or torture, the right to due process, the right to information and other intangible human rights." Article 338 provides that "a state of alarm may be declared when catastrophes, public calamities or other similar events occur, seriously endangering the security of the Nation or its citizens. Such state of exception shall last for up to 30 days and may be extended for an additional 30 days. A state of economic emergency may be declared when extraordinary economic circumstances arise, such as to affect seriously the economic life of the Nation. The duration of this state of emergency shall be 60 days, with the possibility of extension for the same period. A state of internal or external commotion may be declared in the event of an internal or external conflict seriously endangering the security of the Nation, its citizens or its institutions. Such state of commotion shall last for up to 90 days and may be extended for an additional 90 days. The National Assembly has the responsibility of the approval for the extension of the states of exemption. An organic law shall regulate states of exception and determine the measures that may be adopted based on them." Article 339 states that "the Decree declaring a state of exception, which shall provide for regulating the right whose guarantee is restricted, shall be submitted within eight days of promulgation for consideration and approval by the National Assembly, or Delegated Committee and for a ruling by the Constitutional Division of the Supreme Tribunal of Justice on its constitutionality. The Decree must be in compliance with the requirements, principles and guarantees established in the International Pact on Civil and Political rights and the American Convention on Human Rights. The President of the Republic shall have the power to request its extension for a similar period, and the Decree shall be revoked by the National Executive or by the National Assembly or the

latter's Delegated Committee prior to the indicated date of expiration upon cessation of the conditions which produced them. The declaration of a state of exception does not interrupt the functioning of the organs of the Public Power." While some constitutions have provisions that allow certain rights to be suspended in times of chaos (e.g. the suspension of habeas corpus in the US Constitution), does that make the action any less authoritarian? The answer to this question becomes even more clear when attempting to define what constitutes a national crisis, economic or otherwise, and who are the ones in power making these decisions. There is currently, and has been for some time, an economic, social, and political crisis ongoing in Venezuela. The government has used the crisis as an excuse to justify some of its actions already. It seems that including a clause in any constitution providing its potential suspension is an act permitting potential authoritarianism.

Overall, this 1999 constitution does not seem like a very authoritarian document, or one that even has proposals that differ much from policies in social democratic countries, such as those in Scandinavia. While there are some clauses, such as the exceptions clause, that open the door for a discussion on authoritarianism, even the US Constitution has such a version of this clause. It is highly doubtful that many would categorize the US as having an authoritarian government. However, the issue does not seem to be the 1999 Venezuelan constitution itself, but the way in which the judiciary has interpreted that constitution, allowing Chávez to get away with certain things that would be considered unconstitutional. Chávez has also proposed referendums on the constitution which have failed to pass, resulting in Chávez bypassing the constitution and enacting his laws through decree anyway. This document provides a good starting point when analyzing the Venezuelan case, as it is the foundation of Venezuela's current

system. More documents and information will need to be examined in order to develop a rational answer to the research question.

### The Blue Book

One of the most important documents that must be examined is the book written by Chávez (2015), simply titled *The Blue Book (El Libro Azul)*. The book is essentially a first draft of Chávez's plans for Venezuela and the ideas that inspired them. The prologue is written by current Venezuelan President, Nicholas Maduro. In the introduction, President Maduro argues that some revolutionary leaders in Latin America are more important to the Bolivarian Revolution than Karl Marx: "Robinson is for us more important than Karl Marx, and it is because he thought our reality, taking root thought, assimilating all the ideas that had to be assimilated from Europe, but thinking from our Latin-American point of view, non-European, having the courage to formulate own ideas, de-colonizing himself when forging concepts, decolonizing in thinking and doing."

Chávez (2015) creates an idea known as "The Tree of Three Roots" in order to convey some of the tenets of the revolution's ideology. Each root represents the thinking of a Latin American revolutionary: Ezequiel Zamora, Simon Rodriguez, and Simon Bolivar. "And we made this chart representing the thinking of Bolivar and Simon Rodriguez, finding the commonality of the two roots, especially around equality and forms of government... And here we were wondering how to determine the value of each variable. We are moving into deep science, leading these ideas to the mathematical sense" (Chávez 2015, 33).

On the system used by the Revolutionary Bolivarian Movement, Chávez (2015) states, "It is the model that completes the ideological trilogy of the political project now rising from the bowels of the national history. It consists of a counseling, philosophical synthesis, one that shook the conservative oligarchy, when Ezequiel Zamora, 'The Sovereign People's general,' launched its massive federal slogans:

'Free men and land.'

'Popular elections'

'Horror for the oligarchy.'" (p. 50)

"He keeps inventing by ordering the application of measures destined to benefit the poor majorities;

1. Five hectares length squared in distance, contained in the four cardinal points, are to be destined for commune use of each town or villa.
2. Elimination of the lease payment system for the use of land for agricultural or livestock purposes.
3. Fix the ages of the laborers according to their work.
4. The landowners must permanently supply ten cows to the common land so as to supply daily, free of cost, a bottle of milk to poor households" (p. 53).

On the formulation of the Simon Bolivar National Project, Chávez (2015) articulates that, "the project is conceived as a chained series of situations within an evolutionary process that has a profound transformative characteristic." The three main areas Chávez articulates where Venezuela has fallen are: the socio-economic substructure, the political-

legal substructure, and the ideological substructure. Chávez argues that the revolution should focus on fixing issues within these areas (p. 55-56). Chávez then goes on to briefly outline his plans for the reform of the country.

### Concrete Robinsonian Utopia

"Elaborating on the thought of the master, we try to point out a level beyond the strategic objective of [the] Simon Bolivar National Project, a level where the rationale of the process is found: a higher stage of society where humans can 'consult themselves on the means to satisfy their desires' and avoid individual suffering. Such a situation cannot be imagined outside the scope of a deeply democratic and carrying society" (Chávez 2015, p. 58). "The Bolivarian root of such project reawakens the structure proposed by the liberator in Angostura (1819); and in Bolivia (1826). Thus, the Zamoran Federal state will be constituted by five public powers: 1. Executive Power. 2. Legislative Power. 3. Judicial Power. 4. Electoral Power. 5. Moral Power" (p. 69). "It shall become the new Venezuelan era under the sign of the Tree of Three Roots. It is already strongly foreshadowed on the horizon of the Venezuelan and Latin American 21st century" (p. 78).

Chávez (2015) argues that the ultimate objective of his project is to create a new model of society. "Napoleon wanted to govern human kind, Bolivar wanted them to govern themselves, and I want them to learn how to self-govern" (p. 82). "The trilogy of thoughts becomes evident, conforming a coherent being, a doctrinarian component, perfectly defined and homogenous, that identifies the ultimate, objective of the EBR Ideological System: to reach a new model of society (participative, protagonist, and supportive)" (p. 86).



Though this book does offer some interesting insights into the ideological and political system that Chávez claims he is out to create, there still seems to be no concrete ideas or specific policy proposals laid out here that describes how Venezuela will achieve such a system. Chávez also fails to mention the failures associated with previous attempts at socialism, such as the Soviet case and how this system will avoid repeating the same mistakes. There appears to be no sense of self-reflection. More documents with concrete policy proposal will need to be sought out and analyzed in order to reach any conclusions.

### The Red Book

Probably the most important document that will be discussed regarding the PSUV, is *El Libro Rojo*, or the *Red Book*, in English. The book states the PSUV's general principles and reason's for why socialism is the answer to Venezuela's problems. It also claims that it has the answers for how to transition the country from capitalism to socialism. In this section, the main points of the party's founding document will be summarized and later they will be put to the test of being examined side-by-side with the criticisms of John Dunn, Michael Ellman, and Alec Nove.

The PSUV blames neoliberalism as the main cause of Venezuela's issues. They argue that capitalism and the International Monetary Fund's (IMF) programs are driven by more powerful countries and that those countries are the source of the blame. They also argue that the government prior to Hugo Chávez's leadership in Venezuela also bears part of the blame, due to its protection of the interests of the wealthy during the events that led up to and occurred during the events of the Caracazo uprising in 1989. The book argues that the fall of the Soviet Union, which kept imperialist capitalism in check, resulted in a flood that has led to the financial issues

the world faces today. Venezuela and other Latin American countries face challenges due to imperialist powers, such as the United States, interfering in those countries, in order to expand their own interests.

Capitalism contains many problems and contradictions. While capitalism has also been responsible for many of today's marvels, these marvels only serve to advance the interests of the elites, according to PSUV. Global warming and environmental damage are largely the fault of bourgeois capitalism. The wealthy imperialist powers are on one pole and the poor and enslaved are on the other. The imperialist powers plan to recolonize the planet under their own domain. The answer to how to fight imperialism lies in revolution, PSUV claims, and the only way to end the suffering is to enact socialism. Socialism will be enacted by PSUV and will utilize the Mission programs to increase access to healthcare and education as a way to increase social inclusion and circumvent the bureaucratic and heavy structure of the bourgeois state. This will be done using oil rents as a source of financing.

The transition to socialism will be democratic. The party, together with the people, must strengthen the fight against corruption, creating conditions and the mechanisms to combat the vice entrenched structures of the bourgeois state, that promotes the moral and ethical degradation of institutions and of the human being, generating practices that conflict with ethical principles; in consequence, the incessant search for revolutionary transformation of the consciousness of social duty, combined with the application of legal instrumental elements that liquidate impunity, punishing implacable facts that go against ethics and public morals. Every act of corruption is an act against revolution. The party will work in the strengthening of revolutionary ethics, which is the coherence between what is said and what is done, between discourse and action, PSUV

claims (p. 34-35). Interestingly, corruption has continued to be a major problem in Venezuela and may have even increased under the PSUV's leadership (Transparency International 2018).

The book argues that PSUV must be framed as an internationalist movement to contribute to the union of the peoples that struggle to establish emancipatory and libertarian projects in Latin America, the Caribbean, and other continents in the world. PSUV will promote strategic alliances with other countries and create the Organization of Latin American States and the Caribbean. It argues that the exploitation of man by man contradicts feelings of solidarity and mutilates fraternal links. Capitalism undermines the human condition and is against permanence of the species. Irrational imperatives of growth and accumulation causes the planetary destruction of ecosystems and threatens to extinguish sources of life. This catastrophic dynamic is caused by a socio-economic system that dispenses with the needs of humanity and acts bound by its own logic, compelled to constant growth in pursuit of profit. The insane race causes periodic moments of crisis that the system "solves" with the massive destruction of human lives, resources, material goods, and natural resources. Socialism is the only way to guarantee the existence of humanity (p. 41).

