

Venezuela Fiasco Lays Bare Policy Chaos in Washington

by David Ramonet and Gretchen Small

Ousted from Venezuela's Presidency in the early hours of April 12 by a civic-military coup with widespread national support, Hugo Chávez was reinstalled by the morning of April 14. Those chaotic 48 hours resolved none of the issues that led to the confrontation, but wrecked the precious few possibilities for restoring national unity without civil war. The Armed Forces are deeply divided. Chávez's narco-terrorist shocktroops, the "Bolivarian Circles" built up with the help of Colombia's notorious FARC cartel, are exultant at his return, and out for revenge. Capital is fleeing the country, and some governments in the region have warned their nationals that they may wish to leave on short notice.

Worse, the slide toward civil war in Venezuela is now the order of the day across Ibero-America. With governments being shattered by their own servile adherence to globalization, the region is rapidly becoming polarized between two equally chaotic forces: the "leftist" FARC-allied forces which Chávez represents; and the "rightist" would-be imitators of Chile's Augusto Pinochet, with their pretensions of imposing by force, the Mont Pelerin Society's destruction of the nation-state.

Much energy and media space is being wasted internationally, and in Venezuela, analyzing "what really happened." As confusing as the events on the ground were, one central point emerged with total clarity: *The government of the United States is dysfunctional*, a fact with implications extending far beyond Ibero-America.

Speaking in Mexico City on April 16, *EIR* founder Lyndon LaRouche spoke on the strategic implications of what transpired in Venezuela: "I'm not going to take sides on Venezuela," LaRouche said. "But, the way the United States handled the coup and counter-coup—and every politician who knows anything, knows that—shows you that, in Washington, the Presidency of the United States *is not competently in charge of its own policy-making!* Somebody made a coup,

with U.S. blessing. After negotiations in Florida—the usual thing. And, a coup was organized in Venezuela against the Chávez government. This backfired. Somebody in Washington realized that this thing wasn't working, so they supported, and they accepted a counter-coup! What kind of government is that?"

The same policy mess is seen in Colombia, LaRouche elaborated. But, this is merely typical of the broader confusion reigning inside the U.S. government, he emphasized. The Bush Administration is not capable of carrying out an effective policy in any crucial area. "The international monetary and financial system is collapsing. The policies of the United States, at present, will ensure the acceleration of that collapse. . . . There's no sign of any rational policy from the U.S. government, from *any* leading faction, on this issue."

LaRouche's view of the strategic significance of what took place in Venezuela, is shared by others internationally. A well-connected continental European source commented to *EIR* that the past weekend's events were "absolutely a great fiasco for the Americans . . . demonstrating to people around the world, and not only in Latin America, how inept, ill-advised, and incapable this Administration is. What I can tell you, is that I am getting questions, from people around the world, asking me, 'Who's in charge over there in Washington?' There are so many centers of power." And, he asked, what are the implications of this for a future military operation against Iraq?

A Coup That Failed

As uniquely chronicled by *EIR* from the outset, London and Wall Street sponsored Chávez's rise to power in Venezuela in 1999, as a key piece in a project to unleash Jacobin narco-terrorism as their battering ram against the institutions which sustain the nation-states of the Americas. Chávez enjoyed enormous popularity then, in February



The headquarters of Venezuela's national oil company, the focus of the tumultuous events of April 10-15, surrounded by a huge rally on April 11. In the wake of coup and counter-coup, Venezuela's currency and economy are tumbling.

1999; but as he razed one institution after another in the name of a “Bolivarian Revolution” which, despite the rhetoric, adhered to International Monetary Fund austerity programs as strictly as any “neo-liberal” government, opposition began to build.

A stacked Constituent Assembly rewrote the Constitution, and replaced the Congress with an equally-stacked National Assembly, which ran roughshod over any real debate. Chávez's “legal” experts explicitly cited the theories of the “crown jurist of Nazi Germany,” Carl Schmitt, as the legal basis for Chávez's moves against all opposition. At the same time, the country became a safe haven for Colombian narco-terrorists. The “Bolivarian Circles,” the regime's shock-troops, were funded better than its soldiers.

Ordinary Venezuelans became frightened. On April 11, more than half a million, from every social strata and of every age, marched through Caracas to the Presidential palace of Miraflores, where they demanded Chávez's resignation. It was the third day of what had begun as a 24-hour general strike, called by the Venezuelan Labor Federation (CTV) and the leading business federation, Fedecámaras, and backed by more than 40 civil organizations and opposition political parties. Called to support an ongoing strike of workers and managers at the state oil company Petróleos de Venezuela, S.A. (Pdvs), the general strike demanded such elementary rights as democracy, political tolerance, and freedom of expression—all destroyed by Chávez's fascist populism.

