

# LOCAL LEVEL JOURNALISM AND DEMOCRACY INDICATORS IN LATIN AMERICA

Fernando J. Ruiz

## LATIN AMERICA'S WORST AREAS TO PRACTICE JOURNALISM IN THE FIRST SEMESTER 2006

- Black Area, Red Areas and Brown Areas

## OBSERVATORY OF TRENDS

- Blood powered laws
- "Confrontation Chiefs" against the press
- Quotes of the semester

## SPECIAL ANNEX

- The best of Latin America according to Freedom House

Ten journalists were murdered during the first semester of 2006.



Jorge Aguirre  
(Venezuela)

Gustavo Rojas Gabalo  
(Colombia)

Rosendo Pardo  
Ozuna (Mexico)

Johnny Martinez  
(Dominican Rep.)

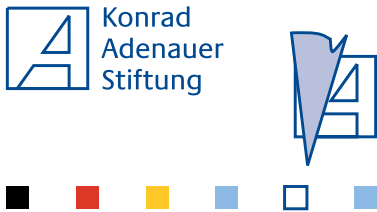
Decalogue of the  
*telepresidents*  
*watchdog*  
of the press



Av. Roque Sáenz Peña 628 piso 2º Of. R  
C1035AAO Buenos Aires Argentina  
Tel/fax: (54-11) 4343-1447  
centro@cadal.org  
www.cadal.org

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Suipacha 1175 piso 3º  
(C1008AAW) Buenos Aires Argentina  
Tel: (54-11) 4326-2552  
Fax: (54-11) 4326-9944  
www.kas.org.ar

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## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

### Fernando Javier Ruiz

Fernando.Ruiz@fci.austral.edu.ar

Advisor to the Democratic Strengthening Area of the Centre for the Opening and Development of Latin America (CADAL).  
Ph.D. in Public Communication from the University of Navarra Degree in Political Science from the Universidad Católica Argentina (UCA).

Professor at the Seminars on Journalism and Democracy and on History and Culture of Communications, at the Austral University School of Communications.

Author of the following books:

-*Otra grieta en la pared: Informe y testimonios de la nueva prensa cubana*, 2003, (Another crack in the wall: Reports and testimonies of the new Cuban press) CADAL / Konrad Adenauer Stiftung

-*Las palabras son acciones: historia política y profesional del diario La Opinión de Jacobo Timerman*, (Words are action: Political & professional history of the La Opinión newspaper belonging to Jacobo Timerman), 1971-77, Perfil Libros, Buenos Aires, 2001.

-*El señor de los mercados. Ambito Financiero, la City y el poder del periodismo económico*, (The master of the markets: Ambito Financiero, the City & the power of the financial press), El Ateneo, Buenos Aires,

# Local Level Journalism and Democracy Indicators in Latin America

By Fernando J. Ruiz

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- Ten journalists were murdered during the first semester of 2006.
- There are at least twenty six areas in Latin America where those who practice journalism risk their lives. In all certainty, there are other red areas where the same risk exists.
- It is most probable that in violent areas much of the violence does not get published because the self censure they impose on themselves not to denounce threats or aggressions increases.
- The Cuban repressive machinery against journalism is the most efficient.
- In most red areas there is a criminal network rooted in the government. This obstructs the government's ability to provide public security to the population.
- Mexican journalism suffered a dramatic first quarter that was an extension of the spiraling violence that the government cannot control. As a compensation, journalists received various government benefits.
- Venezuelan journalism is entering a critical second semester because each time President Chavez increases his power, he exerts more pressure on the media that opposes him.
- The *Telepresident's press watch-dogs* are popular so these are spreading.

# LATIN AMERICA'S WORST AREAS TO PRACTICE JOURNALISM IN THE FIRST SEMESTER 2006

## BLACK AREA

### Cuba

Journalism that is not controlled by the regime is considered “subversive activity” and they experience full weight of government repression.

In Cuba, to communicate by one's own free will is illegal, not even if it supports the regime.

There are 24 journalists in prison. In 2003, twenty were sentenced to prison terms that end between 2011 and 2031. International pressure obtained the release of some journalists (although their sentences were not commuted) but the dictatorship arrested others.

Juan Carlos Herrera Acosta is a journalist who is serving a 20 year term in the Kilo 8 maximum security prison in Camaguey. He had been on a hunger strike for nineteen days when at dawn on March 23 2006, he sewed up his mouth in protest for the beating he had received during the previous two days. On June 8 he started another hunger strike in solidarity with another member of the press, Guillermo Fariñas Hernández.



Guillermo Fariñas Hernández

Fariñas Hernández was imprisoned the first time while practicing as a Psychologist but as a dissident he has taken up journalism. He was able to organize a group of journalists and he manages the local agency *Cubanacán Press*.

On January 31 2006 he went on a hunger strike seeking free access to

Internet for all Cubans. A few weeks before he had been prohibited access to Internet or as he calls it: “Access to progress”.

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**The few journalists who criticize the government are persistently harassed. Journalist Lamasiel Gutiérrez Romero was jailed in October 2005 in the women's Mantonegro prison in Havana and released on March 22, 2006**

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This protest has been receiving strong support in the interior of Cuba and there have been various hunger strikers in different cities.

Support has also been received from abroad. The Organization of American States' Human Rights Commission published a communiqué requesting that the Cuban Government end the “restrictions on receiving and publishing information by Internet that are incompatible with freedom of expression rights”.<sup>1</sup>

As a result of internal and international reactions to Fariñas' protest, the Cuban Counterintelligence official Vladimir Ernesto Méndez proposed that Fariñas be granted “partial access” to Internet but he did not accept this offer.

On April 7, a week after publishing an article regarding Fariñas Hernández' hunger strike, journalist Roberto Santana was summoned to Camaguey to be “interviewed” by “Moises”, an officer in the Cuban Political Police, considered the “Confrontation Chief” in charge of dealing with the independent journalists in that city. Santana had begun

exercising his right of free expression in May 2004. Until then he had taught chess but had been fired for expressing his views. When he took up journalism, in February 2006 he began to be harassed and this continues on till now but he carries on writing and is one of the main sources of information regarding Fariñas Hernández' hunger strike.

The few journalists who criticize the government are persistently harassed. Journalist Lamasiel Gutiérrez Romero was jailed in October 2005 in the women's Mantonegro prison in Havana and released on March 22, 2006. She was accused of “resistance and civil disobedience”. Her husband, Rolando Jiménez Posadas, has been in prison for three years.



Armando Betancourt

The last journalist to be imprisoned is Armando Betancourt. It happened on May 23 when he was covering a protest by neighbors against an eviction in Camaguey. He was accused of “public disorder” and sentenced to prison.

Lieutenant Eduardo González Barroso is the member of the Political Police in charge of “taking care” of him. (See on page 13: **The “Confrontation Chiefs” in charge of handling journalists**).

<sup>1</sup> Press release No. 142/06 dated June 19 2006.

## Baja California, Sonora, Chihuahua, Coahuila and Tamaulipas (Mexico)

The northern Mexico border has had a black 1st. Quarter 2006. An apparent battle between drug cartels in the last years has unleashed uncontrollable violence that seriously affects journalism, particularly in the State of Tamaulipas.

Given the sequence of crimes being committed, it would appear that the drug dealers want to change the rules regarding journalism that up till now they apparently were prepared to abide by. According to journalists in Mexicali, the capital of Baja California, these rules were “don’t publish personal information regarding the drug dealers or their families; publish the truth and don’t attack only one group”.<sup>2</sup>

According to testimonies from different editors and journalists, news coverage given to drug dealers now abides approximately by the following rules: don’t mention the cartel leader’s name, when publishing news on drug dealers don’t make the articles stand out, don’t use adjectives when describing violent deeds, these deeds must be treated individually, don’t sign the articles and little or no investigation is to be carried out beyond the official information.

Journalists writing about crime have developed self-protection practices such as not being out reporting news after 10 o’clock at night, always be accompanied by other reporters, arrive at the scene of the crime once the police are there and ask few questions regarding any link with organized crime. The *Frontera* newspaper from Tijuana has an Action Manual that deals in detail with these types of situations.