The PSUV argues that ever since society was divided into classes, there was resistance and combat against oppression and exploitation. But from the victory of capitalism against feudalism and the predominance of the capitalist mode of production on the world scale, the social struggles of the nascent industrial workers movement merged with the most advanced of the time and gave rise to a struggle for socialism based on science and the deepest feelings of human beings (p. 41-42). The construction of socialism is the only way out against capitalism, in its imperialist phase and to achieve the redemption of the people. The construction of socialism

has started in Venezuela, according to the party, and the crisis of capitalism is evidently unavoidable.

The party states it is born to defend the homeland, to bring the revolution as its emancipatory goal, as a tool to carry the people and the exploited to power, to transition from capitalism to socialism, progressively transforming the relationships of production, exchange, and ownership of the means of production for the liberation of the working class, ending the control and monopolization of the means of production by the bourgeoisie, transferring them to the power of the workers, to the communities and to join all of the peoples of the world in the task of burying capitalism and building a new world, tailored to a free and full humanity. This implies socialization of the means of production, rational distribution of land and riches, and fighting corruption and bureaucracy. They claim it is about changing the current economic model of capitalism, to one that fully satisfies the needs of humanity (p. 43-44). The book also claims that socialism is the only true way to resume the deep meaning of democracy, with the development of the maximum popular power as the most complete form of participatory democracy, of the participation of the popular masses in the construction of the new society, where the power of the organized people legitimizes and enhances actions toward a human society, in loving and peaceful coexistence, in the search and perpetuation of a world in which justice and social equality prevail as basic principles for the design of the distribution of wealth and the benefits of society, ethics, and moral socialism, as a fundamental task that determines self-denying behavior of members of the society, for the fundamental happiness of being (p. 44-45).

The PSUV lists numerous general principles in the *Red Book*: anti-capitalism and anti-imperialism, anti-corruption, socialism, Marxism, Bolivarianism, the commitment to the interests

of the working class and the people, humanitarianism, patriotism, unitarism, a sense of ethics with revolutionary morals and defense of the rights of Mother Earth, the defense of gender equality and equity, defense of the rights of people with disabilities, defense of participative and protagonist democracy in society, being the political vanguard of the revolutionary process, being original and creative, the defense and promotion of popular power, promotion of endogenous development, defense of equality within the party, being critical and self-critical, basing the party on the principle of democratic centralism and collective management, being disciplined, and being the practitioner of internal democracy in the party.

The *Red Book* then turns to the driving forces or subjects of the Bolivarian revolution which it argues are the workers, who are the creators of social wealth and are expropriated from their labor, and in such condition, are called to lead the revolution in the framework of the class struggle. All those subjugated by capitalism are potential subjects of the revolution and must be won for the policy of PSUV to fully realize its emancipatory feat. The PSUV claims it is an expression of the unity of the people. The main enemy of the revolution is capitalist imperialism, especially its hegemonic center, the American government, and transnational monopolies that serve as a social base for imperialism (p. 87-88).

The PSUV argues that it must use peaceful, democratic electoral struggles to win the fight for socialism. There must be a fight against political culture inherited from bourgeois liberalism, and the consolidation of participative and protagonist democracy. A lot of the forms of democratic struggle have a liberal bourgeois character, because they were always manipulated by the bourgeoisie and only its exercise, accompanied by the elevation of the political consciousness of the people, will highlight its limitation and the need to transcend them through genuine democracy, that is, democratic socialism. While the PSUV argues for democratism and peaceful

change, it states that the Bolivarian Revolution is not an unarmed revolution, the defense of the homeland, and the revolution occurs through participation of all the people in defense of security, integrity, and national and popular sovereignty (p. 87-89).

It is stated in the *Red Book* that the main task to fight for “the struggle against the alienation of the social conscience and for the construction of a revolutionary conscience, the fight against domination and political oppression and for transforming politics into a way for full, dignified and rewarding experience; the struggle to make democracy a space for participation and popular protagonism and the fight against the exploitation of the work of others and the humanization and release of work” (p. 101-102). In order for this to be successful, PSUV argues that the republic needs to be “re-founded,” to construct a state of law and social justice that is based on truth, justice, and beauty. Oligarchic, bourgeois, and imperialist ideals need to be defeated. Essentially, the party wants to transform the cultural morals of the country and reinvent society.

In order for the party to “re-found” the republic, it must commit to four ideals: 1) To commit to ending the alienation of work and increase access to free and liberating work, 2) Allow all communication to be inter-subjective, honest, argumentative, and critical to the service of the revolutionary consciousness, 3) Promote cooperation and solidarity, and 4) Promote the commune, as an organized form of the community to be the fundamental cell of the new society and the new socialist state. According to the party, politics will also be transformed. To be effective in the transition state, “we need a strong state that gradually assumes various spheres of economic and social and cultural life” (p. 106-108).

The book calls for the creation of a self-sustaining endogenous development model. This model will include six essential tasks: 1) New forms of power based on participation, in the

construction and in the taking of collective decisions by workers, 2) New forms of administration, public and social management of the companies and the state that allow austerity, optimal rationalization in the use of the resources of various kinds, 3) The joint protagonist participation of the workers and communities, 4) The construction of social knowledge as seeds of autonomy and independence of science and technology, 5) A sustainable social conception and practice, that is, a rational use of the natural resources that do not threaten the balance of ecological systems or compromise the existence of future generations, and 6) The recovery of traditional technologies, popular invention, and the appropriation of science and relevant technology, with a humanist sense, especially of technologies of information and communication for social, collective, and community uses (p. 110-114).

The PSUV argues that it is only possible to advance in the elimination of capitalism if the social relationships of production based on the exploitation of alien work are eliminated. In turn, this is done by eliminating the private ownership of the means of production, in particular, private monopolistic property. This is a principle of the construction of socialism. The party argues that this is the only way. Half-baked attempts, such as establishing a “welfare state” will not alter the relations of capitalist production and will never advance in the construction of socialism (p. 116-117). The move to humanize work will include the following principles: 1) Progressive and growing reduction until its definitive elimination of the exploitation of work of others, that is, progressive reduction until its definitive elimination of the rate of capital gain (operating surplus), 2) Turn work into the fundamental value of production relations and relationships of social networks, promoting the forms of work cooperation, solidarity, and volunteers, 3) Guarantee the incorporation of work of all and everyone, and 4) Progressively introduce substantial improvements in working conditions through humanization of the

workspaces, the use of the right technologies and partner training policies for the improvement of conditions of occupational health and safety, social safety, and collective recognition to promote the creative effort of the workers, the elimination of privileges, among other factors, and reducing the wage gap.

The PSUV argues that ownership in their socialist system would take the following forms: 1) The elimination of monopolistic private national and foreign property on the means of production, especially the essentials; 2) Promotion of non-monopolistic private property with social functions; 3) Promotion of joint ventures with a majority state action and progressive control of workers under the following terms; 4) With foreign companies: technology transfer and of knowledge, realization of social investments correlative to the amount of investment, rigorous compliance with laws and the established contract, guarantee of respect for Mother Earth and national sovereignty; 5) With Community Councils: progressive transfer from state property to communal property, depending on efficiency, honesty in the administration of goods and accumulation of the economic surplus; 6) Promotion of communal property, the form of collective property that can only be used in community; 7) State property, as an indirect form of collective property; and 8) Personal property consisting of personal and family property, which cannot be used for the exploitation of someone else's work.

The *Red Book* sets up the argument that production needs to be organized and that the party must do several things in order to do so: 1) rupture the financialization of the economic systems that allow for exploitation; 2) creation of a state bank; 3) regulation of exchange rates; 4) Control of illegal money laundering activities; 5) review of legitimacy and legality of external debt; and 5) Substitution of the US dollar and US banks to maintain international reserves and as a reserve currency for international payment. The book also states that the country must break its



dependence on others by: 1) Eliminating dependence on international monopolies; 2) Creating a robust agricultural sector; 3) Produce more equipment, technologies, services, and capital within the country; 4) Reigning in “free trade” and eliminate unequal exchange associated with it; 5) advance territorial integration; 6) Promoting international organizations that integrate the economies of states with similar goals; and 7) Stressing the need for endogenous development. The party also states that the country needs to radically alter the patterns of cultural consumption. Ways of financing the administration are also discussed by the party. Two key goals that are very important for the discussion of the paper are: 1) Control by the state of the basic companies and 2) The development of a financing model according to centralized planning of the sectors of the basic companies.

The programmatic guide of PSUV is very bold. It wants to take the system that it claims is representative of what it deems imperialist capitalism, and remove it from Venezuela, turning Venezuela into a Bolivarian Socialist state. While it does make general claims throughout the book of what it wants to accomplish, it never directly states how it is to achieve these goals, only that it wants to reach them. This is the major problem that Dunn and other scholars have with socialist thinking. While socialists claim that their ideas are motivated by the good intention of emancipating the oppressed in society, they cannot articulate how such a transition is to take place. The founding documentation of the PSUV appears to be no different. One would also need to examine what PSUV says it would like to do, as well as what it actually has done, in order to determine if it has met the criticisms proposed by the aforementioned scholars. This analysis will take place at the end of this chapter.

### Hugo Chávez's Interview with Larry King (2009)

In 2009, CNN journalist Larry King interviewed President Hugo Chávez. Some interesting statements made by Chávez himself came out of this interview. The conversation will be highlighted and analyzed. Chávez argues that he wants the U.S. to respect the sovereignty of Venezuela's borders. He claims that the Bush 44 government "toppled me" (referring to the 2002 coup) and "asked for my assassination." Chávez claimed that he saw his assassins and that the order for the coup came directly from the White House. He repeatedly calls the U.S. the "Empire" and states that it is looking to harm Venezuela. The threat of imperialism has been central to Chávez's rhetoric from the outset of his presidency and he claims that he needs to defend the country's oil from the U.S., who seeks to steal it.

Ironically, while Chávez claimed to be a champion of democracy, he defended his cooperation with Iran, a country permeated by authoritarianism, as a right of Venezuela. He argues that internal issues within Iran are not the concern of the Venezuelan government. Chávez is very critical of the U.S. support of Israel and refers to Israel as a genocidal state and argues that Iran simply wants nuclear energy for peaceful use in the future. Venezuela is pursuing a policy of "realism" in the international field, looking to forge an alliance with any country that is opposed to the U.S. regardless of its ideology.

