



# CORREO | DEL | ORINOCO

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## The Caracazo

On February 27, 1989, a popular uprising overtook the nation's capital, protesting the government's neoliberal policies and the growth of poverty and misery in one of the world's largest oil producing countries. The Government at the time ordered the massacre of more than 3,000 citizens - mainly from poor communities.

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## International Military coup in Niger

World nations condemned last week's coup d'etat in Niger and called for a return to constitutional order in the West African nation, one of the planet's richest in uranium.

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## Economy Socialist Supermarket begins to implement changes

The new Bicentennial Supermarket brings hope to workers and consumers used to the exploitation and deceptive tactics promoted by the former owners.

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## Tension: Colombia & Venezuela

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# A new union for Latin America and the Caribbean

*US and Canada excluded*

This week's Rio Group Summit in Cancun set the stage for the creation of a new organization of Latin American and Caribbean nations, without the presence of the United States and Canada. This historic announcement comes after several recent events, such as last year's coup d'etat in Honduras, have raised questions about the effectiveness and relevancy of the Organization of American States (OAS).

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## Venezuela Presides the United Nation's Commission for Social Development

This week, the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela assumed the two-year Presidency of the Commission for Social Development of the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) of the United Nations. Venezuela was elected unanimously by the members of ECOSOC to lead the Commission, and will focus its work over the next two years on reviewing the advances made towards the eradication of poverty on an international level.

Venezuela's Ambassador to the United Nations (UN), Jor-

ge Valero, emphasized that this will be an opportunity to show the world the enormous achievements Venezuela has made in the redistribution of wealth, the implementation of social programs and an overall reduction of poverty and inequality.

The Commission for Social Development is part of the Economic and Social Council of the UN, charged with monitoring and guaranteeing the implementation of the Copenhagen Declaration and Program of Action, adop-

ted during the World Summit for Social Development in 1995. Amongst the continued objectives of the Summit to achieve social development are the eradication of poverty, the creation of productive employment and the promotion of social integration.

During the next two years, Venezuela will be responsible for strengthening the work of the Commission for Social Development and its key role in overseeing social development and poverty reduction worldwide.

**Mission "Energy Revolution" has substituted more than 120 million lightbulbs since 2006**



The Venezuelan Government's plan to substitute incandescent lightbulbs for energy savers has allotted for the installation of 120,829,974 free bulbs since November 2006, for a total savings of 2,097 Mega Watts (MW) of energy. The energy saving lightbulbs consume 80% less energy than incandescent bulbs and allow for both conservation on a widespread level and less cost to each individual consumer.

Mission "Energy Revolution", a program of the Ministry for Energy and Petroleum, initially began substituting incandescent lightbulbs for energy savers in residential areas throughout the nation in 2006. Groups of "energy conservation brigades" went door-to-door in communities across the country to hand out free energy saving lightbulbs to consumers. The first part of the program involved the substitution of 68,529,974 bulbs in homes nationwide. The second part of Mission "Energy Revolution" included the maintenance and replacement of the bulbs already distributed, and the substitution of incandescent lights in the nation's public institutions and businesses.

Mission "Energy Revolution" began as part of a cooperation agreement with Cuba, which has been using energy saving lightbulbs for over a decade.

# Sovereignty and Unity in Latin America

*The Birth of a new community for Latin America and the Caribbean*

A new Latin American and Caribbean organization will be formalized next year in Caracas, consolidating and strengthening regional unity and integration. The divisions between North and South expand as a decision is made to exclude the United States and Canada from participating

The groundbreaking announcement was made this week during the Rio Group Summit in Cancun, Mexico. During the next Summit of Latin American and Caribbean Unity, scheduled for July 2011 in Caracas, a new organization will be created that unites regional countries without the presence of the United States or Canada.

The decision was made by the twenty-five heads of state and representatives from 33 countries that gathered this week in Mexico under the banner, "Latin American Unity, Integration and Sovereignty". Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez expressed his country's clear support for the proposal, declaring, "The people of Latin America and their governments are trying to re-take the original path that unites our republics into a single political body, as Simon Bolivar dreamed. We are assuming his dream and following the road that Bolivar began to build... We need a new organization, a space for us... So that is why we have come to support this idea and we will help consolidate it with patience".

## UNITY AND REGIONAL VITALITY

During the opening ceremony of the Summit, Mexican President Felipe Calderon called for unity amongst those countries attending the event and coincided with his Venezuelan counterpart regarding the necessity to create "a new institution that strengthens us as a region and helps to project us onto the international scene with a renovated vitality".

Regional organizations, such as the Organization of American



States (OAS), have become progressively weaker over the years as other initiatives like the Bolivarian Alliance of the Americas (ALBA) and the Union of South American Nations (UNASUR) have motivated Latin American and Caribbean nations to make decisions affecting this part of the hemisphere, without the dominant presence of the United States.

## THE OAS HAS BECOME IRRELEVANT

The tip of the iceberg came last year after the coup d'etat in Honduras evidenced the clear lack of authority and ongoing relevance of the OAS. After the coup occurred on June 28, the OAS did take a stand condemning the illegal ouster of President Manuel Zelaya, but later took on a more distanced, impotent role. Just days after the coup, the United States and Canada both imposed their political agendas on the other member states of the OAS, dividing the region bitterly and in the end, failing to resolve the crisis in Honduras. The US and Canada were two of few countries in the hemisphere that ending up recognizing a government in Honduras that resulted from the coup dictatorship, which many others found illegitimate. Despite pressure from the US, Honduras remains excluded from the OAS and the Rio Group, and was not invited to this week's Summit.

Many nations see the OAS as merely an outpost of the United States. Cuba, for example, was expelled from the organization in 1962, after a resolution imposed by the US prohibited member nations from adhering to "Marxism-Leninism" and claimed the Government of Cuba had "officially identified itself as a Marxist-Leninist government" and therefore was excluded from "participation in the Inter-American system".

