

# Chavismo's Last Stage: Fascism in Venezuela

by David Ramonet

The government of President Hugo Chávez Frías in Venezuela is preparing to enter into a new phase of “radicalization” of its celebrated “peaceful Bolivarian revolution.” It will once again reshuffle the cabinet, the High Command of the Armed Forces, and even reorganize the political grouping which keeps it in power. And while the population in general is on edge as to what this change will mean, Chávez’s foreign adviser and ideological mentor, Norberto Ceresole of Argentina, has no doubt at all: It will mean fascism.

“I’m worried about Chávez’s dialogue with the people of Venezuela. This is the dialogue which must intensify, and for which Chávez must modify his economic policy. That is to say, to go from International Monetary Fund-ism, to a distributionist, populist policy. Put it in quotes: a ‘fascist,’ or Peronist, policy. Chávez must intensify the dialogue with the people and with the Armed Forces; the rest doesn’t interest me,” Ceresole told Emilio Figueredo Planchart, director of the Internet magazine, *Venezuela Analítica* ([www.analitica.com.v](http://www.analitica.com.v) e), and its journalists who spoke with him in May.

The journalist was not surprised at Ceresole’s cynicism, but he did ask him to explain what he meant by “put it [fascism] in quotes.” “It means that I defend the distributionist aspect” of fascism, the Chávez adviser smoothly replied.

Ceresole is an old Nazi-Communist agent who boasts of being the “theoretician” behind “Chavismo.” “I invented Chávez,” he says; or, “I dreamed of Chávez, and then I saw him walking the streets of Caracas.” And, indeed, the most prominent aspects of the Chávez program stem from the Ceresolian “ideology”: For example, using the Armed Forces for social work projects (as in the “people’s markets”).

Ceresole’s call to establish a fascist regime in Venezuela is no simple rhetorical turn of phrase. In the same interview, Ceresole explained that “the theoretical key [to Chavismo] lies in Carl Schmitt; I recommend that Venezuelan intellectuals read him. He is a great theoretician of the state. He develops the concept of *acclamatio*: very important. In his books he identifies what means of dialogue are open to a Leader such as Chávez: ‘The People is a concept which belongs to Public Law. The People only exists in the public sphere. The unanimous opinion of 100 million individuals is not the will of the People nor public opinion. It is sufficient to express the will of the People through acclamation—through *acclamatio*—through its obvious and incontestable existence.”

Who was the German jurist Carl Schmitt? He was called Hitler’s “Crown lawyer,” because all of the political measures which Hitler adopted, from the “state of exception” to open dictatorship, were justified by Schmitt, whom the academics view as the theoretician of the modern totalitarian state.

Indeed, Schmitt is the key. This is not the first time that Schmitt has been invoked in Venezuela, as I have reported previously in this magazine, and as Democratic Presidential pre-candidate Lyndon H. LaRouche, Jr. has emphasized in several writings. Since the controversy over the constituent assembly, which drafted the new Bolivarian Constitution of Venezuela more than two years ago, the theoreticians of the constitution have liberally cited Schmitt in support of their dismantling the established institutions, and the regime’s right to arbitrarily establish whatever institutions it chooses, based solely on popular “acclamation.”

Some Chavismo leaders tried to justify their fondness for Schmitt with the sophistry that “Schmitt was a theoretician, a legal technocrat, but he was not a Nazi.” False. Schmitt and his friend Martin Heidegger, who persecuted the Jewish professors in Germany’s universities, stood in line together to join the Nazi Party. With the declarations of his adviser Ceresole, Chávez has been exposed: His project is fascism.

## ‘State of Exception’

Last April 25, Chávez and his supporters in the National Assembly staged a pompous event to commemorate the second anniversary of the referendum which laid the groundwork for the formation of the National Constituent Assembly. The official speeches were given by former member of the Assembly Herman Escarrá, by Chávez himself, and by a representative of the Assembly. Chávez used the occasion to announce that he was considering declaring a “state of emergency,” because the powers he currently exercises are no longer sufficient to combat poverty and administrative corruption. He also announced the revival of the Revolutionary Bolivarian Movement 200 (MBR-200), the military lodge which Chávez founded with other officers to organize the February 1992 attempted coup d’état. He also made mention of a “strategic command of the Revolution,” which he deployed to purge, from his political base, the “disloyal” Movement for Socialism (MAS) party.

At that April event, Escarrá felt obliged to explain that “it was never intended in the Constituent doctrine of the Fifth Republic, to implement the thesis of the German Carl Schmitt, in the sense of legitimizing an apocryphal act of sovereignty, but rather to carry out a peaceful constitutional operation, in freedom.”

Notwithstanding, when the formal meeting concluded, Chávez charged Escarrá to draw up a report on the possibility of a “state of exception,” or emergency powers government. The answer Escarrá gave was that Chávez could decree a “state of exception” any time he chose, simply because “the Bolivarian Constitution of Venezuela envisions this.”

