

April 16, 2008  
AEI and Venezuela  
Einstein Turns in His Grave

By GEORGE CICCARIELLO-MAHER

Caracas.

In the inaugural 1949 issue of *Monthly Review*, renowned theoretical physicist Albert Einstein penned a now famous article entitled "Why Socialism?" Here was a towering giant of the scientific community, transcending the limits of his own nominal expertise to weigh in with a clear political verdict: "I am convinced there is only one way to eliminate these grave evils [of capitalism], namely through the establishment of a socialist economy, accompanied by an educational system which would be oriented toward social goals. In such an economy, the means of production are owned by society itself and are utilized in a planned fashion."

It is ironic at best and an insult at worst that the Albert Einstein Institution (AEI) bears his name. Masquerading under the banner of "nonviolent action," the AEI has come to play a central role in a new generation of warfare, one which has incorporated the heroic examples of past nonviolent resistance into a strategy of obfuscation and misdirection that does the work of empire. It is clear enough that Einstein himself would not have supported this sort of apolitical and empty "nonviolence," much less when employed toward imperialist ends.

I recently published on *Counterpunch* a review of Eva Golinger's important book *Bush Versus Chávez* (recently translated by *Monthly Review*), a book which deftly tracks contemporary U.S. efforts to undermine the Chávez government in Venezuela. I immediately received a poorly-conceived email from one Arthur Edelstein, accusing me of libelous statements for merely summarizing Golinger's well-documented findings. This unsubstantiated claim would be followed by a complaint (and veiled threat) from Gene Sharp, founder and "senior scholar" at the AEI. I attach the email in full below with errors intact. The letter speaks for itself, but it's worth quickly clarifying the two central points in question:

Firstly, Golinger's claim that the AEI has received funding from the U.S. government. Sharp is at pains to deny this below, but would no doubt concede that the Institution has received funds from both the National Endowment for Democracy (NED) and the International Republican Institute (IRI). These funding sources are reported in AEI's own annual funding statements. It is only through the worst of bad faith that one could claim that these are not in essence institutions pertaining to the U.S. government, since their formally-private status does little to hide the fact that they were both created by the U.S. Congress in 1983 to support Reagan's covert wars. Both, moreover, have been shown (e.g. in Golinger's first book, *The Chávez Code*) to have directly financed the coup-mongers among the Venezuelan opposition.

Secondly, Golinger's claim that AEI was linked to Venezuelans who were plotting to assassinate Chávez. In his letter below, Sharp quarrels with the

phrase "linked to," when this is in fact not "slippery" in the least, but rather the most precise description of the facts. The AEI did not actively participate in plotting to kill Chávez--it would be inaccurate to claim as much. Rather, Cuban-born far-right opposition leader Robert Alonso (brother of María "Conchita") boasted of having met directly with the AEI shortly before Colombian paramilitaries were discovered training at his estate in El Hatillo, a few short miles from Caracas. When interrogated, they admitted their mission was to kill Chávez.

More direct, however, was AEI's training offered to the Venezuelan opposition toward the formulation of what was called "Operation Guarimba" (brainchild of Alonso himself), a series of often-violent street blockades that resulted in several deaths. The Guarimba tactics of 2003-2004 have been more recently taken up by the opposition-controlled student movement during 2007. According to an analysis published by Strategic Forecasting (Stratfor), Venezuelan student leaders traveled to Belgrade in 2005 to meet representatives of the AEI-trained opposition movement OTPOR-CANVAS, before later traveling to Boston to consult directly with Gene Sharp himself. When these allegedly non-partisan students hit the streets in 2007, their logo was exactly the same as that used by OTPOR and which appears in AEI literature.

Nowhere does Sharp bother contesting these facts regarding AEI's role in Venezuela.

But it's worth pausing for a moment to address Sharp's claim that his organization operates on a "transpartisan" basis, that it is non-ideological, and that it is "neither pro-Chávez nor anti-Chávez." To understand the patent falseness of such claims, it is sufficient to cite the AEI's own annual report from the years 2000-2004, according to which Chávez "became increasingly authoritarian" after his initial election, his "popularity began to wane," and he "responded with violent repression" against opposition protestors. Aside from the utter ridiculousness of these claims, there is no mention of the fact that the organizers of these same protests were the same ones who would participate in a violent and anti-democratic coup in April 2002. The valiant people of Caracas are currently celebrating the 6th anniversary of their popular revolutionary victory against these nefarious forces.

In this same report, moreover, it is admitted that Sharp himself met with Venezuelan opposition leaders as discussed above, and that AEI staffers Robert Helvy and Chris Miller held a "nine-day consultation" in 2003 with the same opposition, here described (in a clearly "partisan" manner) as "democratic" despite the fact that these were the very same people involved in and supportive of the coup a year earlier. Despite Sharp's claims that his organization neither supports nor opposes Chávez, the AEI's own documents claim that "the objective of the consultation was to provide them with the capacity to develop a nonviolent strategy to restore democracy to Venezuela" (p. 21).

The AEI's own Robert Helvy--a retired U.S. Army colonel with a history of government employment, including at the Defense Intelligence Agency--puts this political agenda best when he expresses his initial relief upon

discovering that the AEI wasn't all hippies and pacifism: "It is all about seizing political power or denying it to others" (Newsday, December 26th 1999, reprinted in the AEI's report for the years 1993–1999, p. 7). While Sharp presents this position in the letter below as in some way "deeper" than others, the transparent truth seems to be that it is far more superficial: politics are denied as a surface gesture, obscuring what is a clear political content.