But last year at the OAS's 39th General Assembly meeting in San Pedro Sula, Honduras, three weeks before the coup occurred, member nations voted unanimously to overturn the 1962 decision, reopening the path to Cuba's inclusion in the organization. But the move wasn't without conditions imposed by the US, which made sure to include several "prerequisites" to Cuba's reincorporation in the OAS. Under the US-crafted resolution, Cuba would have to adhere to certain principles of the OAS Charter, such as the implementation of a free market economy and a model of representative democracy based on the US system.

## NOT AN OAS REPLACEMENT

The debate regarding the establishment of the new organization, which will encompass all 33 nations in the region, is already progressing. A few details, such as the name of the organism, still need to be defined. The organization

would function as a space for permanent consultation and political debate, with the goal of amplifying dialogue and accelerating the processes of regional integration.

Venezuela's Foreign Minister, Nicolas Maduro, announced that the actual formal creation of the new organization will take place on July 5, 2011, during the next Summit of Latin American and Caribbean Unity, organized by Venezuela as part of the 200th Anniversary of the Declaration of Independence. President Chavez also indicated that the new organization will fulfill the need to establish a mechanism of Latin American and Caribbean unity based on "transparent relationships founded on respect for the sovereignty of each country and no interference in internal affairs of each nation".

He also stressed that the new organization will not "replace the Organization of American States. That is not necessary". But, President Chavez pointed out, for example, that the OAS failed to intervene on behalf of Argentina in its ongoing struggle to recuperate the Malvinas Islands (also known as the Falkland Islands), taken under force by England in 1833. The issue was a major topic of discussion at this week's Summit.

## ARGENTINA'S RIGHT

Collectively, the 33 nations participating in the Summit of Latin American and Caribbean Unity

supported Argentina's sovereign right to reclaim the Malvinas Islands and at the same time, rejected England's recent petroleum exploitation initiatives in that area.

"In the name of my government and my people, I sincerely appreciate the support given by this Summit to our claims", said Argentinean President Cristina Fernandez, during her intervention in one of the plenary sessions. Fernandez explained that her country will continue its efforts to force England to comply with United Nations resolutions that reaffirm Argentina's sovereignty and right to the islands in the South Atlantic Ocean.

The Summit issued a final declaration supporting Argentina's legitimate right to the islands and called on England to cease its illegal occupation of the archipelago. In 1982, Argentina attempted to take back control of the islands and oust the British rulers, which precipitated a two-month long war with the United Kingdom that Argentina subsequently lost. United Nations resolutions have called on England to de-colonize the territory and return it to its sovereign rule.

Recently, British companies have begun exploring petroleum in and around the islands, which are said to possess as much as 70 billion barrels of oil.

T/ Eva Golinger  
P/ Presidential Press

# Nations Worldwide Condemned the Military Coup in Niger, except the US

The African country is the third largest producer of Uranium on the planet. President Mamadou Tandja was implementing profound social reforms. The Government had ordered the review of concessions given to transnationals



As the military coup leaders in Niger announced last Friday that the curfew imposed just a day earlier would be lifted, they still continued to refuse a return to constitutional order and democracy, despite widespread condemnation from the international community.

The Supreme Council for the Restoration of Democracy (CSR) illegally took power last Thursday after several months of internal political crisis that resulted in a coup d'état that, ousting President Mamadou Tandja from power and leaving several dead and injured. The Council took control over the capital, Niamey, in a tense move that left the nation unsure of what would happen next.

The military coup occurred just as a negotiation process was underway to resolve the political differences in the nation.

In Niger, President Mamadou Tandja was developing a government with "profoundly social" policies", said Reinaldo Bolivar, Venezuela's Vice-Minister for Africa. "That could be one of the causes behind the military coup", he added.

Niger, despite having one of the largest reserves of uranium on the planet, is one of the five poorest countries in the world.

According to Reinaldo Bolivar, Tandja had ordered the review of all the concessions in the hands of European multinationals operating in the nation. "Niger is a country with uranium and petroleum", detailed Bolivar. "But even with those natural resources, it's a really poor country. That's why President Tandja was developing a series of policies geared towards helping the people".

Tandja was elected President

in 1999, after three decades of military dictatorships and coup d'états. He was reelected in 2004, and last year he won a popular referendum to extend his presidential term for another three years. Opposition parties accused Tandja of trying to remain permanently in power. But overall, Tandja enjoyed a majority of support from the people of Niger.

"Unfortunately, Niger is reversing back to the days of military dictatorships", warned Bolivar. "The African Union has already suspended Niger from participat-

ing in the regional community because of the coup. They could also impose an economic blockade".

Despite world condemnation, the coup leaders have declared the situation in Niger "under control". "There is no dissidence", affirmed a spokesperson for the Supreme Council for the Restoration of Democracy, Colonel Goukoye Abdoukarim, while also announcing the national curfew would be lifted and borders and airports reopened last Friday. President Mamadou Tandja was kidnapped and remained a hostage of the coup

leaders. "He is fine. He saw his doctor and his health is normal", declared an officer from the military junta in the southeastern part of Niamey. The coup leaders also announced the suspension of the nation's Constitution.

## WORLDWIDE CONCERN

The coup generated a wave of international condemnations. From Ethiopia, the President of the African Union (AU), Jean Ping, observed the situation in Niger with great concern. Ping underlined that the AU charter "systematically condemns any unconstitutional changes in the region" and therefore, "condemns the illegal power seizure in Niger". Ping called for the rapid and peaceful return to constitutional order in the African nation and ratified the disposition of the AU, in collaboration with the Economic Community of West African States, to facilitate the process.

The European Union also condemned the coup and called on "all parties involved to commit immediately to a democratic process to re-

store constitutional order". "The EU shares the concerns of the African Union regarding the recent events in Niger and supports its mediation efforts", said a press release.

