

# 21<sup>st</sup> Century Socialism: Making a State for Revolution

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**Abstract:** *The Bolivarian Revolution in Venezuela has built mass organizations of workers and communities that have erratically challenged class and market relations – verifying that taking political power is difficult but essential to fundamental social change and that capitalist cultural practices complicate the revolutionary process. This work identifies components of state power, separating state apparatus (government) as a crucial site for instituting social change. The case of democratic, participatory communication and public media access is presented as central to the successes and problems of Venezuelan 21<sup>st</sup> century socialism. Drawing on field research in community media in Caracas, the essay highlights some of the politico-cultural challenges and class contradictions in producing and distributing cultural values and social practices for a new socialist hegemony necessary for fundamental social change.*

**Keywords:** *community media, public media, state, state power, participatory communication, social change, hegemony, culture, revolution, class, class conflict.*

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## 1. Introduction

Objectively speaking, movements, classes, and media must challenge power to be revolutionary. One cannot govern from below. There can be no grass roots social transformation without replacing existing power. History has shown from Ghandi and Mandela to Daniel Ortega in Nicaragua and Lula in Brazil, neither the working class nor its charismatic representatives can secure any lasting accommodation with their patriotic capitalists. Negotiating better terms for the exploited while leaving the social relations of capital intact is not revolutionary, nor even defensible as pragmatic today. If freedom, democracy, and social justice are expected, there is no “third way” as Hugo Chavez and Venezuela realized after the media coup of April 2002.

In the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, it's either global capitalism, with more human suffering and environmental collapse or it's socialism with the working class and its allies building a democratic society of international solidarity. Venezuela provides a positive prime instance of this claim. In Venezuela, revolutionaries are changing society by taking power. This essay highlights the features and contradictions in this historic process, turning to media practices in particular to illustrate the dialectic of state and revolution. This contribution recognizes the need for revisiting and contextualizing the Marxist theory of the state, the role of the working class, and the relationship between culture and socio-economic relations under capitalist globalization of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Marx and Engels wrote almost two centuries ago, while Lenin and Trotsky constructed and implemented Marxist theory in an isolated and underdeveloped, largely pre-capitalist country. Their collective contributions have been debated, defended, and redefined in the subsequent decades by reformists and revolutionaries alike – from parliamentary social democrats insisting socialism would organically arise from mass democratic experiences to Maoists, fidelistas, and other focoistas fighting rural guerrilla wars to take power “through the barrel of the gun,” the character of the state and state power has remained crucial to social revolution, both theoretically and practically. This essay does not attempt to review and evaluate the claims and contentions from past or ongoing debates, rather it offers the Venezuelan phenomena as a concrete opportunity for observing class conflict in action. Without constant reference or elucidation, the essay accepts the thrust of Antonio Gramsci's writings on he-

gemony, which seem to offer considerable clarification to understanding capitalist society since its modern, industrial development, including multiclass political parties, referenda elections, and commercialized mass media and popular culture.

Unless one is active in the solidarity movement or subscribes to radical journals, probably little is known about Venezuela and its inspirational project for social transformation. The US media have settled on two themes: President Hugo Chavez is a caudillo, a populist dictator, hiding behind repeat show elections and bribing the population with social programs funded by oil wealth; Chavez's anti-democratic agenda is evidenced by authoritarian attacks on media and freedom of speech, while social problems remain. These themes express US disdain for all participatory democracy and obscure the actual existing democracy of citizens and workers who overwhelmingly ratified a constitution with "obligations of solidarity, social responsibility, and humanitarian assistance". The real problem for US media and US capital is that Venezuela is demonstrating to the world that democracy indeed can work, but not through neo-liberal, market relations. Democracy needs socialism.

## 2. A Strategy for Revolution: Government Policy and Political Parallelism

The transition to socialism in Venezuela is a dialectical political process synthesizing objective conditions with subjective material possibilities. Led by President Hugo Chavez and the United Socialist Party of Venezuela (PSUV) the Bolivarian socialist strategy (a hybrid of Marxism, Venezuelan revolutionary nationalism, and international solidarity) promotes the power and action of the working class and its allies as agents of social change. Since the first explicit pronouncement for socialism in 2006, the strategy has been to use the objective material power of the Chavez-led government to dismantle and break the capitalist state while expanding participatory democracy by the citizens – organizing and mobilizing "new forces and new passions" fettered by capitalist society (Marx 1867).

The Venezuelan strategy of using the "state for revolution" proceeds along two intersecting avenues, with appropriate tactics, creating a pincher movement on capitalism, the capitalist class, and capitalist social relations. First, the revolutionary leadership is using its position as the legitimate elected government to administer policies and practices that benefit the working class and weaken capitalist social relations. Government power in the hands of Chavez and the Bolivarian socialists is used to undermine capitalist relations and advance socialist democracy, especially participation in decision-making. For every major proposal, the administration encourages public dialogue, mass communication, and mass public participation. Seeking public consent before action secures support for government policies. The ideological, political, and legal framework for such revolutionary policy and practice adheres to government decisions. The "socialist" government becomes a weapon against the capitalist state. Since 1999, when 71% of voters approved a new Constitution and subsequently voted for representatives to the National Assembly, the Bolivarian movement has relied on a complex interactive process of public communication, program initiatives by and for social movements, and continuing confirmation of the legitimate political representation of the interests of the working class majority. Chavez has used his executive power as elected President and the PSUV (and its organizational predecessors) has used its legislative power as elected representatives to create and implement new laws and policies (along with more than a dozen national elections and referenda), while the courts and army have used their legal power to enforce and defend the new laws.

There have been many, many transformational new laws and policies, including land reform, housing reform, indigenous rights, widespread nationalizations (including in oil, steel, aluminum, electricity, telecommunications, and more), provisions for worker's control and ownership of production, creation of a social fund for education, health care, basic food subsidies, and other laws which benefit the working poor and middle classes. In almost every instance, laws, civil codes, and initiatives followed public debate and discussion organized through community councils or other venues. For more than a decade, in law and policy and enforcement, the Chavez government has

resolutely advanced the interests of the working majority and undermined the interests of the capitalist elite.

