

Can a Bolivarian Revolution Liberate North America, & Drop the Dollar, too?

Venezuela in its *Bolivarian revolution* has entailed a commitment to elevating the position and the power of workers. Until 2006, the Chavez government focused on promoting cooperatives (in addition to nationalizing the oil industry and expropriating large landowners). In nationalized medium-sized companies, for example, workers became co-owners with the state. Whereas Venezuela had had only **800 registered cooperatives in 1998, by mid-2010 it had 274,000**, though only about a third were determined to be "operative." It had been hoped that these businesses would produce for the satisfaction of social needs rather than profit-maximization, but the mixed-ownership model, according to which the state and private entrepreneurs could be co-owners with workers, vitiated these hopes.

By 2006 a new model was spreading, which was more communally based. Its political context was that "communal councils" began to be recognized as a fundamental structure of local self-government: in urban areas they encompassed 150 to 400 families, while in rural areas they included a minimum of 20 families. The councils constitute a non-representational structure of direct participation, which exists alongside the elected representative bodies of constituted power. Several communal councils can come together to form a commune. By the end of 2015, over 40,000 communal councils and more than 1,200 communes existed. Councils and communes can receive state funding for their projects, which now began to include **community-controlled companies instead of cooperatives**. In these new **communal companies**, the workers come from the local communities; these communities are the ones who, through the structures of self-government... decide on what kind of companies are needed, what organizational form they will have and who should work in them.

In 2008 yet another model for these companies emerged, the Communal Social Property Company (EPSC). While different kinds of EPSCs can be found in the communities today, their principal areas of activity correspond with the most pressing needs of the *barrios*

and rural communities: **the production of food and construction materials, and the provision of transport services. Textile and agricultural production companies, bakeries and shoemakers**, are also common. Under the initiative of workers, even some state enterprises are partly under community control, at least regarding their distribution networks.

Despite Chavez's commitment to workers' control, it has not been easy to shift the orientation of a state and a private sector deeply hostile to workers. Workers' councils and struggles for worker participation can be found in almost all state enterprises and many private ones—and workers have taken over hundreds of private businesses, sometimes after the state's expropriation of the original owners—but even in many state enterprises the situation is ambiguous: workers don't control the company or even participate in management, but "they control parts of the production process, they decide on their own to whom they will give access to the plant, [and] they are in a full-scale conflict with the management."

A revolutionary process has begun and is being carried forward by communities and workers across the country. The transformation of a society from authoritarian to democratic does not happen overnight.

Venezuela continues building an unequivocal socialist anti-imperialist society by strengthening its Bolivarian Revolution. It is succeeding socially and politically by retaining a large popular support while it is struggling economically because of foreign induced hyperinflation, crippling sanctions and financial U.S. blockade.

Last July 25 President Maduro announced a series of economic measures that many were expecting following the creation of the crypto currency, the Petro, last March. According to Maduro, petro raised \$735m in its first pre-sale day. According to the government, the petro is backed by oil, gas, gold and diamonds, and is meant to help overcome US and EU sanctions.

Here is what we know about the new currency. Petros will be "pre-mined", meaning the government produces

and controls it. Venezuela has allocated five billion barrels of oil to back its new digital currency, which will be the cost of a barrel of oil. "The presale and initial offer will be made in hard currencies and in cryptocurrencies," Carlos Vargas, the government cryptocurrency superintendent, told state television in late January. Vargas also said that after the initial sale, the petro could be sold in exchange for the bolivar. President Maduro announced that "**all citizens and companies will be able to purchase 'petros' on a specialized website with yuans, rubles, Turkish liras, and euros, as well as with cryptocurrencies such as bitcoin, etherium and NEM.**"

Vargas said that each petro could be exchanged through the virtual exchange houses, "but in addition to that, there will be many merchants providing goods and services where you can go with your petro or any crypto currency to exchange it for a service." He added: "In a short future, Venezuelans can buy in the bakery with the petro."

At current prices (\$62 a barrel) 100 million petros could help raise around \$6bn. The government argues this could help Venezuela pay part of the country's obligations. The Venezuelan minister of foreign trade, Jose Vielma Mora, announced that Venezuela would pay for imports from Brazil using the petro cryptocurrency. "A group of Brazilian companies have agreed to receive payment for the sale of food to Venezuela, through petro, starting on February 20, when the pre-sale of the cryptocurrency [begins]," Vielma Mora added. Brazil has not publicly commented on Venezuela's planned use of the petro but other countries such as **Iran, Russia, China** might soon sign on?

Thanks in part to **Chris Wright**

the author of *Worker Cooperatives and Revolution: History and Possibilities in the United States* & *Class Strikes Back*.