The crime organizations do not want to appear in the press in a too negative light because that encourages the government to take action and

destroys the *modus vivendi* they want to maintain. According to journalist Mariano Castillo from *San Antonio Express News*, the narco leaders are trying to influence public opinion, either by deviating government pressure towards other drug groups or by social assistance actions such as massively distributing presents on Children’s Day.<sup>3</sup>

The newspaper *La Mañana* with the largest circulation in the city of Reynosa, published a paid advertisement describing the Children’s Day event that was organized in a stadium by Osiel Cárdenas Guillen, the head of the Gulf Cartel and currently in jail. Thousands of children and their parents attended.

On May 2, CEPET (Centro de Periodismo y Ética Pública) published a declaration asking the following question: “Did the newspaper have the option of not publishing the paid advertisement?”

Violence does not end with the arrest or death of one of the drug organization’s leaders. To the contrary, this starts a succession process and power and area redistribution that is generally resolved by the use of violence. This is what happened with the Arellano Félix brothers, leaders of the Tijuana Cartel.

In that city a contract to kill Jesús Blancornelas, from the weekly *Zeta*, is still out. He has already received four bullets. Two reporters from *Zeta* have been murdered as well as one of Blancornelas’ bodyguards. *Zeta*’s motto is “Free as the wind” but the violence does not cease.

In *Zeta*’s edition of June 2 they reported: “Practically every 24 hours someone in the city is executed”.

Blancornelas has just announced that he will resign from directing the weekly newspaper but will continue publishing his articles in it.

The most dangerous cities along the northern border are Tijuana and

Mexicali, in Baja California; San Luis, Río Colorado and Hermosillo in Sonora; Ciudad Juárez in Chihuahua; and Miguel Alemán, Nuevo Laredo, Reynosa, Río Bravo and Matamoros in Tamaulipas, on the Gulf of Mexico.

At the Interamerican Press Association’s (SIP) instigation, editors and journalists along the northern border agreed to work together on the Fenix Project. It entails creating a team of journalists from different media who rotate, to jointly carry out investigations and the results are published by all the participating media on the same day.

This type of action originated in 1976 in Arizona, USA, when journalist Dan Bolles was murdered. The idea, promoted by SIP, is catching on in various Latin American countries.

Another Fenix Project agreement was reached on January 26 and 27 in the critically dangerous city of Nuevo Laredo. *La Mañana* newspaper of that city hosted the meeting. SIP mentions this newspaper as having “distinguished itself for its coverage on crime”.

Just ten days later, on February 7, two masked gunmen entered the newspaper’s offices and during various minutes fired hundreds of shots. One reporter who was behind a false wall was hit five times but miraculously no one was killed.

At the beginning of 2004, the newspaper’s director and editor, Roberto Mora Garcia was murdered and since then the newspaper had decided to limit the crime coverage. Following the SIP conference, the current Director, Ramon Cantu Deandar proposed that the newspaper stop investigating crime completely: “It makes no sense to investigate drug dealing: its an international problem that not even the Mexican or the United States governments can solve. There is no will to solve the problem; we are not

<sup>2</sup> María Idalia Gómez, “Mexico”, in: *Mapa de riesgos para periodistas*, SIP, 2006, p. 41.

<sup>3</sup> Mariano Castillo, “Will Border violence ever stop?”, *San Antonio Express-News*, 6 de abril de 2006.



going to expose ourselves.<sup>4</sup> [See box: **The editorial of the day after**]

On March 10 the offensive continued. In Nuevo Laredo a radio commentator, Ramiro Tellez Contreras, who also worked in the Municipal Public Security Secretariat was murdered. The Governor of the state of Sinaloa, Eduardo Tours Castelo, questioned the press' attitude of not investigating: "I feel it indicates to them (the narcos) that they have won. I think that these subjects have to be written about. Use Alfredo's (Jiménez Mota) example, write but do not necessarily sign the articles".

The first results of the Fenix project were published on April 3 on the anniversary of the disappearance in the state of Sonora of journalist Alfredo Jiménez Mota, who worked for the *El Imparcial* newspaper. Nine Sonora newspapers, three national newspapers and eight from the south of United States published the same articles on this subject under the heading: "One year and still missing".

### **Córdoba (Colombia)**

On February 4, Gustavo Rojas Gabalo, commentator for Radio Panzemu, was having a drink with a friend in a bar in Monteria when he heard the alarm on his car go off once. It went off again so he went outside to see what was happening. There was a person kicking his car, when the aggressor saw Rojas Gabalo he pulled out a gun and fired at him, seriously wounding him. Rojas Gabalo died a month later. Two members of the paramilitary were arrested for having supposedly participated in the killing. This was the only journalist murdered in Colombia during the 1<sup>st</sup>. semester.

## **The editorial of the day after**

### **Nuevo Laredo's *El Mañana's* editorial published the day after the attack on their offices: "Other people's war on society", February 8, 2006.**

*El Mañana* newspaper had already been target of an attack: in March 2004, their Director and Editor, Roberto Mora Garcia was murdered as he arrived at his home after finishing that day's edition. Since then, in a self defensive attempt, we decided to limit the coverage. Since Roberto Mora's murder, we realized that the government had been overpowered by organized crime and that journalists had no guarantees. This led us to take measures such as self censure on delicate subjects where we sensed there was a risk. We decided to limit our coverage exclusively to reporting the facts and not mention the names of the cartels, in this way trying to perform a careful juggling act in order to survive this war that is foreign both to the newspaper and to Nuevo Laredo's society.

The newspaper is deeply worried that innocent people and their families suffer because of the violence that enmeshes Nuevo Laredo. It grieves us that innocent victims suffer because of this. They use Nuevo Laredo as a battle field, because this is a highly sought after prize. Six thousand tractor trailers cross the border daily and the North American's physically and only 50 or 60 are inspected. This is why Nuevo Laredo is more important than Tijuana or Ciudad Juarez. We propose that the huge amount of funds used in the apparent war against drug trafficking, be used instead to finance awareness, educational and cultural campaigns. Have rehabilitation centers made available free for drug addicts, that drugs be considered as a health problem, including legalizing some non addictive and less dangerous drugs so that they can control it.

Who was responsible? We do not know. It could have been anyone. They are ghosts.

Many times the media is attacked in order to harm the opposing gang and thereby justify that the supposed authorities place pressure on the rival group. It is a form of terrorism.

### **Michoacan, Guerrero and Oaxaca (Mexico)**

On March 9 photographer Jaime A. Olvera Bravo was murdered while walking in the street with his son. He had worked for the newspaper *La Voz de Michoacán* till three years prior to this and then worked free-lance. According to the newspaper *El Universal*, Olvera Bravo "provided information and photographs on police cases to various regional newspapers" (March 10 2006). In the report prepared by the Mexican editors for SIP, the states of Oaxaca and Guerrero were identified as also being particularly dangerous.

### **Chiapas (México)**

Chiapas had been classified as a Brown Area during the previous semester, but became a Red Area after Rosendo Pardo Ozuna, a columnist for *La Voz del Sureste* was murdered on March 29. Another journalist, Angel Ksheheratto Flores, was jailed on February 4 and released on bail. He has been accused of defamation since 2002. This is a fairly common occurrence in the state of Chiapas.

At the beginning of March, Governor Pablo Salazar introduced a proposal to reduce the prison term for defamation and slander. It was he who in February 2004 had proposed increasing the punishment for these crimes making Chiapas the state with the severest penalty for defamation and slander: up to nine years in prison.

<sup>4</sup> *El Universal* de México, February 12, 2006.

## **Cundinamarca, Santander, Norte de Santander, Huila, Cesar, Atlantico, Valle del Cauca, Arauca (Colombia)**

March was a particularly aggressive month for the press, possibly as a result of the elections that were being held. According to SIP's report for the month of March: "The great majority of threats originated in paramilitary forces and from corrupt people related to the electoral process".

While the Mexican drug dealers are increasingly mentioned in reports regarding attacks on the press, the Colombian drug dealers rarely make the press. There are many complaints against paramilitaries and the narcos could be members of this segment.<sup>5</sup>

The paramilitary (including those who due to peace negotiations are retiring) and groups of businessmen, politicians and Government officials involved in corrupt plots, are the two groups recently most mentioned in reports prepared by journalist protection and human rights organizations as attacking the press.

Sometimes it would appear that in Bogota the internal conflict only figures in the press. However, over the last decade Bogota is ranked second among the cities with most murdered journalists.

