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## THE COMINTERNIST ORIGINS OF CURRENT SOCIALIST BOLIVARIANISM<sup>1</sup>

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**Abstract.** *Introduction.* The article examines the Comintern “trace” in the formation of modern “Bolivarian socialism”, proclaimed by the leaders of Venezuela at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Communist postulates (in the Comintern perception) were, certainly, not the only source of the formation of the ideology of the ruling Socialist United Party of Venezuela. At the same time, a number of the postulates were formulated back in the 1920s by activists of the Venezuelan Revolutionary Party (later they became members of the country’s Communist Party) and the Socialist Party of Ecuador. A number of similar concepts were the subject of discussions between the leadership of the Comintern and the Peruvian People’s Revolutionary Alliance and were also debated during one of the congresses of the Communist International. Another important aspect explored by the authors is the analogy between the processes of the formation of a united left party in Venezuela in the 1930s and in the 2000s (as a comparative example, the pattern of creating a united revolutionary party within the framework of the Castro revolution in Cuba was also used). *Methods and materials.* The study uses a set of methods of analysis adopted in historical and political science, namely documentary analysis, systemic and comparative analysis. *Analysis and Results.* The cases presented in the article prove that Socialism of the 21<sup>st</sup> century is not the exclusive creation of Hugo Chavez, but is closely related to ideological discussions in the international left-wing movement of the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The article is based primarily on archival documents, which allowed the authors to show little-known pages in the history of Latin American left-wing parties. *Authors’ contribution.* V.L. JEIFETS and L.S. JEIFETS made joint analysis of the archival documents, carried out the study of historiography, and developed the theoretical framework of the research. The conclusions also are the product of joint work.

**Key words:** Comintern, Socialist United Party of Venezuela, Venezuelan Revolutionary Party, Bolivarianism, APRA.

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## КОМИНТЕРН И ИСТОКИ СОВРЕМЕННОГО СОЦИАЛИСТИЧЕСКОГО БОЛИВАРИАНИЗМА<sup>1</sup>

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**Аннотация.** Статья исследует коминтерновский «след» в формировании современного «боливарианского социализма», провозглашенного лидерами Венесуэлы в начале XXI века. Другой важный аспект, исследо-

ванный авторами, – аналогии между процессами формирования единой левой партии в Венесуэле в 1930-е и в 2000-е гг. (в качестве сравнительного примера использована также модель создания единой революционной партии в рамках кастровской революции на Кубе). Статья основана преимущественно на архивных документах, что позволило авторам показать малоизвестные страницы истории латиноамериканских левых партий. *Вклад авторов.* В.Л. Хейфец и Л.С. Хейфец совместно провели анализ архивных документов, изучение историографической базы, разработку теоретической базы исследования; выводы также сделаны совместно.

**Ключевые слова:** Коминтерн, Единая социалистическая партия Венесуэлы, Венесуэльская революционная партия, боливарианизм, АПРА.

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**Introduction.** The analysis of current political trends in Latin America, including the phenomenon of its “turn to the left” (occurred at the beginning of 21<sup>st</sup> century and still present in some countries of the region, especially in Venezuela) in our opinion is incomplete. Despite studying the current situation, the main features and trends of this “turn to the left” as also of the prospects for its development and possibilities to recover after strong “right-wing counter-offensive”, the historical roots of this phenomenon are often left out of the investigation. This is the “sin” of many political scientists, who examine the “Socialism of the 21<sup>st</sup> century” starting from scratch [26; 42; 48, p. 9–20], that is, without taking in account the historical traditions or the valuable experience of the penetration of the ideas of socialism into the political culture of Latin American nations during the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Due to the visible collapse of the “historical left-wing movement” (i.e. Communist one) since the end of the USSR, the history of the International Communism isn’t generally considered as the real antecedents for the New Latin American Lefts of this century. A slight difference are the works of L.Okuneva who researched Brazilian case [31], but even in this case the author traces the history as back as to the 1980s.

In this respect, we consider necessary to affirm that the analysis of Fidel Castro’s triumph in 1959, without taking into consideration the history of the Communist Party of Cuba between the years 1920–1950 (the so called “first Cuban Marxist-Leninist party”) and its influence among intellectuals, workers and peasants, and without understanding the role of student leader Julio Antonio Mella, etc., would simply be an easy tale similar to the well-known fiction stories. However, this version of history, politically correct and

comfortable for Castroist revolutionary elites (quite significant in the historiography) should be recognized incomplete one, at least. The episodes of the heroic assault on the Moncada barracks, the landing of the “Granma”, the guerrilla combats in the Sierra Maestra mountains remained in live human memory and the personalities of Fidel Castro, Ernesto Che Guevara and Camilo Cienfuegos left everyone else in the background. We are not referring here to “other guerrillas” (as, for example, “The Second Escambray Front”, which also should have its significant place in history), but to the key influence of previous social and political movements, many of which were related to the Comintern activities. Without overshadowing the important role of the insurgents, one must point out that understanding the phenomenon of the Cuban revolution is absolutely impossible without previous investigating of the history of different revolutionary currents and of the penetration of these ideologies in the society.