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California Ends Cash Bail After 40-Year Fight

California will become the first state in the nation to abolish bail for suspects awaiting trial under a sweeping reform bill signed by Gov. Jerry Brown on Tuesday.

An overhaul of the state's bail system has been in the works for years, and became an inevitability earlier this year when a California appellate court declared the state's cash bail system unconstitutional. The new law goes into effect in October 2019.

"Today, California reforms its bail system so that rich and poor alike are treated fairly," Brown said in a statement, moments after signing the California Money Bail Reform Act.

The governor has waited nearly four decades to revamp the state's cash bail system. In his 1979 State of the State Address, Brown argued the existing process was biased, favoring the wealthy who can afford to pay for their freedom, and penalizing the poor, who often are forced to remain in custody.

"Our path to a more just criminal justice system is not complete, but today it made a transformational shift away from valuing private wealth and toward protecting public safety," Sen. Robert Herzberg, a co-author of the bill, said in a statement. "California will continue to lead the way toward a safer and more equitable system."

Washington, D.C., already has a cashless bail system. Other states, including New Jersey, have passed laws that reduce their reliance on money bail. And other states are considering making similar changes.

Under the California law those arrested and charged with a crime won't be putting up money or borrowing it from a bail bond agent to obtain their release. Instead, local courts will decide who to keep in custody and whom to release while they await trial. Those decisions will be based on an algorithm created by the courts in each jurisdiction.

In most nonviolent misdemeanor cases, defendants would be released within 12 hours. In other instances, defendants will be scored on how likely they are to show up for their court date, the seriousness of their crime, and the likelihood of recidivism.

Some people could be released on other conditions, including monitoring by GPS or regular check-ins with an officer.

The goal of the legislation is to eliminate human bias in court proceedings, but critics argue the new system that will be created by the courts runs the risk of perpetuating discrimination.

Meanwhile, the American Civil Liberties Union of California, an original co-sponsor of the bill, pulled its support, arguing that last-minute changes give judges too much discretion in determining under what circumstances people will be released or kept in custody.

"We are concerned that the system that's being put into place by this bill is too heavily weighted toward detention and does not have sufficient safeguards to ensure that racial justice is provided in the new system," the ACLU's Natasha Minsker told NPR,

Margaret Dooley-Sammuli, a senior strategist with the ACLU's Campaign for Smart Justice, said California's approach was not an improvement on the old system and sent a signal to advocates across the country to move ahead cautiously. The organization is involved with bail overhaul efforts in more than 30 other states.

Eliminating bail is as much about reducing the jail population and addressing racial disparities in criminal justice as it is about financial concerns, Dooley-Sammuli said. In negotiating a compromise with Brown and the California judiciary, she said, the authors of SB 10 abandoned those principles.

"We know that where racial disparities are worst is wherever there is discretion," she said. "That this is the best deal California could figure out is a big concern."

Raj Jayadev, co-founder of advocacy organization Silicon Valley De-Bug, said like the ACLU, his group is a former supporter of the bill. Ultimately, as it is written, the law discriminates against the poor.

"They took our rallying cry of ending money bail and used it against us to further threaten and criminalize and jail our loved ones."

And there's the end to the state's bail bond industry.

SB 10 was approved by the Legislature last week, after a nearly two-year push, with largely Democratic support. But it faced heavy opposition from the bail industry and some former supporters of the bill, who said significant amendments to the final version would unjustly expand the number of suspects in pretrial detention.

"We're gone. We're done. As of today the bail industry will start shuttering their doors," Topo Padilla, President of the Golden State Bail Agents Association said, that could affect 7,000 jobs, though Jeff Clayton, president of the American Bail Coalition, says that it's likely that the bail industry will sue, putting the law on hold.

Padilla contended the law is bad for the people of California;

The law "straps the taxpayers with funding 100 percent of all pretrial release programs," and claims it will lead to increasing detentions of people who otherwise would post bail.

Advocates of abolishing bail contend that too many defendants remain stuck in custody because they cannot afford to bail out, effectively creating unequal justice based on wealth. Nearly two-thirds of inmates in California jails are being held awaiting trial.

California is at the forefront of a national campaign to end money bail that has also recently seen states like New Jersey and New Mexico adopt policies to circumvent the for-profit bail industry, though none had yet eliminated bail completely.

David Quintana, a lobbyist for the California Bail Agents Association, said the industry is already mobilizing to block the new law from taking effect, though he declined to discuss the specifics.

"You don't eliminate an industry and expect those people to go down quietly," he said. "Every single weapon in our arsenal will be fired."

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