



CHIT AND CHAVEZ

“Chavez, like Castro, is not only an avowed Communist who has terrorized his own people, they both have assisted and worked with Middle Eastern terrorists. The US should intervene at once”. - Senator Larry Klayman, Republican Senator - Florida.

It's no surprise to hear this from a US politician with an active interest in developments in Venezuela nor is it shocking to see him so actively embrace the neoliberal business elite in their attempt to overthrow the Venezuelan government. Intervention in the affairs of every Latin American country has defined US policy in the region since they stole half of Mexico in 1848. In just a thirty year period the CIA actively assisted with the overthrowing of democratically elected radical governments in Guatemala (1954), the Dominican Republic (1965), Chile (1973), Nicaragua (1980s) and Grenada (1983). Its involvement in a coup in Venezuela in April 2002 merely continues this historical record, as does its support for the right wing's attempts to oust President Hugo Chavez in last weekend's referendum.

Chavez is a military man, who himself failed to overthrow the Presidency of Carlos Perez in a 1992 coup. After his release from prison he rose to power, promising to instigate a 'Bolivarian revolution', based on the ideals of Simon Bolivar, the "great liberator" of Latin America. Chavez posed as the new Bolivar, promising reforms to improve education, welfare and health for 80% of Venezuelans who live in poverty.

Access to education and healthcare in some of the poorest barrios has shot up with 1.5 million more schoolchildren getting three free meals a day and over one million more adults can now read and write. The Bolivarian constitution allows for the recall of any elected official (hence the referendum) and grants the right to a plot of land for anyone aged between 18 and 25, although as a personal favour to himself, Chavez also squeezed extensions to the presidential term.

Aaah... Bolivar

Bolivarian markets' are just one example of the boom in cooperative movements that have taken place over the past few years. In Petare, a working class district in Caracas, marketstall holders meet each Wednesday to set fair food prices for the weekend market. Participating sellers pay \$1 to rent a pitch with this money being reinvested in local community projects. Out of the cities, Self Organised Rural Associations are being set up in an effort to develop a highly integrated system of cooperatives and LETS schemes, where skills rather than money are ex-

changed for food and other goods. City vegetable gardens are cropping (!) up across Caracas as the country seeks to become self-sufficient in food.

But its not the Co-ops that's got up the nose of the Bush Administration Inc. Neither was it jealousy at the fact that Chavez actually won the election that made him president, it's the fact that Chavez campaigned on the basis of a need to "transform the current, brutal, neoliberal economic model." Whilst that itself was bad news for US investors (Venezuelans buy 1/3 of all US goods exported to Latin America), Venezuela also happens to account for 15% of US oil imports. The state-owned Venezuelan oil company, PDVSA oversees the largest reserves of any oil producing country outside of the Middle East and the country has 148 trillion cubic feet of proven natural gas reserves – the largest in the Western Hemisphere. A new Hydrocarbons Law recently raised taxes paid by private companies from 1-17% to 20%-30%.

Chavez has sought to increase his control of the oil industry, booting out Exxon, Shell & Texaco executives and cramming the organisation with loyal Chavistas. PDVSA owns Citgo, an oil company operating in the US which has \$12 billion invested in refineries, terminals and pipelines there, indirectly employing 150,000 workers. When stopping short of invasion the US often uses economic pressure to bully a nation, but now the situation is being reversed by Venezuela. There's also talk of combining Venezuela's oil company with Ecuador's, Brazil's and Trinidad's. These countries would then be able to bargain much harder in trade talks which, up to now, have been mostly a one-way deal designed only to benefit US investors. But the war manual of the Project for the New American Century, the right wing outfit that advises Bush on foreign policy matters, has identified a need for a "concerted national trade and security policy to prevent monopolistic collusion by foreign energy producers". Given that Bush's Latin American Department is crammed with rightwing Cuban exiles, including Otto Reich the architect of former President Ronald Reagan's central American policy that saw 200,000 killed, it's safe to say that such a deal is not going to be successful.

SchNEWS at Ten

There will be a 10th birthday party, new book launch and conference - all on the same day - somewhere in London on the 16th October (coinciding with the European Social Forum). Pencil this date in your diary and keep an eye on our website for more details.

CRAP ARREST OF THE WEEK

For living on your own land...

Paynes Lane Rally is planned to support Peter Robb, a traveller who was sent to prison for 28 days for living on his own land. A judge is also threatening to imprison his wife and children if they don't move from land they bought at Colney Hatch, Hertfordshire.

* The rally will also be dedicating a memorial park to Romani victims of the holocaust and present day racism. Meet Paynes Lane, noon, 22nd August, 01206 523528 for details.

AFTER-CHAVEZ

When Chavez took power the price of oil stood at \$9 per barrel. Oil production was cut and by April 2002 the stuff went for \$23, with extra revenue used to fund the reforms. Later that month Venezuela experienced what the US state department called "a temporary alteration of constitutional order" when the business class replaced Chavez with US-friendly head of the Venezuelan Chambers of Commerce, Pedro Carmona in a coup. He immediately suspended the constitution, legislative assemblies and began reversing Chavez's anti neoliberal reforms. The US recognised the government immediately. Oil production was increased. Two days after the coup, loyal army troops and a demonstration of the poor, hundreds of thousands strong, helped restore Chavez to the Presidency. Carmona flew to Florida.

