

Brief comment on Venezuelan "21st-century Socialism"

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Abstract: With socialist reform and practice, Venezuelan "21 st-century socialism" explores the road of development with its own national characteristics. There are achievement along with a lot of problems, risks and uncertainties. Analysis and review on Socialism in Venezuela can draw inspiration from experience and get more understanding and thinking to the question of "what is socialism and how to build it".

1. Introduction

From the 19th century till now, socialism has developed from utopian socialism to scientific socialism, from theory to practice, from one country to many countries, and from one model to many models. Despite of a history of over a hundred years, the question of what is socialism and how to build it still need socialist countries to explore and practice in accordance with their national conditions. A brief analysis of Venezuelan socialism not only provides a deeper understanding of its socialist construction and development process, but also gives enlightenment from experience and further understanding and thinking of China's socialist development.

2. The background of Venezuelan "21st-century socialism"

The rise of "21st-century socialism" is not an accident, but a result of the combination of internal and external causes, a product of the development of political, economic and social contradictions in Venezuela. The first is the decline in oil price, Venezuelan economic lifeline, rising foreign debt, rampant inflation and the onset of an economic crisis -- causing a sharp decline in public's impression and trust in the government. The defects of democratic political reform bring political and social conflicts. The serious corruption between party interest groups, constantly-change ruling party and leadership and destroyed political participation of the general public bring the government the crisis of ruling legitimacy without the support of the public. Social problems are prominent and contradictions are intensifying. With the rise of new liberalism, the state's intervention capacity has been greatly reduced, and a series of problems such as the financial crisis have arisen. The continuous conflict, the declining living standards and the destitution of the people have a great negative impact on it. The rise of the leftist campaign in Latin America has promoted the government of Chavez to move to the left, advocating the establishment of a new international economic order, attaching importance to the fundamental rights and interests of the people and supporting the civil movement, directly related to the social, justice and efficiency issues, which is widely supported by the public.

Mr Chavez is just beginning to explore a "third way" that is neither too far right nor too far left. But Chavez's government, pursuing social justice, strongly criticize the neo-liberal development model and wants to build a more dynamic and sustainable economic development model through strong state intervention. The Chavez government has faced a series of challenges, especially the violent impact of the military coup in April 2002. Chavez hates and dislikes the United States due to its involvement in supporting and assisting the reactionaries, as well as constant interference and threats to the economy and national security. These factors make its political position become radicalized, and it turns to pursue socialism from seeking to explore the "third way", more and more firmly. When he attended the fifth World Social Forum in 2005, Chavez made it clear that he wanted Venezuela to move in a socialist direction. At the opening of the 4th Social Debt Summit in

Caracas on 25 February 2005, he first explicitly put forward the concept of "21st-century socialism" when describing socialism in Venezuela¹. Since then, he has worked hard to push the "Bolivarian revolution" he advocated to a new height of "21st-century socialism" and pointed out its ultimate goal, leading the Venezuelan people to build "21st-century socialism".

3. The policy view and potential problems of "21st-century socialism" in Venezuela

3.1 Policies and propositions

The Venezuelan government and ruling party have taken a series of measures to achieve what Chavez calls "21st-century socialism". Economy is gradually shifted toward public ownership and common management, and establish more cooperatives and state-owned enterprises. In politics, democracy was fully developed, participatory democracy was established, and a "unified socialist party of Venezuela" was established and improved, making it the largest party in the history of Venezuela. Chavez has also repeatedly stressed the necessity to cultivate socialist values, arguing that only when the economy and political system reform are carried out simultaneously can its effects be brought into full play. In the social aspect, he emphasized social justice, equality and mutual assistance, advocated to improve domestic education level and infrastructure development, carry out poverty alleviation, solve livelihood and implement a new social security system. In terms of diplomacy, Chavez has continued to take promoting the regional integration of Latin America as the top goal of foreign policy, actively established relationship with more petroleum countries, strengthened exchanges and cooperation with China and other developing countries, as well as Latin America and ASEAN, carried out diversified diplomacy and opposed the economic, political and military hegemony of the United States. Like China, Venezuela also adheres to the principles of "sovereignty" "equality" "respect the rights" and "non-interference in others' internal affairs". Thanks to various policies and measures, Venezuela has made considerable achievements in "21st-century socialism".

