

# VENEZUELA - Don't Cry for RCTV

Charles Hardy, The Narcosphere

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*Sunday May 27<sup>th</sup>, 2007 - [The Narcosphere](#) - As I write this, I am looking at a Venezuelan newspaper, El Diario, from February 10, 1992. The editorial that would have occupied half of page 2 is missing. Page 4 is completely blank. The contents were censored by the government of the then president Carlos Andres Perez.*

The newspaper is just one of many horrible memories of the pre-Hugo Chavez days in Venezuela's "exceptional" democracy.

U.S. newspapers seem to overlook what Venezuela used to be like as they today discuss the actions of the current government. I have lived in Venezuela for most of the past 22 years and have never experienced such freedom as that which the Venezuelan population enjoys today under Hugo Chavez. That would include freedom of information. Never, in the past 22 years, has the mass media experienced the freedom it has had during the presidency of Chavez. One can freely buy anti-Chavez newspapers on streets and the airwaves and television channels are amply filled with anti-Chavez commentators.

However, today, May 27, the Venezuelan government will not renew the license of RCTV, a television station that has been on the air for over 50 years. The owner, Marciel Granier, has been running around the world crying because he is about to lose his license. Even the millionaires in the U.S. Senate feel he should get to keep the license. Interestingly, Granier was president of the censored *El Diario* in 1992. He didn't complain then. I bought his newspaper. He got his money.

What the news reports in the U.S. don't tell us, and what the U.S. Senate doesn't seem to understand, is that hundreds of thousands of Venezuelans will be celebrating tonight at midnight because RCTV's license will have expired. They've been meeting on city squares and corners throughout Venezuela discussing who owns the air and what kind of programming they would like on their television sets. They are asking whether it is truly fair that if you are a millionaire, you can buy the air space of the people for the next 20 years. Independent producers will now have a chance to get their programs shown, without having to obtain the approval of Granier who has been something of a media dictator in Venezuela.

Granier is no saint and his channel hasn't been an example of the heavenly kingdom on earth either. RCTV was taken off the air five times by Venezuelan administrations before Chavez ever entered the presidential palace. In 1981, for example, it was taken off the air for 24 hours because of airing pornographic scenes.

In 2002, RCTV actively encouraged Venezuelans to march toward the presidential palace in order to participate in a coup that was taking place to overthrow the democratically elected president. Marciel Granier gave clear instructions to the managing producer of Venezuela's most watched news program on the day of the coup that he should not give any information about President Chavez. Actions like this would not be tolerated by the FCC in the U.S.

However, when Chavez returned to power a few days later, no reprisals were taken against the channel.

No, May 27 is not a sad day for freedom of expression in Venezuela, so don't weep for Mr. Granier when RCTV's license is not renewed. He can still broadcast through cable or satellite and he can still sell his programming to other stations. Instead, rejoice with all the independent producers and thousands of Venezuelan who will have access to the space one wealthy man controlled for years. May 28 will be a day of celebration in Venezuela. It should be a day for celebrating freedom throughout the world.

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You can order Charles Hardy's book, *Cowboy in Caracas, A North American's Memoir of Venezuela's Democratic Revolution*, at bookstores, online, or directly from [Curbstone Press](#).

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