Despite Senator Klayman's concerns it's unlikely that Chavez has been plotting with the Taliban. Given that he has been re-elected numerous times, a dictatorship it is not, but neither is it a revolution. Chavez deals with the multinationals that have caused so much damage in the region already and the whole reform process is linked to the cult of personality surrounding him. If revolution is supposed to pass power to the people, then this one's got a long way to go.

The streets of Caracas have been ringing to the sound of banging pots and pans for months, as the right wing nutcase opposition seeks to annoy the government through noise pollution. Now Chavez is apparently looking for some way to outlaw the banging of pots in protests. But restricting the right to demonstrate is always a tricky business as Caracas resident Armando Lefmans says, "I have made my own cassette of the noise. You put it on at a high volume so you don't have to bother hitting a pan".

* Recommend reading "The Battle of Venezuela" Michael McCaughan (Latin American Bureau 2004) www.venezuelanalysis.com

BY GEORGIA!

The Baku-Ceyhan pipeline is off!

The government of Georgia has ordered BP to halt work on a section of a controversial £2.4 billion Caspian oil pipeline project, the Baku-Ceyhan pipeline. BP had been on site at Borjomi - an area of outstanding natural beauty - for a week and was already felling trees.

The Georgian environment minister said BP failed to provide contractually required environmental assurance that the pipeline could withstand both landslides and terrorist attacks.

The original contract, agreed by former president Edward Shevardnadze effectively handed BP control over a 1,750 mile strip of land cutting through Georgia, Azerbaijan, Kazakstan and into Turkey, a project which bears all the hallmarks of the modus operandi of Oil companies. Encouraged by Bush and financed partly by free public money, the route of the 42 inch wide pipeline is becoming aggressively militarized following sabotage. Anyone speaking out faced intimidation and in some cases torture.

In May, Turkish authorities picked up Ferhat Kaya, a Human Rights campaigner who has been at the forefront of pressing for proper compensation for those affected by the Baku-Ceyhan pipeline. He was considered a "terrorist" by the Court and beaten by police during detention. Four senior pipeline experts who worked on the Baku-Ceyhan pipeline in Turkey have revealed a catalogue of incompetence, cost-cutting and shoddy workmanship, which raises major questions about the safety of the pipeline. All four have successful careers of over 20 years in pipeline construction, and have said this is the worst project they have ever worked on. Their revelations and all the other dirt about this pipeline can be found at www.bakuceyhan.org.uk

Positive SchNEWS

The longest continuous bus strike in the UK for over thirty years ended in victory last Tuesday after 21 days (see SchNEWS 464). Drivers won nearly all their demands for more pay and better working conditions, with no strings. Union organiser Martin Mayer said "Why have the Company conceded so much and so suddenly? Well of course it is because, much to their amazement, our strike held solid for three whole weeks with no one threatening to cross the picket lines - and no prospect of the strike breaking as we poised to begin our 4th week on strike. It was also because they could no longer bear to lose so much money as the strike continued (our estimate is £5 million losses so far)."

www.indymedia.org.uk/en/regions/sheffield

* A tribunal has decided that four electricians who staged one of the country's longest-running industrial disputes were unfairly sacked for belonging to a trade union. The electricians had been protesting against electrical sub contractors DAF who hired unskilled workers on the cheap to carry out work on the £25 million Piccadilly Gardens development in Manchester.

* The Permaculture Association of Britain will be celebrating its 21st birthday next month with a design course and convergence - and of course a party. Permaculture is a design concept that tries to connect everything from growing food, to urban planning to community development. The event takes place in Braziers Park, Oxfordshire, to book tickets call 0845 4581805 www.permaculture.org.uk

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IN THE DOCK

Dennis Burman was killed last year during training in his first fortnight on the job at the giant Felixstowe port in Suffolk. He was crushed on a crane and left hanging, before plunging 36 metres to his death. Health and safety executive have criticised the company, who, despite huge profits lacked proper safeguards for its trainee workers. At a recent hearing Ipswich magistrates have decided that the maximum £20,000 fine they could impose was not high enough and have sent the case to a higher court.

The Port of Felixstowe (PFL) is the largest container port in the UK. PFL is a member of the Hutchinson Port Holdings (HPH) Group, a wholly-owned subsidiary of the multinational conglomerate Hutchison Whampoa Limited (HWL). HWL is part of the Li Ka-shing group of companies and Li Ka-shing is the 19th richest person in the world, with a personal wealth of over \$12.4 billion dollars. It leaves SchNEWS wondering - who owns 'ol Li?

Nice guys Hutchinson Whampoa are also one of the leading investors and supporters of the military dictatorship in Burma, which they describe as "rich in resources and culture". And after their handy work it's also a rich supply of slave labour to be used for infrastructure projects across the country.