This statement is even more valid in the case of today’s political panorama of Venezuela dominated by the United Socialist Party (Partido Socialista Unificado de Venezuela, PSUV) which proclaimed the ideology of the “Socialism of 21<sup>st</sup> Century” (also known as “Bolivarian Socialism”). The history of the early Venezuelan revolutionary movement related closely to the Comintern was forgotten even by many of those researchers who belonged to Marxist trend in Historiography who prefer to start the analysis of the current situation from the “generation of 28”. The pro-Cominternist group among the Venezuelan exiles opposed to Juan Vicente Gomez regime was never so huge, but their contribution in the process of revolutionizing social consciousness cannot be ignored. That revolutionary movement became a

kind of preparatory school for many national politicians and the roots of the ideologies of the mid-1920s were the source of inspiration for consequent generations of parties and militants.

Another example is the “Bolivarian Alternative” proclaimed by the President of Venezuela Hugo Chávez (1999–2013) and, in one way or another, supported by the leaders of Cuba (Fidel Castro and Raul Castro), Bolivia (Evo Morales (the president until November of 2019)) and Ecuador (Rafael Correa (the president until 2016)). Not only it looks a lot like to the ideas put forward by the Third International (Communist International) for the Latin American revolutionary movement, and expressed both by the leaders of the world communist organization and by its activists in the Western Hemisphere.

“I, Hugo Chávez, am neither a Marxist nor an anti-Marxist. I am neither a Communist nor an anti-Communist. You have to go beyond Marxism. It can encompass it, but it is not the solution, especially for our countries, for these conditions where I believe there is no vestige of the working class” [4, p. 392], he also repeated the better definition of his political credo should be “Bolivarianism” [10]. The prominent political scientist Manuel Alcántara put in doubt the proximity of Chávez with left-wing ideology and pointed out that he, rather, should be considered as a politician who had stirred up the most classic components of Latin American populism: “the role of the caudillo on the party, the emotional, rhetorical and key-filled language with a strong symbolic content, movementism as an expression and channel of participation. and of the political representation of a nation-people that until the arrival of the leader has been deprived of all its significance; the furious anti-Americanism, <...> and the return to the preponderant role of the state in a newly centralized economy” [1]. We can admit that it would be an arbitrary oversimplification to declare that the Bolivarian revolutionary ideology is based exclusively on the ideas of the Comintern dissolved almost eighty years ago.

However, one shouldn't put special glasses to be able to observe the influence of the Comintern on Chávez. The question then arises: how did this ex-army officer, who originally was more interested in baseball than in politics, assimilate the revolutionary ideas of the

Comintern? It would be logic to imagine that these ideas were simply in the air, even though the World Communist Party had already gone. Effectively, Chávez himself was never even close to Communist militants, but Luis Miquilena a prominent trade unions militant (originally a Communist Party (PCV) member, but later on founder of the Revolutionary Party of the Proletariat and also a member of the Democratic Republican Union) [12, p. 62; 6, p. 162–167; 29], was his tutor in 1990s. This veteran of the revolutionary movement of the 1940s was the closest comrade in struggle of Eduardo Machado, one of the most active Communist militants who was in touch with the Comintern even before the founding of the PCV and generated ideas consistent with the program of the “Bolivarian Revolution.” Chavez was also influenced a lot by Douglas Bravo, the founder of the Armed Forces of National Liberation, a leftist guerrilla group which fought against R. Betancourt government. This guerrilla commander, excluded in 1966 from the Communist Party, brought together the most radical ideas of the communists of the 1920s and the ideological heritage of Simón Bolívar in the ideology of the Party of the Venezuelan Revolution (PRV), created by him. According to Chavez' ex-companion Francisco Arias, “the main orientations accepted by us, we took from the Party of Venezuelan Revolution” [23, p. 98].

One of the fundamental ideas of Hugo Chávez's “XXI Century Socialism” is “the desire to sow the grain of revolution throughout the world” [51, p. 224]. According to Chávez, it is necessary to spread revolutionary ideas within and beyond the Western Hemisphere: “From Canada to Argentina, in the Caribbean countries we must spread our ideas <...> We must reach the heart of Africa – our mother, our party must pass through all of Europe, beginning with the Portuguese coast and up to the infinite steppes of Russia friendly and fraternal” [51, p. 226]. The President of Venezuela in 1999–2013 proclaimed “the return of the ghost of Socialism” to Latin America and explained the necessity to create “an extensive network of friendly international movements” that would oppose the US “imperial hegemony” with a purpose to propagate the revolutionary ideology in the world [27]. Various intents to carry out this ideology, as J.P. Marthoz affirms, could be seen in contemporary Venezuelan foreign policy [28].

