BAD NEWS FOR HUGO

There seemed to be a lot of good news for Venezuela's Castro Wannabe, Hugo Chavez, this weekend. He was wined and dined by London's wacko-commie mayor, "Red Ken" Livingstone, and serenaded by his supporters waving Venezuelan flags and dancing to salsa music in London streets.

The commie dog-and-pony show is what the media focused on - and not the bad news reality behind it.

First was the refusal of Prime Minister Tony Blair or any member of the British Cabinet to meet with him. The dutifully-left press reported this backwards, claiming Chavez rejected "hints" of an invitation to 10 Downing Street. The truth is that Blair wouldn't give Chavez the time of day.

Second was the US blacklisting Venezuela regarding arms sales, with Assistant Secretary of State Tom Shannon publicly accusing Chavez of ties with terrorists. "Cuban intelligence has effectively cloned itself inside Venezuelan intelligence," announced Mr. Shannon, and has developed substantial "links to terrorist organizations in the Middle East."

But that's just for openers. The real bad news for Hugo is the contempt and antipathy that much of Latin America now has for him, including South America's giant, Brazil. And Mexico.

Columbia's Alvaro Uribe has always despised Chavez, who sponsors the Narco-Marxist FARC guerrilla terrorists. Ecuador's Alfredo Palacio feels the same. But these fellows are pro-American exceptions to what is seen as an alarming left-wing turn most all of South America seems to be taking.

The irony is that fear and loathing of Chavez may be what brings this left turn to a halt.

This is what has happened in Peru. Last January, The Amazon Trapeze warned that an exceedingly dangerous Chavez protégé named Ollanta Humala was poised to be elected president. The hope was that a pro-capitalist Congresswoman, Lourdes Flores, would prevail.

It never occurred to me or just about anyone else that Peruvians would be nuts enough to give a third candidate, Alan Garcia, more votes than Flores and force Humala into a runoff.

Garcia's past presidency of Peru from 1985-1990 was catastrophically incompetent. In those five years, Peru had two million -*two million* - percent inflation. The Stone Age Marxist guerrillas of *Sendero Luminoso* flourished.

Yet it was Garcia and not Flores who accused Humala of being a stooge of Hugo Chavez and wanting to turn Peru into a colony of Venezuela's. Garcia had seen the polls showing 60% of

Peruvians hate Chavez and the strategy worked. He's now polling 12 points ahead of Humala and headed for victory in the June 4 runoff election.

Chavez's support of Humala, embracing him as a visiting virtual head of state in Caracas, has been a disaster for Humala. Peruvians would rather take a chance that Garcia is not as crazy as he was in the 1980s than on a Chavez clone.

But let's get to Big Daddy, Brazil.

Brazil's president, Lula da Silva, is a lifelong leftist who bitterly disappointed Brazil's Marxist ideologues once he took office. He proceeded to act in Brazil's rational economic and national interests rather than crackpot leftism. As such, he looks upon Chavez as a kook, a nutty *caudillo* riding a white horse with all left feet. Lula has no personal respect for Chavez whatever.

Brazil dwarfs Venezuela. It is larger that the continental US, has 188 million population, a GDP of $1.6 trillion, and a per capita GDP of $8,400. Venezuela is 1/10th the size, has less than 1/8th the population, a GDP less than a tenth ($116 billion), and a one-trick pony of an economy of crude oil.

And it - meaning not just Lula, but the most powerful political parties and the vast majority of business leaders - has totally had it with Hugo. They all see his Caudillo Castroism as a clear threat to the Brazilian economy and want no part of it.

None of this has been lost on politically savvy folks in Mexico. The worst fear for the US right now is a presidential victory on July 2 by PRD (Revolutionary Democratic Party) candidate Lopez Obrador. He is an anti-American Marxist whose chaotic socialism would drive even more millions of poverty-stricken Mexicans across our border.

Obrador has been well ahead in the polls - until recently. Then PAN (National Action Party - Vicente Fox's party) candidate Felipe Calderon began a television blitz of ads explicitly comparing Obrador to Chavez, with video footage of the two smiling and embracing each other.

Immediately, Obrador plunged in the polls and Calderon shot ahead. Mexican contempt for Chavez has been growing since he threatened Fox last November, publicly growling, "Don't mess with me." By asking Mexicans if they want a Castroite bully like Chavez, and showing a clip of Chavez's threat paired with a clip of Obrador telling Fox, "Shut up, you country hen," Calderon hit a political bullseye.

All this bad news for Hugo is good news for America. South America may not be sinking into a Castroite poverty pit after all. And with a little luck on July 2, neither may Mexico.

Calderon has learned much from and denounces Fox's failures. His stated goal is job creation with

free market economic reform, "so Mexicans won't have to cross illegally into the United States to look for work, but stay in our own country and prosper."

If Calderon wins, he'll have Hugo Chavez to thank. And so will we.