When the demonstrators neared the Presidential palace, where thousands of Chávez followers were already congregated, they were met by snipers posted in surrounding buildings, who killed more than ten demonstrators; hundreds were wounded. Learning of these bloody events, a grouping of anti-Chávez military forces, headed by Vice Admiral Héctor Ramírez Pérez, chief of staff of the Navy, issued a message to the nation, urging Chávez's resignation. A short time later, Army commander Gen. Efraín Vásquez Velasco, with other members of the High Command, blamed Chávez for the deaths, and demanded his resignation. They invoked Articles 328 and 350 of Venezuela's 1999 Constitution, which oblige the Armed Forces to guarantee Constitutional order, and pro-

claim the right of rebellion against the government, when the latter has violated that Constitutional order. They insisted they were defending that order, and that “this is not a coup d'état.”

Hours later, it was announced that Chávez had resigned, and that the new provisional President would be Pedro Carmona Estanga, the head of Fedecámaras. In a matter of hours, the Bush government in Washington publicly supported the new Venezuelan government.

The Counter-Coup

At that point, two separate processes went into play, which would tip the balance of forces back to Chávez.

The Project Democracy machine, which for two decades has insisted that narco-terrorism must be granted “democratic” rights, began mobilizing its forces. Lazard Frères' *Washington Post* insisted in its April 13 editorial, that the U.S. government and Organization of American States (OAS) “push hard to bring back democratic rule as quickly as possible.” Michael Shifter from the Washington-based Inter-American Dialogue, the influential lobbying organization which promotes drug legalization and the dismantling of the Ibero-American Armed Forces, said that if the Venezuelan coup was not turned around, there would be “political contagion” on the continent, making other countries of the region ungovernable.

London protested, too, through Denis MacShane, head of the Latin American section of the British Foreign Office: “The United Kingdom wants to see the swift return to a legitimate, democratic government in Venezuela.” He threatened that “any delay to this process will be . . . unacceptable to the international community.”

Most governments in the region foolishly threw their support to Project Democracy's campaign to restore Chávez—not out of sympathy for him, but out of terror that the same thing could happen to them. Meeting in Costa Rica on April 11-12 for a Rio Group summit, 19 Ibero-American heads of state, or their representatives, condemned “the interruption of Constitutional order in Venezuela,” and called for an urgent meeting of the OAS, to invoke the Inter-American Democratic Charter, which mandates sanctions against “anti-democratic” countries.

Meanwhile, inside the country, a hard-core cabal—involving elements of the Opus Dei Catholic grouping, their allies in the satanic Mont Pelerin Society, and the henchmen of Venezuelan billionaire Gustavo Cisneros (the Rockefeller interests' representative in Venezuela)—moved to seize control of the Carmona government, before it had even been installed.

The concern of this group, with its own evident international support—in particular, in Washington—was to hijack the anti-Chávez coup, driving out any forces which might fight for a Venezuelan nationalist policy. For example, when the decree establishing Carmona's government was issued on April 12, ten people in addition to Carmona himself signed

the decree, representing civil society. Among the first was Luis Henrique Ball Zuloaga, a prominent activist in Mont Pelerin networks. Ball had angered many in the opposition movement when he published an article in *El Universal* on Nov. 23, 2001, arguing that Venezuela needed an Augusto Pinochet, to implement Pinochet's economic program. Three other figures, representing business and the banks, signed the decree, but labor leader Alfredo Ramos, invited to sign for the CTV, did not appear. Strikingly absent from the new transition cabinet announced immediately afterwards, was any representation of the CTV. Carmona's Foreign Minister was José Rodríguez Iturbe, a top Opus Dei figure in Venezuela and well-known as a nasty "right-winger."

What had surfaced as a coup within a coup, quickly turned into a coup against itself. Carmona's moves split the opposition and the military forces which had put him into office. That split provided the opening through which the Chavista forces, emboldened by the international support coming from Project Democracy and Wall Street's press, moved. They deployed mobs against key points in Caracas in quasi-military fashion. Looting as they went, they surrounded the television stations, newspapers, and the Presidential Palace itself. All were left unprotected because no part of the military was able or willing to fight to defend what the Carmona government had become.

Irreconcilable Interests

Chatter about democracy restored in Venezuela, and reconciliation around the bend, is foolish. The hard-core Chavista terrorists, typified by the Mayor of the Libertador district of Caracas, Freddy Bernal (some of whose henchmen were videotaped firing into the crowd of demonstrators on April 11), are brazenly demanding that those who dared stand up to their regime, face "revolutionary justice." So confident are they of their control of Venezuela as a regional narco-terrorist safe haven, that top FARC representatives who were booted out of Mexico in mid-April, flew on April 13, not to Cuba, as had been expected, but to Venezuela.

The opposition has not given up. The CTV is organizing for a May 1 demonstration, and is calling for a referendum on whether Chávez should stay in office. Both the Social Christian (Copei) party and the Democratic Action (AD) party refuse to recognize him as Head of State. Others are calling for new elections.

But the collapse of the economy may shatter all plans. Capital flight drove down the value of the bolivar by 10% during April 12-16. An estimated \$600 million in economic damage was wrought by the Chávez mobs looting their way back to the Presidential Palace on April 13-14. Businesses have announced they will close permanently. Over the next two months, the government has \$700 million in foreign debt payments coming due. Should capital flight and devaluation continue as expected, that debt burden will quickly become unmanageable.