

Hugo Chavez the socialist and friend of the trade union struggle

President Hugo Chavez of Venezuela who died on March 5, 2013 of cancer at age 58,



50 Truths about Hugo Chavez and the Bolivarian Revolution

1. Never in the history of Latin America, has a political leader had such incontestable democratic legitimacy. Since coming to power in 1999, there were 16 elections in Venezuela. Hugo Chavez won 15, the last on October 7, 2012. He defeated his rivals with a margin of 10-20 percentage points.
2. All international bodies, from the European Union to the Organization of American States, to the Union of South American Nations and the Carter Centre, were unanimous in recognizing the transparency of the vote counts.
3. James Carter, former U.S. President, declared that Venezuela's electoral system was "the best in the world."

4. Universal access to education introduced in 1998 had exceptional results. About 1.5 million Venezuelans learned to read and write thanks to the literacy campaign called Mission Robinson I.

5. In December 2005, UNESCO said that Venezuela had eradicated illiteracy.

6. The number of children attending school increased from 6 million in 1998 to 13 million in 2011 and the enrolment rate is now 93.2%.

7. Mission Robinson II was launched to bring the entire population up to secondary level. Thus, the rate of secondary school enrolment rose from 53.6% in 2000 to 73.3% in 2011.

8. Missions Ribas and Sucre allowed tens of thousands of young adults to undertake university studies. Thus, the number of tertiary students increased from 895,000 in 2000 to 2.3 million in 2011, assisted by the creation of new universities.

9. With regard to health, they created the National Public System to ensure free access to health care for all Venezuelans. Between 2005 and 2012, 7873 new medical centres were created in Venezuela.

10. The number of doctors increased from 20 per 100,000 population in 1999 to 80 per 100,000 in 2010, or an increase of 400%.

11. Mission Barrio Adentro I provided 534 million medical consultations. About 17 million people were attended, while in 1998 less than 3 million people had regular access to health. 1.7 million lives were saved, between 2003 and 2011.

12. The infant mortality rate fell from 19.1 per thousand in 1999 to 10 per thousand in 2012, a reduction of 49%.

13. Average life expectancy increased from 72.2 years in 1999 to 74.3 years in 2011.

14. Thanks to Operation Miracle, launched in 2004, 1.5 million Venezuelans who were victims of cataracts or other eye diseases regained their sight.

15. From 1999 to 2011, the poverty rate decreased from 42.8% to 26.5% and the rate of extreme poverty fell from 16.6% in 1999 to 7% in 2011.

16. In the rankings of the Human Development Index (HDI) of the United Nations Program for Development (UNDP), Venezuela jumped from 83 in 2000 (0.656) at position 73 in 2011 (0.735), and entered into the category Nations with 'High HDI'.

17. The GINI coefficient, which allows calculation of inequality in a country, fell from 0.46 in 1999 to 0.39 in 2011.

18. According to the UNDP, Venezuela holds the lowest recorded Gini coefficient in Latin America, that is, Venezuela is the country in the region with the least inequality.

19. Child malnutrition was reduced by 40% since 1999.

20. In 1999, 82% of the population had access to safe drinking water. Now it is 95%.

21. Under President Chavez social expenditures increased by 60.6%.

22. Before 1999, only 387,000 elderly people received a pension. Now the figure is 2.1 million.

23. Since 1999, 700,000 homes have been built in Venezuela.

24. Since 1999, the government provided / returned more than one million hectares of land to Aboriginal people.

25. Land reform enabled tens of thousands of farmers to own their land. In total, Venezuela distributed more than 3 million hectares.

26. In 1999, Venezuela was producing 51% of food consumed. In 2012, production was 71%, while food consumption increased by 81% since 1999. If consumption of 2012 was similar to that of 1999, Venezuela produced 140% of the food it consumed.

27. Since 1999, the average calories consumed by Venezuelans increased by 50% thanks to the Food Mission that created a chain of 22,000 food stores (MERCAL, Houses Food, Red PDVAL), where products

are subsidized up to 30%. Meat consumption increased by 75% since 1999.

28. Five million children now receive free meals through the School Feeding Programme. The figure was 250,000 in 1999.

29. The malnutrition rate fell from 21% in 1998 to less than 3% in 2012.

30. According to the FAO, Venezuela is the most advanced country in Latin America and the Caribbean in the eradication of hunger.

31. The nationalization of the oil company PDVSA in 2003 allowed Venezuela to regain its energy sovereignty.

32. The nationalization of the electrical and telecommunications sectors (CANTV and Electricidad de Caracas) allowed the end of private monopolies and guaranteed universal access to these services.

