

# An introduction to the Victoria University Cuba-Venezuela Solidarity Club



Produced by the  
**Victoria University Cuba-Venezuela Solidarity Club**  
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# FACTSHEET

## Venezuelan revolution – a brief history

**In less than ten years, Venezuela's Bolivarian revolution has delivered massive improvements to the lives of ordinary Venezuelans, including a 31% reduction in poverty.**

**Such vast achievements in so short a time have been made possible by the peoples' power revolution that has been unleashed in Venezuela's streets, schools and workplaces, being led by the pro-socialist government of Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez.**

The source of the Venezuelan revolution was the deep sense of frustration and anger that the majority of Venezuelans felt about their daily existence. They were poor people living in a rich land. In the early 20th century, the discovery of massive oil reserves put Venezuela on the map as one of the biggest exporters of oil. A small minority became super rich via this oil wealth. The rest of the country however was left behind. A vast layer of working poor eked out a living selling odd bits and pieces on the streets. They lived in dilapidated barrios (shanty towns) that weren't even recognised on Venezuelan maps.

In the second half of the 20th century a Western-style parliamentary democracy was established but as in many "democratic" countries today, no party represented the majority of poor Venezuela. Instead power simply passed back and forth between the two establishment parties who based themselves on the wealthy oil elite.

### THE CARACAZO

Things began to change on February 27, 1989. In a clumsy attempt to make the poor pay for an economic slump, president Carlos Andres Perez, acting on the advice of the International Monetary Fund to implement a neo-liberal free market solution, implemented overnight the "shock treatment" of massive price hikes on fuel and transport costs. This was more than the already-impooverished masses of Venezuela could take.

Spontaneous protests, rioting and looting spread across the country, continuing for several days. The government decided to use military force in the poor neighbourhoods to repress the "disturbances". Up to 3000 were killed in the brutal crackdown. But the military could not put a lid on the rebellion; less than 15 years later the insurgent people of Venezuela would take state power.

But the people were not yet united and they lacked political leadership.

## **The once-excluded Venezuelan poor had moved to political centre stage and the two-party democracy had lost all legitimacy**

### HUGO CHAVEZ

The mass rebellion of the Caracazo inspired Hugo Chavez and his supporters in the army to seek to provide that missing leadership. In fact, Chavez had already started organising rebellious soldiers into a clandestine organisation with the aim of toppling the government and handing power over to a civilian revolutionary government.

Having the support of about 10% of the military, Chavez set out on February 4 1992 to do just that. The attempt failed and Chavez and his supporters spent the next two years in prison. But the attempt itself, and Chavez's promise to try again, electrified the Venezuelan people with anticipation.

After his early release from prison in 1994 due to popular demand, Chavez toured the country promoting his party, the MVR (Movement for a Fifth Republic), for the December 1998 presidential elections. The mass support he had earned for his military rebellion showed itself in the polls. On December 6, 1998, Hugo Chavez was elected president of Venezuela with 56% of the vote, the highest for a president in over 40 years.

## **FIRST STEPS OF THE BOLIVARIAN REVOLUTION**

The first years of the Chavez presidency introduced huge political changes. A mass process of popular consultation drafted a new constitution that was overwhelmingly adopted by a 71% of voters in a referendum on December 15, 1999.

The new constitution, establishing the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela (the 'Fifth Republic') largely set the constitutional framework for the development of popular power. Amongst its 396 articles it created a unicameral assembly and demanded the necessity of the, "participation of the people in the development, execution and control of the public power ...".

## **The biggest challenge to the capitalist system was still to come – a struggle for control of the single biggest section of the national economy, the state oil company PDVSA (Latin Americas largest company)**

The Hydrocarbons law introduced in November 2001 reversed the plan to privatise PDVSA and give PDVSA a majority (51%) controlling stake in all joint ventures with foreign capital and for the government to receive a 30% share of royalties from private oil companies operating in Venezuela.

## **DEFEATING THE COUNTER-REVOLUTION**

For the oil-based elite, this was going too far. They started organising to overthrow Chavez. Their first big counter-strike was the April 11, 2002 coup.

A minority of generals and officers in the military backed by the US, kidnapped president Chavez and nullified the constitution. They imposed Pedro Carmona, the head of the Venezuelan business association, as the new president.

