

Why Venezuela Is a Threat to The Neo-colonial World-System

By Dr. Charles McKelvey, American Herald Tribune, 4 May 2019

Mohsen Abdelmoumen: You have written a very relevant and important book to understand the Cuban Revolution: *The Evolution and Significance of the Cuban Revolution*. In the light of your book, can we say that the Cuban revolution was very important for the emancipation not only of the Cuban people but of all the peoples of Latin America?

Dr. Charles McKelvey: I consider the Cuban Revolution to be a paradigmatic Third World Revolution. It has the dual character that essentially has defined Third World movements and revolutions: (1) an anti-colonial/neocolonial revolution that seeks the liberation of the nation from foreign imperialist domination, and (2) a revolution of social liberation, seeking the transformation of capitalist economic-political-cultural institutions. Moreover, it is an advanced Third World Revolution, as a result of several factors: the advanced character of Latin American anti-imperialist movements in general, resulting from the fact that modern European colonialism and U.S. imperialism arrived early in Latin America; the presence of a radicalized petty bourgeoisie, due to the negative consequences of the Cuban neocolonial republic for the middle class; and the presence of charismatic leaders with an exceptional capacities for understanding, analysis, and leadership, notably Martí in the 1890s, Mella in the 1920s, Guiteras in the 1930s, and Fidel from the 1950s to the early twenty-first century.

I devote approximately half the book to the world-system, seeking to describe the historic development of global structures of colonial and neocolonial domination. By placing the Cuban Revolution in a historical and global context, my intention is to show that the Cuban Revolution is an intelligent and moral response to the world-systemic structures of domination and the sustained structural crisis of the world-system; and my intention is to show that the Cuban Revolution is fully consistent with the general patterns of revolution that the colonized peoples have forged. Accordingly, the Cuban Revolution illustrates the revolution of the neocolonized, and at the same time, it serves as an inspiring and practical example for the neocolonized peoples of Latin America and the Third World.

The Cuban Revolution, therefore, is of utmost significance. It is an advanced expression of the Third World response to colonialism, a response that is at once both political and moral as well as historically and scientifically informed. And it is a response that is emerging from below, from the colonized, indicating to humanity the road toward a necessary more just and sustainable world-system. Moreover, Cuba and the Third World are making this declaration, in word and in deed, in theory and in practice, at a time when the global elite is increasingly turning to savagery.

This current world situation, defined by barbarism from above set against dignity and morality from below, calls the relatively privileged peoples of the North to an awakening of historical and global consciousness. And it calls the peoples of the North to political action, not merely in the form of protests and demands, but in the form of seeking to take political power, so that people's delegates can replace imperialist policies with policies of North-South cooperation, as the global South has demanded for a half century.

I, therefore, write about the Cuban and Third World revolutions to the peoples of the North, especially the peoples of the United States. The role of the revolutionary intellectual is to learn from what revolutions are doing in practice and to educate the people with respect to the insights attained from by listening to and interpreting revolutionary leaders. Such intellectual work is integral to revolutionary practice because a well-developed understanding is the foundation of intelligent and effective political practice. With respect to the Cuban and Third World revolutions, the most important lesson that we learn is that the taking of political power by the people is possible. It can be done, when leaders develop a historically and scientifically informed understanding, when they are attentive to intelligent analysis of political strategies, when they are connected to the people and formulate platforms that respond to the anxieties of the people, when they are dedicated to the education and organization of the people for the long term, and when they have a self-sacrificing commitment to the nation, the rights, and needs of the people, and other universal human values. I believe that these are lessons, rooted in revolutionary thought and practice, that the peoples of the Third World can teach the peoples of the North.

Has the Cuban revolution inspired by the Algerian revolution achieved its goal of liberating the working class from capitalist and imperialist domination? In your opinion, whether in the Algerian or Cuban revolution, is the long process of liberation over?