The capital has many more journalists than in any other state, the media is larger and more important and the response to a threat or attack is greater. Therefore, journalists in Bogota do not suffer the same feeling of isolation and loneliness that journalists in the interior of the country have to face.

In various Red Areas it has reached a point that Reporters without Borders defines as "a process of extinction of Colombian press in areas of conflict" where journalists have to choose between "fleeing or death". The cities of Bucaramanga and Barrancabermeja in the state of Santander, and Barranquilla in the state

of Atlantico, have been particularly violent in the last semester. The police continually carry out "risk studies" to determine which journalists qualify for the special protection program.

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## **Guayaquil (Ecuador)**

On the night of February 13 radio commentator Jose Luis Leon Desiderio went to wait for his wife at the bus stop. They lived in a district called Bastion Popular where organized gang delinquency was increasing. On his radio program, Leon Desiderio questioned the authorities for not taking action against these gangs particularly in his district. When his wife got off the bus at her usual stop her husband was not there. She went to their home and with her daughter set out looking for him. They found his body in a ditch. Nothing had been stolen from him.

Some weeks later the Ecuadorian Police arrested a man for stealing a motorbike and then declared that the person could be involved in Leon Desiderio's murder but to date nothing further is known.

The day after Leon Desiderio's murder in the town of Duran, close to Guayaquil, Raul Suarez Sandoval, a reporter for the newspaper *La Noticia Durandeña*, was murdered. Nothing was stolen off him either.

## **Ceara (Brazil)**

Radio commentator Carmelo Luis de Sa did not die but was shot twice. On May 2, the son of the mayor of Quiterianopolis who had been questioned by de Sa in his radio program, entered the offices of Radio Comunitaria, went straight up to him and shot him. In Brazil, the available information regarding the material and intellectual authors of crimes against the media and journalists show a similar pattern: they are political decisions carried out by police. As mentioned in previous reports, in any Brazilian state exists the probability that a journalist will be murdered at any time.

## **San Pablo (Brazil)**

In the last months, three different media were attacked in the interior of the state of San Pablo. In November of last year, 80% of the building that housed the *Diario de Marili* burnt down. At dawn of January 13, a bomb was placed in *Mogi News* in the town of Mogi das Cruzes. Then on May 18, the newspaper *Imprensa Livr* was attacked by three armed men and most of that day's edition was burnt.



<sup>5</sup> An interesting description of the different stages of Colombian drug dealing and their relationship with the press, can be found in a paper presented at a SIP conference by Martha Soto, head of the Investigative Unit of *El Tiempo* of Bogota: "Narcotráfico: investigación y cobertura noticiosa". ([www.institutodeprensa.com](http://www.institutodeprensa.com))

## Concepcion and Amambay (Paraguay)

Journalist Enrique Galeano from Radio Azotey disappeared on February 14 in Yby Yau, in the state of Concepción. His wife suspects the political authorities of the town. Galeano had been threatened by a drug dealer with strong local political ties.

On March 14 in the neighboring state of Amambay, Jose Kessio from Radio Cerro Cora of the town of Pedro Juan Caballero was murdered. His partner Fabio Barbosa had been murdered last September 15.

The dry border between Paraguay and Brazil is a Red Area where various journalists have been murdered in recent years. SIP has many times pointed out the impunity that exists here.

## Dominican Republic

Journalist Johnny Martínez was murdered in San Cristobal, apparently by drug dealers. In spite of this crime, journalists in this country are far better off than those in neighboring Haiti. Reporters without Borders report ranks Dominican Republic in 51st.

place while Haiti figures in 117th. In terms of danger.

## Haiti

Elections held on February 7 resulted in René Preval as the winner. This will hopefully lead to the beginning of a new democratic period of rule of law. Reporters without Borders and SIP agree that there have been improvements. No journalists have been killed during this first semester but the general situation continues to be very precarious. That is why it is still considered a Red Area. Guy Delva, Chairman of SOS Journalists, a new Haitian association, reported that “the armed groups that caused so much trouble in the past have not laid down their arms”.

## Caracas (Venezuela)

Journalist Jorge Aguirre from the evening newspaper *El Mundo*, was murdered on April 5 while covering a public demonstration protesting against insecurity in Caracas. This took place close to the Venezuela’s Central University. After Aguirre was shot, his cameraman managed to photograph



The last picture by Jorge Aguirre, where his assassin can be seen leaving the crime scene.

the fleeing assassin. The photograph shows the murderer’s back but investigations were able to identify the person and he was arrested. He was a former Municipal policeman from the district of Chacao, expelled from the force at the end of 2005.

Those were days of great tension in Caracas and the rest of the country. Three kidnapped sons of an important Venezuelan businessman were found murdered, apparently by common criminals. This had enormous repercussions and people took to the streets to protest the wave of kidnappings and murders. In many ways it was also a public demonstration against President Chavez. It was in this context that journalist Jorge Aguirre died.

## BROWN AREAS

### Veracruz (Mexico)

Punishment in most Mexican states for offenses against honor is imprisonment. In some states, the terms are particularly severe. In Baja California, Puebla and Veracruz, defamation carries a sentence of up to four years and in Chiapas, following a reform carried out by Governor Pablo Salazar, the sentence can be up to nine years.

### Puebla (Mexico)

See attachment: Official plot against a journalist.

### Venezuela

All Venezuela is a great Brown Area except Caracas that has become a Red Area as a result of a journalist having been murdered. Venezuela’s press situation is in turmoil.

There is freedom of press but it is increasingly threatened. This could worsen in the second semester because of the upcoming December presidential elections.

The national government’s aggressiveness against private media gives free rein to other Chavez supporters at state and municipal levels to act the same way or worse.

The center of power in Venezuela promotes a restrictive state policy against freedom to criticize. The government has been developing two main strategies that affect freedom of expression:

1. Creation of an institutional, legal and administrative structure that can act as a total or partial guillotine on media and journalists. The government’s control over the three powers and the decreeing of repressive laws and regulations are used to threaten government critics.

This stranglehold includes increased difficulty in filing appeals since Chavism has encroached on all state powers, institutions and organizations. In other words, not only has repression increased but at the same time the possibility of resorting to some form of institutional protection has diminished.

2. The increased mass media patronage system that limits freedom of expression. The government’s policy of setting up community radio and television stations is planned as



part of a media battle that already has an “opinion matrix” (very common expression in Venezuela) to refer to. The object of these community stations is not for the communities to express themselves freely but they are extensions of the government’s voice. Rather than promote public expression, they are stifling it. It remains to be seen if with time this new media gains more autonomy than shown under the watchful official eye at their inauguration.

In the new Latin American democracies, in many cases the media has been successful as income distribution mechanisms through the use of criticism. But the current “opinion matrix” to which they are supposed to abide by is particularly sensitive and intolerant to any criticism leveled at the government’s social policies.

The combined effect of these two policies is responsible for increased self-censorship. Various media critical of the government are now visibly more moderate.

Faced by moments of increased tension during the first semester, the government always responded by intensifying their criticism of “private media” and threatened, veiled or not, with different types of punishments. This occurred following the murder of the three businessman’s sons and his chauffeur and after the murder of a priest.

Up till now, both crimes do not have political connotations. Faced with criticism, the government’s response thought process is the following: respond through a controversial spokesman, send in an inspector or resort to the law, depending the circumstances:

(1) Discursive response: Conveyed through state (or semi-public)<sup>6</sup> or private media (or semi-private)<sup>7</sup> that toe the government line. In some cases, mockery and insults from public media is employed.

This policy originates with President Chavez himself and his talk show *Aló Presidente*. His attacks against the media and journalists are not just words since they generate action. From there down, the different types and styles of Chavist communication repeat and amplify the presidential speech all the way down to the “Microchaveses” who at public demonstrations attack, even physically, those who the President criminalizes in his speeches, for example, the “private media”. In this “opinion matrix”, journalists are part of the “enemies of the country and the revolution”. The television program *La Hojilla* is an example of the use of public media to ridicule and insult the



Mario Silva,  
TV host of *La Hojilla*.

opposition or journalists who oppose Chavez. The program’s setting is a semicircle where commentators who support the President joke and mock.

It is very similar to a Cuban television program called “Mesas Redondas Informativas”.

