

## Fact-checking the Heralded “End of the Latin American Left”

*By Peter Bolton,  
Research Fellow at the Council on Hemispheric Affairs*

Recent political developments across the region have prompted celebratory proclamations in the mainstream Western press that Latin America’s decades-long dominance by left-leaning governments is reaching its terminal stages. The landslide victory of the Venezuelan opposition in last December’s legislative elections, the impeachment of President Dilma Rousseff in Brazil, and the triumph of center-right candidate Mauricio Macri in Argentina’s presidential election do indeed seem to point to a region-wide decline in the fortunes of the parties of the *Pink Tide*. But as is so often the case in the mainstream media, commentators have been too quick to make current events fit neatly into overarching seismic shifts. The cursory and often incomplete news reports on which they are based simply do not provide sufficient support for such catchall explanations. While scholars have naturally initiated a more nuanced and detailed debate to consider whether the region is indeed witnessing the end of a *progressive cycle*, press analyses have struck a premature and in many cases triumphalist tone by declaring the collapse of the Latin American left both imminent and beyond serious doubt.

In reality, it is the exact opposite that is beyond serious doubt: it is far too early to write off the future of the left in Latin America. Moreover, more research is needed to understand the dynamics of these movements and how things might play out in the coming months and years. But what is most disconcerting about these knee-jerk press responses is that the people making them seem to not even have a strong grasp of the basic facts surrounding the political developments on which they base their claims, let alone of the nuance needed to develop a sophisticated analysis. In a survey of the media declarations of the purportedly imminent collapse of the Latin American left, COHA has found a shocking collection of glaring and demonstrably false statements over basic matters of fact that reveal the profoundly slipshod nature of their research.

The salience of these findings can hardly be overstated: if journalists in the mainstream media cannot even get basic facts correct, they can hardly be trusted to provide a meaningful analysis of the larger picture.

### **Jackson Diehl**

As predictable as the jeers from the DC commentariat were, perhaps the one figure within the Beltway punditry class who could have been most counted on to react gloatingly to the recent setbacks of leftist governments in Latin America was *The Washington Post’s* deputy editorial page editor Jackson Diehl. Having been a reliable war hawk and right-wing militarist at the *Post’s* op-ed section since the late 1970s, Diehl was quick to turn his wrath on *Pink Tide* leaders and their supposedly grave threat to U.S. national security interests. In 2010 he

repeated American Enterprise Institute scholar Roger Noriega's accusation that then-President of Venezuela Hugo Chavez was collaborating with Iran in the development of nuclear capabilities.<sup>1</sup> In 2013 he accused the governments of Venezuela, Nicaragua and Ecuador of "gutting democratic institutions in their countries," and described Ecuadorian President Rafael Correa as "Latin America's chief caudillo and Yanqui-baiter."<sup>2</sup>

His characterization of the latest political developments, inexplicably posted at the Charleston-based *Post and Courier* rather than his home publication, fits seamlessly with this record of hysterical hyperbole and dubious accuracy. In the article's first sentence he triumphantly announces: "The encouraging news from Latin America is that the leftist populists who for 15 years undermined the region's democratic institutions and wrecked its economies are being pushed out — not by coups and juntas, but by democratic and constitutional means."<sup>3</sup> From this outrageously loaded misrepresentation he quickly moves on to outright falsehoods by claiming that Argentina's Cristina Fernández de Kirchner was "vanquished in a presidential election."<sup>4</sup> From a simple Google search one can learn that she was in fact not even a candidate in last year's presidential election.<sup>5</sup> Apparently Diehl cannot even get past his article's second sentence without revealing his stupefying ignorance of the most basic of facts.

Aside from blatant inaccuracies, he also makes the remarkable claim that "most of the Western hemisphere is studiously ignoring this meltdown," despite the fact that Secretary-General of the Organization of American States (OAS), Luis Almagro, has been calling for months to invoke the OAS Democratic Charter against Venezuela.<sup>6</sup> If he is referring not to the OAS but rather to the leaders of the region's governments, then he is simply confusing their indifference for Washington's isolation in its condemnations of the Maduro government. Just as the United States was completely isolated in its refusal to recognize Maduro's election victory in 2013, so it has been alone in calling for sanctions, for which it has lobbied on the basis of largely spurious allegations of human rights violations.