The Cuban Revolution has, for the most part, achieved its goals. But I would use somewhat different terminology. I would say that Revolution has, for the most part, liberated the nation from neocolonial domination and the people from capitalist exploitation. The concept of the working class as the revolutionary subject is rooted in the eternally important revolutionary intellectual work of Marx, who was writing in a time and a place in which the empirical evidence was pointing to a central role of workers in the revolutionary process. However, subsequent revolutions in Russia, China, and the Third World were pointing to a different theoretical understanding, in which we see that the neocolonized peoples of the world constitute the revolutionary subject in the continually unfolding global popular and socialist revolution.

The emphasis on the working class is politically problematic in today's world. The word "worker" is ambiguous. It can be used in the broad sense to include doctors, lawyers, university professors, and small merchants and business persons. But it also can be understood in the more limited sense of industrial worker or manual worker, and accordingly, some people do not think of themselves as workers. When we call workers to social movement or revolution, many middle-class persons believe that they are excluded. And they should not be excluded, because they are needed. In the case of Cuba, for example, the radical wing of the petty bourgeoisie played a critical role in the revolutionary triumph, and many made heroic sacrifices. At the same time, there are persons who pertain to sectors of the people that do not primarily define themselves as workers: blacks, ethnic minorities, women, and ecologists. All of the popular classes and social sectors must be called to revolution, except for the less than 1% who pertain to the capitalist class. When Fidel called the people to revolution in 1953, he did not invoke the working class but the "people", and he described the various components of the people and the various ways that they are victimized and exploited by the prevailing structures of domination. It is a good example for us.

I also would want to include the word “nation.” In the Third World revolutions, the nation is the central concept and the rallying point. The great revolutionaries of the Third World plus China have all been great patriots, defending the dignity of the nation against foreign domination and interference. But their patriotism is different from patriotism in Europe or the United States, because it is not ethnocentric or arrogant; it is internationalist, envisioning the cooperation of all nations and the solidarity of all peoples, with respect for all nations and peoples.

I say, however, that the Cuban Revolution has, *for the most part*, liberated the nation and the people. In the context of a neocolonial world-system and a capitalist world-economy, no nation can fully attain the liberation of its people. The sanctions imposed on Cuba for its insistence on its sovereignty have the consequence that the people must endure the lack of some material necessities. In addition, the dissemination of consumerist false ideas throughout the world has an effect on the consciousness of the Cuban people, in spite of the sustained effort by the Revolution to educate the people in alternative socialist values. In Cuba, a revolutionary vanguard has been forged, but a revolutionary people is still in formation, although the still imperfect people understand enough that they fully cast their lot with their socialist Revolution and against capitalism and imperialism.

This means that the liberation of the people is a long, worldwide process, and it is far from over. As Fidel taught, the final destiny of the Cuban Revolution depends on the direction of the world. Popular and socialist revolutions occur at the level of the nation, involving efforts by organizations and parties of the people to take political power in the nation. When socialist revolutions take power or partial power, they sometimes fall, and they sometimes sustain themselves for a long period. At the present time, there are seven or eight governments in the world that declare themselves socialist, all in the Third World plus China; and there are various other governments that are allied with them. These nations are developing in practice South-South cooperation, seeking to develop mutually beneficial commerce; and they are formulating alternative principles for the guidance of the world-system. This represents a considerable and important advance. However, the global socialist revolution needs more triumphs in more nations, so that they can work cooperatively with each other in the development of international norms that respect the full sovereignty of nations, including their right to decide for socialism. Their efforts would include constantly demanding and pressuring the capitalist powers for the necessary structural reforms of the world-system. Exemplifying this approach to international affairs, Cuba works actively with other nations and with international organizations in the effort to develop such alternative international norms and structures that respect the full and equal sovereignty of all nations and the self-determination of peoples.

You wrote *The African-American Movement: From Pan-Africanism to the Rainbow Coalition* and you were very involved in the civil rights movement when you were a student; you were Jessie Jackson's delegate to the Democratic National Convention in 1988. What remains of these very important movements of pan-Africanism and civil rights, especially with the emergence of the extreme right and white supremacists in the United States today?