Furious at this turn of events, the poor descended from their mountainside barrios onto the streets of Caracas demanding the return of Chavez to the presidency in a civilian-military revolution with the pro-Chavez majority in the military, who broke from the high command, defied orders and took the palace, arresting the coup plotters. Chavez was rescued and returned to the presidency.

The ruling elite tried again in December 2002 with a lockout of PDVSA, in an attempt to destabilise the Chavez government. Again, the alliance of revolutionary civilians and soldiers mobilised, defeating the lockout.

Each of these defeats of the counter-revolution has enabled the revolution to advance further. The disloyal officers of the army have been sacked, and PDVSA has been taken over by the government. Its revenues have been turned to funding the many new social programs – the missions – organised increasingly through the new forms of grassroots democracy in Venezuela that is giving a new dignity to the lives of working and poor Venezuelans.

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## US aggression against Venezuela's revolution

**The US government is hell-bent on overthrowing Venezuela's socialist government. The US corporate elite's efforts to retain regimes subservient to the US in power across Latin America have been thwarted since the 1998 election of Venezuela's pro-socialist government, headed by socialist President Hugo Chavez.**

By gaining control of Venezuela's vast oil wealth in 2003 the Chavez government resourced social missions that tackle immediate poverty, the housing crisis, environmental sustainability, women's economic development, indigenous development, building a free health care system, free education, dramatically extending public transport, restoring the eyesight of ten's of thousands of people across Latin America, and many more needs of working and poor people. By setting such a good example of an alternative to US corporate domination to millions of impoverished people, Venezuela has become a threat to the US corporate elite.

This became clear on February 5 this year when, three weeks after US Navy Admiral Mike Mullen, head of the US Joint Chiefs of Staff, declared the reactivation of the Fourth Fleet "a great idea", General Mike McConnell, the US Director of National Intelligence, issued his "annual threat assessment". He classified Venezuela as the "principal threat against the US in the [western] hemisphere".

Even Barack Obama, US presidential hopeful for the Democratic Party, takes the same aggressive stance toward Venezuela. In an article in the June 16 Philadelphia Inquirer, Jorge Ramos, the senior news anchor for the US Spanish-language Univision Network, the fifth most watched US TV network, reported that in a recent interview, Obama had told him: "When we start ending the war in Iraq, we can refocus our attention ... in

Latin America." When Ramos asked Obama, "And what about Venezuela's President Hugo Chavez? Is he a threat to US national security and to the rest of the continent?", Obama replied: "I do think that he is a threat, but I think he is a manageable threat." The US war machine accounts for 45% of total military spending across the world.

Already the US government has tried every dirty trick in the book short of invasion to overthrow the elected Chavez government.

### **The US government:**

- in May 2001 organised a threatening war-game exercise off the coast of Venezuela that simulated a naval and ground-force invasion of western Venezuela via Columbia and Panama alongside the Spanish army,
- in April 2002 orchestrated a failed military coup in which pro-US generals kidnapped Chavez and replaced him with Pedro Carmona, the head of the Venezuelan business chamber (Fedecameras), who, with White House support, dissolved the Supreme Court and National Assembly and declared the country's thoroughly democratic constitution null and void,
- between December 2002 to January 2003, helped to coordinate a bosses strike, sabotage and managerial shutdown of the oil industry that crippled the Venezuelan economy,
- since at least 2001 channelled millions of dollars to the anti-Chavez opposition within Venezuela, that was involved in the military coup, an investigation by the US State Department's inspector general two years ago called "A Review of U.S. Policy Toward Venezuela -- November 2001-April 2002," admitted that the Pentagon and other U.S. assistance programs "provided

training, institution-building and support to individuals and organizations understood to be actively involved in the brief ouster of the Chávez government”,

- in February this year supported oil giant Exxon Mobil’s attempt to freeze US\$12 billion worth of Venezuelan assets owned by the Venezuelan state oil PDVSA company, in Britain, the Netherlands, and the US
- in July this year it re-activated the US Fourth Fleet to police Latin America and the Caribbean, for the first time since 1950. This armada will include warships, submarines, stealth bombers, helicopters, and the USS George Washington aircraft carrier, a 333-metre long, \$6 billion war machine, powered by nuclear reactors and typically equipped with 90 warplanes.