The Permanent Secretariat of the Africa-South America Summit (ASA), uniting 54 African nations with 12 South American countries, also rejected the "events that occurred on February 18, 2010 in the Republic of Niger". The Secretariat of ASA expressed concern for the "consequences of this terrible action that returns Niger to the decades of military dictatorships and coups, overcome in 1999".

## VENEZUELA'S CALL FOR ORDER

The Venezuelan government released a statement harshly condemning the coup d'état "perpetrated by elements of the Armed Forces against the constitutional President of Niger, Mamadou Tandja" and called on the "international community, including the Movement of Non-Aligned Nations and members of ASA to reject the coup d'état in Niger and advocate for the physical integrity of President Tandja, the members of his cabinet and their respective families, and to support the United Nations in its call to reinstate constitutional order and the legitimate authorities in the West African nation".

## THE US CALLS FOR ELECTIONS

Despite condemnations from the majority of world nations, the US State Department refused to recognize a military coup had occurred in the West African nation and instead called for "prompt, fair and transparent elections". Due to last year's referendum, Niger isn't scheduled for presidential elections until 2012. Yet Washington's call for "early elections" is not new. After last year's coup d'état in Honduras, the US Government advocated for early presidential elections, instead of a return of the legitimate president to power. And in Venezuela, both in 2002, the State Department urged early elections as a solution to the nation's political crisis. In all three cases, the elected presidents subject to overthrow were considered inconvenient to US interests.

T/ Arlenin Aguillon  
P/ Agencies

## CHRONOLOGY 10 Years of Coups

### 1999

▪ **April 9** | Niger. Military rebels assassinated President Ibrahim Bare Mainasara during a coup d'état.

▪ **April 29** | Union of the Comoros Islands. The army seized power during a coup d'état in this Indian Ocean island nation after a crisis erupted and Colonel Azali Assaoumani annulled the Constitution and dissolved all the institutions.

▪ **May 29** | Guinea Bissau. The Army overthrew President Joao Bernardo Vieira while he sought refuge in the Embassy of Portugal.

▪ **October 12** | Pakistan. Pakistan Army Chief Pervez Musharraf overthrew the government of Nawaz Sharif.

### 2000

▪ **January 21** | Ecuador. A coup led by indigenous and military leaders -amongst them Colonel Lucio Gutierrez- deposed President Jamil Mahuad.

▪ **June 5** | Solomon Islands. The rebel militia group Malaita Eagle Force seized the capital, Honiara, and overthrew Prime Minister Batholeme Ulufa'alu.

### 2002

▪ **April 11** | Venezuela. President Hugo Chavez was ousted from power during 48 hours after a military-corporate-media coup tried to overthrow him.

### 2003

▪ **March 16** | Central African Republic. General Francois Bozize was proclaimed president after rebels seized the capital by force and ousted President Ange-Felix Patasse.

▪ **September 14** | Guinea Bissau. A military coup deposed President Kumba Yalá from power.

### 2005

▪ **February 1** | Nepal. King Gyanendra dissolved the Parliament for the second time since 2002, declared a state of emergency and assumed all powers under the pretext of fighting maoist rebels.

▪ **August 3** | Mauritania. President Muauia Uld Sidi Ahmed Talla was ousted while traveling abroad.

### 2006

▪ **September 19** | Thailand. A military coup took place against Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra while

he was at the United Nation's General Assembly in New York.

▪ **December 5** | Fiji. Fiji's Commander of the Armed Forces, Frank Basinamarama, took power and ousted Prime Minister Laisenia Qarase.

### 2008

▪ **August 6** | Mauritania. Military forces took power and arrested President Sidi Mohamed Uld Cheji Abdallahi and Prime Minister Yahya Uld Ahmed El Waghef, after the government changed the high military command.

### 2009

▪ **March 17** | Madagascar. Opposition leader Andry Rajoelina, supported by a sector of the Army, proclaimed himself President of the Supreme Authority for Transition.

▪ **June 28** | Honduras. President Manuel Zelaya was kidnapped and forced into exile in Costa Rica while military forces took over the government.

### NIGER | 2010

Niger is the latest victim of a coup d'état during the past decade. The list now ascends to 16.

# Bicentennial Supermarket on the road towards structural changes

Even though the store is now run by workers, some things have not changed. The status of shopping bag packers remains in limbo, but many are hopeful that the new socialist market will positively affect consumer's and worker's lives alike

At 22, Erika already has a 7 year-old son and has to work in order to provide him with his basic needs. Yesterday, she showed up to work, like she does everyday, and put on her grey t-shirt. Some may think the color of her shirt is irrelevant, but at the workplace of this young single mother, grey is synonymous with exploitation and discrimination.

Erika works packing shopping bags at the recently converted Bicentennial Supermarket, a place where people still continue to labor within the capitalist logic imposed by the former owners of the retail store chain. Those who wear grey t-shirts have to request special permission to be able to buy products from the store. They have two shifts.

The first shift is from 9am to 3pm. Then, from 3pm to 9pm, the second group comes in. Despite having to comply with set times, they do not receive a wage.

Wearing a grey t-shirt in this supermarket means you do not have a place to store your lunch because you are not even allowed to take a bag to work. Management discriminates against the young men and women that wear grey t-shirts.

Erika has been working here for almost a year, and has always worn a grey t-shirt. Next to her is another young woman who recently had a child. At another cash register, a young man with braids carries out the same task. None of them have permission to walk down the main aisles of the supermarket.

## THE DEVIL IS IN THE DETAILS

At the Bicentennial Supermarket in the upper class Caracas neighborhood of Terrazas del Avila, there are still products from exclusive brands with names written in English. Signs and billboards show the faces of white people, and only one in the whole store has the face of an Afro-



Shoppers are breaking records at the Bicentennial Supermarkets nationwide, which guarantee low prices and full stock of consumer products

descendent woman. Motorcyclists are denied entry.

"Denying entry to motorcyclists is common here in Caracas", commented Arthur García, a motorbike rider who works as a courier for *Correo del Orinoco*.