In the late 1960s and early 1970s, I was a young student seeking to understand the social issues that agitated the people of the United States, and my quest led to ties with the student anti-war and black power movements. In the 1970s, the student movement in the

United States disintegrated a victim of its limited understanding, its tactical errors, and its divisions. Above all, it, for the most part, failed to learn the most important lesson of the Vietnam War, namely, that the Vietnamese struggle was an anti-colonial struggle, standing in defense of the sovereign rights of nations against the colonial and neocolonial powers. And most failed to learn that the war reflected a general pattern, and it was not simply an error of judgment by the U.S. government in the case of Vietnam. Even though the Vietnam War provided a context for the asking of questions and the learning of lessons concerning the fundamentally imperialist and undemocratic character of US foreign policy, and even though there was an anti-imperialist current of thought in the student anti-war movement, the movement in general was not able to systematically learn such lessons and teach them to the people. It failed to form a sustained student or popular anti-imperialist movement, presenting an alternative foreign policy to the people, as a constant dimension of U.S. public debate.

The black power movement was repressed in the early 1970s, with leaders of black nationalist organizations killed, imprisoned, or in exile. Utilizing the gains of the civil rights era, the black movement subsequently settled into an ideologically moderate and reformist political participation. Since the 1980s, there has emerged an anti-racist frame of reference, focusing on the forms in which white racism survives in U.S. society and the world. Even though true, the anti-racist frame is limited. More attention should be given: to the formation of a popular multiracial and multicultural coalition that seeks to protect the social and economic rights of all; to the economic development of the black community; and to a transformation of the neocolonial world-system and the development of an anti-imperialist foreign policy of North-South cooperation. These were the basic proposals of Malcolm X, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., and the black power movement in the 1960s, and they were retaken in the presidential campaigns of Rev. Jesse Jackson in the 1980s.

I was a college teacher in South Carolina during the 1980s, and I was honored to have been selected by the South Carolina state Jackson delegates to serve as a Jackson delegate in the 1988 Democratic National Convention. Rev. Jackson talked of the need to develop the Rainbow Coalition as a nationwide mass organization, and we South Carolina Jackson delegates met on various occasions seeking to develop it in our state. But we were unable to carry this effort forward, and we were unable to develop the Rainbow Coalition as a mass organization that constantly educates the people and participates in public debate.

In your opinion, what remains of the American left? What happened to the great workers' movement that the United States experienced?

The workers' movement in the United States was coopted through material rewards, which were made possible by superexploitation of vast regions of the planet and by deficit spending. The process of cooptation was aided by a long history of repression of the most radical of the workers' leaders. The process of cooptation reached its limit in the 1970s, with the conquest of the peoples of the earth geographically and ecologically overextended, with the peoples of the world in anti-systemic movement, with the government deficit overextended, with the economy battered by inflation and stagnation, and with the United States in a relative productive and commercial decline. By this time, the workers' movement lacked a radical wing, a legacy of decades of reformism and repression; and it was alienated from radical currents of thought represented by the black power and student anti-war movements, as a result of the great cultural shift of the late

1960s. Under these conditions, the workers' movement was unable to effectively respond to the post-1980 neoliberal turn.

With cooptation of the workers' movement, the disintegration of the student anti-war movement, the limited post-1972 anti-racist turn of the black movement (excepting the presidential candidacies of Jesse Jackson), the Left has been unprepared to respond to the challenges of the post-1980 period. Blacks, women, and ecologists have been focused on their particular issues. Progressives, in general, have jumped from cause to cause. In effect, the Left is fragmented and confused. It has failed to develop a historical, global, and comprehensive analysis of the problems that the nation and world confront, with specific proposals that address the needs and anxieties of the people.

How do you explain the rise of the extreme right in the United States and Latin America?

As a result of its confusion and fragmentation, the U.S. Left has not been able to formulate an alternative narrative on the nation. Such an alternative narrative would recognize the achievements and gains of the American Revolution: the establishment of a modern, independent republic, but with bourgeois representative democracy, which limits the scope of democratic rights and excludes many persons from enjoying democratic rights. On this foundation, an alternative narrative could identify with the great popular movements of workers, blacks, and women, which have sought to deepen and expand the American Revolutionary theory and practice of democracy. This is the heritage that the Left today must claim, reformulating it globally, and projecting a vision of a democratic nation participating in the development of a more just, democratic, and sustainable world-system.