Using direct government power has been coupled with a second complementary approach in the Venezuelan “state for revolution” strategy: parallelism. Recognizing that the existing national, state, and local government apparatus remains staffed by the old bureaucracy and technocrats, the Venezuelan government, through both executive and legislative initiatives, has established and promoted various popular missions parallel to traditional government institutions. Rather than confronting the old caste directly and instigating premature social conflicts, parallel institutions provide much needed social services, encourage participation, build consciousness, and establish new norms for solidarity and social responsibility. Organizing parallel institutions is the Bolivarian implementation of Marx’s suggestion that the working class should “wrest power by degrees” (Marx and Engels 1998). Undoubtedly, parallelism is a useful strategy for establishing a new hegemony, creating leaderships, practices, social relations and ideology – a new culture of solidarity, collaboration, participation, and human needs before profits. While avoiding any direct confrontation with the existing capitalist state, parallel institutions, in the form of social missions, anticipate that any future attempts at abolishing or dismantling the missions would likely find engaged, confident, and experienced community activists unwilling to give up either their rights or powers. The missions provide vital human services to the working class, urban and rural poor, and underserved communities. The government has redirected income from oil rent and royalties to fund mission social services. Mission Robinson and Mission Rivas provide free public primary and continuing education to adults. With the help of Cuban volunteer doctors, Mission Barrio Al Dentro provides easy access community health care to millions. Mission Mercal has established neighborhood grocery stores across the country, providing affordable basic food supplies. There are many other federally supported programs in agriculture, land, housing, fishing, cooperatives, and independent community media. Democratic participation is the most striking characteristic of each of these government-supported missions and programs. Democratically elected collaborative community councils ensure continuous dialogue with citizens. Significantly, more than 600 factory councils in primary industry control production, working conditions, and community relations.

The experiences and strategies of the Venezuelan revolution over the last ten years demonstrate the validity and value of several Marxist tenets which suggests how revolutionaries might use a “state for revolution” strategy: social being determines social consciousness; socio-economic structures frame political and cultural practices; and fundamental social change requires new social relations and structures. A capitalist state cannot do socialist tasks. So what’s a revolutionary to do? Understand and wield historical materialism for revolution. With a clear strategy and flexible tactics, revolutionary movements can intentionally use the capitalist state to consciously dismantle that same state while simultaneously building a socialist “self-government of workers”, in Marx’s phrase.

### 3. On the State

The state is not solely the government, nor does the government alone comprise the state, but using the “state for revolution” by using government power for revolutionary transformation is not only viable, it is a necessity for 21<sup>st</sup> century socialism. This is the big dialectic. A Marxist approach to society identifies what is materially present, where historical contradictions exist or may occur, and how conscious human intervention might influence developments. As expressed in countless treatises and debates, the state has multiple, interactive components. In general terms, the state organizes the social reproduction of social relations. We should speak of state power as the expression of dominant class relations and the state apparatus as the institutionalized political means for implementing and enforcing class relations. Additionally, state power depends on the population’s hegemonic consent for dominant class leadership reproduced ideologically and culturally in common sense practices and everyday norms (Gramsci 1971).

State power thus consists of: 1) the forces and relations of production; 2) the state apparatus that establishes and enforces rules; 3) and the cultural and ideological practices that legitimize

class relations and norms. In class society, state power crystallizes relations between classes in institutional structures and expresses those class relations in policies. In other words, the state institutional apparatus (government) is a primary manifestation of the social division of labor expressed in the content and effect of government policies (Therborn 2008). Government policies in a capitalist state defend and reproduce market relations through laws, regulations, and enforcement. Meanwhile, in contemporary capitalist states, media and culture industries promote, reinforce, and reproduce ideological explanations and cultural practices appropriate for capitalism.

Above all, a state is a relation, not just an institution or an instrument. State power establishes, expresses and reproduces class relations through policies and practices – including cultural and ideological. A capitalist state apparatus uses its political and coercive powers to maintain and extend class relations and to break or obstruct any challenges to that rule. A capitalist state apparatus functions as a political manager and reproducer of class relations, including wage labor, private profits, and market tenets, while reflecting and reinforcing ideologies and cultural practices which legitimize capitalist relations, such as individualism, consumerism, authoritarianism, and spectatorship entertainment, e.g. Given this triad of state power, it is easier to recognize and comprehend a capitalist state which nationalizes industry, or a socialist state which reintroduces market relations. Capitalism can function with state-run production, provided wages and profits are sacrosanct. Socialist states may even exist short term with small scale, atomized retail markets, provided the norms and practices of social production and social wealth are reproduced – although long term market relations tend to undermine solidarity, social responsibility and collaborative relations (Lebowitz 2010) as Mészáros (1994) also observes in the Yugoslavian “socialist” market experience.

A capitalist state is marked by market mechanisms and managerial control of production, the apparatus is comprised of party politicians, bureaucrats and technocrats, entertainment and consumerism are cultural norms, if not pastimes. A socialist state would lead to collective participation, production by social appropriation and collective, democratic planning, while politics and culture would be characterized by public persuasion and participation in all cultural production and activity. In general terms, a state may be characterized by its tasks, personnel, and processes of decision and administration – its class character revealed by which class relations it defends, what rules and laws are created and enforced. A socialist state has less need for personnel because workers and community organizations initiate, implement, and evaluate policies and practices. A socialist state must have laws, but more importantly, in a socialist state, the government does not enforce, but the working class and other progressive social agents must realize and implement laws and policies on their own behalf – a perspective codified in the Venezuelan Bolivarian Constitution (Lebowitz 2006). Capitalist states encourage consumer atomization, privatization of social activities, and market rule: protecting the market and the reproduction of private property and capital, by enforcing wage labor and private profits. Socialist states would rely on human solidarity, collectivity, equality, participation, and public transparency: advancing public discourse and debate, public social ownership and collaborative, democratic decision-making. Lebowitz (2010) provides a lively, accessible summary of 21<sup>st</sup> century socialism as anticipated through the practices of Venezuelan communal councils.

Venezuela is a capitalist country. Bolivarian socialist Chavez is president. The socialist PSUV has a majority in the National Assembly. The Constitution proclaims participatory democracy. Missions, councils, nationalizations, and public service programs continue to expand. Still Venezuela is a capitalist country. Ten million may vote for Chavez and socialism in October 2012. Maybe most of eight million workers prefer factory councils. More than 30,000 workers may be members of worker’s militias. Venezuela remains a capitalist country. For now.

Michael Lebowitz (2010) calls Venezuela a “rentist” capitalism, because the primary resource, oil, has been nationalized as state property since 1976 and global oil giants “rent” most of the oil fields from the government. Still, the classic explanation of capitalists exploiting labor power by providing wages while withholding surplus value as profit expresses dominant social relations in Venezuela. While no corporation “owns” the oil, the rent paid for using the oil fields and the royalties paid for extracting the oil does not interfere with wealth acquired in drilling, refining, processing,

and distributing oil. Technically, rent and royalties is the Venezuelan government's share of surplus value, while capitalist social relations based on the wage labor production of a commodity for the market remain. Oil provides almost 80% of the exports and some 25% of the GDP for Venezuela. Venezuela has the fifth largest oil reserves and may have the largest oil shale fields in the world. With such oil wealth, development in Venezuela was distorted. Populations have been concentrated on the urban coast, agriculture was neglected for food imports. In addition to oil production, Venezuela has other major industry, including: aluminum, steel, paper, concrete, auto assembly, textile, rice, retail food and beverage production, and media entertainment, among others (Enright, Frances, & Saaverda1996). Until the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the Venezuelan economy was private, commercial, and capitalist. But capitalism has its internal contradictions of overproduction and class inequality. In short order, global capitalist triumphalism ended the relative tranquility in Venezuela. Even as the wall fell in Berlin, the neoliberal policies of the Perez government in the 1980s led to mass unrest and resistance in Caracas. Since 1992, Hugo Chavez has personified and articulated the new anti-capitalist direction of Venezuela. Venezuela may still be capitalist, but the government is not, and incursions elsewhere have begun. The capitalist state is now under siege.