Venezuela's President Hugo Chavez has declared on numerous occasions that "the devil is in the details". There are still "devils" in the Bicentennial Supermarket, even when the number of shoppers is so great that the store had to open up two additional cash registers.

Recognizing the managers in the supermarket is easy. They don't wear grey shirts. They are dressed in long-sleeved yellow shirts, over which they wear a black sweater. Eduardo Lucena dresses like this. "I don't have much information in regards to why the changes have not begun here", he said.

"In reality, we have asked ourselves why has it taken so long for real changes to occur here", expressed Wilson García, who moved from Santa Barbara in Zulia more than 20 years ago and is now working at the Bicentennial Supermarket.

A month after the takeover, the implementation of fair prices has been one of the changes made. These low prices have generated record sales figures.

## SEEKING TRANSFORMATION

Lisbeth Jimenez was unable to study at a university for 10 years, until finally she enrolled in the Bolivarian University of Venezuela.

She is currently in the sixth semester of Legal Studies and belongs to the Bicentennial workers' union. She's clear about what is happening in Venezuela.

"I was never able to study before because I was excluded", she explained. "When the university admissions board saw that I lived in Petare, a poor neighborhood, they didn't accept me." Her past experience with exclusion led her to create an area for higher education study in the supermarket, a suggestion made by President Chavez.

"It would be great to have a campus here", she added.

Richard Rojas, a young history graduate who hasn't been able to find a job suited to his profession,

works alongside Jimenez.

Rojas doesn't wear a long-sleeved yellow shirt, but he does have other aspirations. "I would like to work in my field of study, and if they open up a university campus here, then I could give classes".

"We have to give this time," affirmed Jimenez. "The changes have to be carried out little by little", she added.

"The workers need to know more about Venezuela's reality", stated Rojas.

"And we are trying to engage in conversations with them about this".

As proposed by the government after the expropriation of the former market Exito occurred, the supermarket is currently being run by the workers. Presently, there is no store manager and the position of human resources manager is vacant. But the rest of the "yellow shirt" positions are still occupied by the same people.

The employee's union is fighting for economic demands. They've been discussing a new collective contract for two years and hope that fair wages will be among the new benefits they are set to receive.

## BENEFITS FOR THE PEOPLE

This past January 19, President Chavez ordered the takeover of the megastore Exito after the owners violated the country's laws by illegally marking up the prices of their products. Chavez accused the management of Exito of "robbing the people".

The Institute for the Defense of Consumer Access to Goods and Services (Indepabis) began a series of actions across the country to defend Venezuelans from price hikes and product hoarding in early 2010. Immediately, the workers of Exito denounced they had been ordered to mark up prices. Similar activity was detected in other retail chains.

Exito was part of the Chain of Venezuelan Stores (Cativen), whose majority shareholder is the French company, Casino. A Colombian group and the Venezuelan company, Polar Enterprises, were minority shareholders.

Last week, President Chavez announced the government had reached an agreement with Casino to buy out 80% of Cativen's shares. Cativen controls 35 Cada Supermarkets, 8 distribution centers and a fleet of 100 cargo trucks.

## FOOD SUPPLIES ARRIVE

The Bicentennial Supermarket is part of a new network of socialist markets created by the revolutionary process in Venezuela. It represents a new type of commerce emerging together with 21st century socialism.

"We are working hard to maintain sales", assured Jorge Graterol, one of the workers in the megastore. "A lot of people have come through here. Last Saturday they even damaged some of the doors in order to get in", added the young man who lives in the capital.

## THE SUPPLY OF PRODUCTS IS GUARANTEED.

*Correo del Orinoco* was able to verify the arrival of trucks carrying sugar, flour, milk and other basic food products. However, major changes have yet to become reality.

"Hopefully the changes will happen soon", expressed Graterol.

"The workers must be seen as a fundamental pillar of these changes", reminded Wilson García.

T/ Arlenin Aguillon  
P/ Miguel Romero  
Caracas

# Venezuela and Colombia at a Crossroads

The Government and Private businesses in Colombia continue to scrutinize the Bolivarian process as Venezuela weakens the relationship with its former major trading partner. ALBA nations are under attack in the region

Following a coup d'etat last summer that ousted democratically elected President Manuel Zelaya, Honduras has formally withdrawn from the Bolivarian Alliance of the Americas (ALBA). This move represents a loss to the Bolivarian alliance, which seeks alternatives to neoliberal policies imposed by Washington in Latin America during decades. But Venezuela and other member nations of ALBA continue to strengthen ties and move away from trade with other countries in the region that seek to debilitate and destabilize their growing socialist movements.

The blow to ALBA in the case of Honduras demonstrated the alliance's importance in the region, and its vulnerabilities. Coup leaders had accused then President Zelaya of pushing for a constitutional referendum that would lead to his indefinite reelection, citing a similar amendment to the Venezuelan constitution. However, Zelaya's economic and regional policies, which included raising the minimum wage, forging an alliance with nations such as Nicaragua and Venezuela, and eventually closing down a major US strategic military base in Honduras, prompted the action.

Though initially Washington condemned the coup in Honduras, the US later supported the coup regime -aiding in its consolidation and impeding the return of President Zelaya to power- and funded the electoral process that installed the current government in place. Since the heavily questioned presidential elections took place last November, only the US and a handful of nations around the world have recognized the "new" government in Honduras. Therefore, it's no surprise that the current Honduran government is sympathetic to US foreign policy in the region and has received visits and support from US congresspersons, high level government officials and multinationals that have



Presidents Hugo Chavez and Alvaro Uribe have had a relationship full of turmoil and tension, despite the closeness of their nations

exploited cheap labor in the country for decades.

## INTERNATIONAL CORPORATIONS CASH IN WITH PARAMILITARY GROUPS

Before the coup in Honduras, Chiquita -formerly United Fruit Company- had officially appealed to the Honduran Business Association following the announcement regarding the raise in minimum wage. But, the influential multinational was unable to convince the government of Zelaya to alter the decision.

