

Venezuelans Mobilize Against Obama's Sanctions

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CARACAS, May 30, 2011. Seeing is believing. Any hope that Venezuelans had in the Obama administration has been shattered against the recent U.S.-imposed sanctions on Venezuela's state-owned oil company, PDVSA. Two massive rallies were held in one week in Caracas against this U.S. foreign intervention. Many of the speakers and many in the audience with their homemade signs expressed the motive behind the sanctions: they are nothing less than an attack on the Venezuela revolution itself and the inherent potential the revolution has to not only push away U.S. power in South America, but transform the economic system on which this power is based.

Sunday's (May 29, 2011) rally was enormous. People represented their role in the revolution by their clothes or signs: there were countless PDVSA oil workers with hardhats and overalls; middle-aged women wearing t-shirts of their neighborhood-run, state-funded food cooperatives; students proudly waving signs about their state-funded school; mothers with children carried signs about their local health-care clinic — all born from the revolution.

All of these groups understand clearly the connection between PDVSA and their social programs: the oil money generated by PDVSA funds nearly all of these social programs; it is literally the life-blood of the revolution. Venezuela's oil minister, Rafael Ramirez, gave a thundering speech against the sanctions, at one point saying, "PDVSA is universal health care, PDVSA is free education, PDVSA is food cooperatives."

Ramirez also pointed out one of the motives against U.S. aggression against Venezuela: "The United States government will not stop until it has all the oil in the world." There is a lot of truth in this statement. As Ramirez also noted, it is not by accident that Libya is the only Arab country in Africa the U.S. has sent troops into — it is the biggest oil producer in Africa. This same motive can be equally applied to Iran: oil plays a much larger role in the U.S.-Iran dispute than any Iranian nuclear energy program. And no one doubts that the motive behind the invasion of Iraq was oil.

Aside from oil, Obama's economic policy is another reason why Venezuela is being targeted. Obama has talked relentlessly about increasing U.S. exports as a route to overcome economic difficulties. But as Cindy Sheehan recently pointed out, U.S. exports to Latin America have precipitously dropped in recent years, since Latin American countries have relied more on each other for economic development, as well as on Russia, Iran, and China — an intolerable situation for U.S. corporate interests.

Yet another motive behind the sanctions is the 2012 elections in Venezuela, the campaigning for which has already begun. Obama likely believed that the U.S. sanctions would discredit Chavez, yet Obama is the one who — like Bush before him — has been

discredited. In 2004 Bush Jr. also tried sanctions against Venezuela that blew up in his face. The average Venezuelan is extremely knowledgeable about the purpose and methods of U.S. foreign policy in Latin America, which transcends the skin color of U.S. Presidents.

Bush Jr. attempted a military coup in Venezuela in 2002. When brute force failed, Bush conspired with local upper-class Venezuelans to sabotage the economy by shutting down businesses and shutting off Venezuela's oil. When this failed Bush tried his sanctions in 2004 combined with a longer term approach: sending tens of millions of dollars to fund anti-Chavez groups in Venezuela, who were able to flood the media and election campaigns about Chavez demonized as a "dictator."

Venezuelan journalist Eva Golinger writes: "According to public documents, just between the years 2008 to 2011, the U.S. State Department channeled more than \$40 million to the Venezuelan opposition, primarily directing those funds to electoral campaigns against President Chavez and propaganda slated to influence Venezuelan public opinion." (February 17, 2011). Golinger also emphasizes Obama's 2012 budget, which specifically allocates an additional \$5 million in "aid" to Venezuelan "civil society," although all funds from the U.S. government go to right-wing, anti-Chavez groups in Venezuela.

U.S. intervention in Venezuela takes several forms, from campaign funding, to sanctions, to military coups. The threat of military invasion looms in the background too, since in 2008 the U.S. military began using several Colombian military bases on the Venezuela-Colombia border. Ultimately, the corporations that dominate the U.S. government will never accept a Latin America independent of U.S. corporate interests. Many of the economic and social programs begun in Venezuela directly contradict U.S. corporate ideology, since they focus on empowering working people to take economic and political control over their communities, cooperating with other communities across the country for the betterment of all working people.

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