

A Dummy's guide to Latin American Presidents

PART 2: THE CHAVEZ FACTOR

by Warwick Fry

The Central American situation is complicated to some extent by the distorting lens of US hostility to the Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez. Honduran President Zelaya's willingness to engage economically with Venezuela was a contributing reason for the coup against him, while Nicaragua's Daniel Ortega has accepted generous financial arrangements with the Venezuelan government.

He is not the first. President Hugo Chavez has not only allowed Venezuela's oil and mineral revenue to be ploughed back into social programs, but he has 'spread the wealth' on a global scale. The Venezuelans have provided subsidised heating oil to municipal councils in the northern United States where old age pensioners regularly died of cold in the winter, and fuel at cost to the London public transport system to 'keep cars off the road'.

But the main achievement of his government has been to free a number of Latin American governments of crippling world debt burdens. Early in the millennium Venezuela bought up Argentina's foreign debt, after the country had been crippled by IMF and World Bank 'rollovers'. (Apparently it sparked an economic recovery in Argentina, which turned the 'debt' into profit). A "Bank of the South" was created which freed other Latin American countries from the need to implement "austerity measures" to service their debts and loans to the World Bank. And ALBA (Latin American Bolivarian Alternative) was created – a commercial alliance including many of the Caribbean countries, as well as the South American nations bordering Venezuela – that provided a healthy counterweight to NAFTA (North American Free Trade Agreement).

The result was the election of a string of progressive Presidents of South American nations who were finally able to introduce the social programs so badly needed in Latin America. Correa came to power in 2008 fighting off Ecuador's creditors, and in international courts had the debt reduced. He reversed the neo-liberal economic policies that had led to the debt situation. An attempted coup against him in September 2010 resulted in a strengthening



Salvadoran government trooper



Salvadoran government trooper

of an alliance of South American Republics (UNASUR) when they called an emergency meeting in Argentina within 24 hours. UNASUR is now considered as having more clout than the OAS (Organisation of American States) that is dominated by the US and Canada. He has also refused to renew the leases on US military bases in Ecuador.

Evo Morales of Bolivia is the first indigenous President of Bolivia, which has a majority indigenous population. He came to power on a wave of resentment, again against neo-liberal economic policies that had led to the privatisation of water resources in Cochabamba. (He also gained a lot of support from his leadership of the coca growers' Union). The peasants found that 'privatising' the water resources to a California company meant that they were paying more for water than they were for rent. He too, was a victim of attempts at destabilisation in 2008, when he expelled the US Ambassador for fomenting a secessionist movement in the eastern province of Santa Cruz – a refuge for former Nazis and their descendants, right wing paramilitary militias, and large landholders.

Venezuela is seen as underpinning these 'leftist' governments. Understandably the eccentric President Hugo Chavez of Venezuela has become the target of an international campaign to misrepresent him. Even ABC Television announcers in Australia referred to him as the 'dictator' of Venezuela, though he has invariably won election after election, after plebiscite, after referendum consistently with well over 60% of the vote, acknowledged by independent observers as some of the cleanest in the world. The one referendum he lost (he ambitiously bundled over 60 articles in it), he accepted graciously.

Western journalists have either deliberately or unintentionally misunderstood his flamboyant style. He has a rare sense of humour for a politician, playing politically theatrical games – like handing Barack Obama a copy of Eduardo Galeano's famous 'The Open Veins of Latin America' at a meeting of Caribbean nations, or waving a copy of Noam Chomsky's latest book at the podium of a meeting of the United Nations

and saying, "I can smell the devil here! I can still smell the sulphur!" He was standing at the podium where George Bush, the day before, had made a speech ridiculing him, his government and Venezuela. It was a sweet piece of theatre that went over the heads of the Western media who wrote it up as evidence of incipient insanity. The representatives of the Third World nations, who had grasped the context, gave him a round of standing applause.

So what does this mean for the Central American nations? Mesoamerica is the stage where the shifting and shaping of political forces and powers for the Latin American nations is too frequently played out. The saying goes that that is a curse: "So far from God, so near to the United States". It is difficult to change the discourse; the frame of reference. But they recognise that, and they try.