To round out his diatribe, Diehl then describes the "obstacles" to getting a recall referendum to remove President Maduro as "comically steep," despite the fact that all of the figures he cites regarding the required numbers of petition signatures (which opposition activists need to gather to trigger the recall vote) are calculated from terms set out in Venezuela's Constitution. By representing the recall referendum as offering the "slim remaining hopes for a democratic solution," he implies that some sort of extra-democratic

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<sup>1</sup> Jackson Diehl, "Is Hugo Chavez a real threat to the U.S.?" *The Washington Post*, September 27, 2010. <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2010/09/26/AR2010092603334.html>

<sup>2</sup> Jackson Diehl, "Jackson Diehl: Will the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights be gutted?," *The Washington Post*, March 3, 2013. [https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/jackson-diehl-will-the-inter-american-commission-on-human-rights-be-gutted/2013/03/03/c018f9a6-81d0-11e2-b99e-6baf4ebe42df\\_story.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/jackson-diehl-will-the-inter-american-commission-on-human-rights-be-gutted/2013/03/03/c018f9a6-81d0-11e2-b99e-6baf4ebe42df_story.html)

<sup>3</sup> Jackson Diehl, "Stop ignoring the implosion in Venezuela," *The Post and Courier*, May 4, 2016. <http://www.postandcourier.com/20160504/160509752/stop-ignoring-the-implosion-in-venezuela>

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Simon Romero and Jonathan Gilbert, "Election Will End Kirchner's Presidency, Not Her Hold on Argentina," *The New York Times*, October 24, 2015. <http://www.nytimes.com/2015/10/25/world/americas/election-will-end-kirchners-presidency-not-her-hold-on-argentina.html>

<sup>6</sup> <http://venezuelanalysis.com/news/11815>

methods might be necessary, and presumably also justified.<sup>7</sup> Keep in mind that the provision for a recall referendum to remove a sitting president is a democratic mechanism that scarcely exists in any constitution besides Venezuela's.

## Rafael Ruiz Velasco

In an article published at the *PanAm Post*, Rafael Ruiz Velasco is just as hasty in his passage of judgment on the fate of Latin America's left. He announces confidently that "the results are clear: the bet on socialism in Latin America has failed."<sup>8</sup> But like Diehl, Velasco makes at least one glaring factual error that undermines his already highly suspect piece. He says of Brazil: "The Olympics will be held with a politically defeated Dilma Rousseff out of office, as she faces impeachment on corruption charges."<sup>9</sup> The truth of the matter is that Rousseff is in fact one of the few leading Brazilian politicians *not* to be facing corruption charges.<sup>10</sup> Her impeachment was rather premised on vague accusations of fiscal mismanagement and budgetary irregularities<sup>11</sup>—hardly the high crimes that under normal circumstances would merit removal from office. Her replacement Michel Temer, on the other hand, *does* presently stand accused of corruption, and not over minor allegations either. In addition to being implicated in the country's ongoing Petrobras scandal, he also stands accused of illegal financing during the 2014 elections<sup>12</sup>; the exact kinds of things, ironically, that *would* normally be legitimate grounds for impeachment.

Either Velasco is conveniently ignoring these facts, or else just has a very weak understanding of the details of what is taking place in Brazilian politics. Indeed, much else in his article makes one wonder whether he is engaging in willful misrepresentation or is just plain clueless. To give just one example, Velasco describes Rousseff and her predecessor, Luiz Ignácio da Silva, as Brazil's "figureheads of failure," in spite of the four electoral victories they have won between them. Leveling this smear against da Silva, whose widespread popularity led to him being affectionately known as *Lula*, is particularly absurd given that he won both of his presidential election victories with over 60 percent of the vote and left office with 80 percent approval ratings.<sup>13</sup>

## Antonio Sampaio

In an article for *Foreign Policy* magazine, provocatively titled "How Brazil's Left Destroyed Itself," Antonio Sampaio pulls no punches in his characterization of Rousseff's impeachment, claiming that it "marks the final fall from grace not only of the president but also

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Rafael Ruiz Velasco, "The Jury Is In: Latin America's 21st Century Socialism Has Failed," *The PanAm Post*, May 19, 2016. <https://panampost.com/rafael-ruiz-velasco/2016/05/19/21st-century-socialism-has-failed/>

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Marina Koren, "Brazil's Impeachment Battle," *The Atlantic*, April 17, 2016.