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## Indigenous people and the Venezuelan revolution

**As part of its program of 21st Century socialism the Venezuelan Government, under President Hugo Chavez, is recognising the enormous cultural contribution of Indigenous peoples and is working to assure their place in the future of national social, political, and economic life. The Venezuelan Government acknowledges the injustices faced by Indigenous communities and an effort is now being made to repay the historical debt owed to them.**

**26 different Indigenous groups exist in Venezuela today, around 535,000 people, or about 2.1% of the national population and are known in their own languages as the Wayúu, Warao, Pemón, Añú, Yanomami, Jivi, Piaroa, Kariña, Pumé, Yecuana, Yukpa, Eñepá, Kurripakao, Barí, Piapoko, Baré, Baniva, Puinave, Yeral, Jodi, Kariná, Warekena, Yarabana, Sapé, Wanai, and Uruak.**

### LEGAL GUARANTEES FOR INDIGENOUS RIGHTS

Chapter 8 of the 1999 Venezuelan Constitution establishes a framework for Indigenous rights. It begins with Article 119, which reads:

The State recognizes the existence of native peoples and communities, their social, political and economic organization, their cultures, practices and customs, languages and religions, as well as their habitat and original rights to the lands they ancestrally and traditionally occupy, and which are necessary to develop and guarantee their way of life.

Constitutional guarantees regarding Indigenous rights also include:

- the use of natural resources
- respect for ethnic and cultural identity
- the exercise of traditional economic practices
- protection of intellectual property
- the right to political participation.

One element of the constitution guarantees Indigenous peoples "the right to their own education, and an education system of an intercultural and bilingual nature, taking into account their special social and cultural characteristics, values and traditions."

### POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

Creating opportunities for Indigenous participation in democracy in Venezuela has been a priority of the current government. The 1999 Constitution requires that the National Assembly, Venezuela's lawmaking body, must include Indigenous representatives. Like the other 164 members of the National Assembly, three Indigenous representatives are elected through a popular vote among their constituencies. Indigenous community leaders helped draft the section of the constitution on indigenous rights.

Communal councils provide a model for local government that is energising citizen participation in Venezuela. These organizations allow community members to identify and solve problems in their own communities, and get financial support from the government to do so. In indigenous areas, the communal councils provide a new format for organization around the principles of democratic citizenship.

# **In 2002 the Venezuelan Government changed the name of Columbus Day to DAY OF INDIGENOUS RESISTANCE**

## **GOVERNMENT-FUNDED SOCIAL PROGRAMS**

Mission Guaicaipuro, named for an Indigenous leader who resisted Spanish Colonial rule, was launched on October 12, 2003.

The mission is a government-funded program that seeks to restore communal land titles and human rights to Venezuela's numerous indigenous communities, in addition to defending those rights against resource and financial speculation by the dominant culture.

Mission Identity is a massive citizenship and voter registration campaign which has given millions of Venezuelans national ID cards, including almost 274,000 Indigenous persons. With the granting of ID cards, they were able to exercise full citizenship rights – state benefits, constitutional protections – for the first time. This is just one way in which the state is attempting to undo past injustices that have kept Indigenous populations outside of democratic structures.

## **SOCIAL MOVEMENTS AND GLOBALISATION**

As globalisation has come to affect all cultures throughout the world, Venezuela has emerged as a leader in the effort to make Indigenous rights a truly international cause.

Indigenous organising at the national level in Venezuela began in 1989, when the National Indigenous Council (CONIVE) was founded to protect traditional lands and defend Indigenous sovereignty against unbridled industrial and commercial development. CONIVE now incorporates 60 organizations and representatives from 32 Indigenous groups in Venezuela. It has begun to work with other native groups in South America to discuss advocacy strategies and create international pressure to preserve indigenous lands and rights.

Since 2003, Venezuela has hosted an annual International Encounter of Resistance and Solidarity of Indigenous and Peasant Peoples. Moreover, in August of 2007, Venezuela hosted the First International Meeting of Anti-Imperialist Indigenous Peoples of the Americas, in which delegates from 45 different countries participated.

## **"THE FIRST PRESIDENT EVER TO DO THIS"**

Under President Chavez, Venezuela has seen unprecedented collaboration between the state and Indigenous communities. For example, the National Telecommunications Commission is training young people from 10 different ethnic groups in the Amazon region and other rural areas to produce community media. Infrastructure was provided in October of 2007 to enable radio broadcasts in native languages on 8 new radio stations that will be networked with the public Venezuelan National Radio. This and other initiatives are helping to promote indigenous culture.