Between the 1950s and the 1990s it was the Cold War. Anything left of centre was Communist, and Communism was The Enemy. It was the rationalisation for propping up military regimes and dictatorships for fifty years or more in most of the Central American countries. This was why the US spent US\$2 million a day in propping up the Salvadoran military for twelve years of civil war. It is not known how much was spent to maintain the 'contra' attacks on Nicaragua, using US military installations in Honduras as a base because, as the trial of Oliver North proved, it was financed illegally. (With indications that it was with CIA protected hard drug money) In 1990 the communist threat went away. There were 'peace talks' at the time, but it was simple to shift the reason for a US military presence to a moralistic discourse spun around a 'war against drugs'.

Which is the ultimate irony. Drug money was used to finance a 'war against communism' and now the region is being re-militarised in the name of a 'war against drugs'.

US aid to the region is predicated on control of the security services in the name of 'the war on drugs'. But drugs are a side issue. Honduras' security services are using mercenaries from Colombia to murder, terrorise, and evict peasants from their land. Government police cooperate with them.

Tens of thousands have been displaced. 45 have been murdered in the last two years. The mercenaries are in the pay of a billionaire (Miguel Facusse) who wants to use the land for palm oil plantations financed with 'green credits' from the World Bank and Europe. Facusse is known to allow planes carrying cocaine to land on a private landing strip on his property (this was revealed in Wikileaks). Yet the US continues to subsidise Honduras' security budget, and provides weapons, training and instruction. And this is a reflection of the situation in Colombia, Mexico, Guatemala...

The security forces in El Salvador are no longer trained in the (renamed) "School of the Americas". They now go to a college in San Salvador called WINSEC. Observers from the US and other countries have not been allowed to view the syllabus that is taught in WINSEC. And we know what is happening in Guatemala.

What does this mean for Central America? Central America is a crucible, as well as a stage. The continued existence of the Resistance movement against the coup in Honduras, the political health of the FMLN in El Salvador, and the electoral victory of the FSLN in Nicaragua gifts us with an example. These little nations, these strong, these humble people, who have survived the trauma of civil war, could very well define for us the limits of empire.

Photos taken during the guerilla offensive of November 1989, which was the critical event that finally convinced the Salvadoran government to open negotiations with the FMLN. Photos: Warwick Fry.

Correction

Warwick Fry's photos published last month of Salvadoran troops and guerillas were mislabelled as 'Nicaraguan' troops and guerillas, due to a production error.

Unfortunately, the error misrepresents the Sandinista government of Nicaragua and the significance of its electoral victory.

The error was no doubt particularly galling to the photographer, after the effort and risk that went into taking the photos. Profuse apologies to Mr Fry. – Ed.



Youthful Salvadoran guerilla

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Call for anglers to join mangrove jack study

Recreational anglers are being invited to help Southern Cross University researchers learn more about the habits of the iconic mangrove jack.

PhD student Toby Pidcocke (pictured) from the University's National Marine Science Centre based at Coffs Harbour is using acoustic telemetry to follow the movements of mangrove jack in Northern New South Wales, and is paying fishers \$50 gift vouchers for the first 25 live specimens donated to the study.

The research is funded by the NSW Saltwater



Recreational Fishing Trust.

At this stage, the research team is seeking live fish from the NSW North Coast locations of Deep Creek (near Valla) and the Clarence River.

The use of acoustic tags will enable the jacks to be tracked over a two-year period.

"We're particularly interested in seeing whether they move from estuaries to offshore reefs once they reach maturity. As well as that, we're interested in seeing how jacks move around within an estuary," Toby said.

Mangrove jack (*Lutjanus argentimaculatus*) are found in estuaries, coastal swamps and rivers across northern Australia, stretching from Northern NSW into Queensland, the Northern Territory and down to Shark Bay in Western Australia.

Toby said that southern mangrove jack possess some

unique characteristics that make them highly prized by recreational anglers.

"Between Coffs Harbour and the Queensland border, they tend to up to about 60 centimetres and three kilograms in weight," he said. "They're elusive and when you do snare one it puts up a good fight."

Anglers interested in taking part in the research can find out more information by contacting Toby Pidcocke at the National Marine Science Centre on 02 6648-3900 or via email mangrovejackresearch@gmail.com

Successful grants help

with fees



by Simone Rutley

It is that time of year when the soccer season seems far far away and yet it is time to sign-on and pay our money. This of course is on the back of Christmas and preparing for the new school year. It is a time of financial strain for a lot of families.

season. There is money for uniforms, coach training and subsidised registration for players. A decision on how to best to use the money for registration fees is yet to be made. The club invites interested kids between 11 and 16 who can't afford the fees to come and talk to the volunteers on sign-on day. There will be more information about how the grant will be used to help with fees.