With the failure of the Left to formulate a coherent narrative that taps into the sentiments of our people, the anxieties of the people deepen, fueled by economic and employment insecurities as well as by a world characterized by multiple manifestations of violence and crime and uncontrolled international migration. The people have not been educated with respect to the causes of these problems, but they have enough common-sense intelligence to understand that the government and the powerful do not care about them. Under these conditions, the people are vulnerable to the discourses of the Right that invoke a new form of nationalism. The people do not have an objective interest in the neo-nationalist program of Trump, but neo-nationalist rhetoric touches emotions among the people. The neoliberalism of Obama and the Clintons only superficially attends to the needs of the people, and it has been increasingly discredited. The social democracy of Bernie Sanders and others in the progressive wing of the Democratic Party addresses more the needs of the people, but it lacks a global and historical understanding of the challenges that the nation confronts, which to some extent is sensed by the people. A proposal from the Left, rooted in comprehensive, historical, scientific, and global analysis; and capable of delegitimizing neo-nationalism before the people; is not present.

Forces of the neoliberal and imperialist Right and neo-nationalist ultra-Right have taken political power in Argentina, Ecuador, and Brazil, representing a significant setback for the Latin American Left, which registered significant gains in the last twenty years. These gains of the Right, however, were accomplished through deception and corruption, and the people have rejected its program, now that it has become manifest. The gains of the Right have been completely different from the previous gains

of the Left, which were attained on the basis of a historically and scientifically informed analysis of the Latin American political-economic-cultural situation, and with the clear proclamation and subsequent implementation of a program in defense of the nation and the people. Therefore, I do not view the recent gains of the Right in Latin America as sustainable, in spite of the fact that the USA will continue to support the Right and attack the Left in Latin America.

How do you analyze the US imperialist offensive targeting Venezuela?

Venezuela is a threat to the neocolonial world-system. It seeks an independent road of autonomous economic development, leaving behind the peripheral role to which it had been assigned, namely, to create capital for the North through its foreign-controlled oil industry, to supply petroleum to the consumer societies of the North, and to purchase the surplus manufactured goods of the North. Venezuela's search for an autonomous road is incompatible with the neocolonial world-system, which requires the subordination of supposedly independent nations. Venezuela is particularly important, because of its role under the leadership of Hugo Chávez in forging Latin American unity and integration in opposition to U.S. neocolonial and imperialist penetration.

We see a US offensive in many Latin American countries such as Nicaragua, Brazil, Argentina, Chile, Ecuador, and so on. In your opinion, is the United States continuing its black operations led by the CIA to destabilize leftist movements in Latin America?

We can never be sure of the role of the CIA, but certainly, U.S. policy is to destabilize Leftist governments in Latin America and to discourage Leftist movements. The Trump administration recently defined Venezuela, Cuba, and Nicaragua as a "troika of evil," and it has accelerated aggressions against them. This indeed is consistent with neocolonial and imperialist logic, for the three nations, in seeking an autonomous and socialist road, are challenges to the neocolonial world-system and the imperialist goals of the United States. Although not included in the troika, Bolivia also is seeking an autonomous road and is a threat to U.S. imperialist interests. In addition, imperialist logic would call for the sowing of division in the social movements of Ecuador, Argentina, and Brazil, for these movements have a strong potential to return socialist and progressive governments to power. The US offensive against Latin America has its logic if you take as given the premises of neocolonialism and imperialism, and if you assume that the purpose of U.S. foreign policy is to promote and defend U.S. political and economic power in the world.

Why, according to you, the US administration continues to view Latin America as its backyard?

If the United States is going to seek to restore its declining hegemony in a neocolonial world-system, it must view Latin America as its backyard, that is, it must assume that it should have virtually unchallenged access to the natural resources, cheap labor, and markets of Latin America. Recognition of these material needs of the U.S. economy is what drives U.S. policy toward Latin America today.