<http://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2016/04/brazil-impeachment-dilma-rousseff/478632/>

<sup>11</sup> Matt Sandy, "Brazil's Senate Votes to Impeach President Dilma Rousseff: What Happens Now?," *Time* magazine, May 12, 2016. <http://time.com/4327408/brazil-senate-dilma-rousseff-suspended/>

<sup>12</sup> "Brazil President Corruption Scandal," Open Source Investigations.

<http://www.opensourceinvestigations.com/corruption/petrobras-scandal-catching-up-to-brazil-president/>

<sup>13</sup> Daniela Blei, "Is the Latin American Left Dead?," *The New Republic*, April 16, 2016.

<https://newrepublic.com/article/132779/latin-american-left-dead>

of her ruling Workers' Party, which has run the country for 13 years."<sup>14</sup> But one can only feel confounded when Sampaio concedes further down the article that "supporters of the government are right to point out that Rousseff herself is one of the few high-profile political figures who has not been accused of abusing her office for personal enrichment. (Her impeachment is related to alleged manipulation of public accounts to disguise a deficit)."<sup>15</sup> This stands in blatant contradiction to how he begins the article, with the claim that "the biggest corruption scandal in national history is revealing the extent to which Rousseff and her allies actively contributed to the rot of Brazil's democratic institutions."<sup>16</sup> It is simply unfathomable how he can lay the blame for the damage done to Brazil's institutions by this scandal at the feet of Dilma Rousseff when he concedes in the same article that her impeachment has nothing to do with corruption. But in the world of Western press coverage of Latin America, this kind Orwellian doublethink does not seem to matter even when such contradictory statements are being made in the very same article.

### Chicago Tribune/Orlando Sentinel

In a "Guest Editorial" in the *Orlando Sentinel*, the editors of the *Chicago Tribune* (I'm confused too) argue that the next U.S. president "will need to engage Latin America with a lot more purpose and resolve," or else "Russia, Iran and China will."<sup>17</sup> To their credit, they do concede that the recent setbacks of leftist leaders "do not necessarily mean a complete, sweeping repudiation of leftist populism," since "the gap between the impoverished masses and the few wealthy elite still defines life for much if not all of the continent." But rather than providing legitimate justifications for progressive policies, this grinding poverty and gross inequality apparently makes these countries "susceptible" to what they term "leftist agendas."

But in addition to this patronizing jeer, the *Tribune* editors also make the exact same factual error as Jackson Diehl by claiming that Cristina Fernández de Kirchner "lost her re-election bid to Argentine center-right leader Mauricio Macri last fall."<sup>18</sup> At the risk of repeating it *ad nauseam*, Kirchner did not stand in the election, and, moreover, was not even able to since the Argentine Constitution sets a limit of two consecutive presidential terms. Granted, her ruling Justicialist Party lost control of the executive to Macri's rival Republican Proposal party, but the candidate for the Justicialists was Daniel Scioli<sup>19</sup> (a former vice-president during the administration of Cristina Fernández de Kirchner's husband and predecessor Nestor Kirchner). To those who might try to dismiss this correction as mere nitpicking, imagine what people in the United States would have thought if a foreign newspaper had reported in November 2008 that U.S. President George W. Bush had lost his re-election bid to Barack Obama. Such shoddy journalism would have surely delivered an instantly fatal blow to the publication's credibility. But when a U.S. publication demonstrates an exactly analogous ignorance of basic facts about Latin America, its unfounded pronouncements and flimsy

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<sup>14</sup> Antonio Sampaio, "How Brazil's Left Destroyed Itself," *Foreign Policy*, May 13, 2016.

<http://foreignpolicy.com/2016/05/13/how-brazils-left-destroyed-itself-dilma-rousseff-impeachment/>

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> "As 'pink tide' ebbs, U.S. must engage: Guest Editorial," *Orlando Sentinel*, May 17, 2016.