#### 4. Reproduction, Reform, and Revolution

Certain theoretical and practical questions arise from the above understanding of the state: Does the Chavez state have the commitment and/or power to implement socialist relations? What has the PSUV/Chavez government done and what will it do with its (government) power? What is the empirical evidence that state apparatus actions are maintaining and reproducing capitalist social relations, or is there evidence that government policies and actions have advanced working class interests and socialist relations? What are the conditions for change and how do policies and practices of the government promote collective action and working class power? Or do policies and practices (including enforcement or lack of enforcement) maintain and protect exploitation and domination by the capitalist class? Capitalism creates surplus value through commodity production and the expropriation of wealth from labor power...it also must necessarily reproduce social relations with wageworkers, managers, owners and the economic, political, and cultural institutions that normalize those relations.

Over the last ten years, what social relations have been reproduced? What role has the government played in maintaining or protecting the capitalist class? What role has the Chavez state played in dismantling capitalist relations, private profit and wage labor? Is the government advancing on capitalism/are capitalists organizing against government actions or complacent and sanguine about government policies? What role has the Bolivarian state played in promoting collective control of the production of social wealth? In other words, how are the three components of state power in Venezuela dialectically developing and what are various class forces doing to intervene in class relations and state power? Have capitalist relations of production (ownership, control, regulation, profit) expanded, been maintained, or curtailed? Has the state apparatus (administration, legislative, courts, and police) created laws, policies, and enforcements that protect capitalist relations or do they advance socialist relations? Have cultural and ideological practices been promoted or emerged that encourage collective collaboration, solidarity, citizen participation, creativity, and social justice or does consumerism, self-gratification, and passive spectatorship remain.

Even a cursory review of the political trajectory of the PSUV and social movements in Venezuela today indicates that a popularly elected revolutionary leadership is using its government power to consciously push against existing social contradictions and unleashing class conflicts that can only be resolved through concerted revolutionary class action. These conflicts are not orchestrated but are being systematically unearthed, providing impulses and opportunities for an organized working class to transform the social relations and replace the capitalist state, not just its government. Government policy and the Chavez leadership, including large sections of the PSUV, seem intent on extending and intensifying socialist relations across society: extending socialist relations through new nationalizations in more industries and services; intensifying new class relations by insisting on worker's control of production, establishing worker's militias to enforce decisions, and support-

ing social movement initiatives for accelerated land reform, housing reform, and media access. The state apparatus of Venezuela is extending socialist relations, creating space for new class relations, interfering with production for profit, against labor as a commodity, and for social intervention in the production of basic goods and services (as expressed in new laws on media, nutrition, production, and civil rights). Confrontations will come soon, but as VP Elias Jaua says: “without confrontation there can be no social gains” (Jaua 2011).

The strategy of “state for revolution” is a conscious process of building independent working class institutions with decision-making power and control. This strategy has three interrelated elements that conform to the three components describing state power presented above: in production and ownership; in political power; and in cultural norms. The Chavez government has declared socialism as its goal with worker’s control of a nationalized means of production a first step. This is not simply nationalization and government expropriation of industry. Rather, changing ownership of the means of production includes laws and policies for changing the relations of production through worker’s councils, community councils, and worker’s militias – no government control over production, but worker and community control to decide allocation of resources locally, regionally, and nationally.

Chavez’s weekly three-hour television program, “Alo Presidente!” is only an iconic example of the government ideological and persuasive campaign for 21<sup>st</sup> century socialism. More significantly, the popular programming on new public service television (ViVe TV, TVes, and Avila TV) and the hundreds of community radio and television stations organized by community councils indicate how democratic mass communication for a new society permeates everyday life – media access, public discourse, and participatory communication – whatever the political consciousness of the programmers.

## 5. Media in Venezuela

The changing ownership structure, production practices, and programming content in media in Venezuela reveals the “state for revolution” strategy. The state apparatus has promulgated laws to curb the capitalist means of media production, expand working class access to the means of communication through laws which limit private ownership and privilege community social ownership, and thereby providing a public space for popularizing democracy, participation, and new social relations not based on advertising, profits, and audience markets. The narrative on community media in Venezuela is above all a prime example of class conflict, highlighting how the socialist government has used its power to nurture another site of power by establishing and promoting non-state institutions under worker’s control for communicating a more socialist and humanist culture. Because the political economy of media in Venezuela reflects the social relations of the larger capitalist society, the incursions against commercial media and the burgeoning parallel community media also reveal the possibilities for the strategy using government power against state power, of creating a “state for revolution.”

Historically, media in Venezuela have been commercial, private, and highly concentrated in a few hands (Golinger 2004). Commercial media still comprise more than 80% of all media operations. A small group of business families own fifteen television stations, including the large national broadcasters: Venevisión, Teleleven, RCTV (the Granier group), and Globovisión (Ravell’s virulently anti-Chavez UHF and cable station); and several regional stations. Supportive of successive conservative and neoliberal governments, these major media have been highly profitable, selling mass audiences to advertisers by producing mass entertainment programming from soaps to game shows and dramas. The Cisneros Group, owner of Venevisión, has become a significant second-tier global media corporation, with more than 70 media outlets in 39 countries, including Univisión, the largest Spanish network in the US, DirecTV Latin America, AOL Latin America, Playboy Latin America, as well as beverage and food distribution (Coca-Cola and Pizza Hut in Venezuela, e.g.), and other cultural productions, including the Los Leones baseball team and the Miss Venezuela Pageant. Venevisión produces some 184,000 hours of telenovelas each year that are broadcast in 38 countries – more than exported by Argentina, Mexico, or even the famed Brazilian soap opera

distributors. Six families own the six largest daily papers. In general, commercial media and entertainment remain dominant and robust, exceeding paper, auto, and all agricultural production in net profits. Significantly, (with the exception of Venevisión and until recently the news daily *Últimas Noticias*) commercial media are sensationalistic, oppositional, and at times even rabid in their attacks on Chavez. In addition to the large commercial stations, there are a few national specialty broadcasters such as Vale TV, a Catholic, educational channel, Meridiano, a sports channel, La Puma, a music channel, and La Tele, an entertainment channel (Wilpert 2007). The political economy summary: consolidated private ownership of means of production; hierarchical production for profit from advertising-funded entertainment media; programs created and distributed to target audiences of consumers, replete with narratives and themes advancing capitalist social relations, reinforcing passivity, authority, and individual consumption.

