



Written by [Selwyn Duke](#) on March 7, 2013

Hugo Chávez: Sic Semper Tyrannis

At a former workplace many years ago, I learned that a certain fellow was cheating the business out of rental fees. So I confronted him, but he showed no contrition. Instead he replied, “I deserve it [the extra proceeds].” In case you haven’t guessed, he was a devout leftist.

This story is brought to mind by the revelation that the late Hugo Chávez had amassed \$2 billion during his tenure as president of Venezuela. Yes, that’s one of those nine-zeros figures. Now, unfortunately for Mr. Heat and Sulfur, the Big Theft technique doesn’t quite work like the Big Lie technique: If you steal a sum big enough, people don’t start to believe you earned it. But why would this man — a champion of the poor, critic of capitalism, and beneficent bestower of charity — steal so much for himself?



Of course, given that ol’ Hugo should rightfully have ended up at the looped end of a rope, perhaps we can’t blame him for having wanted to create an exile-facilitating safety net. As to his justification, however, I’d bet dollars to doughnuts it was akin to that of my former colleague. His “feeling” likely was, “I do so much for the poor, I’ve fed so many people, and I’ve given away so much oil that I deserve it.”

You see, this is standard among the Left. In theological circles, it’s called the “sin of presumption.” The idea is that I’m such a good person, it’s okay if I have my fun and cut a few corners. Hey, where else is the world gonna’ find another God’s gift to humanity like me?

Yet this thinking is like expecting the cops to let you off on bank robbery because you follow the other 249,999-plus laws in the country to a “t.” The good we do doesn’t negate the evil, for we have an obligation to do good. It isn’t the extra credit that cancels out the F; it’s simply the A you got on yesterday’s test. And there’s a new test every day.

In Heat and Sulfur’s case, there’s another problem.

He never actually gave anyone anything, as far as we can tell.

Rather, he simply redistributed money, taking from some and transferring to others. Now, this is always necessary to a degree. Even under limited government, we redistribute money from taxpayers and give it to police officers, firemen, and bureaucrats — who, we should remember, earn their pay (hopefully). As for a government safety net, even when it is the product of sincere intentions, it isn’t charity, which is freely given and freely accepted. It is something else.

And it’s something else still when you take an exorbitant amount of the people’s resources, use it on



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wasteful, destructive programs and projects — to buy votes and facilitate irresponsible behavior and to enforce unjust, tyrannical laws.

It's then called theft.

In this sense, Heat and Sulfur was a lot like mafia don John Gotti. He had his fans, too, such as his Ozone Park, Queens neighbors who passionately defended him. Why the adoration? Because the mobster would take a smidgeon of his ill-gotten gains and throw elaborate July 4 block parties for the whole neighborhood. It was burgers, ice-cream cones, cake, and sold souls. Hey, some people come cheap.

Likewise, Chávez was a thief. Sure, he'd take some of the stolen resources and throw his "parties" as he empowered his party. Then we'd see commercials about how his Citgo Petroleum Corporation was providing free heating oil to America's poor and we were supposed to say, "Wow, he's really not a bad guy." And Hugo could say, "Hey, I'm a good guy.... Put another 100 mil in those offshore accounts."

It has become a cliché, but charity isn't giving people the shirt off someone else's back. It isn't giving away a loaf of bread after you've stolen the bakery. It isn't even, to be frank, measured by how much you give of your own money. It's measured by how much you have left. After all, giving \$1,000 to someone truly in need of it is wonderful. But if a billionaire does this, he has ponied up a whopping 1/10,000th of one percent of his worth. This is equivalent to a person of average worth parting with about six cents. Does it still sound so charitable?

I'm not saying that every rich person need impoverish himself. Hey, even Jesus accepted as righteous the offer of Zacchaeus the chief tax collector, which amounted to giving away half his possessions to the poor and compensating those he cheated fourfold. The point is that we should keep things in perspective and not pat ourselves on the back for the sharing of excess.

But while I'm content to leave a person's moral standing with respect to charity between him and God, the point also is that Chávez didn't even measure up to a skinflint billionaire. He didn't give of his excess. But then there's what he did do: destroy much of his nation's excess — and more. As the *Miami Herald* just pointed out, where blackouts were once unknown in Venezuela, they're now frequent. Where there once was a robust free market, foodstuffs are now in short supply.

Moreover, Chávez scared off international investment by nationalizing (stealing) companies; consequently, as he was lying sick in a hospital bed, his sick nation once again had to devalue its currency. His fascistic pay-to-play system of rewarding political cronies and punishing opponents has given "rise to enormous corruption and the creation of a new class of greedy oligarchs with political connections," as the *Herald* put it. And crime has soared under his watch, with Venezuela now having the world's [fourth-highest](#) homicide rate.

Worse still, Chávez undermined Venezuela's democratic institutions. He rewrote his nation's constitution to suit himself, rigged elections, neutered opponents in politics and the judiciary, and silenced critical media. Thus, it's no surprise that his land is presently moving closer to anarchy. This is what happens when a nation's mechanism of government — which ideally should be a perpetual-motion machine of stability — is destroyed and replaced with a cult-of-personality demagogue. For when that man becomes the government and then dies, you're left with nothing but a scramble for power.

The good news is that Chávez is in a place where he can do no more harm, a realm where neither his captivating rhetoric nor his Machiavellian maneuvering nor his stolen billions can help him. May he get the exile he deserves.



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