On the issue of Venezuela's dependence on exporting oil to the U.S., Chávez acknowledges this, stating, "We all need America" for economic success. At the same time, he argues that the U.S. needs Venezuela, with Citgo (a PDVSA subsidiary) providing the poor in the U.S. with heating oil during the winter months. King then asks, "With all of the oil Venezuela has, why is there so much poverty?" Chávez argues that while poverty still exists in Venezuela, that it has decreased exponentially. He claims that when he became president, poverty was nearly at 60%

and at the time of the interview, it had dropped to below 30% and that extreme poverty was near 7% and that unemployment was 20% and that it had dropped to 6%. He argued that the Great Recession of 2008-2009 had not affected Venezuela and that even during the world economic crisis, Venezuela was still able to provide free healthcare and food for the poor. He claims that Venezuela has changed and has "redistributed the income" to those who need it.

King then turns to the issue of the proposed 2014 referendum on term limits, asking, "Do you want to be president for life?" Chávez state, "No, as long as my people want." Chávez argues that his government and the people want to move away from liberal democracy, which he says is for the rich. His government wants to open the referendum to mayors, governors, etc. He states that he does not want full democracy now, but more democracy for the time being and that one day, Venezuela will hopefully achieve full democracy. The central need is to transfer power to the people.

On the issue of being accused of violating free speech by targeting media companies, Chávez claims that the independent media is not independent because their speech belongs to the owners and that Venezuela has more freedom of speech than ever. King then interrupts asking Chávez if he closed 32 network stations. Chávez claims that is a lie. "If they broke a law and they were closed, they lost their right." King then asks, "Are you going to close Globovision?" Chávez answers, "I don't know. It depends on them," and then accused them of sponsoring coups and breaching loyalty to the country.

Chávez stated that he met with trade union members while in the U.S. and said, "You do not decide what you do in life, your responsibility is thrust upon you." He claims that there is a world campaign to defend a broken system. As a Christian, he claimed, that he wants justice and equality, and that is the only way to achieve peace. His goal is to take people out of poverty.

While this interview does not offer that much in terms of analyzing Venezuela's road to socialism, there are a few key things mentioned by Chávez that indicate he is not necessarily opposed to authoritarianism, or he at least will not admit his actions have been authoritarian. The most glaring example of this was when he argued that he had not closed 32 media networks for being pro-opposition in their coverage of the government, elections, the news, etc. When asked if he was going to close Globovision, a major media network, Chávez essentially said he would do so if they did not halt their support of his ouster as president. Other stations that have been accused of being part of the opposition party have also been closed down. These statements made by Chávez do not make it sound as though he supports an open media and his actions as president to quell the opposition's influence surely do not help his case.

#### President Maduro's CNN Interview (2014)

In 2014, President Maduro was interviewed by CNN's Christiane Amanpour. Compared to the 2009 interview of Hugo Chávez, discussed above, Maduro seemed to make more outlandish claims about the opposition when confronted on Venezuela's accused use of authoritarian tactics to subvert the opposition. Amanpour opens the interview by claiming she is surprised that Maduro would want to speak the truth to foreign media. Maduro says that the foreign press is always welcome in Venezuela and that Venezuela has always guaranteed freedom of the press, but that CNN Spanish supports foreign interventions and entices revolution within Venezuela.

Amanpour then asserts that Maduro has called the opposition fascists and asks if that is what he really thinks. Maduro responds by saying that some members of the opposition are democrats, but that others participated in the coup against Chávez in April and December 2002 and the economic coup in 2004. He does state that this group is a "tiny minority," however. He

claims that he tried to make deals with the opposition but that rightwing extremists tried to disrupt the deals. Amanpour then asks if Maduro is concerned about forfeiting democratic legitimacy by concentrating more power in the presidency. Maduro claims that his concern is to strengthen democracy and that democracy has been strengthened at all levels. At this point in the interview, it seems that Maduro is justifying authoritarian rule. Amanpour then asks if protest is allowed under the constitution then why is the opposition leader, Leopoldo Lopez in prison. Maduro states that society has a right to peace and that the constitution guarantees it. He claims that Lopez promotes violence.

When asked about relations between Venezuela and the U.S., Maduro claims that relations with the U.S. are very good, specifically with workers, unions, artists, intellectuals, and social movements. Between the two governments, however, he claims that there is well documented evidence that the Pentagon has been conspiring to stop the revolution and reconquer South America. He claims that U.S. elites have a project to establish hegemony and that the idea that Venezuela is in despair is an outside idea. It is asserted that the revolution has helped the poor. To this, Amanpour responds by asking what the causes of the financial crisis in Venezuela are. Maduro essentially claims that there is not a financial crisis and that things are going very well. He claims Venezuela has gone from a GDP of \$90 billion to a GDP of over \$400 billion in a 15-year period. Children now have free public education in Venezuela, Maduro claims, while U.S. youth do not. He argues that Venezuela is building a "different economic model than the one in the U.S." Amanpour responds, "we do not understand... is the private sector the enemy? Does government bear any responsibility for mismanagement of the economy? Do you dare to reform because reforms would hurt the people you have been helping all of these years?" She asks if they "take any responsibility." All countries have their own share of problems, is how Maduro responds.

He argues there are problems with inflation and increased prices do not justify toppling a government and that Venezuela is facing attacks. The claim is then made by the president that unemployment has dropped structurally in the last decade from 25% to less than 10%, extreme poverty in the 1990s was 35-40%, it is now at 6%. Maduro claims the goal is to eradicate it completely by 2019.

To conclude the interview, Amanpour asks how hard it is for Maduro to fill the role of Chávez, the person seen as the father of the revolution. Maduro responds that Chávez held the ideas of Bolivar and that, "I sleep well because I have been loyal and hold a part of the legacy of Chávez and do nothing for my own profit." He concludes the interview by telling Amanpour that CNN is always welcome in Venezuela.

This interview seemed to be similar to the one conducted by Larry King of Hugo Chávez in 2009. Maduro seemed to be deflecting the questions of accusations of undemocratic actions around elections and authoritarian attacks against opposition members to statistics about unemployment and poverty, while not really answering the questions. It seems that the Maduro government, much like the Chávez government, does not really have any concrete plans for satisfying the economic and social needs of the Venezuelan people and seem to think that the opposition are a small group of extremists, when in reality, it seems support for the opposition grows every day. It appears that Maduro does not want to admit that the policies of Chávez have failed Venezuela and seems to not even want to admit that there is an economic crisis at all.

#### Second Six-Year Economic Plan (2013-2019)

In 2012, Chávez was running for re-election as president of Venezuela. In October of that year, Chávez released a second proposed six-year plan for the Socialist Bolivarian Government. It

This document, along with the 1999 constitution are probably the two most important documents that will be analyzed in this paper. The introduction by Chávez is divided up into three sections. Within the very opening of the introduction, Chávez states that the goal of his movement is to "liberate" the Venezuelan homeland from "the empire" (presumably the United States), and the "bourgeoisie" that have been actively undermining the people of Venezuela. He states that the liberating thesis of Venezuela will be through "Independence and Socialism." He states that his project is not complete and is a daily and permanent struggle. This sounds very Marxian and also sets up the idea of perpetual revolution that has been seen in past attempts at socialism, such as in Cuba.

Immediately in the opening of the second section, Chávez states that the goal of this program is to transition to socialism and create the radicalization of pre-eminent and participatory democracy. He states that this process of transition needs to be sped up by reinstating the "people's power." He argues that the process towards socialism has already begun in Venezuela, but that the country largely remains under a capitalist system and that the only way to advance the socialist agenda is to continue the program's implementation without slowing down. Chávez states that "oppression, exploitation, and domination," are still prevalent in the daily life of the average Venezuelan and that "it is necessary to completely pulverize the bourgeois State that we have inherited, which is still being replicated through its old and nefarious practices and ensure continuity in the process of creation of new forms of policy management." This language is very similar to that used by Lenin following the Bolshevik Revolution in the Soviet Union in which Lenin wanted to tear down the existing state in order to construct a new one based on his vision. He argues that a multipolar world that favors a shift away from the status quo is already taking place and that now is the time for a new alternative socialist model.

Chávez argues that this program must "trespass the 'point no return'" and that the "old must finally end so that the birth of the new can be manifested to the full." This statement seems to mean that once Chávez successfully implements his program, there is no going back to alternative models advocated by any opposition. This program intends to transform society permanently. Chávez even states that the transition to socialism should be "irreversible."

### The Program

This program is a draft that builds upon the First Socialism program of the *Simon Bolivar Nation*, which was to be implemented during the 2007-2013 period, Chávez states. He argues that the 2013-2019 program is set to expand upon and give continuity to the first program and to guide the nation in the transition toward the Bolivarian socialism of the 21st century. The program is broken into five historical objectives. Each will be briefly discussed here.

The first objective is to defend, expand and consolidate the most treasured asset we have reconquered after 200 years: National Independence. Chávez states that to ensure continuity of the revolutionary process, his movement must succeed in an overwhelming victory in the presidential elections of October 7, 2012.

The second objective is to continue building the Bolivarian socialism of the 21st century in Venezuela as an alternative to the savage and destructive capitalist system and ensure "the highest possible security, political stability and happiness" for our people. The second also claims to want "to build out socialism in order to achieve supreme happiness for our people." Chávez argues that the economic system must move away from the capitalist system, which is "oil-oriented," and a "rentier-like model," to a socialist production model, which will create a more just and egalitarian society, which will satisfy the basic needs of the people. Chávez states



that this program will transition the country away from the old socialist-capitalist model that still exists and remove any classist and racial bias in the justice system that pervades Venezuelan society to this day. This will be achieved through the power of the Bolivarian Constitution, which will allow for the creation of the Missions and the Socialist Grand Missions.

The third goal is to turn Venezuela into a social, economic, and political power as part of the Great Emerging Power of Latin America and the Caribbean and ensure the creation of a peace zone in Our America. This proposal hinges on making optimal use of Venezuela's own natural resources and expanding the military power and strengthening the Bolivarian military doctrine and national geopolitical development. This process also relies on inter-regional organizations, such as the Bolivarian Alliance for the Peoples of Our America (ALBA), PETROCARIBE, the Union of South American Nations (UNASUR), and the Community of Latin America and Caribbean States (CELAC).

The fourth goal is to contribute to the development of a new international geopolitics that gives rise to a multicentered and multipolar world that would allow for the achievement of the equilibrium of the Universe and ensure peace on the planet. This goal centers around anti-imperialism and Chávez states that Venezuela needs to reduce its economic dependence on nations that are seen to be imperialist, such as the United States and diversify its economic relationships.

The fifth goal is to preserve peace in the planet and save the human species. This goal aims to create an "eco-socialist production mode" that seeks to address and reverse the causes of global climate change. Chávez states that the "predating capitalist mode" is to blame for climate change.

While Chávez's program does seem to provide a roadmap for how Venezuela can transition from a capitalist to a socialist system, it is a crude roadmap, at best. It does not delve deeper into how it plans to achieve these goals. Chávez does claim that these goals will be achieved through specific programs, such as developing more agricultural land, for example. However, he does not state how such programs will be implemented or managed, just that they will be created. His ideas lack specificity and thus it would be difficult to extrapolate whether a socialist system could be feasibly implemented.

