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Cover Story

Chavez does it again! The African World By Bill Fletcher, Jr. BC Editorial Board

Let me start by being clear that i am in favor of term limits. I am not in favor of people running forever. That said, the victory of President Chavez is a tremendous one, and not just for him as an individual.

The US ruling elite was thoroughly convinced that they could not only unseat the Chavez administration but that they could begin the reversal of the process of social transformation underway in Venezuela. Through instruments, such as the Washington Post, the ruling elite has been hounding the Chavez administration accusing them of being everything but children of God.

The Chavez victory was critical but it was not a slam-dunk. While President Chavez and his United Socialist Party of Venezuela (PSUV) won a comfortable victory, there remain important challenges. Not the least of these is the on-going struggle with the Venezuelan state.

While Chavez may be the elected leader of the country, one cannot say that the State is in the hands of either the PSUV or the people.

There are those who are committed to turning the clock backwards and they are not simply in operation at election time. Second, President Chavez has committed to following the path towards socialism. Given this, how will the economy be reorganized so that it is both less dependent on oil, but also growing in new fields?

Socialism is not only the provision of services. The economy must be growing but it also must be in the hands of the people. Thus, what

does democratic control of the political AND economic system by the working people of Venezuela look like?

A second major area is that of succession. I started this essay by noting that I believe--strongly--in term limits. When there are no term limits there is a tendency for any leader to surround himself or herself with people who feed their ego and who block off "bad news" rather than helping the leader to understand the real world. There is also a tendency to deny mortality. President Chavez has been forced to face mortality through his own battle with cancer. The process of social transformation in Venezuela cannot depend on one person alone, irrespective of how charismatic and intelligent they happen to be. Any process of social transformation must be both broad and deep, meaning in this case, that the PSUV must become a training ground for the next generation of Venezuelan leaders, and leaders who are, in fact, empowered to lead.

There is an additional challenge, and actually one that faces most of Latin America: race. For Latin America there is both the question of the indigenous people and the people of African descent. Venezuela took dramatic steps some years ago to move into law the rights of the indigenous people. There have also been steps taken to address the demands of the African descendant populations. That said, there is a strong counter-current in Latin America that wishes to deny the existence of racism and racist oppression. The African descendant population of Venezuela, particularly in the form of organized political movements, have been very supportive of the Chavez administration. They will certainly be looking for greater support not to mention increased dialogue on the matter of race in their country.

President Chavez, like much of the world, had been hopeful that President Obama would introduce a new foreign relations approach when he came to office. While there have been important changes, such as the withdrawal from Iraq and the commitment to withdraw from Afghanistan, there has been far too much continuity from earlier administrations. One aspect of that has been the hostility towards the Chavez administration. Instead of taking advantage of the opening that existed in 2009 to strike a different chord, the Obama administration continued to suggest that the Chavez administration represented an unstable and unproductive element in Latin American politics. The reality is that the Chavez administration is part of a much broader current in Latin America that is asserting its sovereignty from the imperial domination of the USA, but also attempting to redress historic economic and political injustices that have often thrown their

respective countries into civil wars, dictatorships and other national calamities. Should President Obama be re-elected it is essential that progressive minded people insist on a rejection of US imperial arrogance and a renegotiation of the relationship between the USA and Latin America. That could start with turning down the hostile volume and activities regularly directed at Venezuela.

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