Decades before, United Fruit's involvement in the CIA-orchestrated coup d'etat in Guatemala against President Jacobo Arbenz in 1954 was no secret. Under its new moniker, Chiquita maintains strong insider ties with Washington through Covington & Burling LLP, a lobbying firm that also granted services to Halliburton following the illegal US invasion of Iraq in 2003.

Chiquita was often accused of political meddling in Latin America throughout the last century and now again in the new millennium.

Disturbing ties have been alleged between the company and Henry Kissinger, who played a prominent role in the 1973 coup d'etat against Salvador Allende in Chile. And in 2007, Chiquita pled guilty to funding a rightwing paramilitary group, the United Self-Defenses of Colombia (AUC), through its subsidiary company Banadex in Colombia. Even after the paramilitary group was officially deemed a terrorist organization by the US government in 2002, Chiquita continued subsequent payments in cash.

Despite the company's claim that it was protecting the lives of its employees through the payments, it ended up paying a settlement of \$25 million USD in reparations to the families of murdered relatives in Colombia. This converted Chiquita into the first US Corporation formally guilty of "financing terrorism". Chiquita has also admitted to sending funds to the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) and the National Liberation Army (ELN), both labeled as terrorist groups by Washington.

## TRADE RELATIONS, CORPORATIONS & AUTONOMY

Relations between Colombia and Venezuela continue to strain following the decline of Colombian imports, such as cosmetics and gas, to its eastern neighbor. Venezuela has been criticized by the business community in Colombia for buying exports from the US in lieu of its Latin American neighbor. But the relationship between the two nations has deteriorated substantially in the past few years due to political differences and Venezuela's rejection of the Colombian government's decision to allow the US to occupy seven military bases in that country, viewed by Venezuela as a major threat. As part of the diversification of its economy, Venezuela continues to build relations with other ALBA nations in the region as well as with Asian and African countries, such as China, Vietnam and Lybia.

But the tension between Colombia and Venezuela has affected the Venezuelan infrastructure. Chevron, a US petroleum company with major investments in Venezuela, has com-

plained of a loss of more than one hundred million cubic feet of gas per day from last year, traversing from Colombia. In response to the current electricity crisis Venezuela is facing, Colombia has also offered to sell surplus energy to Venezuela, but for now, the Venezuelan government has declined the offer. Venezuela did, however, just double a deal with General Electric to purchase 880 megawatts worth of turbines in order to confront the current crisis. This occurs as Venezuela struggles to be independent and autonomous in its energy supply.

## BOLIVARIAN POLITICS AND ECONOMY

Politics and economy go hand in hand in today's world, given the context of the currently complex integrated international markets and the rise of central banks. As a world economic crisis appears more imminent everyday, countries are seeking reliable trade alliances that assure mutual self-defense in political, economic and military affairs.

Upcoming elections in Brazil will be pivotal in determining the future of South American unity. Current Brazilian president Luis Ignacio "Lula" Da Silva has endorsed his successor, Dilma Rousseff, but their party, the Worker's Party (PT), is currently lagging in the polls. Should the PT loose, Venezuela would be surrounded by political adversaries.

A growing US military presence in Haiti is effectively attempting to drive a physical wedge between Venezuela and Cuba, and Colombia has become a US military satellite in the region, similar to Israel in the Middle East. Colombia divides Venezuela from its ALBA partners Ecuador and Bolivia. The increasing US military presence in the northern islands off Venezuela's Caribbean coast, Aruba and Curaçao, also represents a significant threat to Venezuela's security, and could be perceived as an act of intimidation against the three Caribbean members of ALBA, Antigua and Barbuda, St. Vincents and the Grenadines, and Dominica.

With the current far-right political position in Colombia, and the far-left position in Venezuela it seems likely that commerce and diplomacy between the two nations may eventually reach a gridlock.

T/ Benji Lewis  
P/ Agencies

# President Chavez Signed the Federal Government Council Bill into Law

While rendering tribute to Ezequiel Zamora, the General of the People, during the commemoration of the 151th Anniversary of the Federal War, President Chavez signed the new Federal Government Council Law, which will permit the consolidation of socialism and give true power to the people

Under the slogan, *Free Land and Free Men*, President Hugo Chavez signed the Federal Government Council Law during an event commemorating the 151th Anniversary of the Federal War, while also paying tribute to the critical role played by Ezequiel Zamora, known as the General of the Sovereign People.

"This is a historic day to sign a law that takes a big step towards building socialism and will permit us to fight against imperialism and demolish the perverse remains and threats of bureaucracy", said the Venezuelan president from El Calvario Park, which was baptized last Saturday as Ezequiel Zamora Park.



President Chavez drove a tractor to the event, joined by thousands of farmers and land rights activists

"The law is oriented towards creating a socialist nation and contemplates a new geometry of people's power and social power", indicated the head of state, while also announcing that within a few weeks, the Federal Government Council will be installed as part of the revolutionary state.

"This legal instrument is a constitutional mandate, with a new concept of decentralization. It's

not the same as the old capitalist, imperialist concept of decentralization. I saw in the early nineties with the first elections for governors and mayors there was a trap, a lie, that allowed the Empire to advance in its plans to own everything in our country. There are countries where that plan advanced far and now the gold mines and the oil fields are not owned by the national State

but rather by a regional government that can easily hand those resources over to a foreign power. It's a perfect trap", he warned.

## AWARENESS AND INTEGRITY

President Chavez alluded to the political awareness people in Venezuela now have. "I bet that no one will allow themselves to be manipulated or deceived now, as happened before", he said. He explained the new law will help to develop a spirit of integrity. Chavez defined the Federal Government Council as an entity created to plan and coordinate policies and actions for the development of a decentralization process that will permit the transfer of power from the national government to the states and municipalities.