#### The Fascist Coup Against Venezuela

Hugo Chávez (2003) has published a book entitled *The Fascist Coup Against Venezuela: The Life of the Homeland is at Stake Here*, as a major criticism of the coup that was attempted against him by a number of military officers in 2002. The book contains a collection of speeches and addresses that Chávez made between December 2002 and January 2003 and offers an interesting insight into Chávez's and his government's reaction to the opposition, who has accused Chávez of being a dictator. This book allows researchers on this subject to analyze Chávez in his own words.

Chávez does not hide his polarizing and radical rhetoric. In a speech he gave in Caracas in 2003, as a result of the killing government employees and the firing of PDVSA employees, Chávez said, "PDSVA is being purged for the benefit of all Venezuelans." Chávez claims to get his ideas from South American colonial revolutionaries and is trying to take their ideas and mold them to fit his agenda for 21st century socialism. "Nothing could be better, therefore, than to review Zamora's doctrine, his plan for distributing lands to the peasants so they could work them, his plan for an agrarian revolution, his education plan for an egalitarian society, without gross

privileges for a small minority against the interests of the majority" (p. 85). These ideas have been used by Chávez to justify authoritarian actions. "I ordered the military to seize the oil wells, to seize the refineries, to seize the tanker trucks and get them rolling, and they did. I am also prepared to take actions that need to be taken to ensure the distribution of food to the Venezuelan people" (p. 92).

Chávez (2003) does not try to hide the fact that he is trying to gain influence within the major spheres of public life, such as within the educational sector. In a speech given at a ceremony to establish the National Front to Defend the Right to Education, he says, "It seems that the time has come to transform the universities from within, to transform education from the very bottom of its historic structures, inherited from the old order?" (p. 119). The ultimate goal of these actions, according to Chávez, is to deepen and consolidate the Bolivarian Revolution in Venezuela. Chávez also makes the statement that he and his movement prefer peaceful means to achieve its goals, but that if met with violence, they will meet that violence with further violence: "But there is no other road than revolution. This is no longer any kind of dilemma for us. The dilemma facing us today, or one of the several dilemmas, is how to carry forth this revolution. Peacefully and democratically, or by the much more turbulent roads of violence? We prefer the former, but let it be known to all those who oppose this road, like venomous snakes: in the end, there is only one road. We have no plans for retreat, and no plans for defeat" (p. 174). However, Chávez did claim that he supports the existence of a legitimate opposition party, or so he at least claimed: "We need opposition, the country needs a serious opposition leadership. We need a rational opposition leadership, and we would hope – we told them – that you would have the courage and the strength and the leadership ability to reassume the leadership of that opposition, within the framework of the constitution and law, and then we can discuss projects and ideas" (p.

176). However, to counter Chávez's point, it seems that the very constitutions and laws he speaks of seem to be limiting the ability of a legitimate opposition to exist. "Let us hope that a democratic opposition rises up in Venezuela! The country needs it" (p. 177).

When it came to calls for early elections to have Chávez removed from power, Chávez himself declared, "Well why don't you call an earlier election? Me! You're asking me to become a dictator? No one in Venezuela can call early elections, because it is not in the constitution, it would be like staging a coup d'état on the constitution" (p. 180). In fact, Chávez claimed that the very foundation of Venezuelan is based on the new constitution: "And precisely in order for the law to rule in Venezuela, an empire must be established in Venezuela, yes, the empire of the constitution and the laws. That is our empire!" (p. 193).

On the economic side, capital flight was, and still is, a big problem for Venezuela. Many from the upper and middle classes of society have fled to other places, such as the United States. Thus, this has drained Venezuela of much capital and left the governments cash reserves at dangerously low levels. Chávez stated that the government is committed to stemming capital flight: "No, I repeat, we can't let our foreign reserves reach a critical low, which we have defined clearly. That's the reason for this decision, and we're working on the details of a foreign exchange convention. For five banking days that's today Wednesday, Thursday, and Friday of this week and Monday and Tuesday of next foreign exchange will be frozen. And during this period, the Central Bank and the government will be working out strict rules for stopping the flight of capital, also to protect the economy, in other words what is generally known as exchange control" (p. 224). "In order to safeguard our foreign exchange reserves that have been badly hit by capital flight, by hot money, we have suspended the sale of US dollars for one week and we are carefully designing, and in particular, anticipating the consequences of a foreign

exchange control mechanism" (p. 299). As the economic situation grew worse in Venezuela, many wealthy and middle-class individuals were accused of "hoarding" food and other necessities, especially large stores. In response, Chávez stated that those accused and found guilty of hoarding would have their excess food and supplies seized: "Any company, no matter how big it is, no matter who owns it, which is hoarding any type of food which the people needs, must be searched and seized. Of course, when I say this, everyone knows what I am implicitly referring to, to the fact that all of these procedures must stick closely to the law, because we are not talking about trampling all over anyone" (p. 241). This quote is interesting because Chávez says that he is absolutely against the government trampling on anyone's rights, but discusses the potential for forced confiscation of property, such as food. Of course, Chávez claims it is justified because he claims that the wealthy are hoarding food and other essential goods in order to harm the general population. Chávez claims to be against authoritarianism, but quotes Vladimir Lenin in order to criticize capitalism: "Since Vladimir Ilich Ulianov Lenin wrote a thesis, and I remember that in my youth I had read some of it, which is called *Imperialism, the Highest Stage of Capitalism*, and I think that we might think about developing the idea of a thesis for these times which could be called, Fascism, the Highest Phase of Neoliberalism. For that is what these people want to impose on Venezuela, a movement of neoliberal fascism, which I think is the worst of all possible manifestations of neoliberalism" (p. 257). Chávez has accused the bankers within Venezuela of being treasonous and in favor of neoliberal fascism. He has even called for the seizure and nationalization of some banks, and some have been: "We have also opened an administrative inquiry, for example, into the banks, into almost all private banks. Some of them still don't want to open their banks, we will take over the banks as well, we have no problem with that. The law sets it forth very clearly, they are violating the constitution and

banking law. The first thing that we can do is fine them and if they don't take any notice of the fine we could change the board of directors of the banks, even when they are privately owned. The government can appoint a board of directors" (p. 265). Chávez essentially says that businesses that do not fall in line and remain loyal to his government will be punished. This is similar to what his government did to PDVSA: "If we did it in PDSVSA, we have more right in doing so in a bank. PDSVA was much more complex than one bank or even two banks" (p. 266). Chávez also took the same stance when it came to other private institutions, such as schools: "The private high schools don't want to open, well quite simply, I said to the minister, Aristobulo, that they should have their government subsidies withdrawn once and for all, because if they don't want to work why should we give them subsidies" (p. 266)? Chávez said that if private businesses remained close and refused to yield, even after having subsidies stripped from them, then the government would open their own alternative versions of their businesses. On the issue of schools, Chávez said: "And we will open more of our own schools, we will ask for help from whoever we can to guarantee the education of every Venezuelan. To sum up, this government feels much stronger today than yesterday and today, this January 23 all I wanted was to take an X-ray of the moment with my reflections on the moments we have experienced and of the strategic direction we will be heading towards. Completing the projects for political, economic and social transformation, those are our goals" (p. 266-267).

Chávez claims that one of the most important things that must be done to achieve the goals that the government has set, it to increase democratization, especially amongst the poor. "Here we have a new democratic political model – as I was saying – for participatory democracy, which is much more than mere representative democracy; but this process is just beginning give power to the people, give power to the people. It's not 'all power to the soviets';

but is power for the people. I am convinced, brother, that the only way of putting an end to poverty is by giving power to the poor, not by giving hand-outs to the poor but by giving them power to make decisions and find their own solutions, participatory democracy, a new democracy, a new economic model for economic democracy and for a fair distribution of national income” (p. 273). It is interesting that Chávez would claim "it is not 'all power to the soviets.'" Many times, in his political career, he has gone back and forth, contradicting himself. Sometimes he says that he wants to build a model that is similar to what Marx described, which is what the Soviet Union and Cuba (which he admires) are built upon. Other times he seems to claim to want to take a more moderate, democratic approach. Either way, from some of the actions that Chávez, Maduro, and the Venezuelan government have taken, demonstrate that it is somewhere closer to an authoritarian system, than a fair democracy. Chávez has even seemed to champion mob rule, when it benefits his agenda. In 1989, the Caracazo occurred when the poor, who lived on the mountainside surrounding Caracas, descended into the city, rioting and looting. Chávez has praised this series of riots as a stand against authoritarianism and neoliberal fascism: "In Venezuela, fortunately, we had a popular rebellion called the Caracazo, against the IMF package. The last time that Venezuela signed a package with the IMF, there was a popular uprising when thousands died. After that we had two military uprisings. The popular and military uprisings curbed the neoliberal program and cleared an alternative path, the one we are taking now" (p. 288- 289). Again, it seems Chávez is claiming that violence is an acceptable way to achieve Bolivarian socialism, even if it is against programs that were implemented through agreements between the former democratically elected government of Venezuela and the IMF. Chávez even states that the government is responsible for arming the citizens with the ability to bring about a transformation of society: "Who thinks these 224 million poor are going to sit back

and die in a corner? No, this is a time bomb that must be dealt with on time, and not by giving them handouts, but by transforming the political, economic and social models so that they can be involved and have the same rights as the middle and upper class. If we cannot make these changes peacefully, as we are trying to do in Venezuela, this time the world – not only in Latin America but also on other continents – will be faced with war and death, and I who am a Christian, do not believe that this is the world's destiny" (p. 291).