3.2 Potential problems

Venezuela has maintained a high economic growth rate due to its rich oil resources, which account for more than 90 percent of the national total exports. But domestic economic development is relatively backward, agricultural and other industrial levels are relatively low, and 90% of food, goods and technologies are imported. Excessive dependence on the oil industry will lead to unbalanced economic structure development, widening wealth gap and causing more social problems. Chavez established a participatory democracy, which catered to the public's desire for revolution. He improved the lives of the poor, boosted their employment opportunities, and established a new social security system with a broad mass base and the support of the military. However, its domestic socialist party is weak, need to strengthen the party organization and the strength, and enhance public confidence. Government administration takes the form of "strongman politics", the vertical leadership system is prone to corruption. Chavez's individual dogmatism, the latent personality worship surrounding Chavez, will make Venezuela's government and its people become overly dependent on him. On the contrary, they will not be aware of their own shortcomings, nor can they better test the policies; in addition, the domestic opposition and the big bourgeoisie often take the activities that undermine the socialist practice, and the hostility and intervention of the United States abroad; the fluctuation of oil price makes Venezuela face many challenges and risks. The most important point is that Chavez's pursuit of Socialism is a combination of multiple ideas, lacking the solidity of Marxist scientific Socialism theory, without scientific theoretical system as the foundation, the rationality of socialist "building" is not guaranteed. All in all, Venezuela's "Socialism in the 21st century" face a huge test to continue, and the theory and practice of Socialism is worth further elaboration and testing.

4. Several inspirations and reflections

First, Venezuela's "Socialism in the 21st century" has made great achievements. However, it is

not a classic Marxism after Capitalism in the historical development stage, but a means to achieve economic and social progress. There is no doubt that it is a typical national socialist practice, the fundamental purpose of this new socialist model is to explore a non-capitalist road in conformity with the political, economic and social development characteristics of Venezuela and to criticize the development model of Capitalism and new liberalism. It is rooted in Venezuela's history, Bolivar's ideology and the Venezuelan people's struggle for political and economic independence, therefore, Venezuela's "Socialism in the 21st century" is mixed with the theoretical system of diversified thoughts is fundamentally different from the theory and practice of Socialism with Chinese characteristics. It does not reach the degree of scientific system theory, and its rationality needs to be further tested by practice. Practice does not have established procedures, but seeks to move towards Socialism through various attempts and explorations and try to get rid of the state depravity. Although this kind of exploration may have many uncertain factors, but it did not copy the socialist model, active practice, the exploration itself should get attention, understanding and respect.

Second, China and Venezuela share common features in their socialist reform, but each has its own characteristics. Through the analysis of Venezuela's "Socialism in the 21st century", we can make a comparison and draw inspiration. First of all, economic foundation is the top priority. We should focus on economic construction. Only with a solid material foundation can we achieve a bright future of Socialism; then, the issue of checks and balances of power is also the key to socialist construction. We need to establish and improve mechanisms of checks and oversight, strengthen socialist democracy and the rule of law, and ensure political stability and the support of the people so as to better build Socialism. Finally, integrated into the world economic wave while maintaining a socialist identity, only by seizing the opportunity and strengthening cooperation and exchanges can we gain a firm foothold in the international environment of globalization and political and economic integration. Because the capitalist values and Capitalism relationship still exists, the practice of Venezuela's "21st century Socialism" will be affected in different degree, It is likely that the road to Socialism came to an end at the very beginning of Capitalism, and a significant portion of the country's population and class is critical of the Socialism Mr. Chavez wants to build. The next step is to strengthen the intensity of practice, take more powerful actions and use new socialist ideas to resist opposition forces. Venezuela's road to building "Socialism in the 21st century" is full of twists and turns, but we should believe that the future of socialist development is bright. We should make adequate preparations to meet the next checkpoint, overcome difficulties in constant practice and sum up our experience.

Third, Socialism have different forms in different regions, we have to admit and firmly believe in the existence of differences is normal, but the point is to support each other in different forms, make it become more conducive to their own progress, in their own interests and have their own characteristic socialist road, and continue to grow stronger. At present, as socialist countries, North Korea, Cuba, Laos and Venezuela, have different ways and formulation of exploring Socialism. However, no matter what method is adopted, it is a renewal and reform of the Soviet model, and all of them bear traces of the Soviet model. Some are not clear about the question of "what is Socialism and how to build Socialism", some follow rigid dogma, copy the model of the Soviet union, cannot organically combine national conditions with socialist development and make a flexible application, some make a little progress but a lot of regression or stay a state of stagnation in the process of socialist construction. These are risk factors that must not be present and always held. We should be good at analyzing and summarizing the experiences and lessons of the socialist reform in various countries, and actually apply these experiences to the socialist reform in the future.

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