SIGN-ON 2012: 10am to 1pm at the Nimbin Town Hall, Saturday 11th and 18th of February.

Remember Twilight Soccer in first term. It begins 5.30pm Tuesday 31st January – weather permitting! All teams are asked to come at that time. Once we're clear about what teams wish to play a draw will be made up ready for the second week.

GO THE MIGHTY HEADERS!



Mikky and Zoe

Both Football NSW and the Lismore City Council, in recognition of these pressures, have provided some financial support to minimise registration fees. Football NSW have targeted 6 to 10 year olds throughout northern NSW, enabling all clubs to minimise fees for that age group. Headers are using the Youth Grant from Lismore City Council to assist 11 to 16 year olds.

The Headers received \$3390 in total from the Lismore City Council Youth Grant, awarded to the club at the end of last



Marcus and Albert

Nimbin Garden Club Notes



Photos & text by Gil Schilling

Summer Siesta Ends

Having now begun the final month of our so-called, and so far very wet summer, Nimbin Garden Club is back on track with a new program for 2012.

February Meeting

The club's next meeting will be a visit to the home and gardens of Lesley and Tony Trott at 2pm on Saturday 18th February.

I always enjoy visiting this diverse north-facing garden set on the eastern side of the Nimbin Rocks. Tony and Lesley follow permaculture principles

with plantings that encompass rainforest re-generation, an olive grove, herbaceous borders, many species of fruit trees and a vegetable garden.

In pursuit of self-sufficiency and sustainability, a propagation area and shade house packed with landcare and food producing plantings, a dam, several worm farms and compost areas support the Trott's garden. Native wildlife also abounds.

If you haven't visited this garden before, you are in for a treat, and even if you have, there are sure to be few welcome surprises.

The Trott garden is to be found on the Nimbin Rocks Co-op – enter through the gate at 2345a Nimbin Road, opposite Shipway Road. There will be signs and directions from the

entrance, and please do not forget to close the gate and drive slowly, as cattle do graze the property.

Visitors and prospective new members are always welcome to come along and enjoy any meeting visit.

For more information about the club and its activities, please contact either President Michael Vaughan (6689-7193) or Denise Braidwood (6689-9324).



QUICK QUIZ

trivia@bowlo

Questions

1. From which town does the fabric denim get its name?
2. What is the name of the Rolls Royce mascot?
3. What is Bono's real name?
4. What is the capital of Pakistan?
5. What would you do with a peruke?
6. Who wrote War and Peace?
7. For what purpose was the Taj Mahal built?
8. Who won the Oscar for Best Original Song in a movie in 2001?
9. What does NASA stand for?
10. What bird is the emblem of Kyogle?

Devised by the Nimbin Bowlo's Quizmaster, Marty

- Answers**
1. Nimes in France
 2. The Spirit of Ecstasy
 3. Paul David Hewson
 4. Islamabad
 5. Wear it – it's a wig
 6. Leo Tolstoy
 7. It was built as a mausoleum by Shah Jahan in memory of his third wife, Mumtaz Mahal
 8. Bob Dylan for 'Things Have Changed' from The Wonder Boys
 9. The National Aeronautics and Space Administration
 10. Turkey

Nimbin Crossword Solution

From Page 23



These questions are all taken from a round of questions posed at the Bowling Club Trivia Night held each Saturday at 7 pm. Entry is only \$3 per person with regular prizes of \$50 for first, \$20 for second and \$10 for third are paid.



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8.00am	8.45am	8.00am	8.25am
12.00pm	12.35pm *	3.25pm	4.00pm
2.35pm	3.10pm	5.30pm	6.00pm
3.20pm	4.15pm		
5.30pm	6.00pm		
Leaving	Arriving	Leaving	Arriving
Nimbin – Main St. (Park)	Lismore Transit Centre	Nimbin – Main St. (Park)	Lismore Transit Centre
7.52am	8.50am	7.30am	8.00am
9.00am	9.35am	9.00am	9.35am
12.45pm	1.15pm *	4.25pm	5.00pm
3.25pm	4.10pm	6.05pm	6.35pm
4.25pm	5.00pm		
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Rediscovering Fitness

Discover Fitness, located at Nimbin Showground in Cecil Street, is now celebrating its 4th Birthday, and fitness instructor Cassandra Jefferys has made this a perfect time to start a fitness program, by offering gym discounts until the end of June.

