

Behind the U.S. Policy in Venezuela

Since 1998, when current President Hugo Chavez won a popular election in Venezuela, the U.S. government has worked tirelessly with the oligarchy in that country to overturn Chavez' presidency. Chavez was re-elected in 2000, again by a large turnout from the people.

President Chavez' re-election made the oligarchy and the U.S. government even more desperate and they stepped up their efforts to create a "regime change." This included an attempted coup in 2002, a work lockout in 2002 and since 2003, an attempted recall referendum. These attacks have been coupled with attempts to isolate Venezuela internationally.

The U.S. has slandered Chavez relentlessly. They have accused him of the "methodical consolidation of absolute authority." (Wall Street Journal, 3/5/04) They claim he is the one that is being undemocratic. U.S. presidential hopeful, John Kerry has accused Chavez of supporting "narco-terrorists."



The U.S. kidnapping of President Jean Bertrand Aristide of Haiti in February 2004, heightened tensions throughout Latin America. With the coup in Haiti, the U.S. has signaled that it is prepared to once again use military force in this hemisphere against popularly elected governments.

The U.S. would love to do just that in Venezuela and socialist Cuba. Otto Reich, the White House special envoy for Latin America, was quoted as saying, after the coup, "One down and two to go," referring to the two leaders Hugo Chavez and Fidel Castro. The U.S. also has to contend with popular movements for justice in other parts of the Latin America—Colombia, Brazil, Argentina, Bolivia, Puerto Rico, and the Dominican Republic, among others.

Why so much hostility from the U.S.?

Venezuela is a South American country of 24 million people. It is the fifth largest producer of oil in the world and has other natural

resources that should arguably make it a rich country. However, the impact of years of colonial domination, slavery and exploitation has made conditions for the people unbearable. Eighty percent of the population lives in poverty. Of these, 70% are women and children. Before Chavez' election, 67% of Venezuelans earned under \$2 a day. Sixty percent of the arable land was owned by 1% of the population.

The Bolivarian Revolution refers to the process that has been going on in Venezuela since Chavez' election. It is an attempt at reversing the injustices of the past. The disenfranchised are participating in the political process. And the people of Venezuela are rejecting privatization and other imperialist policies. We, the movement in the U.S., must defend the right of the Venezuelan people to self-determination.

Here are some advances of the Bolivarian Revolution:

1. In 1999, a new Constitution was adopted in consultation with a majority of the population. In its current form, it is by far, one of the most inclusive, pro-



gressive constitutions in the world. For example, women have increased rights, from abortion rights to more equitable marriage laws.

2. In November 2001, Chavez signed into law 49 economic and land reforms. This was an attempt to redistribute the wealth in the country.

3. In 2000, the formation of the Bolivarian Circles took up the defense of the Revolution, working in the neighborhoods to implement new programs to benefit the poor. The Circles helped to organize the people and were decisive in the defeat of the right-wing coup in 2002.

4. In response to the oil lockout by management, the government put Petroleos de Venezuela, PDVSA, under new management and restrictions. In 2004, \$1.7 billion from the PDVSA is earmarked for training programs for the poor.

5. In July 2003, Plan Barrio Adentro, (Into the Neighborhoods) was launched. This literacy and healthcare program aims to teach 120,000 people to read and write. It involves 50,000 volunteers and small loans from state-owned banks for families that participate. The healthcare portion involves 10,000 Cuban doctors in the farthest reaches of the country to provide healthcare to thousands who have never received it.

6. As of March 2004, President Chavez plans to submit a law to the National Assembly that would allow the

government to use excess reserves from the Central Bank to fund road, loan, education and health projects. The excess would amount to about \$7 billion.

In 2000, Chavez was the first head of state to defy Washington by traveling to Iraq. He has rallied the OPEC nations to strengthen the organization. He opposes the U.S. war against Iraq. He has extended friendship and solidarity to Cuba, selling oil to the island at fair prices. He was ready to send troops and money to help President Aristide in Haiti and has refused to recognize the illegal government there. He has also offered Aristide asylum. He opposes the Free Trade Agreement of the Americas and calls it an attempt by U.S. imperialism to dominate Latin America.

For these positions, the U.S. alleges Chavez is "eager for a domestic and international confrontation." (Washington Post, 3/5/04) But it is the U.S. that is eager to depose the elected president.

"Regime change" sought by U.S. in Venezuela

The Venezuelan people have not had a moment's peace from the U.S. The oligarchy in Venezuela acknowledges that the U.S. government is helping to fund the so-called "opposition." In September 2003, a group hoping to force a recall referendum of Chavez received \$53,400 from the National Endowment for Democracy for an advertising campaign.

During the failed coup attempt in 2002, U.S. military planes were ready to spirit Chavez out of the country. It provided money and materials; such as fax machines, phones, etc. to the coup leaders. The U.S. was the first government to recognize the renegade government within 24 hours of the coup.

During the lockout in 2002-2003, U.S. corporations such as Exxon were ordering their tankers not to load oil in the port. Others such as Proctor and Gamble, General Motors, Goodyear and Coca-Cola shut down their operations in support of the lockout.

Carlos Ortega, one of the main organizers of the lockout was summoned to Washington for a meeting with the State Department in the middle of the sabotage. This lockout's goal, it should be noted, was to drive the economy of Venezuela to the ground, and by so doing, leave the vast majority of Venezuelans to starve.

The people push back the U.S. & the oligarchy

Because the people are in motion in Venezuela, all attempts by the pro-U.S. forces to set back the process taking place there have been pushed back. The coup attempt on April 11-13, 2002 went down in history as a tremendous failure due to the outpouring of anger and mobilization of the people throughout the country.

Instead of the lockout bringing the people to its knees, the people brought the lockout to its knees by taking over all aspects of oil production from management.

Overall, the people of Venezuela have shown time and time again that they will defend their sovereignty and their struggle to build a better society. They have also extended their solidarity to their sisters and brothers around the world, from Iraq to Haiti to Cuba. That is why we call on all to support the people of Venezuela against all U.S. attacks.

**U.S. hands off Venezuela!
Long live the Bolivarian
Revolution!**