<http://www.orlandosentinel.com/opinion/os-ed-pink-tide-latin-america-20160516-story.html>

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> Jonathan Watts and Uki Goñi, "Argentina shifts to the right after Mauricio Macri wins presidential runoff," *The Guardian*, November 23, 2016. <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/nov/22/argentina-election-exit-polls-buenos-aires-mauricio-macri>

arguments still get taken seriously.

Further revealing their risible political illiteracy, the *Tribune* editors claim that the setbacks for the Latin American left have "all happened with virtually no coddling or stoking from the U.S."<sup>20</sup> Either the authors have never read anything about the United States' covert funding of Venezuelan opposition candidates and its threats of sanctions against the Maduro government, the meetings between major regional right-wing figures and allies in the U.S. Congress,<sup>21</sup> and the United States' use of international organizations to weaken left-leaning governments, or else they are being deliberately duplicitous (and presumably take their readers for a bunch of idiots to boot). The *Tribune* editors conclude with the unbelievably sweeping statement that the region's populations are "fed up with failed leftist policies."<sup>22</sup>

## No Alternative?

This last statement neatly sums up the central message that these articles wish to communicate: that any policies that don't fit the Anglo-American model of unfettered neoliberal capitalism "don't work" and that though people might at first naively support them, they end up getting disillusioned and begrudgingly come to the realization that neoliberalism is the only viable economic system after all. Though they might not spell it out quite so obligingly, the message is essentially a repetition of Margaret Thatcher's infamous claim that "there is no alternative" to free markets, free trade, and capitalist globalization. The presentation of the recent setbacks of Latin American left governments as confirmation of this seems to be a deliberate jibe directed at the many people the world over who hold up Latin America as humanity's beacon of hope for providing a more just, generous, and sustainable way of life.

But though these setbacks of the *Pink Tide* should not be reflexively explained away and the diminishment in popular support for its parties should not be discounted, there are important distinctions and qualifiers that cast doubt on such a rash declaration of victory for neoliberal orthodoxy. Lest we forget, it was less than a decade ago that an economic crash plunged world economies into disarray and prompted no less a figure than Alan Greenspan to admit that free market ideology is flawed.<sup>23</sup>

First, it is important to make the distinction between a decline in support for the *Pink Tide's* parties and support for their policies. Research has suggested that voting publics in Latin America have not become any less supportive of such policies, but rather are becoming disaffected with how they are being administered by those in charge. A poll by *Poliarquía* in the run up to the 2015 Argentine presidential election, for instance, found that 50 percent of respondents were in favor not of a return to the policies of the pre-Kirchner years, but rather

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<sup>20</sup> "As 'pink tide' ebbs, U.S. must engage: Guest Editorial," *Orlando Sentinel*, May 17, 2016.

<http://www.orlandosentinel.com/opinion/os-ed-pink-tide-latin-america-20160516-story.html>

<sup>21</sup> Rachael Boothroyd, "US Republican Senator Meets with Venezuelan Opposition in Caracas," *Venezuela Analysis*, July 1, 2015. <http://venezuelanalysis.com/news/11432>

<sup>22</sup> "As 'pink tide' ebbs, U.S. must engage: Guest Editorial," *Orlando Sentinel*, May 17, 2016.

<http://www.orlandosentinel.com/opinion/os-ed-pink-tide-latin-america-20160516-story.html>

<sup>23</sup> Brian Naylor, "Greenspan Admits Free Market Ideology Flawed," *NPR.org*, October 24, 2008.