## 6. Reaction and Revolution

These conditions of media production were dramatically challenged following the April 2002 coup, which was orchestrated under the leadership of major media, in particular the owners of RCTV, along with the Chamber of Commerce and the Catholic Church hierarchy (all in consultation with the US) (Gollinger 2006). The coup leaders kidnapped Chavez, immediately “abolished” civil rights and the constitution, dissolved the National Assembly, shut down the only independent television station in the country, and broadcast cartoons for the duration of the coup on their own national networks. The people soon discovered the plot, however. The coup was short-lived – interrupted and blocked by mass civic action instigated by nascent community media in the hands of the more conscious sections of the Caracas working class, including low-power community radio, and journalist-activists that printed and distributed thousands of flyers calling for mass demonstrations against the coup (Sanchez 2012). (In May, these activists created the on-line news site, *Aporrea.org* [American Popular Revolutionary Assembly], which has become an important clearinghouse for nationwide community news and information in support of the revolution.)

Hundreds of thousands came into the streets and surrounded Miraflores, the Presidential building, where the coup was headquartered. After President Chavez was rescued the people celebrated their success. The more conscious leaders had a more sober assessment of the relations of power, however. Perhaps they recognized that a Chavez government had not overcome the power of the capitalist state. Seventy-eight Caracas-area media workers met with Chavez and other government representatives demanding more public independent media – media for revolution – not only in policy but in practice.

Although the government-run VTV was nationally broadcast and available to all, community media workers pointed out the fragility of such concentrated mass communication. They insisted on community media outside the state; community media controlled by workers in communities. Government response was immediate. Within the year, Venezuela had a new formation for communication: the Ministry of Communication and Information (MINCI) launched its “strategic goal” to return the right of communication to the population, initiating independent community media while increasing the regulation and monitoring control over commercial media. MINCI was the state apparatus response to working class demands. With the legitimate power of the state apparatus (the government) in revolutionary hands, all three elements of state power were addressed. From its inception, the Chavez-led government passed laws and provided resources to revolutionize the political economy of the media., including the Organic Telecommunications Law of 2000, which established the right to community media (e.g., Article 12 states that every individual has a right to create a non-profit community station). The state apparatus acted to curtail capitalist relations in the media and to advance socialist relations. Media ownership changed. Public ownership, as social ownership, was expanded, conceived as participatory and collaborative under direct popular control by citizens in their working class communities.

Meetings begun in 2002, however, led to a much clearer understanding, and more pronounced emphasis on participatory community media production, codified in a new media law. First, the Open Community Radio and Television Broadcast Ruling in 2002, defined criteria for media pro-

duction, prioritizing independently produced, community-based messages and programs. The Partial Reform Law of Radio and TV Social Responsibility (2006) outlines media rights and interests “for the purpose of promoting social justice and contributing to the formation of the citizenry, democracy, peace, human rights, culture, education, health, and social and economic development” and “to promote citizens’ active and direct participation” (MINCI 2006, 9, 14). Within the next few years, more 300 FM radio and TV broadcasters were organized and licensed. By 2011, Venezuela was approaching 1200 community media outlets (Venezuela en Noticias 2012). The government provided equipment, technical resources and training using the Social Fund, established with revenues from the nationalized oil industry – simultaneously impinging on capitalist prerogatives over resources and turning those resources toward support for participatory democracy. With licensing, the government provided space for public media – not the small spectrum and low-wattage normally available to community media in most countries – spectrum, power, and geography so “community” radio broadcasts reach 3 million in Caracas, for example. Using the “state for revolution”, media production practices and control changed. Laws and licensing legitimized and empowered revolutionary voices by ensuring direct working class access and control. In law and in licensing, commercial, state, party, and religious officials are excluded from public media, while 70% of the production must be directly from community councils themselves.

A few examples may help illustrate how a socialist state apparatus may use its power to revolutionize the political economy of the media and its striking impact on cultural practices. The development and expansion of national public broadcasting is the most easily recognizable change to the Venezuelan media landscape. The programs and processes of program production underscore how a more democratic political economy frames cultural practice. In addition to Telesur, the cooperative satellite television venture of Venezuela, Argentina, Uruguay, Cuba and Bolivia (Artz 2006), and ANTV, the television channel of the National Assembly, three major DTH broadcastings stations have been established: TVes, ViVe, and Avila TV. These public broadcastings stations are primarily funded by subsidies from the Social Fund and “advertisements” for national social services. They are each independently run outside government direction, oversight, or even approval –highlighted by several shows highly critical of Chavez and the government. The production and programming practices demonstrates the dialectic of social being determines social consciousness, because becoming producers, editors, narrators, and videographers for the new society creates new human beings – their social awareness, their life being is prompted to develop by the explosion in consciousness and awareness of their own creativity, power, and experience of social contradictions. In dozens of conversations and interviews with producers, directors, and technicians (conducted in person in 2006 and 2009, and electronically 2010-2011) expressions of determination and desire for a new society reflected the cumulative experience of democratic participation and decision-making that emphasized and privileged community, workers, women, indigenous, and the average citizen.

## 7. Public Media, Public Access

In 2007, the license to broadcast expired for RCTV, the largest private broadcaster in the country. The CONATEL (National Telecommunication Commission) and MINCI reviews found that RCTV had violated and admitted violating numerous broadcasting laws. Moreover, the new Constitution required expansion of public broadcasting, so Channel 2 was licensed to Venezuelan Social Television (TVes, pronounced “te ves” – meaning “you see yourself,” in Spanish). Even as RCTV continues to broadcast via satellite and cable, while Globovisión, Venevisión, and private local stations maintain media opposition to the Bolivarian social project, TVes became the first national broadcaster in the public interest and with public access (Ciccariello-Maher 2007). TVes is a publicly-run station with a Board of Directors elected by unions and community organizations. Funded with \$11 million from the National Assembly (and revenues for some social service advertising productions), TVes relies heavily on independent producers (PIN), journalists and community producers. Seventy-eight PINs provide some 229 programs on TVes’ yearly schedule. Meant to be “merely a conduit through which independent cultural production reaches the airwaves,” according to Minister of



Communication, William Lara (quoted in Ciccariello-Maher 2007), for the first time in national broadcasting history, TVes shows prominently feature working class, women, and indigenous people. Although telenovelas were perfected by Venevisión and RCTV, TVes airs the first ever soap opera with a black lead. Documentaries of popular history are a regular fare on TVes.