*La Hojilla* is transmitted by the public television station, Ocho (Venezolana de Televisión ,VTV).

on weekdays for an hour and a half and repeated after midnight. It is conducted by Mario Silva.

The Ministry of Communication and Information’s website explains the program’s object as: “Using the slogan ‘tearing the media’s veil’, this program dismantles the lies woven by the private communication media”.

President Chavez declared that he watches it every day he can (“I watch *La Hojilla*, unfortunately

I can’t every day but I always manage to see at least part of it”)(December 24 2005). Some weeks earlier he had expressed: “My mother loves *La Hojilla*. A while back we watched it together, she nearly died laughing and nearly peed herself when the program was presented (August 28 2005). During one of his *Aló Presidente* sessions, Chavez suggested to his Ministers that they should watch *La Hojilla*: “It would seem that they are not watching it, they probably don’t have the time. One must watch at least the first part of the program because 11 o’clock at night is late, I wonder if they couldn’t bring it forward a bit” (August 28 2005). On various occasions Chavez contacted the program (See box: **A non-friendly journalist**). In 2005 he called the program to complain in public to them for having defended journalist Walter Martinez whose program, *Dossier*, had just been discontinued: “We are sick and tired of people who wear the red beret to steal, we have had enough of those who play at being Chavists without Chavez”. *La Hojilla*’s style is very similar to President Chavez’ television program but goes even further in the use of insults and language. A member of the program, Nestor Francia, has just resigned and published a statement declaring that he left because: “A succession of events occurred such as formation of interest groups and surreptitious relationships with the police that led to the police being linked to the program (I never participated in this). They now consider that they have a right to give their opinion concerning internal matters to do with the program and get involved in its problems”.

The differences between Castro and Chavez practically disappear when a comparison is made of their speeches regarding the media. Their

<sup>6</sup> “Semi-public media”: are owned by the state and formally their object is to serve the population but they are controlled and used by the government or private groups for their own ends.

<sup>7</sup> “Semi-private media”: they depend on public funding to continue operating in spite of being privately owned. If the government official who manages the public funds decides to withhold these, the next day that media ceases to exist. In Latin America, a high proportion of private media survive thanks to government hand outs. Most taxpayers will probably disagree with this use of their money.

treatment of Reporters without Borders (RSF), an organization highly respected in the entire democratic world, is an example.

According to Venezuela's Ministry of Communication and Information: "Reporters without Borders do not respect Venezuela, they interfere in its internal affairs and in our judge's sovereign decisions. They are accomplices of the coup inciting opposition and private communication companies and joined in a media offensive that is part of the Empire's psychological warfare to justify their attacks against our democracy ( March 9 2006).

RSF's correspondent in Venezuela is Andres Cañizalez and he periodically is target of rhetorical attacks from Chavist spokesmen. RSF's correspondent in Cuba is Ricardo Gonzalez Alfonso is now serving a prison term and will be released only in the year 2023.

(2) Administrative response: SENIAT (Servicio Nacional Integrado de Administración Aduanera y Tributaria) is an agency that controls any type of administrative, tax, technical or legal misdemeanor that stations, the media owners or journalists incur in. The system employed is attributed to Getulio Vargas: "For my friends, everything; for my enemies, the law".

William Lara, recently appointed Minister of Communications and Information said that: "Applying the law does not mean persecuting anyone". Nevertheless, pro-government stations have not received a single summons under the so called Radio and Television Social Responsibility Law.

The government denies in each case any attempt to limit freedom of expression. But in justifying the new laws, Lara refers to them as "war

armaments" to wage a "media battle" against the "private media".

At the end of April when the three kidnapped Faddoul brothers and the father's chauffer were found dead and there were mass demonstrations demanding increased security, GLOBOVISION television station received a notification from Alvin Lezama, Director of CONATEL (Comisión Nacional de Telecomunicaciones), exhorting that "Globovision give these events journalistic coverage according to the principles established in the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela's Constitution, the Venezuelan Journalist's Code of Ethics and Radio and Television Social Responsibility Law". It continued reminding them that according to Article 7 of the Radio and Television Social Responsibility Law: "...use could not be made of yellow press techniques such as deformation of

## A non-friendly journalist

**President Chávez' press conference with Uruguayan President Tabare Vázquez. The question was asked by Venezuelan journalist Francia Sanchez, from RCTV.**

Sixth and last question: Francia Sanchez, Venezuela's Radio Caracas TV (RCTV).

Journalist: The agreement between BANDES and Cooperativa Uruguaya that is bankrupt?... What does it entail and how do we benefit from it?

Chavez: What it entails...its very simple, Francia...its a Venezuelan investment in a very good business with Uruguay. Part of the integration process. I am going to take advantage of your question ...and turn things around ...that media that is involved in politics openly opposing this government.

*(Someone present at the conference remarked that it looked as if the owner of RCTV wanted to run as presidential candidate)*

Chavez: Ah? So it seems...During the April coup attempt, they in this same hall were toasting with champagne and celebrating....In that media its pure fascism...and may the workers forgive me. I'm sure they instructed you to ask the question. Speak to the Chairman of BANDES (Banco de Desarrollo Económico y Social), who is here, Edgar Hernandez Behrens, he will explain the details of the agreement to you. Francia, as a young journalist...you ask what the benefits will be...of this operation that is going to give us integration benefits. At RCTV...did they ever ask themselves how Venezuela benefited from the investment in CITGO (Petroleos de Venezuela subsidiary in United States)? In this investment with BANDES our investment is very modest...

a mere 10 million dollars... In CITGO we have invested thousands of millions of dollars...!

You should be aware of this history... in more than 20 years it gave us no benefit! It's only now that we are benefiting from it! This company that represents an investment of 14 billion dollars! And it has 14.000 gas stations! RCTV never asked itself how CITGO benefited our country... because the owners are of the most established oligarchy...and they never bothered to find out how the country benefited from that company! Give Frijolito my regards! I hope he launches his candidacy; Tell him I will be waiting for him!

VIVA ARTIGAS! VIVA BOLIVAR! (February 14 2006)

news that affects the public's right to be correctly informed according to the laws in force and in no case can they be subject to exacerbation, morbid treatment or emphasis on unnecessary details". Additionally, Article 29 of said Law states that "those providing radio and television service will be suspended for up to 72 continuous hours if the news provided promote, justify or incite war; promote, justify or incite public disorder; promote, justify or incite...." Globovision's Chairman, Guillermo Zuloaga's letter in reply stated: "We consider that this exhortation unfortunately confirms the fear that Globovision has been expressing. The Radio and the Television Social Responsibility Law is being used as a mechanism of news censorship, particularly news that annoys or bothers the National Government". CONATEL had sent similar notifications to all private channels asking that furthermore they withdraw a black symbol "of national

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**Globovision's  
Chairman, Guillermo  
Zuloaga's letter  
stated: "The Radio  
and the Television  
Social Responsibility  
Law is being used as  
a mechanism of  
news censorship,  
particularly news that  
annoys or bothers  
the National  
Government"**

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mourning" since the law did not allow "anonymous propaganda nor placement or insertion propaganda" (April 6). On June 14 President Chavez went even further and threatened to withdraw their licenses: "We cannot be so irresponsible by continuing to allow a small group of people to use the broadcasting space that belongs to the State (...) against us under our very noses, as fifth columnists".

(3) Judicial response: Different government, military or political officials involve journalists in a judicial system overwhelmed by Chavist political power and very restrictive legislation. Venezuelan journalists who oppose Chavez are under continual threat of imprisonment or some type of restriction in their freedom of movement or obligation to present themselves weekly before a judge.

There is exiled journalist Patricia Poleo who is accused of involvement in the murder of the prosecutor Danilo

### A friendly journalist

#### **President Chavez calls La Hojilla. July 21 2005.**

President Chavez: ¡Hello Mario! How are you?

Mario: How are you?

President Chavez: Here enjoying your program, I wanted to say hello to you and Pepe. How is Pepe?

Pepe: How are you, Mr. President? My regards.