33. Since 1999, more than 50,000 cooperatives have been created in all sectors of the economy.

34. The unemployment rate fell from 15.2% in 1998 to 6.4% in 2012, with the creation of more than 4 million jobs.

35. The minimum wage increased from 100 bolivars/month (\$ 16) in 1998 to 2047.52 bolivars (\$ 330) in 2012, i.e. an increase of over 2,000%. This is the highest minimum wage in Latin America.

36. In 1999, 65% of the workforce earned the minimum wage. In 2012 only 21.1% of workers have only this level of pay.

37. Adults at a certain age who have never worked still get an income equivalent to 60% of the minimum wage.

38. Women without income and disabled people receive a pension equivalent to 80% of the minimum wage.

39. Working hours were reduced to 6 hours a day and 36 hours per week, without loss of pay.

40. Public debt fell from 45% of GDP in 1998 to 20% in 2011. Venezuela withdrew from the International Monetary Fund and World Bank, after early repayment of all its debts.

41. In 2012, the growth rate was 5.5% in Venezuela, one of the highest in the world.

42. GDP per capita rose from \$ 4,100 in 1999 to \$ 10,810 in 2011.

43. According to the annual World Happiness 2012, Venezuela is the second happiest country in Latin America, behind Costa Rica, and the nineteenth worldwide, ahead of Germany and Spain.

44. Venezuela offers more direct support to the American continent than the United States. In 2007, Chávez spent more than 8,800 million dollars in grants, loans and energy aid as against 3,000 million from the Bush administration.

45. For the first time in its history, Venezuela has its own satellites (Bolivar and Miranda) and is now sovereign in the field of space technology. The entire country has internet and telecommunications coverage.

46. The creation of Petrocaribe in 2005 allows 18 countries in Latin America and the Caribbean, or 90 million people, secures energy supply, by oil subsidies of between 40% to 60%.

47. Venezuela also provides assistance to disadvantaged communities in the United States by providing fuel at subsidized rates.

48. The creation of the Bolivarian Alliance for the Peoples of Our America (ALBA) in 2004 between Cuba and Venezuela laid the foundations of an inclusive alliance based on cooperation and reciprocity. It now comprises eight member countries which place the human being in the centre of the social project, with the aim of combating poverty and social exclusion.

49. Hugo Chavez was at the heart of the creation in 2011 of the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC) which brings together for the first time the 33 nations of the region, emancipated from the tutelage of the United States and Canada.

50. Hugo Chavez played a key role in the peace process in Colombia. According to President Juan Manuel Santos, "if we go into a solid peace project, with clear and concrete progress, progress achieved ever before with the FARC, is also due to the dedication and commitment of Chavez and the government of Venezuela."

The legacy

Chavez leaves a society where poor and working class people now participate in everyday democracy, with women at the leading edge. For the first time in Venezuelan history, many women have become councillors in new district councils set up by the Venezuelan government.

One of the first to heed the call was Gloria Baroso. Only 40, Baroso has six children and four grandchildren and has been on her own since her husband left home seven years ago. She runs a cooperative bakery in the El Carmen section of Petare and also helps out as a nurse when people in the community take sick. Now she holds a seat on the new district council.

Baroso knows that, before Chavez, it would have been unthinkable for a single mother who bakes bread for a living to hold elected office in Venezuela. In the street in front of the cooperative, she wipes her hands on her apron and sighs. Even before she joined the council, she had too much to do. "But it's worth it," she says. Already, she has seen a profound change. "The Venezuelan people are not the same people they were even a few years ago," she says. "We know our rights and no matter what the rich do to Chavez, this is something they can never erase."

Chavez put poverty at the heart of political debate. Rightly so, given the country's immense inequality and poverty. He invested heavily in social programs such as literacy, health clinics and education. He promoted Venezuela's indigenous culture and urged compatriots to take pride in its pre-Columbian history.

Chavez called time on the US treating Latin America as its backyard; they hated the fact that Chavez was a democrat and democratically elected. He was the man who looked around at a society where, US neoliberalism kept the rich elite, powerful, corrupt, and wealthy and the poor, down trodden, disenfranchised and exploited. He had the strength and courage to do something about it. Chavez was a socialist, a visionary, a champion of the poor and working people. He was an inspiration to all trade unionists, where ever they are, who continue the age old struggle against capitalist oppression.

Steve Jennings MCIPD

Senior Organiser/Political Officer