Founded four years earlier, Vision Venezuela TV (ViVe) is almost exclusively dedicated to community productions. Independent, public, and cooperatively-run, ViVe is funded by the Social Fund and prohibits any advertising commercials. Only 10% of programming is produced in-house, the remaining 90% of shows come from community videographers and documentarians (with specials on traditional peasant planting practices, indigenous musical performances, local community cultural activities, and investigative pieces on housing, utilities, and even religious events). More than 14,000 communities have been featured over the last 10 years, about 40 half-hour shows per week on average. Given its community production focus, for the first time on national television, women, Afro-Venezuelans, and indigenous people are prominent. To ensure quality productions, ViVe has organized community-based training for video production through community councils and some worker's councils. The Bolivarian socialist project "created social missions with health care and education for the poor. ViVe will be the equivalent for television, where everybody regardless of class, color, or beliefs can take part in the great political debate for socialism and the transformation of this country" (Sergio Arriasis, quoted in Wynter 2010). ViVe is not public service broadcasting as advocated by the media reform movement in the US. Rather, ViVe is public access, public control and public production of communication. ViVe even has mobile transmitting stations in each region of the country, along with courses to teach citizens broadcasting skills. A new social power has emerged as working class communities and individuals – directly participating and collectively collaborating – produce solidarity media and democratic cultural experiences. These creative producers represent new human beings, human agents consciously working in and for solidarity among working people and their allies.

One more important public broadcaster deserves mention for its connection to Venezuelan youth. Avila TV was originally launched in 2006 as part of a socialist communication initiative by the former Bolivarian mayor of Caracas, Juan Barretto.

Close to 400 twenty-three year olds produce, write, edit, film, and broadcast edgy, creative programming aimed at urban youth. Avila might be described as a station with hip-hop sensibility and socialist lyrics. A typical Avila broadcast day includes news, political talk shows, features on international and community issues, and telenovelas about Caracas working class families, but no commercials. Their programming decisions are guided by an explicit commitment to a new social order, as expressed by one of the many articulate young producers, "We aren't trying to sell shampoo or name brands clothes, or any capitalist products for that matter. We are trying to stay true to our principles and combat consumerism" (Mellado 2009). Watching Avila TV, viewers quickly notice the style, the tone, the structure of programming. At time even the music feels argumentative, strident. Avila is "not like ViVe, they privilege discourse, we privilege the aesthetic" (Mellado 2009). For example, in the spring of 2009, Avila aired a weekly series called "El Entrompe de Falopio", about women and gender issues in the revolution. A year-long live program, "Voice, Face, and Struggle of the People", included one titled "Impunity", where hosts, guests, and audience members sharply criticized the government for granting amnesty to the 2002 coup leaders. Even the telenovelas have political overtones with not-so-subtle barbs at the opposition for undemocratic obstruction and the government for not championing working class interests and advancing socialism more quickly. High-quality documentaries, professionally and creatively produced, have included the widely acclaimed 2008 "El Golpe" (The Coup) and the 2009 feature, "200 years of Caracas: The Insurgent Capital of the Continent". The young producers at Avila have also aired shows on Afro-Venezuelans, indigenous cultures, and homosexuality – all topics ignored or taboo on commercial television. Finally, Avila has been an integral part of RED TV (Education for the Revolution and Development of Venezuela), a city-wide educational project to bring classes in screenwriting, playwriting, and video production to the working class communities of Caracas. By 2010, fifty-five community councils in Caracas had media committees, where community members receive exten-

sive training, mentoring and equipment – cameras, computers, and editing software for video production and post-production. Community media committees then have regularly scheduled spots on Avila's daily schedule for airing 10-15 minute video productions. In other words, the socialist government, nationally and locally, has created laws, provided resources, and prepared space for non-commercial, non-capitalist media production. In the vocabulary of the Bolivarian project, new "protagonists" can now fully participate in creating their own culture, their own stories, expressing their own interests. While they are making video, making television, making communication, they are also making new human beings. Lives and experiences of working class communities and community activists are valuable, valued, and shared – informing the nation of how and what new creative human beings can and will be with the revolutionary transformation of society from capitalism to socialism.

## 8. Community Media: Independent and Participatory

Complementing and historically and politically preceding these major broadcast ventures, community radio and television in Venezuela have a rich tradition of participatory communication. The seminal leader of all is Catia TV in Caracas, the first legal community television in the country. Catia TV's slogan "Don't Watch TV, Make TV!" is inscribed on the outside walls of its broadcast studios and demonstrated daily by collaborative rotating teams of 4-7 community producers organized in ECPAIs (Independent Community Audiovisual Production Teams). Each ECPAI decides the topics, formats, aesthetics, and content for broadcast programs, "emphazing stories from the barrio, contradictions and changes, or not" (Vasquez 2009). Catia TV lives popular education and democratic participation, articulating its television production and programming with assemblies, events, and communication guerrillas: muralists, storytellers, oral historians, artisanal creators, and puppeteers. Its purpose "is to act as an organizing tool, where communities build their own audiovisual discourse..." (Catia TVe Collective 2006). Collaboratively teaching and learning creates dozens of ECPAIs, "having knowledge of communication; having a critical analysis surrounding the conditions and social context in which an individual or group must live; identifying the cultural and ideological values that effect the group's or collective's vision; developing a understanding of reality and how they act; associating learning with the collective construction of knowledge; and identifying and analyzing [their] own practices" (Catia TVe Collective 2006).

Beginning as the Simon Rodriguez Cultural Center, a volunteer-based community-building project, showing film and video in vacant buildings in the neighborhood, Catia TV eventually emerged as a media-based social movement that expanded and organically developed through intimate interaction with the community. Even before the Chavez election in 1998, the cultural center was showing community-produced news and entertainment in the community centers of West Catia. (An early leader of the Cultural Center was Blanca Eekhout, now president of ViVe TV, extending the participatory radical social ethos into the heart of public broadcasting, confirming in practice the revolutionary impulse of the Bolivarian government.) Following the national impetus to develop community media, Catia TV was licensed in 2000, by the April 2002 coup was setting the standard for participatory, democratic, public access television—a model to be emulated by the hundreds of community media launched after 2003. "The fundamental principle of Catia TVe is to encourage participation within organized communities. Catia TVe seeks community participation in the making of audiovisual productions reflecting community struggles and demonstrating how to build networks within the community... [the] objective is to build a media that the people want, with democratic participation based on dialogue. As part of this objective and considering that community media is a space for the people to exercise their power, at least 70 percent of Catia TVe's programming must be produced from within the community... Because Catia TVe is a television station connected to the working class...every Catia TVe participant has a minimum political consciousness and social responsibility...Catia TVe shares a space for communication with organized groups that come from various communities in Caracas, as a way of protesting" (Catia TVe Collective 2006).

Dozens of community television stations now broadcast across Venezuela. Not all are successful in integrating community participation with media production. Petare TV was established without

much community input and despite funding, technology, and training, it struggles from the lack of collaboration and organic connection to residents. Petare TV shows how government initiatives fall flat without participation and interest: Petare's communal council barely exists; recent Colombia immigrants have created much social disruption; crime, unemployment, drugs, and atomization mark Petare daily life. Citizens are more intimidated than motivated. Thus, Petare TV is just one more station on the dial for neighborhood residents who do not yet feel or believe in social responsibility or collective action. The state apparatus cannot impose participation or a new social order; socialism and the transition to socialism requires participation, initiative, time, aptitude, creativity, and an organic connection to the life of the community. Disaffection and surrender are not key motivators for social change.