<http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=96070766>



"continuity with change."<sup>24</sup> As Raanan Rein, a professor of Latin American and Spanish history at Tel Aviv University, put it: "The left lost more than the right won."<sup>25</sup> He added: "It wasn't that Macri became so popular, it was simply that his predecessors, the Kirchners, destroyed Peronism."<sup>26</sup> In other words, what is needed is not a relapse back to tooth and nail neoliberalism, but rather a new and more effective leadership to build on the alternatives that were first attempted by the leftist old guard. The many achievements that resulted from these policies include: expanded access to public services such as healthcare<sup>27</sup> and education;<sup>28</sup> radically reduced poverty<sup>29</sup> and child malnutrition;<sup>30</sup> widespread construction of new homes for those in need;<sup>31</sup> and a significant pushback against the brutal realities of income and wealth inequality<sup>32</sup> that have long plagued the region. Many of these policies' merits have been recognized by international organizations including the United Nations,<sup>33</sup> the Carter Center,<sup>34</sup> and even the World Bank.<sup>35</sup> Perhaps the most revolutionary of all the changes implemented by the Pink Tide governments were the drafting of new constitutions that guarantee social, political and economic rights to all citizens,<sup>36</sup> and also include unprecedented protections for marginalized groups such as women<sup>37</sup> and indigenous people,<sup>38</sup> and even for nature.<sup>39</sup>

To be sure, legitimate feelings of betrayal exist throughout the region and it is important to hold progressive governments accountable for their share of errors in confronting the economic downturn or failing to prepare for a rainy day. But though many voters might express their anger at the governing *Pink Tide* parties for their mistakes and lack of foresight by abstaining or even casting a protest vote for the right-wing opposition, this does not indicate a wholehearted endorsement of these parties' proposals, far less a desire for a return to

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<sup>24</sup> Daniela Blei, "Is the Latin American Left Dead?," *The New Republic*, April 16, 2016.

<https://newrepublic.com/article/132779/latin-american-left-dead>

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> <http://www.worldbank.org/en/results/2014/06/24/argentina-reduces-risk-and-improves-health>

<sup>28</sup> Mark Weisbrot, "Why Ecuador Loves Rafael Correa," *The Guardian*, February 15, 2013.

<http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2013/feb/15/rafael-correa-ecuador-elections>

<sup>29</sup> [http://cepr.net/documents/publications/weisbrot\\_revista\\_fall\\_2008.pdf](http://cepr.net/documents/publications/weisbrot_revista_fall_2008.pdf)

<sup>30</sup> James Suggett, "Venezuela Reduces Malnutrition in Children to 4%," *Venezuela Analysis*, July 7, 2008.

<http://venezuelanalysis.com/news/3626>

<sup>31</sup> "Venezuelan Social Housing Project Delivers 700,000th Home," *TeleSur*, April 19, 2015.

<http://www.telesurtv.net/english/news/Venezuelan-Social-Housing-Project-Delivers-700000th-Home-20150419-0019.html>

<sup>32</sup> "Venezuela, Uruguay Register Lowest Inequality in Latin America," *TeleSur*, April 29, 2015.

<http://www.telesurtv.net/english/news/Venezuela-Uruguay-Register-Lowest-Inequality-in-Latin-America-20150429-0006.html>

<sup>33</sup> Antony Boadle, "Brazil's Rousseff says extreme poverty almost eradicated," *Reuters*, February 13, 2013.

<http://www.reuters.com/article/us-brazil-poverty-idUSBRE91114F20130219>

<sup>34</sup> <http://www.cartercenter.org/countries/ecuador-health.html>

<sup>35</sup> <http://www.worldbank.org/en/results/2014/06/24/argentina-reduces-risk-and-improves-health>;

<http://www.worldbank.org/en/country/venezuela/overview>

<sup>36</sup> Sarah Wagner, "Women and Venezuela's Bolivarian Revolution," *Venezuela Analysis*, January 15, 2005.

<http://venezuelanalysis.com/analysis/877>

<sup>37</sup> Michael Fox, "Women and Chavismo: An Interview with Yanahir Reyes," *NACLA*.

<https://nacla.org/article/women-and-chavismo-interview-yanahir-reyes>

<sup>38</sup> <http://activoca.org/our-programs/success-story/new-bolivian-constitution-guarantees-more-rights-indigenous-people>

<sup>39</sup> <http://therightsofnature.org/ecuador-rights/>

neoliberalism and the structural adjustment era of the 1980s and 1990s.