**Methodology and sources.** Through this text the authors will analyze the relationship established between the first Venezuelan communists and the General Staff of the world revolution based in Moscow, as also the relations between the Comintern, the Ecuadorian Socialist Party (PSE) and the Peruvian American People's Revolutionary alliance (APRA). We are not especially interested in highlighting the organizational links between the Comintern and the Latin American left-wing forces, but, rather, consider that these groups laid down the bases for the contemporary "Bolivarian socialism" and the approaches formulated by the Venezuelan, Peruvian and Ecuadorian revolutionaries discussed various times with the Executive Committee of the Communist International (ECCI) were a prelude for the discussions within the Bolivarian sector of contemporary Latin-American left-wing. We see a need to analyze the position of the Comintern on the first plans for the formation of the PCV and the APRA (which went far beyond the orthodox Marxist dogms), as also the perception of the situation and circumstances of this segment of Latin American left-wing movement by the headquarters of the Comintern.

Until recently, the details of this story were kept under lock and key, and only with the partial opening of the Archive in the Comintern in Moscow (RGASPI, for its acronym in Russian) do they begin to appear before the public. The history of the Latin American sections of the Comintern is full of examples that show that initially the Third International was not a robotized mechanism of the world revolution, but a living institution, full of discussions and contradictions. This article helps to fill the historiographic gap by highlighting several guidelines for discussions about cominternist tactics in Latin American countries as also to explain better what kind of Comintern inner discussions and political processes within Latin American left-wing groups of 1920s might be considered as a legacy for today's political processes.

While the studies of the history of Venezuelan and Ecuadorian left-wing were made more than once [6; 7; 25; 27; 29], however, the researches base on RGASPI materials are, rather, scarce, and while there are some of the works which highlight unknown pages of this evolution

(we should distinguish the articles by M. Becker, D. Kersfeld, V. Jeifets and L. Jeifets [3; 20; 21; 22; 24]), there is still a necessity to show in what extent the current left-wing turn is connected with the Comintern epoch, i.e., to find out the antecedents of "Bolivarian Socialism of the 21<sup>st</sup> century".

The study uses a set of analysis methods adopted in historical and political science, namely: documentary analysis, systemic and comparative analysis, which allows us to reconstruct the main lines of interaction between different Communist groups of "Bolivarian countries" and the Comintern. It is these research methods that contribute to a critical examination of the documentary base of the study, which includes documents from the Latin American political parties and the Comintern found in the RGASPI and the Center for Research of Mexican Socialist and Workers' Movement (CEMOS) located in Mexico City. We also shall use some newspaper sources, especially those that published materials describing the essence of complex relations between PCV and the PSUV in Venezuela, with a purpose to obtain information on the events related to the subject of the study.

Meanwhile, the resolutions taken and the official documents cannot be the exclusive platform for investigations of the subject. The performances behind the scenes at the Comintern were a key part of the functioning of its national sections, which confronts historians with the challenge of studying them from the analysis of secret correspondence. In order to find out and collate the details of the history of the Venezuelan, Peruvian and Ecuadorian left of that period, we will contrast the archival sources with the information published in the existing bibliography. Such an approach makes it possible to better understand the essence of the evolution of the left in to assess accurately the issues that could not be publicly discussed given their confidential nature.

**Analysis.** The analytical part of the article consists of five sections; this structure is contributing to achieve our objectives. In the first, we will focus on the essence of the Bolivarian approaches as formulated during the discussions at the Sixth World Congress of the Comintern in 1928; the second one deals with the plans of the revolutionary continentalism proposed by the Peruvian revolutionary Victor Raul Haya de la

Torre which might be considered as an alternative to a Communist vision of the revolution. The third and the fourth sections are dedicated to description and analysis of details of formation of the left-wing movement in Ecuador and Venezuela (respectively) and to their complex relations with the Comintern. Finally, the fifth section contains an analysis of some aspects of the process of formation of the PSUV in the first decade of this century. Various sections include an analysis of the parallels in relations between the Comintern headquarters and internal development of the national left-wing groups in the 1920s and political processes in the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela at this century.

#### **The Comintern faces the Bolivarianism: the discussions at the 6<sup>th</sup> World Congress**

The term “Bolivarian countries” first appeared in the Comintern documents in the 1920s. During the discussion at the 6<sup>th</sup> World Congress (1928) on the program of the Comintern, Jules Humbert-Droz, the member of the ECCI and the leader of the Regional Secretariat for Latin America, affirmed that to solve the problems of America Latin America was necessary to apply to the region the tactic used by the Comintern in the colonial and semi-colonial countries [18, p. 104]. He justified his thesis in the fact that the political independence of the Latin American countries did not allow them an independent capitalist development. For this reason, very soon the continent became an object of exploitation: first by British imperialism and then by North American one. Such circumstances, according to Jules Humbert-Droz, turned Latin America into a focus of strong struggle whose balance was increasingly tilted to the side of the United States. The most important strategic conclusion of Humbert-Droz was the recognition of the struggle of the Latin American people against imperialism, as one of the most important factors in the battle of the international proletariat against the British and North American imperialisms.