In June 2006, CONIVE's "First National March of the Indigenous People" expressed solidarity with the policies of President Chavez. The orientation of the Chavez government, which is focused around giving value to history and the principles of equality, justice, and solidarity with all peoples, is a boast to the struggle for Indigenous rights in Venezuela and around the world. Noeli Pocaterra, an indigenous rights activist from the Wayúu community and a member of the Venezuelan National Assembly has said, "Simon Bolivar, the first liberator, gave back the lands, the best lands, to the original inhabitants. But President Chavez is the first president to ever do this to dispossessed Indigenous."

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# Cuba and Venezuela: one revolution

By Marcus Pabian

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Arriving in Havana on June 16 for a meeting with Cuban President Raul Castro and his brother, retired Cuban president Fidel Castro, Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez said that Cuba and Venezuela were undergoing “one and the same revolution”. The revolutionary socialist governments of Venezuela and Cuba are organising the working people of their two countries to reduce material and cultural poverty and increase genuine democracy. They are showing poor people across the world an inspiring alternative to capitalism.

Chavez was in Havana to discuss with the Cuban leaders how the two governments can respond to the skyrocketing international prices for food and fuel, as well as the increases in global poverty these price rises, and the growing problem of climate change, are causing. According to Cuba’s ACN news agency, Chavez said these problems represented “a crisis of ideas, of governments, of the model, of capitalism in general”.

At a two-hour meeting on June 17 between Chavez and the Castro brothers, they decided to further integrate their two countries to confront these crises. According to a June 17 Associated Press dispatch from Havana and a June 18 article in *Granma*, the daily paper of Communist Party of Cuba, the three leaders agreed to strengthen the social missions their governments are collaborating on, and to increase joint economic ventures between their countries.

Integration between the two revolutions took off following the successful struggle by Venezuela’s working people’s government, born out of the April 2002 popular uprising against a CIA-backed military coup, to take control of Venezuela’s state oil company PDVSA — the largest company in Latin America — from the country’s capitalist oligarchy. Expropriation of PDVSA by the Chavez government opened the socialist stage of Venezuela’s Bolivarian national-democratic revolution. It has enabled the government to secure the funding and administrative resources to massively expand the government’s social missions, aimed at providing Venezuela’s poor majority with vitally needed social services.

The social missions have attracted the attention of people across the world and have dramatically and immediately improved the lives of the majority of Venezuelans and in particular the poorest. One of the first and still most far-reaching missions was to create an effective, free and complete national healthcare system. It was named mission Barrio Adentro — “Inside the Neighbourhood” — to signify its attention to poor people living in the slums of Caracas and other Venezuelan cities. Socialist Cuba played the major role in turning this goal into a reality by sending 20,000 health professionals to participate in Barrio Adentro. With tens of thousands of Cubans on the ground in Venezuela through the social missions, solidarity has grown among ordinary Venezuelans with the Cuban people and their revolution.

On July 16, Cuban Vice-President Carlos Lage inaugurated one of the latest developments in the healthcare system being constructed in Venezuela with Cuba’s help — a high technology diagnosis medical centre in the Venezuelan city of Maracaibo staffed by Cuban health professionals. The centre will provide X-ray scans, magnetic resonance imaging, diagnostic ultrasound and other specialised services free of charge. Lage said the work of Cuban health professionals in Venezuela “is one of the priorities of the Cuban revolution”.

In return for such assistance from Cuba, Venezuela has taken a sledge hammer to the US economic blockade of Cuba, begun in 1962. This blockade has been aimed at imposing punishing costs on what

revolutionary Cuba spends on vitally needed imports and at restricting its export earnings. Reuters reported on July 21 that Venezuela and Cuba organised 300 cooperation economic projects in 2007, with 58 manufacturing and 12 agricultural joint ventures being funded by Venezuela across Cuba. As a result, health clinics, schools, roads, water systems, and housing are being upgraded right across the island.

A major project is the restoration of the Soviet-era Cienfuegos oil refinery which had been moth-balled during the 1990s, following the collapse of the Soviet Union and its provision of crude oil to Cuba. The US\$5 billion project will be an enormous development for the Cuban economy and is larger than of all Western capitalist investment in Cuba between 1995 and 2000.

