



## LULA, HUGO AND THE NEW LATIN AMERICA

Sunday, April 18, 2010

Every week CUIP's president Jacqueline Salit and strategist/philosopher Fred Newman watch the political talk shows and discuss them. Here are excerpts from their dialogues compiled on Sunday, April 18, 2010 after watching selections from "The Charlie Rose Show."

**Salit:** We watched a roundtable on Charlie Rose about Latin America and the political and economic changes going on there. Parts of the discussion were interesting.

**Newman:** Though, in some ways, it seemed like every discussion I've heard since the third grade.

**Salit:** About Latin America?

**Newman:** Yes.

**Salit:** I think I know what you mean. They all have the U.S. as the center of the universe, but that's what's changing. Charlie Rose interviewed four analysts from different points on the political spectrum, but they all told a similar story. And the story, with different specifics for different countries, is that there's now a greater political distance between Latin America and the United States than there has been for many decades. The separation, the greater distance politically, comes about because Latin America is demanding it. They want a peer relationship with the U.S, not a subordinate relationship. And there are two sources of the new Latin American power. One is the economic growth that's taken place, particularly in Brazil, now recognized as a global economic powerhouse; to some extent in Chile, and other parts of the continent, too. With that greater economic strength comes the ability to make greater demands on the United States. The other is the change in the political trends which have put Latin America at what the experts called "the center-center-left." Nation after nation has some form of either socialist or social democratic government that was elected by the people. So, those two things taken together, empower Latin America to be able to assert a greater independence.

This is not a new topic. We've talked about the emerging analysis of a "World without the West," a world where the United States is not the "be all and end all" single superpower. Though it is obviously enormously powerful, the U.S. is no longer the only game in town. I'm wondering if this discussion about Latin America, however much it's like discussions from 60 years ago, fills out the changing picture of where the U.S. is internationally.

**Newman:** I guess what I really meant by saying it's the same kind of discussion that I've heard since the third grade (which was a long time ago) is what you were pointing to, namely something almost genetic. It seems almost impossible for Americans (and/or people who have spent a lot of time in America, even if they're Europeans) to look at Latin America in any way other than in its relationship to Washington. It almost feels like nobody can do it. That was true then and, even though the American position has changed dramatically, I think that's still the case. These discussions are so unworldly.

**Salit:** Meaning one-sided.

**Newman:** And that's the paradigm. You would think there would be more of a focus on the influence of Europe on Latin America, since that's transparently accelerated over the last period of time and is a force in the movement towards social democracy. Not to mention that the Bush policies – which alienated much of Europe – no doubt encouraged the Europeans to extend their influence in the Southern Hemisphere. There was no mention of Cuba's influence, which is huge. The Rose panelists did eventually make mention of China, but it's a much bigger issue than they made of it. The basic history here is that there has been more than a half century of peoples' struggles across Latin America and they've been interconnected. What always unified them – and there are different countries with different historical situations – was and remains an anti-Americanism. Now these countries have become sufficiently powerful so that their anti-Americanism can be channeled to get whatever benefits they can out of their relationship with Washington. But it doesn't change the fact that there is a pervasive anti-Americanism.

Where does that come from? The strategy of Washington was to politically and economically control Latin America, arguably dating back to the Monroe Doctrine. But it failed. As we well know, there are fewer things more difficult for Washington to do than to admit defeat. When I was a youngster, the "panelists" in those days didn't quite let on that the U.S. was in the midst of a long term effort to fully control Latin America. Today's Charlie Rose panel is fundamentally the same. They're all focused mainly on Washington/Latin America relationships. But they fail to point out that things have not gone according to Washington's original plan.

**Salit:** I think that's worth elaborating. One of the panelists mentioned that during the 1960s there were nine right wing coups that overthrew democratically elected, progressive governments. All of these coups were supported by the United States. The U.S. was instrumental, more directly than it often has been in other parts of the world, in bringing the right to power. And, not just right leaning governments but full blown right wing fascistic dictatorships. Over the last 10 years, the right has been removed from power across Latin America, by a wave of democratically elected left candidates, now governments. One of the Charlie Rose panelists pointed out, a big difference today is that the U.S. isn't persecuting the left in the way that it once did. The whole history of the U.S. strategy of supporting anti-democratic, right-wing, pro-Washington

governments didn't hold. Many people suffered terribly as a result of that policy. But, nonetheless, that whole 50-year history has been repudiated.

**Newman:** I agree, but even in that formulation, I hear it as failing to fully articulate the key point of that hugely important historic occurrence, namely the fundamental weakening of Washington. When they use a sentence like "the United States is not persecuting the left as much as it used to," they don't point out that Washington is in no position to persecute the left. To me, there's a profound bias in their formulation as a result.

**Salit:** I appreciate that.

**Newman:** Latin America is as good an example of the decline of power of the United States worldwide as anything that's happening in the world.

**Salit:** Maybe I'm trying to rescue some insights from the panel here, but nonetheless, I thought the discussion about Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva of Brazil and Hugo Chavez of Venezuela, the two most formidable governmental and, as it happens, left leaders on the continent...

**Newman:** "As it happens" is inaccurate. It happens because the entire situation in Latin America and internationally has played a substantial role in that happening.