The Federal Government Council will establish strategies and plan the processes to transfer power directly to the people. It's directives will be legally binding on the regional and municipal governments.

Executive Vice-President Elias Jaua will preside the Council, which will be composed of two cabinet ministers, three governors and three mayors. The Council's budget comes from the Fund for Inter-Territorial Financing, which will also allow it to channel in-

vestments to promote equal development in the regions.

## DISCUSSION AND GRASSROOTS DEBATE

President Chavez encouraged people's assemblies and Community Councils to engage in debate on the new law and its implications. "It gives more power to the people. We could start by developing agricultural, agroindustrial, tourist and ecological districts that help create a new and innovative way to utilize our territory", he said.

"The bourgeoisie are saying I'm trying to eliminate state governments and that this law violates the Constitution. But the people won't let themselves be deceived. On the contrary, the Federal Government Council strengthens the People's Power and the law expressly states that new districts can be created without affecting the territorial order". Chavez called on Community Councils, farmers, factory workers, women, students, fishermen and others to prepare for the transfer of economic and social power. "It's a new culture, the Revolution of the People's Power", he exclaimed.

T/ Elizabeth Perez Madriz  
P/ Yoset Montes

Caracas

## A new Cable Car will connect the Capital with the Airport

A joint venture between Venezuela and Austria will build the new system

"A Venezuelan-Austrian joint venture will be in charge of the administration, repair and construction of the cable cars in the country, including the one in Merida and a new system that will connect the Warairarepano National Park with the central coast", announced Alejandro Fleming, Minister of Tourism.

This week, one of the representatives of the Austrian company Dopelmayer visited Venezuela in order to "present the work schedules for the construction and rehabilitation of the cable cars. I have asked the company to give



The Cable Car in Merida, a major tourist attraction, will be up and running soon

us precise dates and a timeframe so we can evaluate the progress of the work", said Fleming.

The key element in the relationship with Austria, he added, "is the transfer of technology. It's not

just that the Venezuelan people will count on an infrastructure to enjoy, but we also will have the possibility to acquire the knowledge to maintain and create new transportation platforms".

The new transport system from the Warairarepano Mountain (also known as the Avila Mountain) won't just be an attractive addition for visitors to the nation's capital, but also will serve as an alternative route to La Guaira, where the international airport is located, and to get back to Caracas.

"The Bolivarian Government has reinforced the nation's tourism infrastructure", exclaimed Fleming. "The Warairarepano Cable Car System, which is currently used by residents of Caracas and visitors alike, will be fortified". Fleming recounted that last February 17,

attendance to the National Park broke records. Fleming added that no decisions will be made without consulting the workers for their input on improvements.

## SOON, MERIDA

The renovation of the Cable Car in Merida "represents a great challenge". The Minister of Tourism promised that it will be the highest and longest in the world, and the most modern, thanks to the additional work to reinforce it that is underway. It should be ready "very soon", he assured. Although he didn't give out any dates, he enumerated the difficulties involved in its reparation, which include working at an altitude of more than 4,000 meters and transporting materials.

Merida's Cable Car, which runs

up into the Andes mountains, was once revered as the highest of its kind in the world. But decades of abandonment left the system to ruin, and prior governments made corrupt deals with companies that never completed the maintenance and repair work necessary to keep the Cable Car working.

The Chavez administration created the Ministry of Tourism with the goal of building an infrastructure that would allow for foreign and national visitors alike to enjoy and treasure Venezuela's vast and diverse beauty. Previous governments never developed a tourism industry in the country, as it was not seen as profitable as oil.

T/ Vanessa Davies  
P/ CO File

Caracas

# The Caracazo

A mass popular explosion overtook Caracas twenty-one years ago and changed the country forever

February 27, 1989 is a date that marked Venezuela forever. Thousands were killed, slaughtered and arbitrarily detained and tortured by the “democratic” government of the time, led by President Carlos Andres Perez. Most of the dead and arrested were poor people, many of whom had been out protesting and rebelling against the neoliberal economic policies announced by the government just days earlier.

After the fall of Venezuela’s last dictatorship in 1958, the nation’s two main political parties, Accion Democratica (AD) and COPEI, made a pact to share power and align the country’s policies with foreign economic interests. That agreement, known as the “Punto Fijo Pact”, led to decades of “elected” governments from both parties, one after the other.

In 1976, Carlos Andres Perez, president at the time, nationalized the country’s oil industry, promising to invest the massive wealth in the nation’s infrastructure and development. Despite the oil boom of the 70s, Perez fell through on his promises. After he left the presidency, the economy began a downward spiral and by 1983, the currency was devalued several points, increasing financial despair amongst citizens. The Venezuela of the 70s and early 80s, known as the “2 for 1” time - because everything abroad was so cheap to Venezuelans that they could buy two items of each product - rapidly began to disappear.

Poverty grew at an alarming rate. Infrastructure was abandoned. The agricultural industry vanished. All focus was on oil and its immense profits. But those earnings were not going into the national purse, but rather the pockets of the political and economic elite, which grew wealthier and wealthier while the majority of Venezuelans fell to poverty. The nation’s big middle class became an even larger working class, and the rich built walls to live behind to hide their stolen wealth.

## EMPTY PROMISES

In the 1988 presidential elections, Carlos Andres Perez was the



Riots broke out in Caracas in reaction to the economic policies of the government at the time, angry demonstrators burned cars and looted stores in protest

candidate again for Accion Democratica. Having left the presidency in 1979 during a time of prosperity from the growing oil industry, Perez promised to return the impoverished nation to the “good ole days”. “Everyone will have a big television”, he promised in his campaign, assuring supporters that the middle class would rise again under his leadership. One of Perez’s major campaign promises was his staunch rejection of the wave of privatization policies sweeping the region. While other countries were implementing the “neoliberal package” imposed by the International Monetary Fund, promoted by the Washington consensus, Perez told his supporters he would not lead Venezuela on the path to privatization. He would “preserve” the nationalized oil industry that he himself had helped create more than a decade earlier.