President Chavez: Fine, and are you looking after yourself Pepe (laughter)

Pepe: May God bless you anyhow, Mr. President (laughter)

President Chavez: Amen! Talking about blessings and Christ and all those things: Mario, I wanted to tell you how happy I feel, for days I have wanted to call you but wanted to wait for the right moment when I was relaxed because I think the reappearance of La Hojilla is so opportune,

I think its at a good time, when people can listen to it. I think it's the battle of ideas and also to support Blanca Ekout, the Chairlady of Channel 8 and the big jump forward she is giving it. I have promised to visit her, tour the premises and speak to everyone. Today I also watched for a time the program "Kiosko Veraz" followed by you and Walter, big leaguers. I want to congratulate you.

Mario: Should you miss our program at 10.30, we are repeating it again after midnight.

Pepe: Mr. President, on my part thank you very much for the reference to being a big leaguer. (laughter)

President Chavez: I think that La Hojilla....what you were saying about repeating it after midnight. I was thinking that blade (hojilla): could it not be the same one from that old jingle? "Blades that scrape when shaving upwards, shave till they last" (rhymes) (laughter)

Mario: Mr. President, you know that one of the questions is that we need to maintain a line of defense against the media. The communication media have again been stepping up their attack. What's more, now the Catholic Church have stepped in, I mean the hierarchy of the church because its necessary to differentiate who the Church's hierarchy is and who really carry out Christian work. Our idea here at La Hojilla is to continue maintaining the front line in support of the revolutionary process.

President Chavez: "Yes, I think it's very opportune. You know, you all who have been evaluating this new media attack, its part of a plan that crosses borders. You saw the decision of the United States Congress against Telesur that hasn't even gone on the air yet but is going to, God willing, this Sunday".

Henderson.<sup>8</sup> She first escaped to Peru and from there went to United States.

In January it was announced that her extradition would be requested

Patricia Poleo is a recognized journalist. She was awarded the Juan Carlos I King of Spain prize for her research on Vladimiro Montesinos' presence in Venezuela when the Venezuelan government was denying this. Gustavo Azocar was linked to another non journalism crime.



The government's position is that these journalists are not under accusation for being journalists but because they are criminals.

If in the next elections President Chavez consolidates his position, self-censorship of anti-Chavist media will most probably increase. It is clear that since 1999 as Chavez' has gone strengthening his position, pressure increased on media that disagreed with him. It is not clear what attitude Chavez will adopt if he increases his institutional power even further.

## OBSERVATORY OF TRENDS

### Blood powered laws

Congressmen are slow in passing laws dealing with the press. In many cases, they are scared of approving media legislation in fear of reprisals. In other cases, the congressmen themselves do not want to loose their power to take reprisals. For example, laws revoking contempt of court offenses, repealing prison terms for offenses against honor, or dealing with control of public information are all languishing unattended in most Latin American congresses. But all this changes when a member of the press is murdered, then the congressional will is reverted as if in a perverse fulfillment of a law of compensation.

For the press, Mexico experienced a black first quarter. Murdered journalists and a newspaper's office shot at generated a flood of political willpower that finally managed to push through pending legislative and institutional reforms. Already in 2005, security for the press had worsened so there was a great sensibility towards this.

It remains to be seen if these formal reforms will produce any substantial changes in the press' security or if they were just rhetorical expressions that do not change the government's real intentions.

The Mexican government took three initiatives:

- a. The national Chamber of Deputies repealed the penalties for defamation and slander. From a penal offense it became a civil offense at a federal level although it remains a penal offense in various states. Congressmen are loath to depenalize this offense though very rarely are journalists jailed because of it. It is as if the politicians want to maintain it as a way of threatening the press though they recognize that it is very difficult to actually enforce. When a member of the press has been arrested, the media reaction has been such that he is released. When journalist Angel Ksheratto Flores was arrested in the state of Chiapas where the prison term is up to nine years, he was only jailed for eighteen days.
- b. Approval of a law that protects the right not to reveal the source of information. This law is beginning to be considered in Latin America and in some countries it has been passed.
- c. Two days after *El Mañana* newspaper from Nuevo Laredo was shot at , the government created the "Special Office to Handle Crimes against the Press" headed by David Vega Vera. This was recommended to the Mexican government by the Inter-American Human Rights Commission and they had agreed to create it at a meeting with CPJ (Journalist's Protection Committee) on September 15 2005. The Special Office will not handle organized delinquency crimes against journalists which, at least along the northern border, conform the majority of cases. These will be handled by the Organized Crime Specialized Investigation Sub-Procurator (SIEDO).

The Mexican editors have asked that the Special Office's jurisdiction be increased to include organized crime. They also ask that these cases be handled by Federal courts and that these crimes do not prescribe.

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<sup>8</sup> IPYS (Instituto de Prensa y Sociedad) and Transparency International awarded their prestigious prize for outstanding research on corruption to two Venezuelan journalists who investigated the Henderson case. They are Tamoia Calzadilla, from *Últimas Noticias* and Laura Weffer from *El Nacional*.



## “Confrontation Chiefs” against the press

No one in Latin America has more experience in repression than the Cuban government. Since 1959 they have been building institutions for social control that have served the same government and the same people in power. This learning process and trained personnel today are the proletariat's ideology and cutting edge. The Political Police are the advanced stage of the revolution.

To attempt to describe this structure in democratic countries is difficult and far more in dictatorships where a cult is made of opaqueness. In dictatorships, it's the society and not the State that must be transparent. However, based on testimonies given by persecuted dissidents and their families, we can reconstruct some of the most common repressive practices and reveal the names of some of the persecutors.

After the Castro brothers, the person who directs the repressive apparatus against dissidents is probably General Humberto Francis Prado, Viceminister of Interior in charge of the Counterintelligence Directorate (DGGI). Prado's boss is the Minister of Interior, General Abelardo Colome Ibarra.

General Francis Prado was born in 1947 and studied in the Soviet Union between 1965 and 1969 during the period when the Soviet leaders tightened up on Nikita Khrushchev's flexibilization. On returning to Cuba, he went on military missions at least to Angola, Ethiopia and Nicaragua. In 2004 he was Fidel Castro's head of security which meant that he was one of the people most obeyed on the island. Now, as head of Counterintelligence, his place of work is Street No. 19, between O and M, in the heart of Havana. (Or is it Avenue No. 31, corner of 110, in Marianao?). According to different dissidents, within Counterintelligence there is Department No. 21 known as “Enemy Subversive Activity Confrontation”.

An article published in *Cubanacán* on February 14 2005 says the head of Department 21 is General Calderin Tamayo, formally head of Prisons. Others say that the head is “Coronel Agustin”, otherwise Colonel Armando Guirola, whose photograph appeared in journalist Pablo Alfonso's article in *Nuevo Herald* on March 2 1999.

This area in Counterintelligence is in charge of the dissidents but the dissidents are not interrogated by General Francis Prado. He is not present when this takes place. When independent journalists are summoned they will probably meet one of the following military personnel: Francisco Estrada, Aramis Rodriguez, Danilo Lopes, Jesus Aguila, Orlando Soroa, “Mayor Atencio” or “Captain Jorge”. Also mentioned are some of possibly higher ranks such as Colonels Rodolfo Pichardo Olano or Luis Mariano Lora.

They must consider their work as degrading because generally they do not give their real name. The dissidents maintain that they do not know if the given names are true or not. They also say that Suzuki motorbikes are preferred by Counterintelligence.

The military have the monopoly of what in democratic countries would never be allowed: Internal Intelligence. All the senior members of the Ministry of Interior, particularly Counterintelligence, are military. These military “take care” (this is how they describe it) of each dissident and their families. It is always the same person who “takes care” of each dissident so they get to learn all about his or her life. They build up a personalized but hostile relationship with each one and their ability to exert pressure and punish is enormous. They adopt a “case by case” approach.

Journalist Oscar Espinosa Chepe was in prison and his wife Miriam Leiva went to church every Sunday with the “Damas de Blanco” (Ladies in White) to pray for his release. “Agent Silvio” who interrogated her husband always followed her. But the couple's relationship with “Silvio” became very difficult so he was replaced by “Agent Randi”.

Obviously, the “Operational Officer” has back-up personnel but the dialogue is always with him. Sometimes the strategy is to coordinate with “other factors” (Local police, Fighter's Association, Communist Party and Defense of the Revolution Association - CDRs) to concentrate pressure on the dissident.

The language used is cynical. They make “visits”, hold “interviews”, journalists are summoned to have “conversations of interest” with these “friends” who want to give them “advice”.