## **Achievements of the Venezuelan revolution**

### **Free health care**

When Hugo Chavez won the presidential election in 1998 there were 1628 primary health care centres in Venezuela. Mision Barrio Adentro (“Inside the Neighbourhood”) was one of the first major social programs launched by the Chavez government (on April 16, 2003) after gaining control of the PDVSA oil company. With the help of 20,000 Cuban health professionals, staffing many newly built clinics reaching 70% of the population, this new mission has continually expanded a new free healthcare system.

Through Mision Barrio Adentro, free health care has been brought in with 8621 primary health care centres and 922 integral diagnostic centres and high technology centres equipped with advanced medical technology. While only 1628 primary physicians cared for a population of 23.4 million in 1998, today 19,571 attend to a population of 27 million — a 1200% increase. In its first year more than 18 million people were treated and more than 50,000 lives saved. Infant mortality, a universal indicator of health, has dropped from 25 per 1000 live births in 2002 to 18 per 1000 in 2006.

Mision Miracle, launched in 2005 with Cub’a help, has restored the eyesight of 86,231 people not only in Venezuela but in other Latin American countries.

### **Environmental sustainability**

Despite having an economy built around oil production, Venezuela is breaking new ground toward environmental sustainability. Mision Arbol, established in early 2006, has reforested 38,200 hectares of land with 33.6 million trees. Conservation minister Miguel Rodriguez has explained that this was only possible due to the organisation of 2418 conservationist committees, composed of 54,495 members, taking responsibility for the collection of 106 tonnes of seeds.

Mision Revolucion Energetica was launched on November 17, 2006, with the aim of reducing energy usage and switching to sustainable energy sources. The mission seeks to create a solar panel manufacturing plant with the help of Vietnam that will produce more solar street lights, some of which are already being installed in various pilot projects. The mission has replaced 79 million incandescent light globes across the country. The mission aims by 2012 to reduce the use of oil in electricity production by 25 million barrels a year.

### **Free education**

Chavez’s government has made education one of the key pillars of the revolution. The national literacy program Mision Robinson, taught more than 1 million Venezuelans to read and write between July 2003 and December 2005, eliminating illiteracy according to UNESCO. Mision Sucre has also dramatically increased the numbers of Venezuelans enrolling in higher education with 350,000 students in university-

level education programs as of 2006. Today, 10 universities are being constructed with plans for another 28 completely new universities as well as a program for upgrading an additional 29 universities. Overall the numbers of students in the country has increased massively. In 1996-97 there were around 5.8 million students while 10 years later that number was 11.8 million.

# Venezuela & Chile: a contrast in strategy

By Jorge Jorquera  
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There is one song in my life that invariably draws tears, Inti Illimani's Cancion del Poder Popular. Along with El Pueblo Unido and Venceremos, this song was one of the hymns of the Popular Unity government of Salvador Allende. But more than any other song, it symbolised the hopes of the Chilean workers and the political illusions their leadership had sown. The tragedy these illusions led to brings back much anger and the desperate hope that such a path will not be walked again.

"We will take the reins  
of all our business  
and that once and for all they understand  
man and women all together

Because this time it's not just  
a change of president  
it will be the people who build  
a very different Chile"

A few years ago some friends changed the song, only one word actually. They replaced Venezuela for Chile. Again the song brought tears but this time accompanied by hope rather than anger.

Like thousands of Chilean workers, my father did not return home from work on the afternoon of September 11, 1973. In his factory, like in hundreds of workplaces, the workers debated what to do. His factory had ample supplies of petrol and some workers argued to use this in an attempt to engage in armed battle with the tanks and soldiers invading the streets of Santiago.

Hundreds of thousands of class-conscious workers heeded President Salvador Allende's call that morning: "I call on all workers to occupy their workplaces... the people must be alert and vigilant. You should not allow yourselves to be provoked nor to be massacred but you must also defend your gains."

Allende's words encapsulated the impotence of the Popular Unity (UP) leadership in the face of the generals' coup. In his first announcement at 7.55 am, Allende still assured the workers that "loyal [armed] forces respecting their pledges to the [government] authority, together with the organised workers, will squash this fascist coup that threatens the nation". By the time of his final radio announcement at 9.10 am, Allende had resigned himself to the tragedy now awaiting the Chilean workers.

In their factories the workers hung on every word from Allende. He told them he would not resign and would pay with his life defending the "Chilean revolution". The workers waited for direction - how were they to resist? Allende sent a message through his daughter, Tati, to Miguel Enriquez, general secretary of the Chilean Movement of the Revolutionary Left (MIR). "It's the hour of Miguel", Allende said.