Perez won the election and took office in early February 1989. To the terrible surprise of his supporters, his first official announcement as president was the acceptance of an International Monetary Fund (IMF) loan of \$4.5 billion USD. Venezuelans reacted with shock to Perez’s blatant betrayal, and feared for the future of the country. Perez, who had referred to the IMF and the World Bank as “genocide workers in the pay of economic totalitarianism”, was now capable of handing the country over to multinationals.

Fear of privatization grew quickly. Business owners began to hoard



consumer products, believing inflation would soon raise costs and products would be worth more in a matter of days. Why sell now when the price could triple by next week and more money could be made? Supermarket shelves went bare. People began to panic.

The reforms announced by Perez caused an immediate raise in gas prices, based on a fear of the oil industry being privatized. Consumers were instantly affected, and reacted.

## THE BIG EXPLOSION

On February 27, 1989, the people took to the streets. The protests began in Guarenas, a suburb of Caracas, as commuters boarded public transportation in the early morning hours, only to find out bus fare had gone up overnight.

The rejection of the price hikes was widespread, and protests rapidly became violent. Tensions were extremely high. Buses were over-

turned by angry riders refusing to pay the increased and unjust fare. Word spread quickly to other areas of Caracas and riots broke out everywhere. Stores that had been hoarding products for weeks were looted by hungry and angry residents, disgusted with business owners for hiding the products from consumers so they could raise costs.

Hunger was the most visible incentive of the protests. Looters weren’t stealing expensive goods, they were taking meat, cheese, milk and other food products that had disappeared from stores in the days before.

Demonstrators began to organize and fill the downtown streets, calling on the President to react to the unrest and concern of his followers. But President Perez chose to respond with force, and not with dialogue. He called out the National Guard and the police and ordered them to use lethal force to repress the protests.

## THE MASSACRE

The security forces under the command of Perez went into the poor neighborhoods of Caracas and shot on sight. In some instances, their machine gun fire entered homes and killed women cooking in the kitchen, or children taking naps or playing in the parks. It was a cruel and perverse way to eradicate poverty. Thousands were killed -massacred- on the days of February 27 and 28. Mass gravesites were dug and bodies were thrown in and covered up so that the true number of dead will never be known.

A state of emergency was imposed and constitutional rights were suspended - indefinitely. The event left the nation bitter, mourning for the loss of thousands of brothers and sisters, but also for the loss of dignity. Perez had handed the country over to multinationals and killed all those that opposed him.

## THE REVOLUTION BEGINS

Despite the immense tragedy that took place on February 27, 1989 -today remembered as the Caracazo (the big Caracas explosion)- the date is seen as the beginning of the Bolivarian Revolution. It was the first mass, spontaneous people’s uprising against neoliberalism and privatization - against imperialism and capitalism.

Three years later, a Lieutenant Colonel in the Venezuelan Army, by the name of Hugo Chavez, led a military rebellion to overthrow the murderous and corrupt government of Carlos Andres Perez. The February 4, 1992 insurrection failed, and Chavez was imprisoned, but Perez’s government began to rapidly fall apart. On November 27, 1992, another military uprising attempted to oust Perez, but also failed. Months later, Venezuela’s Congress impeached Perez for corruption and placed him on house arrest. He later fled the country as a fugitive from justice, arriving in Miami.

Carlos Andres Perez has never returned to Venezuela again, but the Bolivarian Revolution has lived on and continues to grow and prosper. Those whose lives were lost to the brutal and repressive policies of the past will always be remembered.

T/ Eva Golinger

### EDITOR'S NOTE

Some may wonder why opposite to this column, is a film recommendation that has little to do with Venezuela. Yes, this is a Venezuelan newspaper. And our first and foremost mission is to inform you about what is happening here, and to break down the myths and lies spread daily in the mainstream media about President Chavez, the Bolivarian Revolution and the Venezuelan reality. But our objective also is founded in principles of justice and truth, universal beliefs that bind us as humans.

Sometimes, it's important to look within and ask why we do what we do. The film we recommend this week is about a US lawyer, William Kunstler, who is one of the greatest revolutionary fighters that has graced humanity. He was a lawyer to the beaten, the hated, the fighters, the voices of millions, the strugglers and the survivors who tried day by day to change an unequal and unjust system.

Kunstler's political awakening came early in his career. The 1950s were times of great repression, fear and political stifling. "When I saw the brutal battering the Freedom Riders received from white southerners, I aligned with the underdogs. As I became more and more involved in the southern struggle, I found that I was no longer satisfied practicing conventional law and talking liberal politics. I felt empty inside when I saw black people beaten and bloodied. I had to do what I could to stop their pain because, seeing theirs, my own was unbearable".

How can we bear witness to the aggressive, bloodthirsty media campaign against Venezuela that seeks to justify the unjustifiable, and do nothing to stop it? To us at *Correo del Orinoco Internacional* it's unbearable to hear the war drums beat and see the distortions convince the world of something that is so wrong, so unjust and so unpermissible. We have to act. We have to inform. We have to try our best to spread the truth and to deconstruct the lies.

And so we join Kunstler and the fight for a better world.

## Revolutionary Truth

*In a time of universal deceit - telling the truth is a revolutionary act.*  
**George Orwell**

I am very excited to come back to Venezuela this week—it has been over four years since I have been there when I was one of the tens of thousands of people from all over the world that attended the World Social Forum in Caracas.