They also warn them, this may then become a “written warning” (journalists accumulate a couple of these before being arrested). They may be confined to house arrest or picked up in a car and left off some distance from their homes.

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Oscar Espinosa Chepe

The military want their victims to listen to them permanently, reminding them constantly that they have the knowledge and nearly total control of their lives. It is nearly certain that Counterintelligence organizes supposedly spontaneous “acts of repudiation” where groups of “civilians” go to the dissident’s home and throw eggs, threaten them or do some other “civic activity”.

According to Reporters without Borders, Counterintelligence organized a “denigration campaign against journalist Roberto Santana asking his neighbors not to greet him any longer”.

On March 20, a member of the Political Police threatened journalist Luis Cino with organizing an “act of repudiation”. The Cuban dictatorship has innumerable ways of pressuring the population. An example is that all dissidents end up unemployed.

The extensive information that the Counterintelligence has makes infiltration of dissident groups relatively easy. When more than seventy dissidents were jailed in March 2003, at their trial twelve under cover Counterintelligence agents testified against them. Some of these had been placed there a decade back.

Among the journalists there were two under cover agents: Manuel Orrio and Nestor Baguer. Orrio was Agent Miguel and Baguer was Agent Octavio. The dissidents suspected that Orrio was an agent but they never suspected Baguer. Both continually questioned the dissident leaders, they provoked internal quarrels and Orrio leveled corruption charges against important dissidents.

After Orrio came out of the closet and was made somewhat of a hero, in an interview he declared that “among the independent journalists, its taboo to criticize the opposition. I broke that rule and ran into trouble”. In his notes, Orria mentions the repression and refers to his boss: “the officer of the Political Police who goes by the name of Luis Mariano” (“Dios, Elian y la mala leche”, February 29 2000). The memoirs of Agent Octavio, who died last years, were published with Ministry of Interior’s approval under the title *Secretos desde el Malecón habanero*.

Even more enigmatic is the case of Agent Ignacio: Lexter Tellez Castro. The main world human rights organizations were asking for the release of this supposed journalist. In the trial of Juan Carlos González Leiva, a blind dissident, Tellez Castro declared he was Agent Ignacio of the Political Police.

As an undercover agent, Téllez Castro had shared a cell with Guillermo Fariñas Hernandez, who had been on a hunger strike (see “Cuba” page 4). According to Fariñas Hernandez, Tellez Castro had suggested to him that he feed himself secretly.

After revealing that he was an agent in the trial that condemned a blind dissident, Tellez Castro declared that he regretted having acted under cover. Other agents were glorified by the regime but Tellez Castro was ignored and since the day when he testified at the trail, no one has seen Agent Ignacio again.

Orrio and Baguer were also witnesses at journalist’s trials. They could not add further information to what the Agent’s in charge already knew as the dissident’s activity is public and they were aware of all their movements and monitored their communications.

Infiltrations are always a hard blow for the dissident organizations because they have to have confidence and trust among themselves in order to face such cruel dictatorships.

For some time the Counterintelligence officials have been using the term “Confrontation Chiefs”. This may be as a result of a change in the Ministry of Interior’s strategy brought about by a generational change that took place. Various dissidents have reported that some of the interrogators are less than thirty years old. They are well prepared, at least within the dictatorship’s conceptual definitions. They have been trained as the regime’s elite. The Ministry of Interior’s schools and academies graduate thousands of students every year.

In their rehearsed speeches to the dissidents, as happened to journalist Luis Cino while he was under arrest, the interrogators justify their actions by saying that “independent journalists play the same role as did the armed opposition at Escambray and that can not be allowed”.<sup>9</sup>

Francisco Estrada is one of the most mentioned interrogators. Some dissidents maintain he is the head interrogator, if such a title exists. He interrogated Oswaldo Paya, Oscar Elias Biscet and his wife Elsa Morejon, Oscar Espinosa Chepe, Miriam Leiva and Rodriguez Saludes (journalist with a prison term till 2031). Elsa Morejon remembers Estrada

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**In the prisons, the dictatorships are also dictatorships. On top of being jailed, they suffer the added penalty of having their family visits arbitrarily controlled. The visits are few and made difficult by the prisons being located at hundred of kilometers from their homes and even worse, they are be suddenly suspended for no obvious reason. Dissidents are not allowed to be alone with their families, beatings, punishment cells and being imprisoned with common criminals who in some cases are provoked by the Political Police to be violent.**

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<sup>1</sup> Rural worker’s uprising in the interior of Cuba against Fidel Castro between 1959 y 1965.

well because he was the instructor at her husband's trial and also the person who informed him of the successive transfers of prisons that he endured and will continue doing so as his sentence lasts till 2027.

In the provinces, the relationship between the journalists and their persecutors is closer and possibly even crueler. At Villa Clara, the group responsible for persecuting the hunger striker Fariñas Hernández seems to be composed of Capitan Vladimir Ernesto Mendez, Lieutenant Colonel Ruben Gonzalez, Lieutenant Colonel Fidel Omar Gonzalez and Mayor Pablo Echemendiá, commanded by Colonel Luis Mariano Lora.

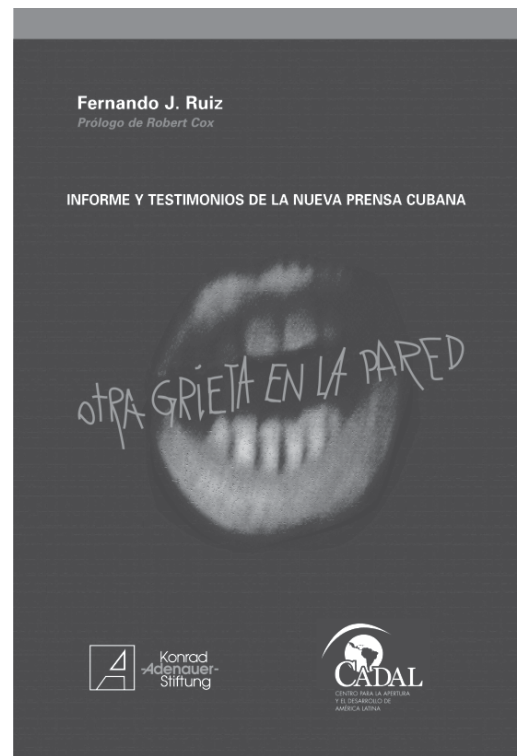
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In the prisons, Counterintelligence has maximum authority over the dissidents. Another figure is incorporated in the repression: the "re-educator" who continually harasses the journalist to break his will. Last March, journalist Normando Hernandez reported having been beaten by his re-educator at the prison at Ciego de Ávila.

At the end of 2005, journalist Raúl Rivero wrote that his fellow journalist Víctor Rolando Arroyo: "...was at this moment dieing. At dawn today he entered his 25<sup>th</sup> day of hunger strike. He is demanding that the Ministry of Interior remove Agent Armesto who since spring 2003 is in charge of persecuting him at the Guantánamo prison".<sup>10</sup>

For the jailed dissidents, self-aggression (hunger strikes or self-mutilation) is a form of defending themselves against Counterintelligence. General Francis Prado knows that being a dissident is not the only way to end up in prison. One of his predecessors as the Castro brother's Head of Security was General Jose Abrantes. He died in prison in 1994 after being the dictatorship's Minister of Interior.

<sup>10</sup> Raúl Rivero, "Cárceles cubanas: la muerte como alivio", *El Mundo* de Madrid, October 3 2005. The Counterintelligence official's full name would be Juan Armesto Vela.



**“Ruiz has been able to compile the history of marvelous people who expose themselves to fight a cruel system, in a regime where lies and betrayals are daily occurrences.”**  
*Robert Cox*

Available in the main bookstores in Argentina & available in pdf in [http://www.cadal.org/libros/pdf/Otra\\_Grieta\\_en\\_la\\_Pared.pdf](http://www.cadal.org/libros/pdf/Otra_Grieta_en_la_Pared.pdf)

## Decalogue of the *Telepresidents Watchdog* of the press

The first Latin American Telepresident was Fidel Castro. In 1959, when he took power, television in Cuba was sufficiently developed so that Castro could reach all the population frequently with this then new media and using it to announce his presidential decrees.