Some Latin American communists from the beginning did not approve this concept. Thus, Ricardo Paredes, the leader of the PSE, thought that in the Latin American continent there were between three and four groups of countries with

similar economic, historical and political development; Argentina, Uruguay, Chile and Brazil, according to him, corresponded to the first group and were the countries with more developed industry and agriculture compared to other countries and where the British capital predominated and a bourgeois democracy was existing. The second group included the Caribbean nations and could be called colonial countries, where the Americans were creating an economy of monocultures. According to Paredes' typology, the countries of Central America and Mexico were included in the third group, “with multiple similarities, but also with many differences”. As a separate group, Paredes considered the “Bolivarian” countries (Venezuela, Colombia, etc.), with many similar features: great consequences of feudalism, an industry “that was still in an initial stage”; and oil as the most important feature of this group of countries. Paredes paid attention to the differences between Latin American countries in relation to the national question, pointing out that indigenous people in some countries were an important factor in the revolutionary movement due to the similar economic conditions of servitude and the location of the indigenous race in the lowest social level. As examples he cited the triumph of the Ecuadorian liberal revolution of Eloy Alfaro and the massive participation of indigenous people in the Emiliano Zapata movement during the Mexican Revolution [39; 43, p. 23–25].

In the course of the discussion that took place in the journal *The Communist International*, the Soviet communist Sergei Gusev (Travin) presented an absolutely paradoxical opinion about the character of the revolution in Latin America. He distinguished the weakness of Latin American bourgeoisie and the absence of its revolutionary spirit; the few numbers and little consciousness of young industrial proletariat, and that it had not yet become a revolutionary class; he highlighted also the presence of the imperialist bloc. According to Gusev, the fragility of the national bourgeoisie facilitated the formation of the worker-peasant bloc in the countries of Latin America, although he was aware of the backwardness of the urban proletariat, particularly the industrial one. He considered “the rapid arrival” of US imperialism

as a catalyst for the revolutionary process, “because for the working masses of Latin America, US imperialism was much more aggressive than the British” [47, p. 97].

While describing the conditions necessary for the triumph of the revolutionary national liberation movements, Gusev highlighted joint and simultaneous (possible, armed) actions which might be taken in different places and nations under the slogan of “the anti-imperialist union of the republics of workers and peasants of Latin America”. He came to conclusion that it was impossible to liberate the countries of the continent from the imperialist yoke by way of bourgeois-democratic revolutions: “only the socialist revolution could liberate Latin America and give the land to the peasants”. In this way, Gusev thought of the future Latin American revolution as a “spontaneous mass revolution of the socialist type” [47, p. 99, 101].

Meanwhile, Humbert-Droz warned about the possibility of usurpation of hegemony in the Latin American revolution by the military: “When the revolutionary movement leads us to the usurpation of power, the latter is not held in the hands of three classes, but in the hands of the petty bourgeoisie and officers, the generals, who defend the interests of the petty bourgeoisie and express their ideology <...> When the movement triumphs, they obtain power for themselves. The masses that approach the movement do not create their own organs of the power” [18, p. 110]. In some sense this prognosis made by Humbert-Droz can be seen in the phenomenon of Chávez at the XXI century.

In the 1920s, the idea of the formation of a united Communist Party of the “Bolivarian countries” (Venezuela, Colombia, Ecuador and Bolivia) was considered various times within the Comintern and within some revolutionary groups. The organization of the CP of the “Bolivarian countries” was put on the order of the day during the realization of the plan to reorganize the Revolutionary Socialist Party of Colombia and the constitution of the section of the Third International in Venezuela. For several years the militants tried to convert this structure into an independent political movement and, after the planned triumph of the communist revolution, they were going to use it as an independent actor in international relations.

### **Another face of the revolutionary Continentalism**

The “continental” way of thinking was typical not only for the ECCI, but also for the future founder of the APRA, the Peruvian revolutionary Víctor Raúl Haya de la Torre. While Aprist historiography over the decades claimed that Haya had rejected the proposal to join the Comintern and became a bitter enemy of the Communists because of the ideological controversies [41], the story is more complex. After his visit to Moscow in 1924, the exiled Peruvian student leader, who at that time was a member of the CP of Mexico, asked for a formal council from the Comintern while declared that he was trying to form a large party of workers and peasants in Peru with a purpose to turn it later into an “international structure for all of Latin America and thus inspire the revolutionaryism of the masses for the revolution with the aim of the unity of the peoples of the continent against Yankee imperialism” [17, p. 28-29].

Haya de la Torre did not doubt at all that the future party would unleash immediately the agitation throughout America “on the basis of the indigenous, peasants and workers to carry out the Latin American Federation based on the suppression of capitalist exploitation, nationalization of industry and modernization of the social system of Incaic communism for agricultural production” [17, p. 29]. The founder of the new party asked the Comintern to lend him moral support and agitation, and, “if possible”, to give also some financial aid.

After presenting the party’s program to the trial of Edgar Woog (Stirner), the most prominent Comintern specialist of the Third International in Latin American issues, Haya incorporated into the document some clauses about the nationalization of industry, the distribution of land over the basis of ancient Incaic traditions, the formation of Workers’ and Peasants’ government, the substitution of the bourgeois parliaments with the Soviets, etc. The program declared the unity of the peoples of America and open and determined anti-imperialism. Haya de la Torre was going to build his party on the basis of organizing principles of any other Communist Party, but at the same time was going to “adapt them” to national realities. However, to avoid panic or backlash, the

APRA was to omit “scaremongering or foreign words” and to be “absolutely national” in its propaganda and literature [17, p. 31]. After the consolidation of power and ending the danger of counterrevolution and an imperialist intervention, Haya de la Torre promised that the Peruvian government would evolve “towards a more radical communism.” The Aprista plans continued to be continental, however, Haya de la Torre’s activity was focused on Peru because, according to him, in Argentina, Chile and Mexico “there is a lot of reactionary force and a lot of labor division” [17, p. 31–32].