The tool that allowed Chávez and his government to cement their hold on power, was the 1999 Constitution that reformed the entire political system in Venezuela. Essentially it has given Chávez and the president of the country the ability to rule through decree. "This constitution enshrines the rights of workers and children, gender equality, a ban on privatizing PDSVA, as well as social rights. A whole chapter elaborates on the ban on privatizing the social security programs and on the provision of free, mandatory and quality education for all. It also obligates the State to put an end to latifundia and irregular land ownership, as well as to support and prioritized cooperative projects, including subsistence fishermen rather than the large-scale trawlers. The Constitution establishes the rights of the indigenous peoples, and a respect for their customs and language" (p. 311). Chávez stated that the goal is to reform the political system itself: "Our purpose is to introduce a participatory model in which the people play a leading role through their involvement in local citizen's assemblies that make decisions that are binding on the established powers. All in all, here is an advanced and revolutionary Constitution" (312). "This law provides for mechanisms to put an end to latifundia, seize idle land, expropriate, as required, the property concentrated in the hands of a few owners, and restructure land ownership. The law goes beyond to establish financing arrangements, as well as technology and machinery support, for farmers. It is a revolutionary law" (p. 314). This new constitution has allowed



Chávez to enact many policies that assist in carrying out his agenda: "We passed a new Income Tax Act. The Constitution typifies the crime of tax evasion" (p. 314). "We passed a new Banking Act to, among other things, force the private banks to finance with preferred rates certain projects that are indispensable for our development; for example, farming programs. We passed a Microfinance Act that established a microfinancing arrangement available to the poor. Under this Act, a Women's Bank, a People's Bank and a Microfinancing Fund were established. So far, we have extended hundreds of thousands of microcredits to the poor" (p. 315). It is clear that this new constitution has allowed the Chávez government to carry out much of its own agenda. In areas where it has prevented Chávez from carrying out his agenda, the constitution has been changed to make it in agreement with the proposed policies, interpreted in the government's favor by the judiciary, or ignored altogether.

#### Frontline: The Hugo Chávez Show

In the PBS documentary *Frontline: Alò Presidente* (2008), there is much discussion over Chávez's rise to power and how he became such a controversial leader. The documentary mentions that while Chávez's government publicly states that it is committed to the defeat of the FARC (a rebel organization following a Marxist doctrine) on the Colombia-Venezuela border, many have accused the Chávez government of supporting the rebels. Chávez has also been accused of being critical of anyone who questions him. The documentary mentions that in 2007, Chávez was backing a referendum on the constitution that would have given the executive branch of government more power. The referendum vote failed. However, twelve laws were passed afterward that closely resembled the proposed constitutional reforms. Chávez's government appeared to be committed to getting his agenda passed one way or another.

On the economic front, Chávez stated that he was committed to building a better economy for Venezuela. He stated that he wanted to focus more heavily on textile production and construction. He also wanted to focus on land reform and creating economic cooperatives. Critics of Chávez have stated that while Chávez claims he is committed to an egalitarian goal of ending poverty in Venezuela, his policies have increased poverty overall, while leading to a new class known as “Bolígarchs”. These are individuals who have gotten wealthy off of being invested in industries or economic activities that the government has had a large role in since instituting policies related to the Bolivarian Revolution, such as the oil industry with PDVSA. Many argue that this Bolígarch system is no different than the corruption that has always historically existed within Venezuelan politics, and that it may even be worse than has been seen in the past.

#### An Analysis of the Chávez/Maduro Economy

When examining the economic policies proposed by Hugo Chávez during his reelection campaign in 2012 and comparing them with the economic situation in Venezuela today, one thing becomes very clear: Chávez's policies have not worked and have had a negative effect on the Venezuelan economy. In conducting research on the economic situation facing Venezuela, it appears that some of the government's economic policies have been directly responsible for creating the situation that the country is now facing.

Food shortages seem to be the greatest consequence of these economic policies, which has increased starvation and has even led to death. According to Zuñiga and Miroff (2017), 11,000 babies died in 2016, many in large part due to malnutrition. This was an overall infant mortality rate increase of 30%. A survey of 6,500 Venezuelans found that three-quarters reported

losing weight in 2016, with an average loss of 19 pounds. But which economic policies can be blamed for this vast shortage of food? According to multiple sources, price controls on certain foodstuff are to blame (Aslund, 2017; Yudiana, 2017; Zuñiga and Miroff, 2017). Price controls are a favored economic tool of the Chávez/Maduro administrations.

The Chávez and Maduro governments, in order to boost its oil incomes, artificially pegged its currency (the Bolivar) above the market rate (Yudiana, 2017). This gives the consumer the feeling that they have more money than they really do, as more often than not in Venezuela, the US Dollar is exchanged at the black-market rate. The sharp drop in oil prices since 2014 has not helped the Venezuelan economy, which still relies chiefly on oil as its main export. This has resulted in a decrease of food imports by about 73%, leading to vast shortages of certain foodstuff and the price controls on certain foods has made those that would normally be readily available, hard to come by. Price controls have had the effect where producers of certain items, such as bread, refuse to produce those items, because the price that they are allowed to sell them at would net them either no profit or even a loss. Since these goods are not being produced, or are being produced in small quantities, they are scarce in the market. This effect is having a chain reaction on other sectors in the food industry. For example, a poultry farmer outside of Caracas had 200,000 hens in 2016. Now he has only 70,000. He cannot afford to buy more chicks or feed the ones he currently has, resulting in deaths of his livestock. The price controls on poultry have also made his business unprofitable for the little he is able to sell. In other parts of the country, farmers have no choice but to import fertilizer, spare parts, and feed, but with the lack of money, they have not been able to do so. The government has not been providing as much assistance to these farmers, as it has been hoarding the dollars to pay back its foreign creditors. Quality and production has suffered (Zuñiga and Miroff, 2017).

In Chávez's economic plan for 2013-2019, he claimed that he wanted to see increased food production, but statistics show that the country is more dependent on imported food now than in the past. Infrastructure has deteriorated, which has decreased the supply of oil. Coupled with the decrease in global oil prices, Venezuela's oil export-based economy is in crisis. After 2004, Chávez's government began nationalizing farms to increase the amount of land available for farming, eventually seizing more than 10 million acres. The government also seized factories, resulting in a sharp decrease in domestic food production. Farmers argue that they must sell back at black-market prices if they want to continue making money. They claim that government regulated prices do not even allow them to break even and stay in business. This, coupled with the rampant problem of criminal gangs forcing businesses into paying "protection" money and stealing produced goods, has led to an even larger decrease in supply and profits (Zuñiga and Miroff, 2017).

Yudiana (2017) has argues that Chávez's economic policies have landed Venezuela where it is today. One of the biggest mistakes, which seems to be mentioned by many economists, is Venezuela's failure to diversify itself from its oil-based economy as well as its price controls and currency exchange controls that were enacted to stem capital flight. Initially, Chávez's reliance on oil incomes to pay for social programs, such as the missions, did not seem like a completely terrible idea. Even during the leadership of Chávez, the average GDP growth in Venezuela was 3.5% between 2000 and 2013, which was considered much more stable than during the 1980s. However, as Chávez began to spend more and more on social programs and the income from oil began to decline, this was sure to spell disaster for the economy. Money from oil could no longer support these programs fully, and large amounts of wealthy Venezuelans who had fled the country did not make the tax increases a viable alternative

(Yudiana 2017). The Venezuelan government resorted to borrowing money from foreign creditors and printing more currency, which resulted in high inflation, further increasing prices of goods.

Aslund (2017) has argued that Venezuelan inflation is so rampant, that the country is heading toward a "Soviet-style" collapse. Again, Aslund argued that it is a consequence of Venezuela's reliance on oil and the collapse of oil prices that occurred in June 2014. Aslund argued that a similar situation occurred in the Soviet Union in 1981 following a global collapse in oil prices. According to one of Russia's post-Soviet reformers, Yegor Gaidar, Soviet officials thought that the boom in oil prices would allow them to continue spending. This seems to be a similar case in Venezuela. While the government of Venezuela does not officially state that it follows a Marxist-Leninist approach to economic policymaking, it appears that they have been spending on social programs with oil income with little regard.

Aslund (2017) also ascribes price controls as a factor in Venezuela's current economic crisis. The government spends enormously on subsidies for certain food staples, such as meat and bread. Even with the decline in oil prices, Venezuela is not changing course, as it continues with these subsidies. In order to pay for these subsidies, the Maduro government intends to continue printing money. This has resulted in inflation reaching dangerously high levels, as much as 700% per year! This is a level approaching the rare case of hyperinflation, which according to a Johns Hopkins University economist has only occurred in 56 cases in world history, and 15 of them alone came out of the collapse of the Soviet Union. Hyperinflation leads to a situation in which there is no incentive to work any longer because the value of money is so low. Output declines until financial stability can be restored. In the Soviet case, production fell by about 10% in 1991 due to the decrease in oil production by about 50% between 1988 and

1995. In order to keep up with inflation, the Soviet Union borrowed foreign money, increasing its foreign debt, just as in Venezuela. Unless Maduro changes the economic policy course in Venezuela, the situation is likely to worsen. However, it is unlikely that the government would change its course on its economic policies because doing so would be admitting that it had been wrong all along (Aslund, 2017).

From looking at Venezuela's economic situation and comparing it to the proposals that Chávez put forward in his 2013-2019 plan, it can be evidenced that his program was not successful. Chávez ran on an economic platform that heavily relied on increasing food production through increasing usable farmland and subsidies for farmers. It can be demonstrated that this was not successful. Price controls have led to shortages of basic foodstuffs, such as bread and meat, while government seizures of land and factories has led to them often sitting dormant with little to no production taking place. In addition, Venezuela has decided to chiefly rely on its oil exports for its national income, something Chávez stated he wanted to move away from in his proposals.

The decrease in national income that came from the fall in global oil prices, pushed Venezuela to borrow and print more money to fund its social projects. This has resulted in inflation levels that are approaching hyperinflation status. Rather than change course, Venezuela's government seems to be steaming ahead, but as it runs out of currency in its reserves, what will be the solution? Eventually the country will no longer be able to pay its foreign debts and its credit rating will slide. The country could fall into further economic chaos. Has the Chávez and Maduro regimes learned nothing from mistakes made by past socialist governments? Looking at some of the effects Chávez's and Maduro's policies have already had on the Venezuelan economy, it would seem not to be so.

### The PSUV and Dunn's Criticisms

In the *Politics of Socialism*, John Dunn lays out a case for why traditional socialism has failed and argues that contemporary socialist parties do not have an answer to how they will effectively overcome capitalism and establish a socialist state. While Dunn argues that capitalism is not a perfect, or even a fair system (by a longshot), it is preferable to any socialist system that has been attempted. Here, PSUV's plans will be examined alongside Dunn's criticisms to see if the party has attempted to address such criticisms and if their arguments hold any merit.

#### Political Criticisms of Socialism and PSUV

The PSUV claims that society can keep all societal goods, while eradicating all societal bad. As human beings, this is not possible, Dunn argues. While it can be regarded as a noble effort to rid all ills from society, humanity is not perfect, and ills will always exist. There can never be a world where someone's maximum gain does not result in a loss to someone else. For example, a community may require an airport to be built to serve travelers. Where this airport is built will affect someone in a negative way. If it is too far from popular destinations, then travelers will have to go a long distance by ground transportation to and from the airport. Conversely, if the airport is too close to popular destinations, the noise of the airplanes will affect those in the surrounding area. In either situation, someone is negatively affected. The total bad cannot be established, and neither can the total good. There must be compromise.