It was far too late. The MIR, the only consistently revolutionary party-organisation of the Chilean

working class, was not strong enough on its own. Its members tried desperately to activate their networks to provide the leadership the Chilean workers so desperately required.

Enriquez had met early that morning with leaders of the Chilean Socialist Party (PS) and Communist Party (PC), the two largest organisations in the UP. The PS leadership and its ranks had increasingly radicalised throughout the period of the UP government. They were disposed to struggle but they lacked the cadre organisation to effect this in such a crisis.

The far better organised PC told the MIR that it would wait to see if the leaders of the military coup would close parliament before deciding on a course of action.

Workers were left without recourse - many fought valiantly for the socialism they believed they had begun to construct with the UP government. Thousands died in hand-to-hand combat defending their factories. Most went into hiding to fight another day, only to be arrested, tortured and jailed.

On September 17, General Augusto Pinochet's military dictatorship criminalised the national trade union federation (CUT). On September 24, it dissolved parliament. On October 1, it replaced all university rectors with military personnel and on October 8 it criminalised all left parties.

The PC and sectors of the PS and of other components of the UP, such as the Radical party and parts of the Movement of Popular Unitary Action, maintained the view that the left's strategy should centre on winning the "democratic bourgeois" away from supporting Pinochet and that any form of armed resistance should be avoided so as not to scare off such support. The reformist leaders who had dominated the UP government continued with the same strategic perspective that had led to this historic defeat.

### **A mistaken strategy**

The Unidad Popular in Chile represented (in part) a movement, much like the Bolivarian movement, whose trajectory was anti-capitalist. However, unlike the Bolivarian movement, the leadership of the UP had a reformist view of socialist strategy.

Dominated by Eurocommunism and the Popular Front traditions and perspectives of the Chilean Communist Party, the Allende government of the UP had a *gradualist* - classically social democratic - perspective of how socialism might develop in Chile.

The Popular Unity's election program of 1969-70 proposed "gradual transfer of power from the ruling groups to the workers, peasants and progressive middle sectors through the creation of a people's assembly, and a greater participation of workers and peasants, through unions and community organisations, in national and local policy decisions, as well as direct representation of workers and white-collar employees on the board of directors of public enterprises".

Allende, who himself symbolised the tragedy of socialist aspirations wedded to reformist perspectives, never tired of arguing for this gradualist strategy, regardless of the forum. While his speeches turned to the left and more radical phrases at mass events, even in bourgeois forums he argued for the reformist project of the UP. His 1972 speech to the United Nations is a great example of this:

"In a programmed and coherent manner, the old structure, based on the exploitation of the workers and the domination of the main means of production by a minority, is being overcome. It is being replaced by

a new structure -led by the workers and placed at the service of the interests of the majority- which is laying the foundations for a growth that will represent real development, that will include all the population and not cast aside vast sectors of the people and doom them to poverty and to being social outcasts. The workers are driving the privileged sectors from political and economic power, both in the centres of labour as well as in the communes and in the state. This is the revolutionary content of the process my country is going through for overcoming the capitalist system and opening the way for a socialist one."

The gradualist social democratic view of socialism, as developed in the classical work of Bernstein of the German Social Democratic Party, is prefaced on the impact of economic measures that aim to socialise the economy and and supposedly erode the power of the capitalist class over time.

Significant economic reforms were at the heart of the UP's program. The UP government, though hampered by its parliamentary weakness, moved to expropriate all agricultural estates which were more than eighty hectares of irrigated land, nationalise the basic resource industries that were in the hands of foreign and domestic monopolies, including large mining industries, the financial system (banks and insurance companies), foreign commerce and the big distributional firms, as well as carrying out a number of other significant economic measures aimed at improving living standards for workers. Such measures included increasing the wages of lower-paid workers by 66%, providing a litre of free milk a day each for 4 million children, and financial measures that halved unemployment and increased consumer purchasing power.

This reformist perspective rejects the Marxist-Leninist view of revolution as a fundamentally political drama. The power of the capitalist class, while historically determined by economics, is manifest in politics and must be confronted by the working class on this basis - in a struggle for state power.