Shortly thereafter, Chávez began a three-week trip to Europe and Asia, during which the threat of a state of exception being declared—or a “self-coup,” as some called it—threw the country into a state of tension beyond any seen since the beginning of the Chávez government. Never before, have pamphlets and proclamations, in favor of and opposed to the government, circulated so freely in the barracks.

The pressure to reject this measure, including from some sectors of the Chávez camp, reached Chávez at some point of his trip, such that, from Indonesia, he declared that the conditions of chaos which would merit imposition of a state of exception, did not exist in Venezuela, despite the fact that his Attorney General had reported that the decree, complete with all the legal justifications, was ready. Chávez finally announced that there would be no state of exception, for now.

But the question which everyone has been asking since he raised the threat, is: Why a state of exception? Chávez has more power than any Venezuelan President of the last 50 years, and until now, he has only used it to comply, in every detail and with great rigor, with International Monetary Fund and World Bank policies. His ballyhooed economic “achievement” was to reduce inflation, but at the cost of an economic recession from which there is no relief in sight. His other achievement was an increase in the price of crude oil, which has more to do with the world financial crisis than with OPEC itself. But even that “achievement” has proven useless, since nearly all of Venezuela’s oil revenues have gone religiously to pay the foreign debt. Anything left over, has been wasted on populist projects and anti-development programs of the type promoted by the World Bank for countries which “do not have the luxury”—according to the Bank—of making major infrastructure, education, and agro-industrial investments based on the use of advanced science and technology.

That is the great irony of Chávez’s recent trip to Russia, China, Iran, and other countries. Within each of these countries, there is a serious policy discussion under way regarding a vast infrastructure project from east to west—from Amsterdam to the coasts of China—and from north to south—from China and Siberia to the Middle East, crossing through central Asia, in what is being called the New Silk Road, or the Eurasian Land-Bridge. As originally designed by Lyndon LaRouche, such a strategy would address the impending global economic depression and the bankrupt international financial system, and would include the creation of a new financial and monetary system, a New Bretton Woods.

However, throughout his tour, Chávez never touched on any of these crucial issues. Rather, apart from his notoriously bombastic rhetoric, he attempted repeatedly to destabilize his host countries. In Russia, he tried to set President Vladimir Putin on a collision course with the United States, which Putin diplomatically avoided; in China, he insisted on his Maoist nostalgia, in the face of a Chinese leadership which emerged from the triumph over Maoism. And in Iran, Chávez met with Ayatollah Khamenei to try to forge a “brotherhood” between

the revolution of the mullahs in that country with his own “Bolivarian” revolution. He did this at a moment when President Mohammad Seyyed Khatami has been attempting to promote a “dialogue of civilizations,” and to trace a moderate course for Iran.

## **Bolivarian Circles**

Most recently, Chávez has undertaken to organize “revolutionary Bolivarian circles” through his Sunday radio show, “Hello Mr. President.” In fact, he is trying to reorganize his base of political support, by dismantling the political parties that supported him during the electoral campaign, as part of the “patriotic pole,” because they are not sufficiently unconditional in their support.

In this drive, Chávez is confronting for the first time, the current Interior and Justice Minister, as well as organizer and leader of the Fifth Republic Movement (MVR), the veteran Luis Miquilena, who presides over the National Constituent Assembly. Chávez named him minister for a second time, in hopes of handing leadership of the MVR party over to his own brother Adán. However, the politically crafty Miquilena absolutely refused to hand over the organization he had created, and which counts among its members the largest bloc of Chavismo deputies in the National Assembly, the majority of Supreme Court judges, and the People’s Defender.

Thus stymied, Chávez opted for relaunching the MBR-200 from below, centered entirely around his own person, to rule “by acclamation,” and outside of the institutions. Chávez reported on his radio program that the political command of the revolution would operate out of the Presidential Palace at Miraflores, and that his brother Adán Chávez, the President’s private secretary, would be the coordinator.

Chávez doesn’t care that his “revolutionary Bolivarian circles” are being compared to the Committees in Defense of the Cuban Revolution established under Fidel Castro. He ridicules those who warn him that he is committing a crime, by using state assets to organize his own political party. At the same time, he says that those who do not join his “circles” are “enemies of the process.” Chávez is in a race against time, in part because his followers have not succeeded in winning over the organized labor movement, whose top leadership will be elected next September.

The trade unions haven’t been tamed, and are in fact the principle bastion of defense of the general welfare of the population, of the common good. They control the oil, steel, and aluminum industries, as well as the teachers’ unions and public services and other posts. So far, they are the only social organizations which have succeeded in getting the government to step back, as was seen in the oil strike of several months ago.

Lacking an entry in the trade union movement, Chavismo is trying to create a corporatist parallel “labor” movement with street vendors, and unemployed recruited by the “Plan Bolívar 2000 and 2001” distributionist programs modeled on Mussolini’s Italy.