However, the premises of U.S. intentions are false. The rise and fall of hegemonic powers is a normal tendency in the world-system, and the USA cannot restore its hegemony. Moreover, the neocolonial world-system itself is unsustainable, as a result of

its contradictions, the most important of which is that the world-system has been built on a foundation of conquest and exploitation, and it has run out of new lands to conquer and new peoples to exploit.

Accordingly, a paradigm shift is needed with respect to U.S. policy. The USA should search for new forms of production and investment that would imply a dignified adjustment to the relative productive and commercial decline of the nation. And it should seek to implement, in cooperation with other governments, global structural changes that would imply the development of a more sustainable world-system. Especially important in this regard is the transformation of exploitative core-peripheral unequal exchange, rooted in colonialism, into mutually beneficial commerce among nations.

Such a paradigm shift is unlikely without the taking of political power in the USA by delegates of the people, replacing politicians that promote the interests of capital.

In your opinion, do not the peoples of the south and those of the north have a common destiny that is to fight the global oligarchy that is bleeding the entire planet?

Yes. The peoples of the North and South have a common moral duty to work cooperatively in the development of a more just world-system characterized by respect for the sovereignty of nations and mutually beneficial commerce, and that attends intelligently to common human problems, such as climate change. The peoples of the South have called for North-South cooperation since they forged the Third World project in the 1950s. But the North has not been responsive. The global elite has demonstrated since the 1970s that it attends only to its particular interests. Politicians give priority to their political careers, rather than the public good. And intellectuals and activists of the Left have revealed a subtle ethnocentrism, not finding the time to study the social movements of the Third World, from which they would learn important insights with respect to global structures of domination and the social movements forged from below, insights that would enable them to formulate and to act with greater intelligence and effectiveness.

Israel continues to kill Palestinians in the indifference of the world. How do you explain the impunity enjoyed by the criminal entity of Israel?

Israel is a strategic ally of the United States in a region of the world with important natural resources, and this, of course, results in impunity. Moreover, the framing of the issue perhaps is important. The creation of Israel conformed to the general global pattern of European settlement on the lands of other peoples, who were defined as peoples of color and as not inherently possessing the same rights. However, Israel was able to avoid a designation in Western consciousness as a “white settler” society. Because of the Holocaust and the way that it was interpreted in the Western nations, the Jewish people were seen as victims of the evil of fascism, and not as colonizers. In this context, the rights of the people of Palestine were ignored. This distorted and one-sided interpretation soon established itself as influential in Washington. In the late 1960s, the “New Left” emerged to challenge the prevailing Cold War frame of reference, which presented Western democracy as the defender of the good against the evils of communism and fascism. In this new ideological context, the rights of the nation and people of Palestine gained voice in the USA, and over the years it has become one of the causes of the Left. However, as noted above, the Left is not effectively present in U.S. public discourse.

You have initiated Global Learning which seeks to educate the peoples of the North on the political economy of the modern world system, as understood by Third World revolutions and social movements. Can you tell us more about this project?

I use the [Global Learning Website](#) to post links to classic works of Third World leaders and intellectuals and to post the speeches of important political leaders of the Latin American Left today. I also use it to post my own writings or links to my published works, and I use it to promote academics events in Cuba. In addition, the site is home to [my blog](#), “The View from the South: Commentaries on world events from the Third World perspective.”

In your opinion, is there not a vital historical necessity to create a world front against imperialism and capitalism?

Yes, a world front against imperialism and capitalism is necessary to prevent humanity from falling more and more into chaos and to prevent possible human extinction, and therefore it certainly is vital. And the creation of such a front would be of historic significance, launching a new stage in human history.

I view a world front against imperialism and capitalism as based in popular social movements that seek to take political power in particular nations. The social movement organizations constitute a vanguard among the people, committed to educating themselves and educating the people with respect to the global structures of domination and the principles that must guide post-capitalist societies and a more just world-system. Their goal must be the taking of political power, which they can only do with the support of the people. Accordingly, they must adopt politically intelligent strategies, assessing their impact on the political consciousness of the people. On the road to power, the social movement organizations and alternative political parties from the various nations form relations with one another. Having taken power, the socialist and progressive governments develop cooperative political and economic relations with one another, formulating the principles, in theory and practice, of a more just and sustainable post-capitalist world-system that respects the sovereignty of all nations.