In contrast, Afro TV, in Balo Vento on the east coast of Venezuela, illustrates the cultural and social potential for community media led by community activists and linked to a politically awakening community. About 15% of Venezuela is Afro-Venezuela, the historic consequence of Spanish slavery and cocoa plantations in the east. Balo Vento had long been neglected by central government, relegated to continued exploitation by remaining small cocoa growers. Following discussion and ratification of the new Constitution that establishes Venezuela as a multiethnic, pluriculture society, the government established a subcommission of African descendants in the National Assembly. The education, health, and housing missions were extended to Balo Vento, along with the opportunity for public, independent, community media. Afro TV was the early regional media project launched by a handful of community activists. Their mission includes recovering their African past, expressing their cultural and artistic present, and organizing public dialogue on contemporary issues important to Balo Vento, such as land reform, development, and worker's control of cocoa production. In 2009, Afro TV was broadcasting 4-5 hours daily on a UHF signal. Afro TV is also available via the Internet. Early programs included "Cimmarones," stories of slave rebellion, and "Que Es Eso," featuring local characters telling their life stories (Perdemo 2009). Afro TV, while modest in its operation, nonetheless illustrates the relationship between media access and community cultural experiences, the dialectical development of becoming new human beings through participation in creating one's one existence. In the words of MINCI Alternative and Community Media Director, Ana Viloría, "Community media visibilizes our faces, our voices, so we collectively know what we are doing is connected to humanity. We become protagonists...we make for ourselves the task of learning ideas and tools that are available for the political actor" (Viloría 2009).

There are currently more than 100,000 community activists working with more than 400 community radio and 40 television stations with some additional 800 broadcasters in various stages of preparation, production, training, licensing and regular broadcasts, most to be completed by the end of 2012. Community media have been a national priority for MINCI since 2008, when it unveiled a new strategic plan for funding, training, and licensing community media with national broadcast capabilities. By 2009, community media reached 56% of the population. As already indicated, this national program represents the continuing dialogue about communication and the concerted interaction between government and working class communities to establish laws, practices, and democratic control over media in Venezuela. An example of government intent, was Chavez's defense of CONATEL's (National Telecommunication Commission) decision in 2008 to "recuperate" 32 private radio and 2 private television stations for violations of laws on media monopoly, those "stations now belong to the people" who should "control the strategic means of production" of communication in Venezuela (Viloría 2009). At all levels, from officials to teenage producers, socialism for the 21<sup>st</sup> century is articulated as a process for creating new social relations, beginning with ownership and control over industry, including media that contributes to a new social consciousness and new social being across classes. Community radio illustrates this dialectical process of protagonist-initiated development of political self-awareness and power.

At Radio 23 de Enero (broadcasting at 3000 watts in Caracas), community council journalists and producers from the more than 50 social movement collectives broadcast weekly programs of music, opinion, health, public affairs, and news. Also in Caracas, teens, grandparents, DJs, and investigative journalists collectively share the broadcast schedule at Radio Primero Negro, a station

with a long history of community organizing. More than 60 programs are aired weekly by “students, housewives, unemployed, and members of community organizations” (Lujo 2009) The station’s community activists conduct regular surveys and conversations with neighborhood residents to assure programs meet the needs and interests of all, and to always recruit more participants for the station, offering training and the expertise of station technicians. Both of these “community” stations reach more than 1 million residents of Caracas – not your typical “community” broadcaster in the US or the rest of the North.

Radio Minero, in Tumeremo, is operated by working miners and their community producing their own news and programs. In Zulia, Maracaibo, the indigenous community broadcasts over Radio Yupa in their native language, with stories and topics drawn from their historic culture and everyday concerns. About 40 television stations, and hundreds of radio stations, now air countless inspiring stories by novices facing microphones for the first time and feeling the power of communication, directly experiencing the meaning of democracy and community (Labrique, 2011). Local stations have leaders, directors, and specialists on cultural, political, and indigenous, community issues, creating a “communication force” for revolutionary change (Viloria 2009).

Participatory journalism and participatory democratic production at ViVe, Avila, Catia TV, El Negro Primero, and other public and community media outlets reflect changing social relations. University and professionally trained journalists work alongside community correspondents and participatory journalists, constructing and distributing news and news reports that are accurate, timely, but much more democratic in framing and sourcing because they are not bound by the advertising needs or editorial dictates of a market-driven media. New norms of objectivity with partisanship serve the information and educational needs of the majority striving for democratic control over their lives. The goal of 21<sup>st</sup> century socialism as promulgated in word and deed in Venezuela exists (not to provide government largess and with patronizing welfare benefits) but for nothing less than to place the working class and its allies as protagonists in the process of restructuring social relations, including replacing the artificial norms of professional journalism, which pretend to separate facts from context.

Community and public media for 21<sup>st</sup> century social alter the practices and functions of media in line with human needs, so that a participatory socially-conscious media contribute to a new cultural hegemony of a creative, socialist humanity – against the hegemony of consumerism and neo-liberalism – for a culture of cooperation, solidarity, and dedication to creating social justice and solidarity. In this mix, journalism of necessity becomes more vibrant, more alive, identifying facts, sources, and truths related to the real experience and conditions of the working class population.

In addition to community radio, television, and newspapers, the media battle in Venezuela has entered cyberspace. Early on media activists recognized the importance of Internet communication. Aporeea.org went on-line in May 2002, bringing together dozens of journalist-activists linked to community councils, community media, and independent newspapers and journals. Working with and through the National Association of Community and Alternative Media (ANMCLA), Apporeea.org has demonstrated the value of networking news and information among community media – one of the few means for countering commercial media dominance. Meanwhile, with more access, more resources, and more cultural capital, privileged youth and university students working with the conservative Primero Justicia party, the right-wing foundation Futuro Presente, and other opposition groups have been developing coordinated attacks on the Bolivarian revolution using social media and the Internet. The conservative youth have been courted and funded by the U.S. State Department, Freedom House, the Cato Institute, and the National Endowment for Democracy, and other U.S. government and private agencies. With some \$7 million from the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), anti-Chavez youth and student groups have used Twitter, Facebook, blogs, websites, and email messaging to destabilize the government through rumor and agitation against social programs and social reform (Golinger 2010). The Venezuelan government has not ceded the terrain. In the last few years, the government has energetically extended Internet access to millions of citizens. In 2000, only 4.1% of Venezuelans had Internet access, in 2009, 33% had Internet access (Internet World Stats, 2012). In addition to the 8 million citizens who have

Internet access, and in direct refutation of commercial media claims about Internet restrictions, the government has established 668 community-based Internet “infocenters” with free public access. In 2010, the Ministry of Science and Technology launched 27 mobile infocenters “which will travel to remote areas in the Amazon, Andean and rural regions, guaranteeing free Internet services and computer training to citizens” who previously lack access to the technology (Golinger 2010). The Ministry also budgeted \$10 million to build another 200 free cybercenters in underserved neighborhoods. In all, the current infocenters provide Internet to 2.5 million permanent users and up to 10 million visitors annually. As with all community media, the government is dedicated to participatory democracy, seeking to transfer operations and administration to community councils so citizens can collectively determine the technological needs of the residents.