“Government by television” was how Herbert Matthews, renowned *New York Times* journalist who had met the famous guerrilla leader in Sierra Maestra, described it. Now there are various presidents who do the same: Kirchner, Uribe and Chavez. Evo Morales is just starting. The method seems to be successful so it is probable that its use will extend.



The ten club rules are:

1. Centralized public information exclusively in the hands of the President. In all three above mentioned governments it is dangerous for mid level officials, and also for Ministers or Vice-presidents, to make any statements. They stand to be reprimanded public or privately and thereon desist from any discursive autonomy. Chavez always refers to the need for “unity” in face of the opposition. His military upbringing does not conceive any autonomy, only strict alignment. In March he once again changed his Minister of Communication and Information, naming William Lara. This is part of his electoral strategy: there are presidential elections at the end of the year and he is running for reelection. At Lara’s swearing in ceremony, Chavez declared: “Communications are too sensitive for it to have too much autonomy”.
2. Critical or very critical tone when dealing with journalists and the media that are considered to be critical or too critical. Telepresidents act as the journalists’ watchdogs. Many journalists and owners of media have been surprised by the virulence of the presidential criticism and over- reacted, which resulted in presidential victories. After Castro and Chavez, possibly the most aggressive is Kirchner. His criticisms seem to always be the same. On February 21 he said: “I have never known a newspaper or journalist, or most of them, who publish a list of erratum or who deign to correct themselves. They never make mistakes, they always know the truth and they want to tell us what the country should be like through their articles or newspapers. They must realize that we the Argentines have learnt to distrust certain things”. Kirchner attacks *La Nacion* newspaper and *Noticias* magazine. Chavez attacks *Globovisión* and the “private media” in general. The recently installed Evo Morales attacks *Unitel*, the private television network with national coverage based in Santa Cruz. On May 10 he threatened: “We already have all the information: UNITEL’s owner is a great landowner who works sometimes illegally with other companies. Uribe attacked what he called “a small circle of Bogota journalists”, among them are renowned professionals from the *Semana* and *Cambio* magazines. Tabare Vazquez identified as opposition the main Uruguayan newspapers and several of the principal radios y television stations.
3. Discretionary use of television causing a “chain effect”. The public agenda is set by the Presidents. In Chavez’ case, the chain/network in fact exists. In Kirchner’s case, it is the use of the presidential podium on every possible occasion; Uribe, uses the Community Councils and Chavez, from his program *Aló Presidente*. The Presidents communicate with their audience/people without intermediaries, vertically and constantly.
4. Attempt to hegemonize the public agenda. Colombian professor Omar Rincon refers to it as “Government in live and direct” where “the news is the President”.<sup>11</sup> On February 21 the editor of the *Clarín* newspaper of Buenos Aires, Ricardo Kirschbaum, when receiving presidential criticism for the coverage of two items of apparently minor importance, declared: “*For Kirchner, the media should not set the agenda. The information should only be transmitted if its part of the official strategy*”.
5. Communicate transparency in the government’s actions through the language used and showing the Presidential figure in a very informal manner.

<sup>11</sup> Omar Rincon, “Cuando gobernar es una emoción televisiva”, in [www.revistanumero.com/46/uribe.htm](http://www.revistanumero.com/46/uribe.htm) .



6. Constant monitoring of the media. President Chavez told the press: “You know that whenever I can I watch quite a lot of television and I am constantly looking out to see from where we are being attacked, no?. You attack me, I attack you, I counterattack, I defend myself, etc (“Aló Presidente”, May 21 2006).
7. In-depth monitoring of public opinion. As is the case with most governments today, they want to be aware of the population’s preferences at all levels.
8. They have no clear and meaningful political opposition. Uribe has already been reelected; Kirchner and Chavez appear to be firmly on the same path.
9. They can apply coercive measures against media considered as opposition or lukewarm. The other side of the coin is that friendly journalists or media are constantly smothered with attentions. This can be achieved with the use of public funds, radio and television licenses, or by filtering information to them. Bernardo Kucinski, Lula’s communications advisor and opposed to this practice, calls it: “privileged communication”.
10. Low predisposal to reply to criticism or to media that they consider as opposition. Aversion to mass meetings with local press where they can be asked questions at the reporter’s discretion. After three years in power, Kirchner has never given a press conference to local or international press. Lula gave his first press conference after a year in office.

President Lula shared some of the characteristics of the members of this club but the serious corruption crisis that he faced made him adopt a less restricted attitude towards the press.

At Lula’s request, Bernardo Kucinski prepares an internal “critical letter” where he analyzes the public agenda and Lula’s handling of information. He is a type of private ombudsman who counsels the president. Kucinski declared: “The President is obliged to receive the press despite of what they may say later. It is an institutional obligation. The President must talk to them and through them, to the nation. I think Lula and his government lacked this perception of their obligation”.<sup>12</sup>

Following most of these 10 rules does not mean that a president is not democratic. But the sum of all of them results in a communications policy that is excessively aggressive for budding democracies that must permit the institutionalization of criticism. The last two rules are a good test to judge how democratic a president is (or a governor or mayor).

The Argentine journalist Jorge Elias stated: “That the presidents were elected democratically does not necessarily imply that they are democrats”.<sup>13</sup>

## Quotes of the Semester

VENEZUELA. “As the Bible states, first came the Word. It started with stigmatization, with disqualifications and verbal attacks. This caused a change of behavior among the population who started to perceive journalists in a different light than previously: before they were allies, professionals who echoed the people’s demands and needs. Now it is as an enemy and this new attitude has resulted in endless attacks and aggressions to hundreds of reporters, photographers and cameramen. Following this stage which has yet to end, the legal stage commences”. (Gregorio Salazar, Secretary General of the Press Worker’s Nacional Union, *El Universal*, Caracas, February 20 2006)



William Lara, Minister of  
Communications and  
Information of Venezuela.

COLOMBIA. “When we meet with mafia sources, we apply a type of protocol. There is always more than one journalist present, the media’s editors and directors know about it and if the case merits it, we leave written minutes of the meeting. We always let our source know that others are aware of the meeting and this gives us some security. Obviously, the information provided by our sources is always checked with third parties and if we think we are in danger, we inform authorities in whom we trust, where we are going (because in Colombia there are authorities in whom we do not trust). We only do this in emergencies”. (María Elvira Soto, head of *El Tiempo* of Bogota’s Investigating Unit, January 26 2006, at a SIP conference)

<sup>12</sup> Alice Sosnowski, “Lula eliminou a necessidade da imprensa”, *Observatorio da Imprensa*, October, 2006.

<sup>13</sup> Jorge Elías, *Mapa de riesgo del Cono Sur*, SIP, 2006.

CUBA. "I am the Director General of the independent news agency Cubanacán Press, based in the central region of the country. Our agency's main object is to denounce abuses, beatings, imprisonments and whatever point of view that your system does not allow to be made public. (...) Therefore, although I live in a dictatorship, I consider that I am a free man, and so that you and the State Security officials who are dealing with my case do not make fun of me and tarnish my dignity, I have decided to go on a food and drink strike starting 12.00 midday today, because I want Empresa de Telecomunicaciones de Cuba S.A. to install in my home direct Internet access as they do for the privileged member's of your Government. (...) So that I make myself quite clear and because I consider that you are not my homeland, when I learnt how to sing the Bayazo Anthem, I learnt the meaning of 'To die for the homeland is to live'". (Letter from Guillermo Fariñas Hernandez to Fidel Castro, when starting his hunger strike on January 31 2006)

MEXICO. "Arousing social irritation against the media is one of various ways that legal or illegal powers attack journalists and information companies". (Miguel Angel Granados Chapa, "Periodismo irritante", *Reforma*, Mexico City, February 21 2006)

PARAGUAY. "Now we have police protection, but I don't know what I will do when all this blows over. I am afraid: for my wife, my two daughters (a baby a few months old and a 13 year old). While carrying the coffin at my brother's funeral, a man came up to me and said: "You are the next to die". He then disappeared. I was wearing the bullet vest that the police had given me". (Pablo Medina Velasquez, correspondent for *ABC Color* of Capiibary, State of San Pedro)\*

\*Jorge Elías, *Mapa de riesgos del Cono Sur*, SIP, 2006, page 51.