Woog did not take long to support Haya de la Torre, since he also perceived the Peruvian situation very promising; the Swiss revolutionary considered Haya de la Torre’s views “too abstract”. And the biggest obstacle to realizing the ideas of Víctor Raúl, according to Woog, was precisely this future party “organized directly to assume power”, in which its boss would be “almost the only one who has a more or less Marxist conception of the movement. revolutionary”. Woog’s conclusion was very disappointing for Haya de la Torre: “I do not doubt that for Peru the support of the indigenous peasant mass will be decisive for the maintenance of proletarian power, but without an iron party, without a group of comrades perfectly educated on the basis of experience itself and that of the Russian revolutionary movement and the period of reconstruction in Russia since the October revolution, they will not be able to stay in power for two months” [52, p. 34].

The break between Haya de la Torre and the Comintern was consummated in 1926, when the Peruvian founded APRA as a Latin American “autonomous movement” “without any foreign interference or influence”. Taking a distance from the Comintern, the Alliance expressed its disillusionment with the Latin American Antiimperialist League (controlled by the Communists), which “did not enunciate a political program but a resistance to imperialism” and the Latin American Union, which “limited itself to intellectual action”. The Apristas implied that only their party, like the United Front of manual and intellectual workers (workers, students, peasants, intellectuals, etc.) was the driving force of the anti-imperialist revolutionary movement in Latin America.

### **Between adventures and organization: the birth of Communism in Ecuador**

Ricardo Paredes and his companions, in their turn, saw in the Ecuadorian Socialist Party a force capable of becoming a strong and dynamic organization, based on the promotion of communism in neighboring countries, and set the ambitious goals of rallying all the Communists in the region around the PSE [39, p. 3]. The “revolutionary pact” with the PRV and the Revolutionary Socialist Party of Colombia was considered as the basis for the future activities, thus stipulating the simultaneous actions of three allies. The objective of such a movement should be the creation of the Greater Socialist Colombia (Colombia, Venezuela, Ecuador), as the important and first cell of the future Federation of Latin American Peoples, and later, of the World Soviet Federation.

Understanding the organizational insufficiency of three parties to carry out such a project, the PSE considered that their unification by stages was needed: first, the creation of the common leadership of the parties of Colombia and Ecuador able to work in coordination with the delegate sent by the PRV, and, secondly, the organization of a single directive center of the three parties [38, p. 3].

During the debate on Raúl Mahecha’s (one of the leaders of the famous banana strike in Colombia, who stayed in Ecuador being persecuted by Colombian authorities) unexpected plan, the leaders of the Ecuadorian communists became even more convinced of the regularity of such an orientation. Mahecha, according to his own words, received a proposal from the representatives of the Rockefeller group company, to make available to the Revolutionary Socialist Party of Colombia “to carry out the social revolution, first in Colombia, then in Ecuador and later in Venezuela”, 5 million dollars and big quantities of rifles, cannon and machine guns on condition that the latter would grant the oil concession to the “Standard Oil”. The representatives of the American oil businessman supposedly affirmed that “what they would get was the oil of these nationalities” [38, p. 3–4]. The proposal was extended to the PSE and the PRV. In the event of rejection by the Communists, the agents of Rockefeller decided to offer this plan

to Colombian President Olaya Herrera and organize the invasion to Ecuador to “impose its oil policy and get the black gold that the United States was beginning to lack, while England was removing the US from their positions in Colombia and in other countries” [36, l. 23–24].

From Enrique Terán’s (PSE’s Secretary General) point of view, the acceptance of this plan could contribute to favor a rapid realization of the social revolution with a greater probability of its success. The advantage consisted in the possibility of delivery of weapons by “those bandits” immediately and without arousing any suspicion on the part of the bourgeoisie. The final outcome could be “the possibility of triumphing in the three republics and forming our Soviet federative union, which makes up such a great force that we could declare war on concessions later, and crush imperialism with our continental war of montoneras. The opportunity not to let the reaction advance later until it annihilates our parties like in Chile, Mexico, Cuba, Venezuela etc.” [38, p. 4].

In this way, the leaders of the PSE and Mahecha saw the tactical union with the oil oligarch Rockefeller, as the real possibility of the triumph of the continental social revolution. With all this, they were fully aware that such a tactic would mean the betrayal of “our ideals and our international organization”. On the other hand, they were afraid of rejecting such a path, since other forces would accept this help, and then “the revolution that we rejected... would turn fierce against our parties”, wrote E. Terán and R. Mahecha to the South American Secretariat of the Comintern [38, p. 5].