HWL's also run Harwich docks, where two dockers are pursuing employment tribunals after they were sacked. But the company's rich culture involves saving cash and limiting workers rights by employing dockers from Poland.

The prospect of the first national dock strike since the end of the National Dock Labour Scheme is also on the horizon after dockers, drivers and port workers covering twenty three port operations across the UK rejected a 2.9% pay offer. The ports are run by Associated British Ports whose profits rose to £74.5 million last year. The union is seeking a minimum wage of £7.50 an hour for all employees and £10 an hour for drivers. Since the end of the National Dock Labour Scheme, casualisation has crept in ports across the country - part of the low paid 'flexible' economy (or 'flexploitation') which is now endemic throughout the country. The growth of casualisation, where people are forced into low paid jobs with little or no training, no job security, no sick pay and no holiday pay means bigger profits for companies - but more deaths and injuries for the people working for them.

* For more on this story www.easf.org.uk

* SchNEWS writer **Simon Jones** was killed on the first day of work at Shoreham Docks in 1998. Since then the Simon Jones Memorial Campaign have fought against labour casualisation. See www.simonjones.org.uk

JET DREAM

SchNEWS was surprised to read that Brighton now has an airport - called Brighton City Airport, just where in the city is it? Er, Shoreham actually. From a small scale aerodrome, it now runs scheduled services to the Channel Isles and France.

With air pollution the fastest growing contributor to climate change do we really need yet another airport? And who's it for anyway? It's the top 20% who use aircraft the most - going on club class business trips or weekend getaways to their second homes in Tuscany. At current levels air transport will account for 15% of global warming by 2050. Plans are afoot to expand or build another runway at Shoreham, adding to this unsustainable trend, and turning a once tranquil area into a noisy hell-hole.

A Stop the Shoreham Expansion picket of the Shoreham Airshow is taking place next Saturday (28th) from midday-3pm followed by a walk through threatened marshlands of the Widewater Lagoon Nature Reserve. Meet outside Brighton Station at 11am

SchNEWS in brief

Last week the **Information Commissioner** said that, as a result of ID cards and other surveillance measures, Britain could "sleepwalk into a surveillance society". There will be a national gathering in Manchester to organise resistance to the Government's plans to introduce identity cards. Contact Defy-ID: admin@defy-id.org.uk or phone 07980 291478 for details of the venue. www.defy-id.org.uk ** This weekend (20-21) **St Agnes Place** in Kennington, a squatted street for the past 30 years, is hosting everything from live music, party and protest photography exhibitions, sculpture and art in the street fireshow, cyborg performance, standup comedy, food and workshops from 12 till 12 Saturday and Sunday. Nearest tube is the Oval www.stagnesplace.org ** The **Rhythms of Resistance** samba-protest band are holding dance workshops every Wednesday 6.30-9pm at Highbury Roundhouse Youth and Community Centre, 71 Ronalds Road, London, N5. (Holloway Road tube). If you interested email rorkate@123mail.org ** **Kit Sampson**, who spent decades campaigning for Gypsies, is returning her MBE for a second time as a protest at the government's racist attitude towards gypsies. She originally handed back her MBE when the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act came into force in 1994, but was persuaded to take it back when Labour got into power, but now says "This government is exactly the same as the last one." ** **Camden Council** have finally dropped charges against a man who put up posters on bus stops opposing council houses being flogged off (see SchNEWS 463). ** **The BASS Community 'Fayre'** is happening on The Level on the 4th September from 12pm till 6pm. Attractions include SchNEWS movies, kid's space and workshops, DJ workshops, Eco-Arcadia, cream teas and veggie food. info@bass23.org

Anti-Social Burger Order

Last week police used Section 30 of the Anti-Social Behaviour Act at McDonalds in Leicester Square. Section 30 of the ASBO Act gives police power to disperse groups of two or more people for causing intimidation, harassment, alarm or distress where "anti-social behaviour is a significant and persistent problem in the relevant locality". Now SchNEWS thought that maybe the police had told all McDonalds staff to disperse for intimidating the public through their aggressive advertising, causing harassment of parents by utilising children's "pester power", causing alarm to vegetarians for selling meat or causing distress to people's guts from their crap food. But no such luck - the police told protesters at a weekly picket of McDonalds to disperse or face arrest. Protesters aren't taking this lying down and have called for more people to join them at future regular McDonalds pickets, Leicester Square, every Thursday, 5.30pm-7.30pm. Contact: antimcdonalds@doraimail.com

...and finally...

"The little missus was away at a Tupperware convention, so I had to do my own laundry. I'm not used to washing clothes, and they say this happened because I didn't separate my whites from my coloureds". So klanman Arnie Stevens told reporters in Oklahoma after being thrown out of a Klu Klux Klan rally because his hood and robes were... pink. Although Arnie reasoned that a rogue red t-shirt in his wash was a sign from God that "segregation is a way of life in laundry as in life", he then went on to argue "I can't help what colour my robe is can I? It's what's inside that counts" somewhat missing the ironing of the point. (from, er, *Private Eye*)

Disclaimer

SchNEWS warns all latin lovers playing with Bush is a cut-throat business and you could end up with a close Chavez... Honest!