MEXICO. "The Prosecutor for crimes against journalists is a useless decoration". (Jesus Blancornelas, *Zeta Weekly*, June 2)

CUBA. "Socialism not only asphyxiates liberties, imprisons, tortures and exiles but it is also boring and predictable. The three newspapers with national circulation are badly printed rags with four feeble pages that repeat the same as radio stations and the two remaining television channels. The same is true about the provincial pamphlets that support Fidel Castro with the enthusiastic collaboration from a group of his merry friends that defend in Cuba what they cannot live with in their own countries". (Raúl Rivero, "Matar al periodismo", *Cuadernos de Pensamiento Político* n° 10, April/June 2006)



BRAZIL. "Before, when I filed a complaint regarding the illegal extraction of mahogany, I showed my journalist ID card. Today I do not. I arrive at the towns as if I were nobody. The owners of the bars immediately advise when strangers start asking questions. When preparing to file a complaint in a given region, to restrain possible enemies I first distribute a dossier to the investigation authorities and press organizations giving the names of the suspects in case anything happens to me". (Carlos Mendes, correspondent for *O Estado de Sao Paulo* and reporter for *OLiberal en Para*)\*

\* Clarinha Glock, "Brasil", in: *Mapa de riesgos para periodistas*, SIP, 2005, page 162

BRAZIL. "For two years I investigated and produced a report for Globo network regarding the arms shipments going to Suriname, via Para. The arms were stored in the Military Police barracks with the Commandant's consent and they were to be exchanged for cocaine with a cartel of drug traffickers. (...) Before the article was broadcasted, I went to see the witness who was to be transferred to Brasilia for his protection. On arrival, unknown individuals had already entered the witness' house located in the middle of the jungle and destroyed everything. It was 11 o'clock at night. Three cars surrounded mine; I made a risky maneuver and managed to escape while trying to contact the television station on my mobile phone. My pursuers started firing. I finally managed to get through to the television station and asked that they call the Federal Police. I arrived at the police headquarters vomiting with fear. That night I slept in a hotel using another name and did the same when I boarded the plane. It was as if I were a delinquent. Drug dealers go to any lengths and they murder journalists with total ease. I had to move house four times in one year. I was very scared, the moment I stepped out onto the street I knew I could be killed. On buses I always sat right at the back. When waiting for the subway I always stood away from the yellow line, I was terrified that someone would try to push me. I stayed on the Witness Protection Program for five months but it was absurd to continue. They offer new identity, employment, a minimum salary to live in one room. If I had had children I would have been driven crazy, not even my parents new where I was. Being on the protection program is no life. I used to take sleeping pills but still could not sleep, I was afraid that they would kill me while I slept. All I could think about is staying alive. I had to cut and dye my hair. I cried a lot and my money was running out. I believed in the power of the press ...but the price was too high". (Claudia Bastos, reporter for *O Globo*, en Para)\*

\* Clarinha Glock, "Brasil", en: *Mapa de riesgos para periodistas*, SIP, 2005, page 154

## SPECIAL ANNEX

Journalist Lydia Cacho wrote the book “The devils of Eden. The power that protects child pornography”. (“Los demonios del Edén. El poder que protege a la pornografía infantil”) involving some businessmen. As a result of a lawsuit that a powerful businessman from the state of Puebla filed against her, with no official warning she was arrested in Cancun in the state of Quintana Roo and transported by car nearly one thousand seven hundred kilometers. There, she was held for a day and a half and finally freed on bail.

On February 1, Blanche Petrich of the newspaper *La Jornada*, published recordings of a conversation where a businessman known “El Rey de la Mezclilla”: Kamel Nacif, thanked the Governor of Puebla for having transported the journalist.

Just a few hours previously, a judge in that state had ordered the arrest of Lydia Cach, who was in Cancun in the state of Quintana Roo, 1500 kilometers away. Lydia Cach was arrested and taken by car to Puebla. Nearly two months later, the newspaper *Jornada*, received at their reception desk a “a somewhat battered manila envelope with no sender address”. The recorded conversation is very interesting because it reveals the complicity regarding the press between people of power. This is very common in the region.

Puebla’s Governor: How are things, Kamel?

Businessman: My darling Gov.

Governor: My f...d up hero.

Businessman: No, Daddy, you are the hero in this film.

Governor: Well, yesterday I really gave that old slut a hard knock. I told her that here in Puebla the law had to be respected, there is no impunity and whoever commits a crime

is called a criminal. I don’t know if she wants to make out she is a victim or get some self-publicity. I have already sent her a message; let’s see how she answers it. But the fact is that she has been a total nuisance, so I gave her a hard knock and hopefully she and others will learn a lesson.

Businessman: I know, and the fact is that these sluts keep on sucking and sucking. I made a statement for television.

Governor: Ah, that’s good. Was that for Mexico City or here in Puebla?

Businessman: Here, but they told me they would send it there. It came out here. In the *Milenio* I said: “If you want to read it, the Governor’s hand didn’t tremble when he signed it.

Governor: It does not and will not tremble.

Businessman: Miserable rat’s balls. What have they done? How revolting this is, eh?

Governor: No, they think they are God in the seat of power.

Businessman: That’s how it is. I called to thank you. I know this caused you a problem but...

Governor: Man, forget it, I like these affairs. I agree with you, these sons of bitches, on these subjects, I say... of course, we are not saints. Now if anyone has proof let them present it. If not they’d better shut up.

Businessman: Listen, in something so shameful as this, my distinguished friend, because it really is shameful.

Governor: That’s how it is.

Businessman: And to thank you I have a great bottle of cognac that I want to give you but I don’t know how to get it to you.

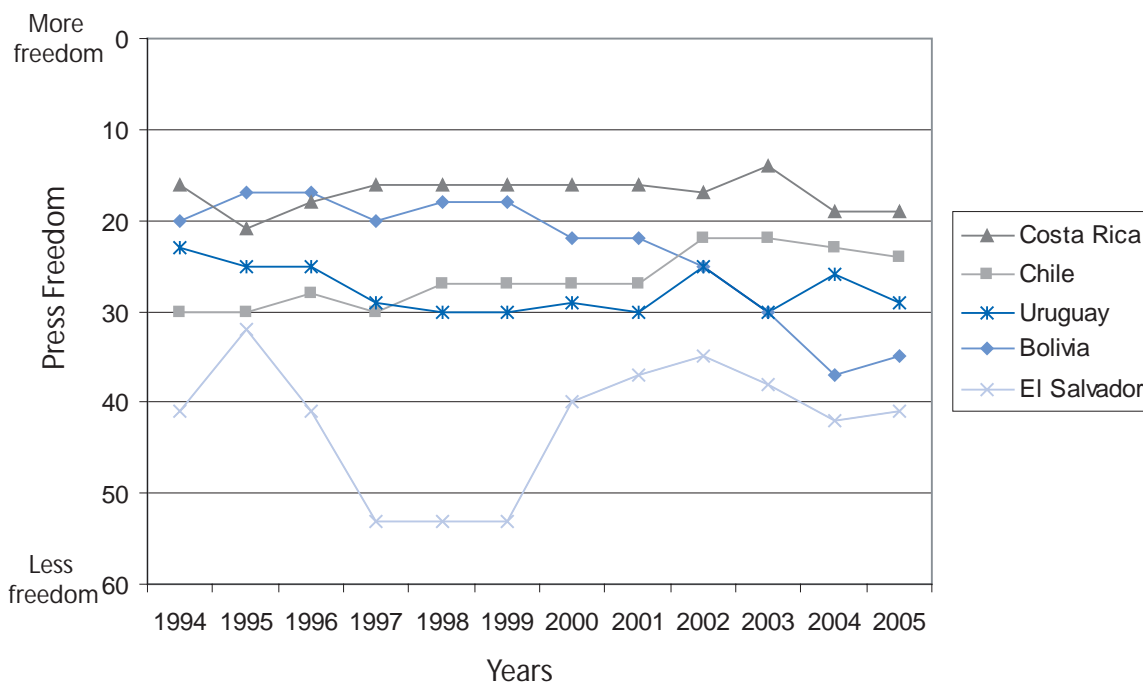
Governor: To Casa Puebla, of course.

Businessman: I wanted to hand it to you personally but you are so busy.

Governor: Send it to Casa Aguayo so that I can drink it.

Businessman: You are going to drink it all alone? Then I will send you two bottles, not one.

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By Belén Oliveros.