Albert Einstein was clear about what his values were. He didn't hide behind the empty formalism of "nonviolence" as a replacement for political belief, but rather combined a socialist ethic with a clear preference for a non-violent world. The AEI would do well to follow this example, firstly by admitting that political values do indeed underlie their activities, and secondly by recognizing in all honesty that these values are quite different from those endorsed and espoused by Einstein himself.

Abstract nonviolence is a recipe for continued domination, for turning a blind eye to the violence that runs through the veins and capillaries of the empire. It is no substitute for the struggle for a truly peaceful world. As the unsurpassed saying goes, "No Justice, No Peace."

George Ciccariello–Maher is a Ph.D. candidate in political theory at UC Berkeley. He is currently writing a people's history of the Bolivarian Revolution, and can be reached at [gjcm\(at\)berkeley.edu](mailto:gjcm(at)berkeley.edu).

Dear George Ciccariello–Maher,

We have not met, and to the best of my knowledge we have not been in touch in any way. I note, however, that you are working toward a Ph.D. in political theory at Berkley. In the early 1960s I did similarly at Oxford.

I note, however, with considerable distress, and also concern for you, about your apparent lack of caution and credulity in concluding that Eva Golinger is correct in her accusations against the Albert Einstein Institution. She claims to show that the Albert Einstein Institution is "directly supported by the State Department (135), and linked to prior attempts to train Colombian paramilitaries to assassinate President Chávez (136–137)."

I am shocked that you apparently have in this case not exercised appropriate scholarly and political caution that would normally be expected of a Ph.D. candidate in political theory, by failing to check whether the accusations are accurate. You have committed both errors of fact and of logic. This action by you reflects badly on your credibility, as well as political judgment. This does not reflect well on your university, either.

Your wording in your article about Eva Golinger's book makes it clear that you accept her apparent false statements and you repeated them as true.

The gravity of your statements is not reduced by your using the slippery phrase "linked to."

The Albert Einstein Institution provides information and consultations about nonviolent alternatives to persons and groups, only when requested,

and even to those that use violence and may do so in the future, as we have done with groups hostile to the Rangoon military dictatorship.

Neither the Albert Einstein Institution, nor we individually, are responsible for any violence that opponents of President Chávez might commit despite our efforts to inform them that nonviolent means of action exist that can be used in acute conflicts.

Only with greater knowledge of this nonviolent option is there a chance that such persons and groups might chose to adopt it in place of violence. If we had refused the request for a workshop for the Venezuelan resisters, some of them would possibly have concluded the "only" option to be another coup d'état, riots, assassinations, or even a foreign invasion, as in Iraq.

Unfortunately, you have now placed yourself among others that have attacked the Institution, its publications, or me personally, with whom I would have assumed that you had nothing in common. These include the military dictators of Burma (then called the SLORC) and the FSB (formerly the KGB) of Putin's Russia.

You find it distressing that some Venezuelans learned from the successful nonviolent undermining of the cruel Milosovic dictatorship of Serbia, where our writings on nonviolent struggle were influential. Would you have recommended that the dissident Venezuelans instead use violence?

I regret that Mr. Chávez, unfortunately, repeated similar accusations when he read in virtual quotations from the writings of Thierry Meyssan, also apparently without checking their accuracy. Please see our open letters to President Chávez and Thierry Meyssan on the AEI website, [www.aeinstein.org](http://www.aeinstein.org)

Neither the Institution nor I personally is a tool of, or apologists for, Unites States' government policies and actions. Many of these I personally find to be quite unacceptable. As a young man I did prison time for opposing US military policies.

The Albert Einstein Institution has never received funding, advice, suggestions, requests, or instructions from the State Department.

We have had nothing to do with, or knowledge of, any attempts to assassinate President Chávez or to train Colombian paramilitaries to do anything.

Our research and policy studies are "transpartisan," in the sense that we welcome interest in obtaining greater knowledge about nonviolent struggle from diverse persons and groups across most of the political spectrum, except fascism. The Albert Einstein Institution is concerned about the problems of war, dictatorship, oppression, and genocide.

We have writings about the relevance of nonviolent struggle for all of these. You will note in my open letter to President Chávez that I called his attention, if he anticipates a coup d'état, to our publication "The Anti-Coup" on our website, [www.aeinstein.org](http://www.aeinstein.org) To my knowledge this is the only program in existence for deterring and defeating coups d'état from any source. We

also have programs for resisting invasions and occupations that were used in Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania in 1991.

We are in no way ideological. We do not participate in ideological campaigning. We are neither pro-Chávez nor anti-Chávez. We operate on what we regard as a deeper level. We focus on the technique of nonviolent action as a substitute for both violence and passivity. Nonviolent struggle has political consequences, principally through empowering people.

In addition to research and policy studies, we prepare and provide, when able, educational information about nonviolent conflicts to groups engaged in conflicts. We do not campaign or participate in on-going conflicts on any side. We do not give advice on what any side should do in a specific conflict.

You have a choice. You can reaffirm your own and Ms. Golinger's false accusations, or you can personally retract and correct your own false statements and strongly urge CounterPunch to publish your corrections prominently. The latter will help to improve your credibility.

I look forward to learning what corrective action you are taking.

Sincerely,  
Gene Sharp  
Senior Scholar

CC: Jeffrey St. Clair, Alexander Cockburn