Cassandra said, "Discover Fitness has been a success because it caters for people's personal goals. Whether it is bodybuilding, toning, weight loss or you just want to look and feel better, Discover Fitness provides the very best exercise options, from personal training, Zumba Fitness, yoga, group fitness, indoor and outdoor training."

Here is what members say about Discovering Fitness.

Jenny:

Last year, after a series of strange episodes involving a wobbly knee-cap, I finally went to the doctor and the conclusion was that my under-utilised thigh muscles were not holding my knee cap in place! The required treatment was simple – no pills, no surgery, just getting fitter and more stretching.

After nearly five decades of taking my body's health for granted, I had to take action, and so I made an appointment



with Cass at Discover Fitness.

When I first went to the gym at the Nimbin Showground I felt self-conscious, unsure about what to wear and, frankly, embarrassed about my lack of fitness. I realise now that these concerns had created a block to getting my body in shape. However, I was welcomed in a friendly and professional way by Cass, my level of fitness was assessed, and a varied routine was designed to suit my needs and capabilities.

I was introduced to an impressive range of gym equipment and soon discovered which suited me best. I began to steadily build strength, endurance and fitness, gradually losing my self-consciousness and feeling at home in the space. After the first month or so, Cass redesigned the routine to gently push me further and I began to see the results.

It's fun, relaxing and rewarding; I see old friends, make new friends, share a laugh and enjoy improving my body. People of all ages, shapes and sizes participate in a variety of classes and workouts.

Cass always has a positive word to say about my progress and if I don't go for a while because of the disruptions of everyday life, I'm warmly welcomed back and can slip into my routine with ease.

Liz:

Just before my second baby turned one, and with three months left of maternity leave, I realised if I didn't do something quick to get back into shape, work would begin, life would be even busier, my weight would be unlikely to reduce and my fitness would drop even further. I called Cassandra and was so pleased to hear she was sympathetic to helping me regain fitness and lose weight, in an environment that was friendly towards my kids and the constraint that having a baby along for the ride can entail.

I was impressed that Cassandra, with five kids of her own, was so encouraging and confident we'd meet my goals, although, she did point out it would involve "a lot of work". I specifically told her I was worried about running or doing anything too hot, as I wouldn't be up to it and found it too uncomfortable. Still, my goal was to lose 12 kilos in 12 weeks! We had a laugh about this a few months ago, looking back at my program, as somehow Cassandra had managed to build up my workouts without me really noticing, to the point that I willingly took part in the 2011 annual 5km Nimbin Fun Run



Group fitness training

she organises, and even made 3rd place in the ladies.

Cassandra has been incredibly supportive of the interruptions a baby can make on post-pregnancy training, flexible in her availability and wise in her counsel. She has taught me a great deal about making choices with diet and how to increase my metabolism to burn off excess weight, and increase my cardiac fitness.

Dave:

When I began weight training with Cass 10 months ago, my goal was to increase my strength and muscle mass. Over the years I have begun training with similar intentions on many occasions, up until now I had not managed to maintain my motivation for long.

Over the last 10 months however, I have gained 5 kilos of muscle by training twice a week for around an hour at a time. Training with a



personal trainer once a week has made all the difference to my motivation and progress because each session strikes the right balance between challenge and support.

Cass designed a training routine specifically for me and then adapted it as my strength has increased. Having a stronger body has meant that I can fully engage in my active lifestyle without getting wiped out or injured and the training sessions leave my mind relaxed and focused.

Discount Membership
Cassandra is keen to make

starting a fitness routine as easy as possible. There is no contract, no joining fee, just easy month-by-month gym membership, which is now only \$20 per week for unlimited access (1 month advance payment), or a book of 10 visits for \$70, valid for 6 weeks.

Membership includes a supervised program, fitness assessment and nutritional advice. Please present token (below) to receive your discount.

For a full brochure, phone Cassandra on 0428-439-526 or 6689-1405.



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