**Salit:** Point taken. One of the more cynical panelists called it the "good cop/bad cop" routine between Lula and Chavez. Lula himself holds together a complex coalition government. His own party is not the majority party in Brazil, the Workers Party is a minority party. But, specifically, they were referring to Lula's ability to gain certain advantages for Brazil in dealing with the U.S. because the U.S. is essentially afraid that if it goes negative on Lula – I don't just mean in the newspapers, but in terms of trade deals, etc. – that Lula will turn more directly to Chavez, who's considered a more hostile antagonist to the U.S. From Washington's point of view, Chavez is less conciliatory than Lula is. The point was that this is something that the two of them are doing together, that Chavez and Lula do this together, and that it's tactically effective for them. Put another way, one of the things that has helped Brazil to become a major global power is Venezuela – their ability to play that against the United States, or to play the United States off in that situation.

**Newman:** I agree with you. I'm certainly no expert on Latin American relationships, but my impression has always been that though there's a strong impulse for most, if not all, of the Latin American countries to work with each other, it was made difficult by Washington. Washington worked overtime to make sure they didn't. So, as Washington's position weakens, their quite natural inclination to play together increases, which is exactly what Washington has always been afraid of.

**Salit:** Yes. Lula and Chavez have turned the old paradigm on its head, politically speaking. I'd like to know your thoughts about the comments made by Kevin Casas-Zamora, a former Vice President of Costa Rica, who said: 'Oh yes, Latin America has turned to the left. But it's a vegetarian left.' That was his term. It's a "soft-speaking" left. On the one hand, I know what he's saying. The left that is in power today in Latin America did not achieve power through armed struggle, through the traditional 1960s style insurgencies. Obviously many of these democracy movements have historical connections to those struggles, not to mention to Cuba, which did make a social revolution through an armed insurrection. But, I would say that Casas-Zamora thinks there's now a form of socialism that is more tolerable to the U.S.

**Newman:** And where does that exist?

**Salit:** The form of socialism that's more tolerable to the U.S.? Presumably he means Brazil, Chile, etc.

**Newman:** Well, I presume, in terms of the big picture, he's also referencing China. I guess China is more tolerable to the U.S.

**Salit:** China is somewhere between tolerable and a necessity.

**Newman:** That's what I'm raising. The issue of whether there is a form of communism, or socialism, or whatever, that's more "tolerable" to the U.S. doesn't mean anything. That suggests that different forms of socialism pass by Washington for their "credibility check." The U.S., like everybody else, is more and more obliged to respond to what is, the history that is. It's not that it's more tolerable or less tolerable.

**Salit:** It's what is.

**Newman:** That's what is and you have to respond to what is. You could say, relatively speaking, that the Latin American left is more vegetarian than it used to be. Well, everybody is more vegetarian than they used to be. The whole world is more vegetarian. It didn't just happen in Latin America. But, Latin America is also the home of the West's only armed struggle that installed a socialist government and lasted.

**Salit:** Cuba.

**Newman:** Cuba, which has had a disproportionate influence on Latin America.

**Salit:** Disproportionate to its physical size and the size of its economy.

**Newman:** Exactly. Cuba's had a tremendous influence on Latin American politics, it seems to me. So, that vegetarian characterization actually seems Washington-centric. Now, you could say that's OK, because that's how the world has been. But we now

have an understanding, not only of where the world has been, but of the direction in which it seems to be moving. So one would have to work to alter those kinds of characterizations, but I don't think this panel did that. They no more wanted to talk about the degree of control that Washington had over Latin America when I was growing up 60 years ago than they now want to talk about the fact that they've lost a great degree of control.

**Salit:** That it's significantly diminished.

**Newman:** Interestingly enough, the way that manifests itself in terms of the form is exactly the same. Again, I'm not speaking as an expert on Latin America. I have a little more expertise on how people talk about the United States. I've been listening to that for 75 years now. I think it's no small part of why the United States has had so many misunderstandings of what's going on in the world. I've finally become somewhat wiser on that issue. I no longer find it as tolerable as I once did.

**Salit:** With regards to China, we also watched a Charlie Rose discussion on the nuclear summit. The focus was on Obama's efforts to influence China to join him in the sanctions on Iran. Obama and President Hu met this week to talk about that. In any event, we saw an exchange between Rose and Joshua Cooper Ramo, a China expert. Charlie Rose asked him 'How do the Chinese view this? We know how Washington sees this. We know what Obama is trying to do here, but how do the Chinese see this?' Cooper Ramo emphasized that China has a different nuclear strategy than we do, which is that they don't believe they need a lot of nuclear weapons in order to use nuclear weaponry as a deterrent. All they need to have is a bunch of them that work. And, he points out, the Chinese nuclear doctrine is "no first strike." They will not use nuclear weapons in a first strike. They have what they need to use them defensively, if that should become necessary. So Cooper Ramo says that in terms of China's attitude towards Iran, the Chinese feel that the Iranians see these things more along the lines of the way China does than the way the U.S. does. So China's presupposition is that Iran will take a "no first strike" policy, that they want to develop nuclear weapons for defensive purposes. It's the sine qua non of national defense in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. You have a couple of nuclear weapons and then you can basically guarantee that pretty much no one is going to screw with you in a major league military kind of way, because you have them.

**Newman:** But Cooper Ramo didn't mention one very important difference. Iran has close relationships with every terrorist organization in the world. That's who Washington is most afraid of.

**Salit:** Yes, and justifiably.

**Newman:** What I object to in Cooper Ramo's analysis is I don't think it's exactly the same as the situation with China.

**Salit:** Because of the difference in China's relationship to terrorism and Iran's relationship to terrorism?

**Newman:** Exactly. I think his is an incomplete analysis. He's a little China-centric.

**Salit:** As we know. Thanks, Fred.