Of course, there is also the natural and universal tendency in all societies for people to gradually tire of their governments (regardless of success or failure), to take for granted the gains that were made, and to forget the bad aspects of what came before. All governments, like all human enterprises generally, are deeply imperfect and are not, in Latin America least of all, immune from risks of corruption and other malign influences. But these negative factors are hardly unique to governments of the left. After all, plenty of governments of the right throughout the region have been not just corrupt, but in some cases even murderous. From the military dictatorship of Augusto Pinochet in Chile in which thousands of people were "disappeared"<sup>40</sup> to the torture and extrajudicial executions that took place during Venezuela's Andres Perez administration,<sup>41</sup> such governments hardly compare favorably to those of the *Pink Tide*.

Secondly, it is important to make a distinction between left-leaning governments and the social movements and popular sectors that thrust them into power. The continued energy of these movements demonstrates that their drive to resist neoliberalism and fight for social change is as fierce as ever. Indeed, one of the most basic mistakes of these shallow op-ed columns is their failure to consider, let alone grasp, the workings of the internal dynamics of these movements and their relationships with their national governments. If anything, the fall in support for *Chavismo* in Venezuela among some of its traditional base has more to do with the failure of the Maduro government to maintain its engagement with the popular sectors rather than a newfound enthusiasm on their part for a return to neoliberalism and a repeat of so-called structural adjustment.

Thirdly, it is important to remember that the parties that have opposed the *Pink Tide* governments have been pressed to the left and have, at least publicly, adopted much of the language and ideas of their political adversaries. During the 2012 and 2013 presidential elections in Venezuela, for instance, opposition candidate Henrique Capriles Radonski presented himself as a social democrat and the standard-bearer of the moderate left ideas of Brazilian President Luiz Ignácio da Silva<sup>42</sup> (who incidentally endorsed the *Chavista* candidate<sup>43</sup> in both cases<sup>44</sup>). His campaign also used some of the enduring symbols of *Chavismo*, calling itself the "Bolivarian Command" and promising to not discontinue the social missions, but rather make them more efficient and less ideological. Though leaked documents subsequently revealed his plan was to make a swift about-face after the election and impose a brutal neoliberal agenda once in office,<sup>45</sup> Capriles at least understood that the immense popularity of then-President Chavez's policies meant that he had to publicly present himself as a center-left progressive in order to stand a chance of winning. The Venezuelan opposition has also moved

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<sup>40</sup> "Chile recognises 9,800 more victims of Pinochet's rule," BBC News, August 18, 2011.

<http://www.bbc.com/news/world-latin-america-14584095>

<sup>41</sup> <https://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/reports/Venez93O.pdf> p. 8

<sup>42</sup> "Profile: Henrique Capriles," BBC News, October 3, 2012. <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-latin-america-16811723>

<sup>43</sup> <http://www.correodelorinoco.gob.ve/nacionales/lula-da-silva-respalda-reeleccion-presidente-hugo-chavez/>

<sup>44</sup> Tamara Pearson, "Ex Brazilian President Lula Supports Venezuela's Maduro," Venezuela Analysis, April 3, 2013. <http://venezuelanalysis.com/news/8476>

<sup>45</sup> Jody McIntyre, "Who is Henrique Capriles Radonski?," *New Internationalist*. <https://newint.org/blog/2012/09/25/venezuela-elections-capriles-chavez/>

to the left on social issues and even fielded three LGBT candidates in the 2015 December legislative elections.<sup>46</sup> Likewise, Mauricio Macri presented himself during the presidential campaign in Argentina as a pragmatist and moderate technocrat rather than a free market absolutist.<sup>47</sup> As was the case with Capriles, there is good reason to think such pronouncements were insincere (he has already rekindled Argentina's relationship with Wall Street<sup>48</sup> and filled his cabinet with bankers<sup>49</sup>), but it at least demonstrates that the political center of gravity amongst Latin American publics is way to the left of the traditional forces of the right.

Fourth, we should not forget that circumstantial factors have created problems for left-leaning governments that are not of their own making. Global drops in commodity prices have made life difficult for all leaders in a region that has long been heavily based on extractivism. Whether it be oil in Venezuela, copper and zinc in Bolivia, or soybeans in Argentina, global downturns have caused problems for these governments which would have been just as pronounced had their right-wing rivals been in power instead. Dependence on exports of raw materials long predates the *Pink Tide* and moving out of this legacy would have been a challenge for any government.