The UP's program recognised the general importance of achieving a new "popular state" state, "the revolutionary changes required by Chile can only be carried out if the people of Chile take power into their own hands and exercise it in a true and effective manner". However, the UP program reflected the increasingly sharp struggle between the reformism and Eurocommunism of the CP and sections of the Socialist Party, MAPU and the Radical Party, and the revolutionary outlook beginning to develop among the vanguard workers, inside and outside the UP.

"The new power structure will be built up from grass roots by extending democracy at all levels and by organizing the mobilization of the masses."

In effect the UP government pursued a policy of "extending democracy" but only where and when it could placate the capitalist class and its political representatives.

In almost every inevitable confrontation, the Allende government preferred to make political concessions to Christian Democracy and the capitalist powers.

### **Chavez takes another road**

In April 2002, the government of left-wing Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez also faced a right-wing military which, like that launched against Allende 30 years ago, was strongly supported by the country's capitalist business elite. However, thanks to the radically different strategy pursued by Chavez and his close associates, the Venezuelan Pinochets and their backers in Washington were dealt a stunning

counterblow.

In the April 1971 municipal elections the UP obtained 50.86% of the vote, an increase of 13%, thus strengthening its ability to counter right-wing opposition to its reform agenda. However, it failed to do so. Instead, the Chilean capitalist class grasped the initiative and in March 1972 the leaders of the opposition parties and the employers' associations met to plot a vast plan of civil disturbance and economic sabotage.

In April 1972, a small section of the UP, previously part of the Radical party, broke with the government, and the opposition organised its first "march of democracy".

In contrast, after winning his first election in December 1998 with 56% of the vote, Chavez moved immediately to the election of a "constituent assembly" to draft a new constitution. The new constitution was approved in a referendum by 70% of the voters.

After the new constitution was adopted, the old congress was disbanded and new elections held. In July 2000, the Chavez forces won a majority in congress and Chavez was re-elected president. In November 2000, the government enacted 49 new laws, including a land reform law and a law aimed at re-organising the national oil company Petroleos de Venezuela (PDSVA).

Unlike the UP in Chile, the Chavez government deliberately set out to strengthen the independent organisation and mobilising power of the working classes, regardless of "provoking" the Venezuelan capitalist class and US imperialism.

In early 2001, the government began to organise working people into the Bolivarian Circles, neighbourhood-based action committees which provide the embryonic structures of organs of working people's power.

In October 1972 the Chilean National Confederation of Road Haulers declared an indefinite national strike. On October 13, shopkeepers also declared a national strike.

In the face of the "bourgeois strike", supported by all the right-wing parties, the Chilean working class mobilised and began to takeover over production in the factories and distribution of consumer goods in their neighbourhoods.

Faced with this working-class offensive, the Christian Democrats - the main right-wing party, withdrew its support for the bosses' strike. The UP leaders interpreted this as a new opportunity to win the Christian Democrats' support. On November 2, 1972, the UP announced the entry into the cabinet of three generals. According to the PC this was going to be a "cabinet against subversion". Rather than strengthen workers organisations and move to the much promised plebiscite and dismantling of the old parliament, the Allende government retreated and sought to avoid the inescapable political confrontations with the Chilean capitalist class.

The UP leaders' orientation toward the army were symptomatic of their reformist strategy. Instead of strengthening the hand of the constitutionalist generals and officers in the armed forces (of which there were significant numbers), by encouraging the united action by the rank-and-file soldiers and junior officers with the workers' movement, the UP government refused to go "behind the backs" of the armed forces' high command.

In a meeting with UP MP Laura Allende, also attended by MIR leader Andres Pascal Allende, Colonel Ominami, who was in charge of the El Bosque air force base, pleaded that President Allende should meet with pro-democracy officers. Allende never did.

By contrast, Chavez has consistently organised the democratic forces within the armed forces. In 1982, he was one of the four founders of the clandestine Revolutionary Bolivarian Movement (MBR-200), which in 1992 organised some 2000 officers and soldiers in a revolt against the right-wing government of President Carlos Perez.

In 1999, the Chavez government launched Plan Bolivar 2000, drawing the soldiers and junior officers into public works and encouraging direct contact with the working classes.

By the end of 1972, Washington and the Chilean capitalist class had already begun making serious coup plans. By May 1973, they had decided on a June coup date. Still the army's III Division, responsible for Santiago, was unreliable, with too many democratic officers and soldiers and the coup plan was uncovered.