The leaders of the PSE asked the Comintern for the right to make “immediate and definitive” decisions and their responsibility for them. They expected them to analyze exactly “the very serious moments we are going through, the proximity of an armed movement in our countries, the imminence of an agrarian revolution, especially in Ecuador, the immense significance that a revolution can have in a group of countries that would undermine the imperialist power” [38, p. 8]. However, the Comintern did not want to accept the ambitious and obviously adventurous plans of the Ecuadorian communists, without bothering to explain the reasons for their decision. It is clear that the leadership of the International did not see

in this the prospects of the Latin American revolution, preferring to concentrate on other priorities.

### **The stumbling way of the Venezuelan Communism**

Venezuelans Salvador de la Plaza and the brothers Gustavo and Eduardo Machado – emigrants and enemies of the dictatorship of Juan Vicente Gómez, participated actively in the Latin American anti-imperialist movement and founded also the Continental Revolutionary Group (GCR) and did everything possible to act based on the tasks of the “continental revolution” [see more details in: 16]. In 1927, with the participation of the members of the illegal Continental Revolutionary Group, the PRV was founded with a purpose to unify all opposition to Gómez, both abroad and within the country, to overthrow the dictator. The PRV presented itself as a defender of the “foundation in Venezuela of the government of principles and not the government of a single leader”, of a government capable of “putting an end to the hegemony of individuals and replacing it with the predominance of ideas”. The PRV stated that it is fighting for progress and improvement of the situation in Venezuela and for world peace [35, p. 46].

The GCR set the task of taking advantage of the favorable situation for the triumph of communism in America “that must arise in Venezuela as soon as the armed revolt that is being organized at the moment triumphs [9, l. 35–36]”. Venezuela was considered as the potential base for the deployment of the revolution on a continental scale. To achieve these objectives, two programs were drawn up: one for secret operations and the other for public actions, and believed that it was necessary “to keep the end pursued in secret until the revolt triumph, trying to achieve, on the one hand, the participation of the group in it, hence the participation of the masses, and on the other hand, not to give international capital a pretext to obstruct the movement”. The group supposed to form and lead “a united front with all the organizations, regardless of their social tendencies, for the campaign to overthrow the current tyrant and for the armed revolt that is being prepared with de facto means for the recognition of belligerence” [9, l. 36].

Gustavo Machado – the “general commissioner of the revolution” – immediately went to Moscow to “establish and maintain the broad brother relations between the government of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics and the one that would be created in Venezuela after the triumph of the Revolution” [50, l. 15]. The Venezuelan supporters of the continental revolution only wanted from the III International and the USSR money and an expedition ship [15, p. 76] to carry weapons already offered by the Mexican government, and after the triumph of the revolution they expected the sending of advisers to carry out the socialist reforms. This idea was fully accepted by the Soviet plenipotentiary representative in Mexico Stanislav Pestkovsky and by Mikhail Grolman, the ECCI representative in Mexico.

However, in Moscow the Communist leaders thought otherwise. The Comintern and the People’s Commissariat for Foreign Affairs (NKID) denied aid to the Venezuelan revolutionaries, rejecting the “Garibaldian way” of overthrowing Gómez and considering support for the “pronouncement” as an adventure in view of the absence of social base within the country. They recommended creating the communist party before organizing the anti-dictatorial armed intervention [13, l. 162; 50, l. 220].

The true reasons for the refusal can only be assumed, since they were not explained in detail in the available documents. Conceptually, the ideas of the APRA, the PSE and the GCR anticipated the program of S. Gusev and were fully inserted into the general ideology of the world revolution. A similar armed expedition to overthrow the dictatorial regime in 1928 was planned by J.A. Mella, the leader of the Anti-Imperialist League of the Americas, ready to collaborate with the anti-Machadist leaders of the Nationalist Movement, but Mella never got the support of Moscow [46, l. 1]. While the Comintern gladly engaged in the organization of armed interventions in Germany, the Balkans, and elsewhere, without stopping at enormous expense, it did not agree to the ambitious plans of the supporters of the “continental revolution”. Why didn’t the officials of the world revolution support the revolutionary uprisings in Latin America? The history tells us that armed actions against hateful dictatorships could achieve their results. In a few years, only

APRA was able to triumph in the elections in Peru, showing the appeal of its program to the masses, in 1933 a general strike organized by the Cuban Communists led to the fall of the Gerardo Machado regime, etc.

The probability of success of the revolt in Venezuela was also great, since the opposition to the tyranny managed to accumulate broad social sectors ready to participate in the anti-dictatorial coalition and anti-imperialist activity. However, the proclamation of its emphasis on the Communist Party and the program of the socialist revolution, contributed to the reduction of the field of activity of the radical leftist opposition against J.V. Gómez. What they were afraid of at the headquarters of the Comintern was the loss of hegemony of the party of the proletariat in the revolution, and their consequent conversion into general democratic ideology of the anti-dictatorial movement. These fears were not absolutely unfounded, since in Latin America the degree of loyalty to the Comintern of the followers of the world revolution was quite conditional. Communism was more of a dream than an ideology, the same as today for Hugo Chávez. That is why its members did not consider it possible to overthrow the tyrannical regimes by forces that were not under the full control of the Comintern, proposing the socialist revolution for the distant future.