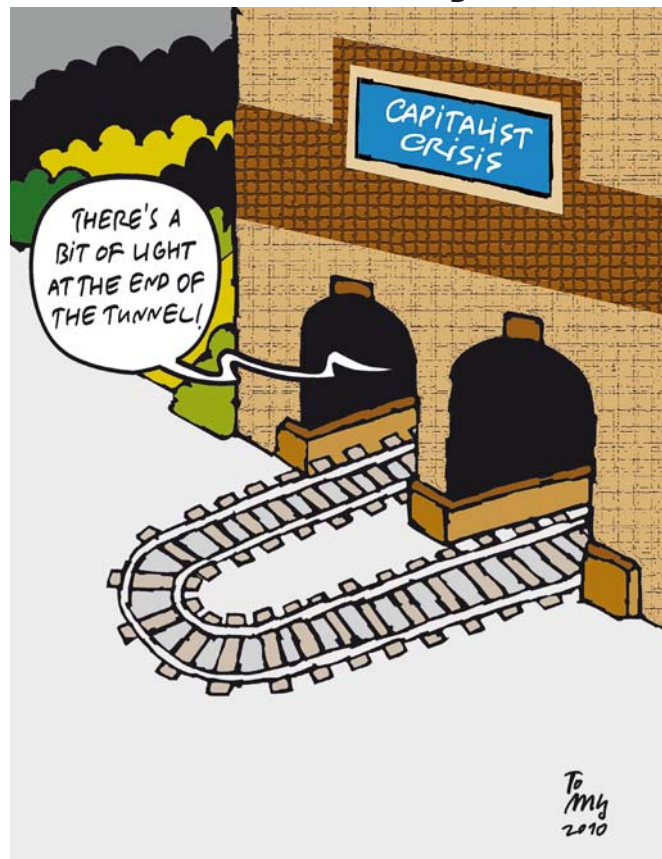
A few months after I was in Venezuela for the first time, I was on a cable news network here in the US and the commentator, Norah O'Donnell, introduced me as the woman who met with "Communist Dictator," President Hugo Chavez of Venezuela.

Right after she introduced me we went to a commercial break and I said: "Norah, you know that Chavez is neither a Communist nor a dictator." She replied: "I know, but we had a meeting and we decided to call him a 'Communist Dictator' anyway."

That's exactly the problem here in the Empire. What passes for "news" is often just intentional, slanderous propaganda. I haven't been able to trust anything the "news" says in the Empire for a long while, but since that day on MSNBC, I question if the propaganda is now always designed to put false ideas in people's heads.

I picture people at home hearing O'Donnell's intro and thinking: "hmm—Hugo Chavez is a Communist Dictator." If the TV box says so, then it must be true. I can remember all kinds of cases of people being prosecuted for "indecent" in broadcasting, but not for intentionally lying on the air.

Even though, after 10 years in office and with many challenges facing his administration, Presi-



dent Chavez still enjoys impressive positive approval ratings in Venezuela. A recent poll from Venezuela shows he enjoys a 60.3% approval rating. Sure his ratings are slipping, but in contrast, after barely a year in office, the President of the United States, Barack Obama's ratings have fallen to 46%, as shown in a recent CBS poll. I think many people here in the US have figured out very quickly that Obama does not represent the people, but represents the corporations that groomed him and put him in power.

Why am I going back to Venezuela after four years? I am going to set the record straight for people living in the Empire about President Chavez and the Bolivarian Revolution. Facts are facts—one very "inconvenient truth" about Obama is that he targets US citizens whom he classifies as "terrorists", and they can be assassinated by the CIA or by the Pentagon anywhere outside of the country. Some people here get outraged at me, and anyone else, for pointing this ugly fact out—but not at Obama for actually doing it.

I am going to Venezuela to be able to present facts and truth to the people of my country not tinted with the stain of fear and greed of the ruling class elite.

It is completely clear to me that because the ruling class elite demonizes Chavez and Venezuela, it fears true revolution and the power of the people. Chavez's leadership helped create other revolutionary governments in Latin America and has been a true inspiration to people around the planet who want the world's wealth and resources returned to the hands of the people where they belong.

Often when I go to events here in the US, many Obama supporters are in attendance, and I put all my cards on the table at once and I say: "I am not here to praise Obama, and I am not here to bury him, either—I am here to tell the truth." Unfortunately, for Obama supporters and for the people of the world, the truth I tell about Obama is often exactly like the truth that I told about Bush—and that makes so many people so very uncomfortable.

I am not going to Venezuela to "praise or bury" President Chavez - or the country either, but to be able to share positive things about the culture and process of change that people in my country rarely get to see.

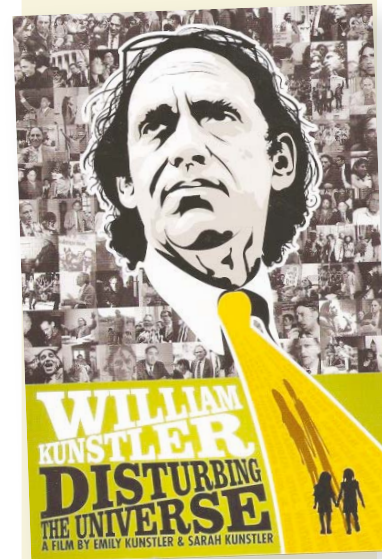
It is my honor to be the bearer of truth no matter what the cost!

Hopefully, the truth will truly set us free and allow us to learn how to live in peace with our neighbors!

### Cindy Sheehan

*Cindy Sheehan is a US peace activist and founder of Peace of the Action, an anti-war organization that promotes profound structural change in the US.*

We recommend  
**William Kunstler:  
Disturbing  
the Universe**  
A Film by Emily Kunstler  
& Sarah Kunstler



No, it's not about Venezuela. But it is about fighting for social justice and making a difference.

This extraordinary film explores the incredible, influential and controversial life of civil rights attorney William Kunstler. In the 1960s and 70s, Kunstler fought for civil rights with Martin Luther King Jr. and represented the famed "Chicago 8" activists who protested the Vietnam War.

To his daughters, Emily and Sarah, it seemed that he was at the center of everything important that had ever happened. This powerful film not only recounts the historic causes that Kunstler fought for; it also reveals a man that even his own daughters did not always understand, a man who risked public outrage and the safety of his family so that justice could serve all.

### OPINION PIECES WELCOME!

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