This process is underway. The Forum of Sao Paulo was formed in 1990 as a regular interchange among Latin American political parties of the Left, only one of which, the Communist Party of Cuba, was in power at the time. Over the next twenty years, parties of the Left took power in various nations, such that the Forum evolved to include Parties of the Left in various nations, both in power and not in power. As sufficient parties of the Left took power, Latin American governments of the Left formed regional associations, developing cooperative economic and political relations among the nations of the region. This process culminated in the formation of the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States, composed of all of the nations of America, except the United States and Canada. At the same time, the governments of the region have forged cooperative economic relations with various governments of the Third World plus China, circumventing to some degree the core-peripheral economic relations that are central to the neocolonial world-system. The process of Latin American union and integration has been under attack by the U.S. government and the Latin American Right, and it has suffered setbacks in recent years, as should be expected. But major world-systemic tendencies favor the continued development of an alternative, more just, democratic, and sustainable world-system forged from below by the neocolonized peoples of the

earth. This is so because, on the one hand, global elites have responded to the sustained structural crisis of the world-system with actions and ideologies that defend only their particular interests, thereby revealing their incapacity for responsible leadership; and on other hand, because the alternative world-system being forged from below is rooted in scientific understanding, historical and global consciousness, and the fundamental human values that have been embraced by the representatives of the governments of the world in a number of international forums, including the General Assembly of the United Nations.

Interview realized by Mohsen Abdelmoumen

Who is Dr. Charles McKelvey?

Charles McKelvey is Professor Emeritus at Presbyterian College in Clinton, South Carolina, USA, and member of the Advisory Council of the Honorary Section of Political Science from the South at the Faculty of Philosophy and History of the University of Havana, Havana, Cuba.

He obtained a B.A. in Religious Studies from Pennsylvania State University in 1969, an M.A. in Inner City Studies from Northeastern Illinois University in 1972, and a Ph.D. in Sociology from Fordham University in 1979. At Penn State, he encountered the student anti-war movement and the black power movement among black students. Charles McKelvey studied the work of Marx and various currents of Marxist thought, especially in the period of 1979 to 1990. He dedicated himself to the process of sustained encounter with the social movements: the Jesse Jackson Rainbow Coalition from 1988-90; the popular movement in Honduras from 1990 to 1998; and the Cuban revolutionary project from 1993 to the present.

Fulbright Scholar, he gone to Honduras, Central America, from August 1994 to June, 1995,

to conduct research on the problem of underdevelopment in Honduras and on the work of the Christian Commission for Development. In 1996, Dr. McKelvey founded the Center for Development Studies and served as Director until 2001. The Center for Development Studies was a non-profit organization whom the objectives included increasing understanding of Central America and the Caribbean by conducting programs that integrate academic work and travel experiences. It conducted programs in Cuba from 1997 to 2001, developed in cooperation with the Latin American Faculty of the Social Sciences (FLACSO-Cuba). College professors, graduate students and professionals from ten nations participated in its programs. Charles McKelvey conducted 11 educational programs in Cuba from 1996 to 2010. He formed Global Learning in 2011, a sole-member limited liability company dedicated to international education and the promotion of academic events in Cuba.

Having traveled extensively to Cuba since 1993, he has many contacts and relations in the Cuban sectors of higher education, culture, and tourism and is very familiar with the workings of the Cuban system. An informed and passionate defender of the Cuban revolutionary project, he lives most of the year in Havana.

His book: The Evolution and Significance of the Cuban Revolution (2018) interprets the Cuban revolutionary movement from 1868 to 1959 as a continuous process that sought political independence and social and economic transformation of colonial and neocolonial structures. Cuba is a symbol of hope for the Third World. He wrote too: The African American

Movement: From Pan Africanism to the Rainbow Coalition and Beyond Ethnocentrism: A Reconstruction of Marx's Concept of Science, as well as many articles.

The Global learning website

Dr. McKelvey blog