As previously stated Dunn argues that certain ideas within socialism contradict themselves. Certain ideas within *The Red Book* appear to as well. In one particular section, the book argues that while neo-liberal capitalism is to blame for the world's ills, it has led to the creation of marvelous technologies that have largely benefited society. However, these

advancements have been mainly used to serve the interests of the imperialist powers for their own gain. Two thoughts here: 1) Have these advancements benefited society at large, or have they only benefitted the imperialist elites? It cannot be both. 2) If capitalism is indeed responsible for these wonderful advancements, then what is the alternative? Would transitioning to a society that resulted in a stagnation in technological advancement due to lack of capitalist innovation be morally “good?” One might be hard pressed to find someone who would think so.

The PSUV argues that liberty and equality for all peoples is the overall most valuable goal. One objective they argue will achieve this is the elimination of bureaucracy and corruption. However, under the PSUV’s administration, bureaucratism is still present, and may even be worse today. Thus, the PSUV has not been willing, or may not be capable, of improving society in the way that it states it wants.

While PSUV is correct that the events of the Caracazo and the unwillingness of the (at the time) establishment to listen to the worries of the poor were important in shaping the atmosphere surrounding the event, the PSUV has not created a better system. True, some projects, such as the Missions, have been successful in reducing illiteracy and poor health conditions in rural Venezuela, they are not really socialist plans. At large, PSUV’s system has not been any better than what they claim to be fighting against. Food shortages, infrastructure failure, imprisonment of political opponents, etc., have increased in recent years. Based on Dunn’s argument, the system has been a mix of incompetence and tyranny.

The PSUV has argued for the revolutionary road to socialism, rather than the reformist route that Dunn advocates for. While it does not openly advocate for violent revolution, it does discuss radically changing the system. Of course, this can lead to an unstable system, which is what is being seen in today’s Venezuela. The PSVU has been in power, in effect since its



creation in 2007, and even before then if considering its precursor, the MBR-200. Since then it has used its power to jail political opponents. This seems to further reinforce Dunn's point that revolutionary socialism is not preferable in the sense of conflict avoidance. While reformism can lead to pushback, it is generally preferable. Initial pushback against the PSUV has been met with arrest of political opponents in Venezuela. Only since 2015, has PSUV been defeated in legislative elections, with the opposition coalition MUD winning a majority in the National Assembly.

Just as Dunn mentions that democracy has its limitation, initial reaction to Chávez's leadership resulted in pushback from the private media, which backed the coup that briefly overthrew him in 2002. For many, this seemed to prove Chávez's argument that there was an imperialist conspiracy to overthrow him, and this galvanized support for him and his movement. However, in recent years, the party has instituted organizations such as Chávez schools to reinforce the ideology of the party within the population.

Dunn has argued that electoral choice is typically between the lesser of two evils. In Venezuela, the situation seemed similar until Chávez won the presidency in 1998. Power seemingly oscillated between two ruling parties, AD and COPEI with a lack of radical reforms taking place. The PSUV, on the other hand, represents a major shift to the left in Venezuelan politics.

While socialism claims to detest hierarchy, there seems to be a contradiction in Venezuela. Chávez has presided over the party from its formation in 2007, and even the precursor since 1998, until his death in 2013. Even in his death, the new president, Nicholas Maduro, has defended Chávez as the eternal leader of the party. While the *Red Book* claims to want to eliminate hierarchies, oligarchies, corruption, bureaucratism, etc., it has done, little to do so and the country has become even more entrenched in corruption and favoritism.

The PSUV does argue that the workers need to join the party and fight against imperialist capitalism alongside the party in order to win their freedom. However, under the main tenets of socialism, political identity would no longer be necessary. The PSUV seems to contradict this. It claims that it will be the vanguard of the working class and defend its right to continue to resist the encroachment of capitalist imperialism. It argues for the need for a perpetual revolution in order to stop and prevent imperialist capitalism from returning. Political identity would still be needed therefore to determine who the “enemy” is.

While Dunn argues that the party and state apparatuses cannot be one in the same, the PSUV claims this is not an issue. It states that the state’s interests would be the people’s interests. Of course, this is not always true. Imagine that the state wanted to enact a trade deal that promoted free trade between two states. This could affect workers in a negative way. The working class would thus be opposed to such a deal that would harm them and benefit the states. In this case, the state and the people are at odds, and the party must choose which to support.

The PSUV claims that it knows what is best for the people and that it will fight for the interests of all people. Of course, all people have different interests, and it cannot logically defend, or even purport to know the interests of all people. The PUSV also claims that its system will be better than the one that it will replace. However, it can be demonstrated that this is not true and that it has been worse for Venezuela. The party also does not clarify how it will make the transition to socialism a reality.

The PSUV does nothing to address the past failures of socialist governments, such as the Soviet Union. In other instances, it even has defended the Soviet Union and leaders such as Mao Zedong of the Communist Party of China in *The Red Book*. It also presupposes that socialist alliances can be made between other nations and that their interests will be the same. While two

or more socialist states can have similar goals, not all of their goals and methods of governing will always line up. Different states can have different challenges and interest. The PSUV does very little to address how it plans to overcome capitalism. It spends more time criticizing capitalism and arguing that it wants to overcome it, rather than discussing how it actually plans to do so. They continually argue that the problems the country is experiencing, and have experienced in the past, are all due to liberal imperialist capitalism. The party fails to admit its own failures and does not address how to fix the shortcomings of socialism.

While PSUV claims democracy will be strengthened under its leadership, it can be argued that it has done much to stifle democracy, such as arresting political opponents, changing electoral rules to benefit the party elections, etc. Chávez and Maduro have ruled Venezuela for over twenty years. Despite the country's further descent into economic chaos, the PSUV largely continues to win electoral support, save for the 2015 legislative elections.

Alternatives by PSUV are not discussed in the event that their proposed system fails. It simply assumes that its system will succeed and regards it as "scientifically socialist," meaning that its system WILL work. The PSUV has also shown that it is unwilling to move towards a different system and had doubled-down on failed policies. While it argues that there will be pushback from the imperialist elites, the working class will support their movement. While PSUV has managed to gain the support of a massive amount of the Venezuelan population, there are still many who do not support them. The PSUV does not discuss how to deal with those who oppose its will in a democracy way, other than simply stating that democracy will be preserved.

## Economic Criticisms of Socialism and the PSUV

While Marx and Engels (2012) argue that all of history's struggles have been based in class struggles, Dunn states that this is not true. The PSUV claims that there is a class struggle between the wealthy elites and the poor working class. This is a major cause of today's issues in Venezuela, they argue. While PSUV argues that democracy must be persevered and expanded, there is a large opposition that would lead to a stalemate and would cause any such system proposed by PSUV to be infeasible.

It is argued by Dunn that socialism has not been as efficient as capitalism at allocating resources. He asks how would a socialist society reallocate resources to make it a fairer system and how would the state make sure it did not violate the rights of those who were having their property reallocated? The PSUV discusses having a strong state during the transition phase to increase its influence within economic and cultural life. However, it does not directly discuss the confiscation of private property and its redistribution to the poor. While the government has nationalized private companies and confiscated their property, these are not actions that were directly argued for in the party's platform. The party seems to be implementing these ideas in an improvised way, without any real planning. The party also discusses the humanization of work but does not fully go into detail on what that means for workers.

In Venezuela, PSUV argues that it will use oil rents to finance its socialist economy. However, while oil plays a vital role in the world economy, and will for many years to come, its reliance on oil will eventually decline. If oil becomes a less important part of the global economy, how will PSUV move to an alternative resource to fund Venezuela's economy? Dunn argues that a market economy will be better able to respond to this type of change. It is a change

that PSUV does not even consider, even though they discuss the need to protect the environment. Once such method of reducing environmental degradation, is the reduction in the use of oil.

Dunn has stated that the invisible hand of the market would be subverted by planning in a socialist economy. He argues that this would lead to increased inefficiency. He goes on to ask how such an economic and social system would then be organized. When it comes to this question, PSUV simply states that society will be more democratic, but goes into little detail about how such a society and economic system would be organized and led, which seems to prove Dunn's point. Dunn of course maintains his argument that capitalism has been more successful than Marx would have envisioned, and that socialism is an overreaching response to correct the issues of capitalism. The PSUV's arguments disagree with Dunn's assessment. While admitting that capitalism has led to many advancements in society, the party claims that all these benefits have only gone to the elites, which is patently untrue.

#### Transitory Criticisms and PSUV

Dunn has mentioned that nobody knows for sure how the transition to socialism can be sustained once it has been achieved and that previous attempts, such as that in the Soviet Union have been a failure. The PSUV goes as far to argue that the Soviet Union was a benefit to society and that its collapse unleashed imperialist capitalism to all parts of the world. The Soviet Union was hardly what would be called the savior of humankind and a beacon of hope that this statement makes it seem. It was strictly vying for its own interests by challenges the other pole. It may have been responsible for holding back capitalism, but its alternative was just as bad, if not worse. While the *Red Book* does attempt to describe HOW a transition to socialism could take place, it mainly lays out the foundation for "revolution." It does little to explain how it will

maintain such a system once it has been implemented. Now what? Do they have a plan to continue maintaining this system? If there is no plan of continuity, how will the system be able to be held together? The PSUV appears to have no answers on how to keep the system going, at least when examining *The Red Book* and other documentation. In Venezuela, the workers are also not united in a common struggle. Dunn states this is because work does not carry the same distinction of pride as it used to. While Venezuela's largest industry by far is the oil industry, there are other industries present, such as telecommunications, transport, agriculture, etc. These workers may not feel as united as socialist thought and PSUV claim, and may not come together to support a single party or movement.

The PSUV fails to satisfy one of Dunn's central arguments, which is that socialist parties do not articulate what they will replace capitalism with in enough detail. PSUV spends much of its time criticizing capitalism rather than outlining a reasonable program to achieve socialism in Venezuela. It also does little to discuss the shortcomings that socialism possesses. While PSUV argues that its plan is founded upon Marxism, it does not state what Marxism truly means.

Socialism presupposes that all of society's ills will be ridded of once transition away from capitalism is complete. Dunn argues that this is not the case. According to the *Red Book*, Venezuela's issues will be solved once the transition to socialism is completed. However, while the party does argue that the revolution will have to be continuously defended, it claims that all ills of society will be defeated. There are other issues that occur in society that are not the fault of capitalism and transitioning to socialism will most likely not solve them. The PSUV does not care to admit this, however. Dunn would likely argue that PSUV has failed to meet the challenges that he has set forth in his critique of socialism.