Extending access to working classes and indigenous people is only part of the solution. As with other social projects, working class protagonists creating new social relations and more democratic communication forms will determine what a “socialist” Internet may look like. Fuchs sketched some broad outlines for a commons-based Internet dependent on a commons-based society (Fuchs 2012, 48) and the socio-cultural thrust of participatory social programs would suggest the Bolivarian revolution will so advocate, but at this point, beyond extending free public access and community administration it is not yet clear what the Venezuelan revolution will contribute to a more democratic, participatory Internet.

## 9. The Socialist Triangle

The trajectory of public broadcasting, community media, and participatory democracy with public access to media portends a new social function for media. Legalized, funded, and supported by the new Bolivarian government in power, these independent community media may still be entertaining, but more importantly, they are revolutionary media. Media that air working class-generated narratives reflecting the collaborative creativity and shared experiences of those who aspire to write their own future history; media that broadcast messages, stories, and images of solidarity, collective action, participatory democracy, and communities in struggle for democracy, social justice, self-government, and working class leadership of society. In sum, a revolutionary leadership has used its government power against the capitalist state, expanding sites for additional participation by the Venezuelan working and middle classes, women, youth, Afro-Venezuelans, indigenous populations, and others previously underserved and excluded, politically, socially, and economically. The Bolivarian government for 21<sup>st</sup> century socialism has been using its legislative, executive, and administrative power to direct Venezuelan national resources towards advancing working class control and democratic social relations.

The emerging popular community media represent what Michael Lebowitz (2010), following István Mészáros (1994, 2008), terms the “socialist triangle.” Moving beyond the economist, determinist version of Marxism, which distorts historical materialism, Mészáros and Lebowitz understand the political economy of socialism to include: 1) the productive capacity and forces of society; 2) the social relations of “production” of humanity, understood as revolutionary human development that comes from the “simultaneous changing of circumstances and human activity or self-change” (Lebowitz 2010, 49); and 3) (in direct contrast to capitalist self-interest) the creation of communities of human solidarity—humans consciously working to meet the needs of the [global] community, including the “full development of the creative potentialities” of all humans (Mészáros 1994, 817). There is no doubt this informs Chavez. Citing Mészáros, Chavez proclaimed in 2005 that Bolivarian socialism is creating “a communal system of production and consumption” (in: Lebowitz 2006, 108). In other words, socialism thus conceived includes nationalized industry to secure social wealth (removing capitalist ownership and exploitation of resources and labor), worker’s control of production to institute democratic relations of production (ending production for profit without regard for safety, the environment or human needs and opposing state control over production), and democratic, participatory culture for determining how social wealth will be applied to develop humanity (replacing the culture of consumption, hyper-individuality, ethnocentrism, and self-interest). Public and community media in Venezuela aspire to this “socialist triangle” in their public, social owner-

ship of the means of media production, in the direct control over production and distribution of media by workers and community councils (without interference by the state or commercial media institutional control), and in the organic development of a culture of solidarity through collaborative, participatory production from and by the people themselves (as illustrated in Catia TV's ECPAL teams, Avila and ViVe communal documentaries, and community radio programming across the nation).

In most every respect, public and community media illustrate the dialectic of creating a “state for revolution” – as expressed in Venezuela today. As MINCI's Community Media Director, Ana Viloría explains this is “an exquisite contradiction. The state is used to initiate new practices requiring direct working class control *outside* and *above* the state. The state [government] did not impose, or implement. The state [government] did not bribe or provide a gift, or even provide a service to the public. Rather, the state [government] initiated a policy, provided funds [from the nationalized social wealth], while the communal councils and worker's councils implement, direct, create and decide how to use media to communicate their own messages and ideas” (Viloría 2009).

One third of media broadcasts in Venezuela are now socially-owned with licensing collectively held by the media users themselves. These new media social relations are nothing like the vertical broadcasting and control prevalent in commercial media. These media do not broadcast to “receivers” or “audiences”. These new media have established active democratic relations of production because they are under direct workers community control, functioning to develop class actions and advance a new social order. State power over communication (including private control and ownership and government regulation) is passing to organized worker and their constituents, as community media become organizing structures and practices undermining capitalist social relations, production norms, and ideology. Community media, in practice, transform individuals, communities, and social classes who directly experience the power of the power to communicate, the power of the power to democratically decide and implement. Community media, and their national public media counterparts, prepare the working class majority for the coming confrontation with capitalism (within Venezuela and from the US) by experiencing and communicating in production and programming new norms of class solidarity, collective ownership, and democratic practices.

## 10. The Reality of Power

This is no idealistic journey into possibility. The Venezuelan community media experience is an actual historical dialectic, based in the material reality of an unfolding revolution. In dialectical terms, the social consciousness of workers and their allies arrives before, simultaneously, or in interaction with the available social structures. The material dialectic of becoming is based on the consciousness informed by experience and possibility. Media workers, women, youth, indigenous people, and large sections of the working class, middle class, and unemployed are propelled by workers and communal control to imagine and create new social practices – in violation of the norms of class society that dictate power and control from bureaucratic institutions. New media practices include writing their own stories, producing their own programs, relying on working class sources, recognizing the integrity and value of working class experiences and knowledge, serving their communities and cultures, and connecting with other communities. These practices uncover real human potential, inspire further creative endeavors, as illustrated daily through TVes, ViVe, and Avila airing of communally-produced news and culture. Importantly, these multiple, but shared experiences have the potential to lead protagonists to new understandings, including the recognition that their new access to communication and power can only be secured ultimately by establishing new democratic social relations throughout society—not just in one plant or at one station. Their individual self-realization requires the collective societal realization of 21<sup>st</sup> century socialism.

In Venezuela, revolutionary voices are no longer compelled to cry out from the grass roots. Revolutionary voices now broadcast from the highest hilltops of the urban centers. Because resolute leaders in the Bolivarian government, from the president to the National Assembly are using the state apparatus for revolution, revolutionary voices have the power of communication, the power of

action, the power of decision and control over production. In the process of democratic media production, social relations and social consciousness are being transformed.

Socialism, after all, is not just an ideology or a program. Socialism means new, revolutionary human beings with the power to realize the needs of all, using their own voices as power – not speaking truth to power (that impotent refrain of the self-righteous and powerless liberal) – but speaking power with truth, as collective agents of their own historic reconstruction. Community media are a vital, if insufficient, venue for creating new human beings as active agents of history, agents of communication who are no longer listeners, viewers, or spectators, but protagonists who make their own realities.