### **The formation of contemporary Socialist United Party in Venezuela**

Hugo Chávez declared more than once that he considered his country as the center for the advancement of the ideas of “Socialism of the XXI century”, not only in Latin America but throughout the world. The international organization “Bolivarian Alternative for the Americas” (ALBA), created in 2004 at the initiative of Hugo Chávez and Fidel Castro, included Venezuela, Cuba, Bolivia, Nicaragua, Dominican Republic and (for a short time) Honduras, as also some smaller Caribbean nations [37]. This group bases its activity on the ideas of mutual social political and economic assistance among the Latin American nations, considering their revolution as part of the global struggle against US imperialism [19; 30]. The intents to create a kind of Fifth International which would be, alike the Comintern, an international

coordinating center for the leftist parties throughout Latin America and all over the world, was also the essential part of this Chavist strategy. The PSUV, which had in its best moments, more than 7.5 million people, according to press reports, was considered as a political lever to form the network of international movements [11].

In Cuba, after the Castroist revolution, the process of forming the only leading party was carried out above all “from below”. The Popular Socialist Party (PSP) recognized the leadership of Fidel Castro in the revolutionary process and was willing to accept the different forms of cooperation, from the election of the leader of the July 26 Movement as its Secretary General to the creation of the Revolutionary Organizations Integrated (ORI), like the base of the United Party of the Socialist Revolution of Cuba. Initially there were some obstacles due to the activities of the communist Aníbal Escalante, secretary of the National Directorate of the ORI (who, incidentally, in the 1930s worked in the ECCI). Finally, Escalante was dismissed from his post in March, 1962 by the ORI leadership at the instigation of Fidel Castro who accused him of “having promoting the sectarian spirit to its highest possible level, of having promoted an organization which he had controlled” [5, p. 19–20]. The situation with the “old-line Communist” Anibal Escalante was, however, something more complicated. According to some archive documents from Poland published recently in the USA, Escalante had concentrated too much control over national apparatus of the party in his hands and the July 26 Movement (M-26) was quite jealous with it and had feared that the PSP would be able to get control over the military cadres [45]. This internal episode had also international dimension as Moscow was preoccupied over the clash between Escalante and Castro and was wondering if this wouldn’t signify the rapprochement between Havana and Maoist China [44]. In two years ex-leader was imprisoned and accused of being part of a “microfaction plot” within the Communist Party and of maintaining some extraofficial relations with the Soviet embassy trying to orchestrate the overthrow of Castro [5, p. 19–20]. However, the international dimension of the Escalante case never became very significant within Cuban political life, as the main part of the PSP finally choose to support Fidel

and to let him free way to construct a new political system.

On the contrary, in Venezuela the formation of the leading PSUV was done “from above”, by “Commander Chávez”, although had no such international dimension like in Cuba. While the PCV supported originally to Hugo Chávez and during some consequent elections the PCV was among the parties who formed part of pro-Chávez coalition, later on the situation became more complex. At the 13<sup>th</sup> Extraordinary Congress of the PCV (2007), the Venezuelan Communists after energetic debates over Chávez’ plan to create the PSUV which would absorb all the national left-wing forces decided to approve this plan, but at the same time they opted to maintain their own political autonomy [14]. In Autumn of 2007 the PCV was one of the most energetic promoters of option “Yes” at the referendum convoked to approve or not the draft of new Constitution suggested by Chávez and National Assembly.

The leftist forces that did not want to dissolve in the PSUV, because they did not want to lose their individuality, were branded as traitors by the leader of the Bolivarian revolution. In October 2008, Hugo Chávez broke relations with the “schismatics” and “counterrevolutionaries” of Patria Para Todos (PPT) and the PCV, who did not agree to disperse in the PSUV and presented their own candidates in elections: “Don’t be liars, PCV and PPT, you have your own counterrevolutionary plans. You are playing at dividing the popular movement and I accuse you of counterrevolutionaries, and you must be swept off the Venezuelan political map as disloyal, liars and manipulators” [40].

Already after the triumph of the referendum on the constitutional changes presented by Chávez, the Communists were forced to get even closer to the PSUV, since they did not want to be out of the political life of the country [2]. On February 16, 2009, the PCV proposed to preserve the structure of the so-called Simón Bolívar Command to use it as a dispute club for pro-Chavista social sectors. The same was stated by the representatives of PPT. The communist Yul Jabour was right when he pointed out that Chávez’s success in the referendum was practically guaranteed, because in reality the “hard-fought” parties worked together on the most important issues of the campaign. On the other

hand, it was important for the PSUV not to rush to give a positive response to its comrades from yesterday, today considered semi-dissidents. In this new phase of romance with the PSUV the PCV converted into the second party in the Chavist coalition (2.99% of votes) [8], and at the presidential elections the PCV obtained about half of million votes.