### The PSUV and Ellman's Arguments

Based on Michael Ellman's work, *Socialist Planning*, it can be confidently stated that PSUV does not meet the challenges that he presents in his book. The *Red Book* and other supporting documents argue in favor of a planning mechanism for organizing the economy. The party claims that Marx's critique of capitalism allows for "the construction of a new system of national accounts which allows for the establishment of new indicators for planning and for the evaluation of development of the economy in relation to the improvement of the material conditions of the new social relations of production and property." The party also argues it is necessary to eliminate the intermediation of capitalist trading and in doing so, "to bring, unify, and make transparent the production-consumption" mechanism. The PSUV claims that this will be done through planning of what, how, and how much is distributed, "creating marketing chains of a socialist nature based on the transformation of cultural patterns and of collective and community consumption, that is, satisfaction of consumption socially necessary with austere sense and solidarity, with an increasing participation of the communal commerce." The PSUV also claims that it will develop a financing model according to centralized planning of the sectors of the basic companies. It goes on to state that PSUV will guarantee that state enterprises are assumed as companies at the service of state policy under a planning scheme centralized and consequently, at the service of the nation and the community. The PSUV claims that their model of central planning is to be conducted under Marxist socialism, while Ellman argues that Marx never clearly stated that his ideas involved economic planning or centralization.

Venezuela has tended to operate under a system of economic reforms but has attempted to enact them in a much more rapid way than what seems to be advocated for by Ellman. According to the *Red Book*, PSUV wants to bring about large-scale economic changes, rather

than minor reforms to make the system fairer. The party states that the goal of socialization is “about changing the economic rentier model with a mono producer and consumer to a productive and diversified one, pointing towards a full satisfaction of human needs” (p. 43-44). Would government control over the economy not lead to a culture of mono production, one that is less diversified? The book here is unclear and seems to argue that making the economy work for everyone is a tenet of socialism. While it is, that is not the only economic system that claims to be for the benefit of everyone. The book further argues for the need to fight against domination politics in the transition to socialism. “We need a strong state that gradually assumes various spheres of economic, social, and cultural life. The fight against political domination requires the state to leverage popular power and ensures that the new institutionality be consolidated under the sign of popular participation, of new organizations marked by the commune and the councils of the different social sectors (workers, students, women, indigenous peoples, etc.)” (p. 106-108). This seems like a radical shift, rather than one of reformism and one marked by political domination of PSUV to be the only system that can be allowed to exist. Furthermore, the book states its goal is to “promote a socialist economic model based in sustainable endogenous development, that implies the fight for the progressive elimination of capitalist exploitation of the work of others and individual appropriation and private products...simultaneously, ensure that the appropriation of the product of labor is social, both from the point of view of consumption to meet human needs, as of social accumulation to expand the material base production of the company. Design and invent new forms of production, distribution, circulation, and consumption, which tend to eliminate the logic of capital and the predatory intermediation of capitalists” (p. 108-110). In a capitalist model, a private company does not have the goal of promoting human needs or social responsibility. While this can be encouraged by the



government in some ways and regulated to a certain extent, the main goal of a private industry is to make a profit. The PSUV here is arguing that the government must force these economic changes to occur. When examining Ellman, changes in economic systems and methods cannot be forced to change overnight. Reformism is a gradual process.

Venezuela's agricultural challenges are no different than the ones that Ellman articulates. Hugo Chávez argued for government intervention in order to increase food production, chiefly, of rice. He made the argument that a country whose diet largely consisted of the consumption of rice should produce most of its own product, and even export it to other countries worldwide. The *Red Book* argues for an agro-industry, to be developed in an articulated and harmonious way as a base of the productive pyramid, with a nationalist orientation to develop an independent productive apparatus, sovereign and diversified, aimed at the satisfaction of the fundamental needs of the Venezuelan people. "In short, put into practice the self-sustaining endogenous development model as an economic model that, the light of the main determination of the construction of socialism, allow us to advance in the economic sphere." Food shortages remain rampant and the government has not significantly addressed these concerns, often even refusing to import additional food or take food aid from other countries or the United Nations, seeing it as admitting that its experimentation has been a failure. Ellman would likely agree that it has.

*The Red Book* takes a moral approach to labor planning. The book argues for the "humanization" of labor spaces, and the "elimination of all kinds of privileges, the just distribution of income, and the security and coverage of industry, social, and solidarity." The PSUV argues that this is needed because "capitalism is the forced purchase and sale of the labor force converted into one more commodity." It seems here that PSUV is arguing along the lines of a labor force that is guaranteed access to work and a sense of social security that Ellman states

many socialist and capitalist states have argued for. The book also argues that it is “only possible to advance in the elimination of capitalism if the social relationships of production based on the exploitation of alien work, and therefore, if the processes are elimination of private accumulation of capital based on the profit produced by the exploitation of work. In turn, one of the conditions for eliminating the exploitation of the workers is the elimination of private ownership of the means of production is essential, in particular, private monopolistic property. This is a principle of the construction of socialism. The coverage frontier can be extended of social care and services, and the quality of life of the population, much more in a state that received high income like ours, but these will be no more than diverse modalities of the so-called ‘welfare state,’ which in essence they do not alter the relations of capitalist production and will never advance in the construction of socialism” (p. 116-117). Here PSUV seems to take a more radical step than that previously mentioned. While arguing for the elimination of monopolies and the need to socialize the means of production, the party never goes into detail about how to achieve that goal. It criticizes other socialist attempts to change the economic system that have led to ‘welfare states.’ It really does nothing to specifically state how it will optimize and change the organization of labor. Indeed, the government has done relatively little to actually create jobs within the country. While it may have enacted programs to increase the skills of potential workers, the demand for these workers has been in decline.

In Venezuela, PSUV has argued that poverty is on the decline. However, if one examines the country today, that is clearly not so. While it could appear that income is rising, inflation has reached some of the highest in the world. The government has enacted price controls and currency manipulation techniques in an effort to make it appear that Venezuela is doing much better than it really is. Price controls on food and other goods have led to low production,

because there is no incentive for producers when they cannot sell at a profit. Venezuela has also made it a mission to plan international trade, by creating or joining in organizations such as ALBA, UNASUR, ASA, the Latin American Caribbean Community of nations, among others. The *Red Book* also calls for distribution of income in a fair manner. One of the central tenets of Chávez's socialism was to eradicate poverty and inequality. The PSUV may have done that, by making everyone equally poor.

Rationing may be the closest thing to a solution that the Venezuelan government under the leadership of PSUV has taken to address the problems of low supply. Almost all goods are in short supply in Venezuela, even oil is being rationed by the state oil company PSDVSA. While oil can still be purchased cheaply in the form of gasoline for motor vehicles, there are heavy restrictions on how much can be purchased. Food stuffs are also in incredibly short supply. Often there are long lines in front of grocery stores with people waiting to purchase good and other necessities. Even when these products are available, they are usually astronomically expensive. The only Venezuelans that appear to not be having issues when it comes to shortages of goods, are members of the ruling party.

In examining the overall work of the *Red Book* and comparing it with the arguments made by Ellman, it does not appear as PSUV has successfully addressed some of the serious issues raised with transitioning to a socialist economy. The problems that it has addressed, it has only done so on the surface, providing such simple answers as they will attempt to remove those problems from society. The party just makes general statements, rather than offering a distinct set of steps that need to be followed in order to transition to socialism. Ellman would most likely agree that PSUV is improvising their ideas as they go along and that they truly have no idea how to implement a successful socialist system in Venezuela.

### The PSUV and Nove's Analysis

The PSUV's arguments, especially those made in the *Red Book* also do not seem to hold any water when compared to the ideas expressed by Alec Nove in *The Feasibility of Economic Socialism: Revisited*. For instance, in *The Red Book*, it appears that PSUV wants to take Marx's ideas and apply them as a literal policy interpretation. The book states that the party is to be formulated along Marxist lines. It also does little to address the economic supply chains that Nove highlights previously. The party only advocates for the transition from capitalism to socialism where the means of production are owned and operated in a public way, but no other clear indications of how to achieve this are specifically mentioned.

Nove would probably argue that the same case is unfolding in Venezuela under the leadership of PSUV as did in the Soviet Union under the Bolsheviks. While the elections may have been legitimate in the beginning of Chávez's rule, as his party's popularity began to diminish, and the popularity of the opposition began to increase, his party had to limit the number of candidates qualified to run, often invalidating the candidates of the opposition, while approving only candidates from fringe parties and its own party. The government has become largely hostile to the press and has even shutdown media agencies that criticized the Chávez administration. While officially advocating for an idea of increased democratization, PSUV has moved to limit the political freedoms of the opposition, claiming that they are traitors and terrorists, and that restrictions are being done in the name of safety and security. They have even gone so far as to arrest opposition leaders under terrorism charges. Even when the opposition coalition (MUD) won the 2015 National Assembly elections and took back control of the legislature, the government moved to limit the power of the National Assembly and moved to

have another Constituent Assembly to replace it. The PSUV is moving to delegitimize other political parties in an attempt to become a one-party state, it would seem.

Nove's argument that attempts to transition to socialism is different in every country is also true for the Venezuelan case. Venezuela's case would appear to have begun under something resembling the Yugoslavian model but has quickly come to resemble something that occurred in Poland, except that the government really does not appear to be attempting to reform itself, but rather to double-down on already failed economic policies. Where this will lead to is anyone's guess. Opposition parties and coalitions have taken to the streets demanding that actions be taken by the government to fix the worsening crisis, but the government has been unwilling, or possibly even unable, to meet the demands of the population. Knowing that they cannot meet the economic needs of the people, and thus facing a loss at the ballot box, they turn to illegitimate means to stay in power.

According to PSUV in *The Red Book*, the party will use Venezuela's oil revenues to pay for its social programs. Chávez even set aside a fund to help finance his Mission programs, which were funded through oil moneys. However, PSUV under Chávez began to increase the amount of money that was taken from this fund and use it fund additional programs, much of it also landed in the pockets of bureaucrats in the form of bribes, embezzlement, etc. For a time, the price of oil began to climb to record highs, and the oil rents paid for these programs. However, the global price of oil crashed in 2008 and has only moderately recovered. Chávez and PSUV set aside very little money for the rainy-day fund and the government began to not be able to make payments on its debts. This has only increased in recent years as the skilled labor and functional equipment used to extract oil has become in short supply. This has plunged the Venezuelan economy into chaos. While PSUV did call for plans to create and fund additional

industries in Venezuela, it was never able to follow through with those goals. The PSUV has not had a real answer to how it will deal with the oil crisis that Venezuela has been experiencing.