### **11. Two States: Dual Power in the Balance**

Of course, just as the nationalizations of steel, aluminum, and other industry have not replaced capitalism or its social relations throughout Venezuela and social missions have not replaced traditional political or social institutions, neither has the development of public and community media alongside an entrenched, popularly-appealing commercial media displaced the entertainment-based individual consumerist culture in Venezuela. Indeed, contrary to the *New York Times*, the *Washington Post*, and US network television, media in Venezuela are diverse in form and substance, with commercial media being openly, and harshly critical of the Chavez government. In other words, despite and because of the advances of the Bolivarian movement, there are currently two states in Venezuela. The government represents the working class majority and is using that power to organize and promote parallel institutions and sites for building political power and a new socialist culture. At the same time, the few dozen wealthy families and their minions remain as a still powerful capitalist class with major interests in media, banking, retail and food production and distribution, and importantly in popular culture. Music, movies, television, fashion, and the comforting familiarity of market relations encourage simple self-gratification, individualized mass entertainment, and consumerism. But the capitalist class is politically disoriented and divided, finding political unity difficult even with US guidance. Meanwhile, managers, shopkeepers, and middle class students and professionals are anxious and fearful, pummeled by the market, constrained by their small business mentality. Most are atomized and alienated from society, but many are attracted to the democratic impulses of the socialist reforms in education, health care, housing, and credit. In brief, Bolivarian socialism is growing; capitalism is under siege. A major confrontation is near.

### **12. Making Change by Taking Power**

In the transition to socialism in Venezuela, the conflict between two states must be resolved. The future socialist state is embodied in the current Bolivarian government, parallel political and social institutions, including new media, changing social relations of production represented by worker's control of production, and the explosion of class consciousness and political organization of the working class. The weakened capitalist state relies on the prevalence of wage labor and market relations across the national economy and in global trade, its entrenched government bureaucracy, especially on the provincial and local level, ideologically reinforced by Venezuela's energetic consumerist entertainment culture. The future socialist state is pressuring the lethargic, but agitated capitalist state, featuring "elements of the new society with which the old collapsing bourgeois society is pregnant" (Marx 1871, 335). The capitalist class will not willingly relinquish its power to profit and exploit. There will soon be a war of movement, in Gramscian terms. There will be a battle of classes and their allies. Skirmishes like the media coup of April 2002, the oil management strike of December 2002, the daily obstruction by mid-level government officials, industrial sabotage, irregular border incursions by Colombia, continuous media incitement against government policies and over social problems like crime and housing, are but precursors to more organized civil unrest, including civil war.

Of course, overshadowing the national and regional class conflict is the threatening presence and ongoing intervention of the United States, which continues to advise, finance, and intervene on

behalf of the Venezuelan elite and larger U.S. interests (Benjamin 2006; James 2006). In 2012, U.S. President Obama asked for another \$5 million for the opposition groups, adding to the \$57 million they received in 2010 from the US and EU combined (Golinger 2011). As inroads are made into capitalist power, US intervention will surely increase in myriad ways. The immediate future in Venezuela will be an intense struggle between the old and the new.

Will the Venezuelan working class and its allies be prepared in consciousness and organization to withstand the onslaught, including the likely intervention of the US in some fashion? The strategy of “state for revolution” anticipates the coming confrontation by resolutely building sites and experiences prompting the self-organization of the working classes. Some success can be noted: six million members of PSUV, twenty thousand community councils, hundreds of worker’s councils in nationalized industry, thousands of social missions directed and staffed by tens of thousands of community activists, thirty thousand worker’s militia, and hundreds of independent community media. The “state for revolution” continues to create opportunities for the working class and their allies to organize their own institutions, relations, and actions to fight for socialism. In action, the collective leadership of the state apparatus, the parallel working class institutions, and the independent political organizations seem to understand that their Bolivarian goals will realize 21<sup>st</sup> century socialism, only if they secure sufficient revolutionary power in a new state—with democratic, non-capitalist social relations, worker’s control of production; direct, participatory political leadership and authority in law and policy; and socio-cultural practices for solidarity, democracy, and democratic communication.

The transitional phase to socialism began once the state apparatus undertook socialist goals, including writing laws and policies that opened avenues for new social relations, and putting the production of social wealth, including the production of media in the hands of the majority. Access to information and media production is a recognized human right in the Venezuelan Constitution (Articles 57-58, 65), the 2004 Law of Social Responsibility in Radio and Television declared the airwaves and radio spectrum a public good. CONATEL, MINCI, the National Assembly have only elaborated proposals for democratic media. The working class communities are the agents for implementing those proposals. The state apparatuses, such as MINCI exist to “solicit the people’s involvement,” because revolutionary leaders “know what we are doing is connected to humanity...so we put ourselves the task of learning that ideas and tools are there for political action” by the working class as protagonists of history (Viloria 2009).

By all available indications, using the “state for revolution” in the case of media suggests that public and community media have established working people as protagonists in the revolution, markedly helping personalize the meaning of collective participation for media workers and their community bases. Yet, with a completely sober assessment, this may prove insufficient, because consumer culture is ingrained in Venezuela and seductive in complex ways. When ViVe TV showed indigenous Venezuelans speaking their own language with Spanish subtitles, nobody understood, including the Chavistas (Sergio Arriasis, quoted in Wynter 2010). Fashion shows and beauty pageants remain popular, as do games shows and soap operas on commercial television.

Public and community media in Venezuela are constructing and broadcasting images for a new democratic socialist society, but with a growing awareness that new cultural identities cannot come from images or stories alone. A new socialist culture can only be created through political debates and battles for social justice, democracy, and new social relations that put human needs before private profits. The experiences of community media strongly hint at the real creative potential for humanity. Recognizing that objective material conditions condition possibilities for subjective intervention at opportune conjunctural moments has been a hallmark of historical materialism. In Venezuela, material conditions include oil resources, oil prices, class forces, lingering capitalist cultural norms and the likelihood of US intervention. Subjective conditions include the increasing organization and class consciousness of the working class and its allies, as well as concerted efforts to inform and persuade all of the benefits of solidarity, collaboration, and social justice.

Of course, understanding the dialectic of history and the contradictions within class society may inform the Bolivarian leadership in Venezuela, but it does not guarantee success. Nonetheless,



Marxism has once again demonstrated its analytical and practical value for social change. Championing participatory democracy and implementing a “state for revolution” policy of government action and parallelism in social programs is a well-conceived strategy for winning socialism in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Those convinced of the democratic ethic and practical logic of historical materialism would do well to add their own subjective contribution to the efforts for 21<sup>st</sup> century socialism. Collectively raising more voices to defend, promote, and emulate community and public media in Venezuela will increase the possibilities for success and broaden awareness of an important historical lesson. Community and public media in Venezuela are demonstrating an important strategic truth: social change can only be realized when protagonists for democracy have power. May we recognize our own power in acts of solidarity, encouraging us to mobilize our own independent political power as working people and other citizens are doing in Venezuela.

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