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Someone Finally Takes Sean Penn's Advice

Michael C. Moynihan | March 25, 2010

Leave it to the wretched regime in Caracas to send Venezuela—home of the Orinoco basin, the terrifically incompetent state run oil company PdVSA, and South American's 6,151st experiment in egalitarianism—into a humiliating energy crisis. As *The Guardian's* Rory Carroll reported last week, “Businesses have reported a collapse in sales and employment, which is expected to aggravate a recession already the deepest in South America, and compound the president's woes ahead of legislative elections.”



So what does a squalid little autocracy do when faced with an increasingly angry opposition, irritated that a country of such massive oil wealth cannot keep the power on or the shelves stocked with meat or sugar? Well, don't tell Sean Penn (he'll get a big head), but the Chavez regime has taken his advice; cracking down on free speech and the pesky, disorganized political opposition. First, it was anti-Chavez politician Oswaldo Alvarez Paz, who recently told a television interviewer that the well-documented charges emanating from Spain connecting the Miraflores gang to FARC and ETA could not be easily dismissed. The country's reptilian Justice Minister Tareck El Aissami responded by throwing Paz in jail (on charges of “spreading false information”) and commenting: “Someone cannot stand up to defame, to lie, to manipulate in the media here and not have anything happen.” It's eerily reminiscent of Sandinista censor Nelba Blandon's classic vulgarity, when asked why the government shuttered an opposition newspaper: “They accused us of suppressing freedom of expression. This was a lie and we could not let them publish it.”

So with the independent channel RCTV now out of the picture, having had their broadcast license twice revoked (both for broadcast and cable), the vultures are circling Globovision, the only non-sycophantic news station still broadcasting in the country. Today the channel's owner Guillermo Zuloaga was arrested and charged with “contempt and for offending the chief executive of the republic.”

The Los Angeles Times has details. Cato's Ian Vasquez comments.

In related news, Oliver Stone's hagiographic (and assuredly soporific) Chavez movie has found a distributor!