In the history of Venezuela, when the PCV was founded, a similar case has already occurred. A barrage of accusations fell on the Communists, the leaders of the PRV de la Plaza and Machado, the men who founded the party and led the Latin American anti-imperialist movement, left movement. They were accused of “caudillismo” and asked to dissolve the PRV and take care of something “specific in nearby regions of the country.” G. Machado bitterly wrote: “May we disappear from the “circulation, may we no longer be named. <...> We are attacked because it seems that we are not satisfied with being leaders but that we aspire to be leaders! This happens to the extent of the ridiculous and I am not willing to let Ricardo Martínez [he was referring to Venezuelan communist who at those times was in charge of the Latin American Section of the Red Trade Union International] continue mortifying himself with my future presidency of the republic. This is not revolutionary, nor is it serious” [16, p. 25].

As disciplined members of the Comintern, the leaders of the PRV carried out the order of their superior instances; the Communist Party of Venezuela was founded by other people. However, in the mid-1930s, when the dictatorship fell, they returned to the country and throughout their lives played an important role in party activities. The current PCV could not resist the pressure of Hugo Chávez, but in order not to disappear from political life, it had to accept the compromise [2; 34].

After the death of Hugo Chavez in 2013 and postulation of Nicolas Maduro by the Gran Polo Patriotico, the PCV supported him [19]. However, it maintained its basic attitude saying that it was not considering the Venezuelan social and economic system as Socialist one [32; 33]. The Communist supported the majority of the candidates postulated by the GPP, but there were divergences in regional and municipal levels, and the PCV finally decided in some cases to postulate

its own candidates competing with GPP. The rupture came in 2020 when the PCV decided to present its own list to the National Assembly. According to O. Figuera, “the resistance is against North American or European imperialism not because socialism is being built in Venezuela, no, it is not because of that, because in Venezuela socialism is not in crisis, dependent and rentier capitalism is in crisis, which is the model that is has installed in our country, that model is in crisis <...>. Faced with this model, we have proposed raising a revolutionary solution that deepens peasant, worker and popular control and their role in the process of transformation of Venezuelan society and not a solution that is proposed is to build a new revolutionary bourgeoisie” [34].

Although some observers considered it a maneuver with a purpose to accumulate the anti-Maduro votes in circumstances of abstention by the main part of opposition parties, the essence of the issue can be easily read in the same words by Figuera: “Our difference with the Government is not a quota for the National Assembly, our difference is political, it has to do with the fact that we do not share economic policy, with labor policy, at the agrarian and peasant level, which has to do with bureaucracy and corruption, the existence of mafias that control important spaces of society and the State <...> those are our differences that are not of today, we have raised them for years” [34].

The PCV never wanted to be a minor partner, but an equal one. While it had to subordinate partially to Hugo Chavez, the Communists remember that they are the oldest party in Venezuela and that it was their ideology which became one of the founding stones for the Bolivarian socialism. Thus, it was inevitable that they would require political independence, especially in the moment of crisis of the ruling regime. In effect, Maduro’s accusations against the PCV are very similar to those made by Chavez in 2008: “We carry a project, clinging to Bolívar, to Chávez, to the socialist project, defined, clear, we think very well what we do and we do it without depending on blackmail neither imperialists nor leftists, childish and false. In the end they come together, they are destructive forces, both” [49].

The compromise between Chávez and PCV was one-sided. The Venezuelan president Hugo Chávez planned to build the “Socialism of the

21<sup>st</sup> century” taking as an ideology, to a great extent, the one born in the Comintern, but without the PCV founded with the participation of the Third International as an independent political force. This well points to traditions of the World Communist Party that didn’t allow for differences within its ranks. It looks like the PSUV leaders fascinated with their hegemony and charisma of Chávez proved unable to understand the complex essence of their relations with the Communists and some others allies.

### Results

While examining the Comintern “trace” in the formation of modern “Bolivarian socialism” (the slogan and ideology proclaimed by governing Venezuelan Socialist United Party) the authors came to conclusion that there is a visible influence of the Comintern ideology and practice which contributed to the political formation of some leaders of Venezuelan “Bolivarian” revolution (Hugo Chávez, first of all). Although it was not the only source of the formation of such ideology, some of these postulates not only were formulated back in the 1920s by left-wing militants close to the Venezuelan Communism and to the Comintern, but also were shared by the militants of the Ecuadorian Socialists and Communists and the leader of Peruvian Aprism V.R. Haya de la Torre. These concepts were debated energetically and finally amended during the VI Congress of the Comintern, however, Moscow was not able to change completely the original ideas offered by Latin American left-wing militants. The general conclusion is that the “Socialism of 21<sup>st</sup> century” it is not completely new approach, but a sum of some previous concepts adopted to the realities of South American politics of this century.

As for the models of the Party construction discussed in respect to the Venezuelan Revolutionary Party/Communist Party of Venezuela, the authors see a lot of similarities with the process of the creation of united revolutionary party formed during Castroist revolution in Cuba. However, it was demonstrated that this process was quite different in today’s Venezuela and it was undertaken from above, with obvious purpose to marginalize some political actors; these circumstances never let to unify all the left-wing and revolutionary forces. The Communist in

Venezuela opted for maintaining their organizational autonomy precisely because of PSUV’s inability to permit ideological heterodoxy and equality of different left-wing parties.

### NOTE

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