Based upon Nove's arguments in his book, socialism in Venezuela under PSUV has failed, just as attempts in other countries have. The PSUV has become increasingly politically oppressive in recent years and the economic situation continues to worsen. Chávez's ideas have also included the idea of "perpetual revolution," in which the opposition must always be defeated whenever it appears. There has also not been healthy debate between socialists and anti-socialists, as many in the political opposition have been barred from running in elections or even jailed under trumped up charges of treason and terrorism. Reform does not seem likely either, as the government continues to double-down on already failed policies in an attempt to remain in power. Nobody knows how much longer this PSUV leadership can last. President Maduro just won re-election in May 2018, which will solidify his presidency well into the 2020s. How much more can the water boil before it spills over?

### A Final Analysis

The issues presented at the beginning of this paper were: What can it mean to promote an anti-capitalist agenda after the failure of the Soviet Union and the collapse of communism as a vibrant ideology the world over? What, if anything, did contemporary anti-capitalist parties learn from the Soviet failure? What kind of socialism do they propose to implement and how do they envision the transition from a capitalist society to a socialist one in the context of a globally inter-connected and technologically complex world of the 21st century? How do they propose to organize an economy promoting equality, solidarity, and environmental sustainability as well as efficiency, dynamism, and innovation? It would appear from the research that Chávez's

promotion of an anti-capitalist agenda has nothing new to offer the world and it seems that the Bolivarian Revolution is destined to be a failure. Initially Chávez seemed to be presenting the country with plans for social democracy, and even the 1999 Constitution in many respects was a well-crafted document that addressed many of the issues prevalent in the country. While it was by far from perfect, it seemed like a reasonable step for the government to take. There are also no real issues linked to socialism within the document. It was not until 2006 and 2007 that Chávez really began to express his support for a socialist system. It is possible that he was facing challenges from those who were on his left and challengers who were on the right. It appears that Chávez used the idea of a transition to socialism as a way to envelope the parties on the left, such as La Causa R and the Venezuelan Communist Party and roll them all into the PSUV. His turn towards socialism almost seems that it was a political improvisation.

## CHAPTER 6: DISCUSSION

### Lessons Learned by PSUV

It is our belief that given the mounting evidence, PSUV has not learned from the mistakes made by past socialist governments, and it has continued to repeat the mistakes of its predecessors. The dream of the Bolivarian Revolution is in effect crumbling for PSUV, despite being the most electorally successful socialist party since the collapse of the Soviet Union. The case of PSUV does not bode well for many other anti-capitalist parties around the globe that argue for similar policies as the Bolivarian government. Many on the left around the world, including in the West, have praised Hugo Chávez in the past for his socialist views and his unrelenting dialogue regarding human rights and the uplifting of the poor. His populist message continues to resonate not only in under-developing/developing countries, but also in industrialized nations such as the United States. It would be interesting to further explore if the left still sees PSUV as a party worthy of respect, despite the death of Chávez and the current socioeconomic and political turmoil engulfing the country.

It seems that many of these far-left parties have not learned from past mistakes. It has been over a hundred years since the Russian Revolution and nearly thirty years since the collapse of the Soviet bloc, yet anti-capitalists who argue that socialism or communism will be better have learned nothing. In its infancy, Chávez's government promised a democratic government by which individuals would be uplifted and given a voice in order to become participating agents of change within their country. The party platform called for: free and fair elections, the protection of political parties, freedom of speech, uplifting the poor, improving living conditions and educational opportunities, protecting the environment, promoting human rights, mitigating



racial tensions, and restructuring the economy in order to help it prosper. After 20 years in power, the party continues to claim these ideals as the foundation for their governing policies; however, they continue to struggle with the implementation of socialism, and demonstrate either a total ignorance or disregard for the lessons that could be learned from their predecessors.

Similarly, to their predecessors, Venezuelans sought to emancipate the poor and bolster a fair economy free from oppression and corruption. However, what began as a new experiment in Latin American socialism, rapidly became eerily reminiscent of the Soviet Days.

At the root of most socialist/communist movements is the drive to end human rights violations and government corruption. If we learned anything from the Soviet experience, is that once power is concentrated it becomes very challenging to hold the state responsible for any violations of either ideals. Even though the Soviets set out with the best intentions, we now know that their communist experiment violated human rights and brutalized its own citizens. While PSUV's government comes nowhere near Stalin's, it is important to note that they have continuously violated human rights and instigated violence within their own borders. Currently, Maduro's government is facing hyperinflation, severe resource scarcity, socioeconomic and political unrest, infrastructure failure, as well as a growing health care and sanitary crisis. Despite of these issues, the PSUV controlled government has ignored foreign aid, cracked down on public dissent, labeled NGOs protecting political freedoms as treasonous, allowed prison conditions to severely deteriorate, imprisoned political opposition leaders, and most egregiously undermined its citizens rights to clean and sanitary conditions, necessary healthcare, and most importantly food and basic necessities. It must be acknowledged that Chávez, when alive, established "missions" and community cooperatives to provide basic services to the community and to diversify the economy, while simultaneously training individuals. However, many of

these initiatives failed due to poor planning and lack of funding. Several communities were left with non-functional cooperatives or missions under their responsibility once the funding disappeared and the establishing committee moved on to the next funded opportunity. Ultimately, this was another example of the party's inability to learn from the mistakes of its predecessors.

Another crucial component for PSUV's socialist platform was their need to transcend capitalism and rid their society from the evils associated with the economic model. Much of the party's rhetoric indicated a desire to have a planned economy, one where the state owned the means of production instead of the people as was suggested by Karl Marx. Again, the Venezuelan government failed to demonstrate that they had learned from their predecessors' mistakes, when they began expropriating private property and nationalizing industries without a clear economic plan for how they would manage these sectors of the economy. Furthermore, Venezuela failed to capitalize on the economic boom brought in by high petroleum prices, instead of utilizing the money to diversify the economy, much of it was utilized to fund the missions, thus in a way foreshadowing the country's economic woes and social program failures once the price of oil significantly dropped again.

Overall, the party of PSUV has failed to demonstrate any ability to reflect on its policies and actions in order to implement course correction. Their leadership and governing decisions indicate that they are either ignorant or not concerned with the mistakes of their predecessors, and as such are incapable of learning from history in order to truly have the capability of implementing a socialist system for the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Despite describing a socialist utopia within the parameters of their party platform, they have failed to make those goals come to fruition for the Venezuelan people. Ultimately, we can conclude that PSUVs attempt at a modern version of

socialism only falls short of plagiarizing the ideas and mistakes of the Soviet Union's experience.

### Implications

This paper has several important implications for the study of socialism and specifically, the study of political parties within the field of political science. It is important to realize that anti-capitalist movements are alive and well today all around the world. While some, such as PSUV, may be more powerful and electorally successful than others, such as the small New Anti-Capitalist Party in France, there is still a sizable following in the ideology. Understanding these political ideologies and how they influence left-wing political parties is crucial as more populist candidates enter the political arena across the globe. Additionally, it is important to understand cases, such as the case of Venezuela and PSUV, to better understand which countries are susceptible to these ideologies and why do they inevitably always struggle to succeed under socialist rule. The reflexive practices that were used in this paper could be utilized to study other anti-capitalist parties to either support what has been found in this paper, or potentially offer different results or expert opinions on the subject.

Since the fall of the Soviet Union in 1991, scholarship centering on the studying of Marxism and socialist movements has declined at the academic level. It is our hope that the study of the Venezuelan case and anti-capitalist parties around the world, will be given more attention by scholars. In the current political climate, it seems that there is a major focus on the far-right, especially in Western Europe and the United States. The far-left should not be forgotten either. Both sides are equally important to study within the field of political science and our understanding of the vast political spectrum is crucial if we are to continue studying this ever-

changing global political landscape. Hopefully the results of this paper can persuade others to take interest in the study of the Venezuelan case or other anti-capitalist parties in an effort to advance our understanding of these topics and continue to further the political dialogue around these ideas we believed to have died with the fall of the Soviet Union.

### Limitations and Future Research

One major limitation to this analysis, which has been previously discussed, is its focus on only one anti-capitalist party. In today's world there are many anti-capitalist parties still active in a plethora of political and socioeconomic environments. Even though most have not experienced the electoral success of PSUV, many of them still have sizable party memberships and loyal party bases. With this in mind, it is important to caution against generalizing the findings of this paper. While one can draw many comparisons between two parties, it is important to refrain from making definitive inferences since these parties can vary vastly and, as such behave very differently under similar circumstances. Furthermore, the PSUV is a Latin American party from a country with a colonialist history that has had a tumultuous relationship with democracy throughout its history. Therefore, any concrete generalizations that can be made should take this into consideration, as parties from countries with imperialist histories or long histories of democracy might respond differently to these ideals.

Future research should focus on looking at some of these other parties and exploring their platforms in order to see if they have learned from previously failed attempts at socialism/communism. Furthermore, it would be interesting to compare other anti-capitalist parties with that of Venezuela's PSUV to determine, what if any, patterns emerge that could indicate the potential success or failure of an anti-capitalist government. Ultimately, if other

scholars reached similar conclusions regarding the inability of anti-capitalist parties to acknowledge and correct the mistakes of their predecessors, then this would help to mitigate the limitations of our claim and bolster the relevancy of this line of inquiry.

## CHAPTER 7: CONCLUSION

In examining the case of PSUV in Venezuela and asking whether the party has learned from the mistakes made by past socialist societies as articulated in the criticisms made by Dunn, Ellman and Nove, it can be argued that Bolivarian Socialism has not lived up to the task. The economic and political situation in Venezuela continues to worsen every day and the country is much worse off than when Chávez began his presidency in 1999. The party's documentation has not adequately addressed the shortcomings of socialism and this is becoming more apparent as the country continues to slide into economic decline and the political situation becomes more unstable. President Maduro won the recent presidential election in May 2018, solidifying his electoral position at least for the next few years. Based on what has been observed since Chávez and PSUV came to power, the prognosis does not look good for the socialist experiment attempted in Venezuela. If the party does not alter its course on the economy, it may seal its own fate, though it may have already done enough irreparable damage. However, Maduro's government may be experiencing a Catch-22, where if they reverse popular measures in order to correct course on the economy and gain political stability, they could end up alienating their base while doing little to gain support from an already jaded opposition.

If a fair election were held in Venezuela, it can be argued that the country would overwhelmingly oust PSUV from power. Thus, the only way for the party to maintain its position as the dominant political party in the country is to become something approaching that seen in Cuba or the former Soviet Union, and therefore ultimately solidifying the claim that PSUV was unable to learn from the mistakes of its predecessor and will ultimately suffer the

same fate. Venezuela will remain an interesting case to study and one that will likely continue to be relevant as PUSV maintains its hold on power in a resource rich country.

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