Allende called on workers to mobilise and threatened to arm the people if necessary. Hundreds of factories, offices, schools and population centres were occupied. Democratic officers in the armed forces demanded the UP government pass over to an offensive against the coup plotters. However, the UP government, imprisoned by the reformist strategy of building an alliance with the so-called "democratic sectors" of the bourgeoisie, decided against any offensive.

Demoralised, the constitutionalist head of the armed forces, General Carlos Prats, resigned himself to the looming defeat as did hundreds of democratic officers and thousands of soldiers.

The April 2002 coup in Venezuela put the Chavez government to the same test as the June 1973 coup attempt in Chile. The popular response to the April 2002 coup revealed the embryonic development of a worker-peasant-soldier counter-power to that of the capitalist class and its generals.

Within hours of Chavez's kidnapping by right-wing officers on April 11, a popular uprising against the coup had begun in all these sectors. The people in Caracas' poor hillside suburbs started to come out onto the streets. At the same time, protest action began throughout the country's interior.

The decisive action came from General Raul Baduel, in charge of the Maracay-based parachutists' brigade and a founding member of the MBR-200. He refused to recognise the coup regime headed by employers' federation leader Pedro Carmona and, together with the people of Maracay, the parachutists' brigade set up barricades in preparation for battle.

Word of Baduel's stand soon reached leaders of the popular movement and soldiers throughout the country. The order went out through the Bolivarian Circles and other mass organisations for people to march to the army barracks. They did so in their thousands, calling on soldiers to support the movement and to demand the return of Chavez.

This strengthened the resolve of the pro-Chavez officers and soldiers. On April 12, a group of young officers with contacts in the military academy, where a number of the coup conspirators had set up their base, met to organise themselves. They had two key goals - to find a general at the army headquarters (Fuerte Tiuna) who would side with the people, and to break the media blackout on developments.

Lieutenant-colonels Jesus Manuel Zambrano Mata and Francisco Espinoza Guyon played a leading role. They garnered the support of generals Martinez Mendoza and Garcia Carneiro at Fuerte Tiuna and they organised the retaking of the government TV channel, Canal 8, from the coup makers.

By 10 am on April 13, the presidential palace regiment took over the palace and forced coup leaders to flee. By then, hundreds of thousands of people were on the streets of Caracas, sweeping down to the city centre from the hillside suburbs. The atmosphere was defiant, with repeated chants of “Pueblo, escucha, unete a la lucha” (People, listen, unite in the struggle); “Chavez, amigo, el pueblo esta contigo” (Chavez, friend, the people are with you).

Having crushed the coup attempt, the Chavez government moved against the coup plotters, sacking over 400 leading military officers. By the time of the second attempted capitalist conspiracy to oust the government - the December 2002 oil industry lockout - the Chavez government was able to mobilise an increasingly class-conscious and combative working class movement to break the bosses' strike and to bring the oil industry under workers' control.

By the end of 2002 the Bolivarian Revolution had wrested political power from the Venezuelan capitalist class and begun to construct a revolutionary peasant-worker state. The capitalist class remain, the offensive of imperialism continues to escalate, and without the spread of the revolution nothing is guaranteed, as Nicaragua demonstrated, but a revolution is being made.

Thirty years on from the Chilean tragedy, the working people of Venezuela have begun to learn in practice the negative lesson of the experience of the Chilean tragedy of 1973 - summarised by MIR leader Miguel Enriquez at an underground press conference held one month after Pinochet's coup: “The crisis of the system of [capitalist] domination ... [was] crystallised in the rise of the UP government. This generated conditions that would have permitted, if the government had been utilised as an instrument of the working class struggle, the conquering of power by the workers and a proletarian revolution.

“But the reformist project assumed by the UP imprisoned itself in the bourgeois order... With the hope of achieving an alliance with a section of the bourgeoisie, it didn't base itself on the revolutionary organisation of the workers, in their own organs of power. It refused an alliance with the soldiers and junior officers; it preferred trying to fortify itself within the capitalist state apparatus and the officer corp of the armed forces.

“The reformist illusion allowed the dominant classes to fortify themselves in the superstructure of the state and from there initiate its reactionary counter-offensive. The reformist illusion was paid and is being paid for cruelly by the workers, their leaders and parties ... dramatically confirming the words of the French revolutionary of the 18th century, Saint Just: ‘Those who make revolutions in halves only dig their own graves.’”