Fifth, there is a tendency to characterize the policies of *Pink Tide* governments as "unsustainable." The unsustainability argument appeals to basic intuition but is based on a false analogy—that a country's financial situation is akin to a household budget. One could just as easily point out that with the resource wealth and technological sophistication of today's world, there is clearly the means to provide for every person on planet earth many times over. That we are not doing so is not a failure of the left, but rather of capitalism and explicable largely in terms of the lasting legacy of colonialism and its lingering power structures. These pressures bear particularly heavily on Latin America given its long history of colonial oppression, not to mention its proximity to the major force in the world that has worked to maintain this status quo and long treated the region as its "backyard."

Finally, therefore, it is important to consider the superpower's lasting impact on the region. Meddling by the region's hegemon and its internal allies has consistently caused damage to *Pink Tide* governments and their efforts at social reform. The United States' aggressive stance against them is understandable given the threat they pose to its hemispheric dominance and the preeminence of its favored international organizations. *Pink Tide* governments have established new international bodies to realize the vision of the decades-long struggle for regional integration and provide a buffer against U.S. imperialism. The Bolivarian Alliance for the Peoples of Our America (ALBA) and the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC) are attempts to transcend Washington's "free" trade orthodoxies and forge an alternative to the Organization of American States (OAS). The Union of South American Nations (UNASUR) was founded to mediate regional conflicts and could in the future provide a framework for military cooperation or freedom of movement for citizens of member nations. The monetary fund BancoSur, though still in its nascent stages, is hoped

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<sup>46</sup> Corina Pons, "Venezuela's first transgender candidate to run for Congress," Reuters, August 8, 2015.

<http://uk.reuters.com/article/uk-venezuela-politics-idUKKCN0QC25P20150808>

<sup>47</sup> Daniela Blei, "Is the Latin American Left Dead?," *The New Republic*, April 16, 2016.

<https://newrepublic.com/article/132779/latin-american-left-dead>

<sup>48</sup> Benedict Mander, "Argentina rekindles its relationship with Wall Street," *The Financial Times*, May 12, 2016.

<http://www.ft.com/intl/cms/s/2/6aeb9ae2-17aa-11e6-b8d5-4c1fcdbe169f.html>

<sup>49</sup> Astrid Prange, "Macri to take Argentina in a new, neoliberal direction," *Deutsche Welle*, December 6, 2015.

<http://www.dw.com/en/macri-to-take-argentina-in-a-new-neoliberal-direction/a-18898041>



to provide an alternative source of lending free from the dictates of the IMF and the World Bank. Taken together, these organizations have provided a hope that international relations can in the future be based more on international cooperation, rather than competition, and mutual, rather than solely national, interests. This phenomenon is essentially the expression in the international realm of what Roger Harris of the Taskforce on the Americas has described as "the threat of a good example."<sup>50</sup>

Though it does not completely explain away the failures on the part of progressive governments, there has nonetheless been a clear pattern in terms of the treatment they have received from United States: the more successful *Pink Tide* governments have become at helping their citizenry and providing an alternative to Anglo-American neoliberalism, the greater the incentive has grown to crush this threat. When the sabotage is successful it provides a double benefit for the United States and its internal allies: in addition to making a different path unviable it also makes these policies appear as intrinsically unworkable, and thereby "proving" that the neoliberal status quo is the only way forward.

Clearly this ghost of Thatcher haunts the minds of mainstream media commentators, explaining both their lazy treatment of the facts and dogmatic commitment to making all news events fit the neoliberal agenda. What is truly important, therefore, is not so much the immediate electoral fortunes of the *Pink Tide* governments, but rather the efforts to defend the spirit of the movements on which they are based and the intellectual legacy of their principles. A heavy burden lies on those of us who strive to counter the new neoliberal offensive and the mendacity of its propaganda foot soldiers.

***By Peter Bolton, Research Fellow at the Council on Hemispheric Affairs***

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<sup>50</sup> Roger Harris, "Venezuela: Supporting A Once and Future Revolution," *Counterpunch*, June 26, 2013. <http://www.counterpunch.org/2013/07/26/venezuela-supporting-a-once-and-future-revolution/>