

Defend Venezuela's democracy

Nicolas Maduro won the presidential election - respect the democratic will of the people

On April 14, the Bolivarian candidate Nicolás Maduro won the presidential elections with 7,586,251 votes (50.61%) against the opposition candidate Henrique Capriles who received 7,361,512 votes (49.12%), with a turnout of 79.69%.

The opposition refused to recognise the results of the election and has launched a campaign of violence. On the night of April 15 several CDI health clinics were attacked across the country, as well as alternative and state media outlet buildings and journalists, offices of the United Socialist Party of Venezuela, etc. As a result of this politically motivated violence 9 people were killed, all of them in the Bolivarian camp.

The noisy campaign of the opposition was combined with a national and international media campaign, international interference and pressure (from the United States, Spain and OAS), etc. In effect, the aim was to create a situation of chaos, challenge all of the democratic institutions and prepare the way for a coup, just as in April 2002.

Faced with this campaign, described by president Maduro as a "developing coup d'Etat" we note the following:

- the Venezuelan presidential election was conducted on the basis of the same electoral register, voting system and machines as the October 7 presidential election, the results of which the opposition did recognise

- the voting machines and systems were audited prior to the elections, on election day and

the day after, with the presence of opposition technicians and no complaint was registered

- on election night 54% of polling booths, chosen randomly, were publicly audited with the presence of opposition and Bolivarian observers. The voting results recorded by the voting machines were checked against the paper receipts in the boxes. No complaints were registered.

- the elections were observed by over 170 international observers from many countries including India, Brazil, Great Britain, Argentina, South Korea, Spain and France. Among the observers were two former presidents (of Guatemala and the Dominican Republic), judges, lawyers and high-ranking officials of national electoral councils. All of them stated that the elections had been free and fair and the system transparent, reliable, well-run and thoroughly audited.

- all governments around the world have now recognised the democratically elected president of Venezuela, Nicolás Maduro, with the exception of the United States.

- instead of following the legal procedures for challenging the result or lodging specific complaints, the opposition incited violence. No complaints were lodged with the National Electoral Council until four days later, when 9 people had already been killed.

- at the demand of the opposition, the National Electoral Council decided to audit the remaining 46% polling booths. The opposition then said it would not participate in this



The working masses defend the Bolivarian revolution

pic: Prensa Presidencial

audit and would not recognise its results and will challenge the election results in front of the Supreme Court of Justice.

Hands Off Venezuela conference therefore resolves to:

- recognise the democratically elected government of Nicolas Maduro

- explain the real issues involved and counter the lies, manipulation and half-truths of the mass media regarding the Bolivarian revolution and particularly the election process

- campaign to defend the democratically expressed will of the Venezuelan people and the election of President Maduro against any attempts to remove him by means of a coup reject the hypocrisy of the so-called "demo-

cratic" opposition which is the same one which organised the coup in 2002 and has constantly attempted to remove the democratically elected government of Venezuela and destroy its Bolivarian revolution

- demand that those responsible for the violence and the killings of the days after the elections should be brought to justice and punished, both those who committed those acts as well as those who are responsible for incitement - enough impunity

- redouble our efforts to defend the Bolivarian revolution and organise solidarity with it in the British trade union and labour movement and amongst the population in general

Gotcha textile factory: under workers' control

The Bolivarian Revolution has suffered from the beginning from the economic sabotage of the employers. Workers, following Chavez's call, have responded by occupying some of these factories and running them under workers' control. This is one of the conquests of the revolution. One such experience of workers control is that of the women textile workers of Gotcha in Aragua. A representative from the factory was present at the HOV Conference 2013 in London and we passed the following resolution about their struggle.

This Hands Off Venezuela conference notes the courageous struggle of the women workers of Gotcha, the textile factory in Aragua.

The workers of Gotcha attempted to form a union in order to address the problems of health and safety, working conditions, legal rights and others there were facing in the period of 2006-08. In the course of their struggle they discovered

that many of them were not officially employed by the company, but were technically "self-employed".

The owner of the factory responded by making all of them redundant and abandoning production.

The workers of Gotcha decided to take over the installations, occupy them and start to produce under workers control from 2008.

Since the beginning of the occupation the workers have had to face many attempts by the former owner and also bureaucrats in state institutions (like electricity company Corpoelec) to sabotage production.

The women workers at Gotcha also face problems derived from the lack of any legal status of their occupation.

They have been struggling for the expropriation of the factory under workers control, as has been done previously by the Bolivarian government in the cases of Venepal, CNV, INAF and others.

Gotcha has also played an ac-



Working women play a leading role in the Bolivarian revolution

tive role in the national movement for workers control, understanding that their struggle is part of the wider struggle of the Venezuelan working class.

The women workers of Gotcha are an inspiring example of how workers can produce without bosses, but bosses cannot produce without workers.

We therefore resolve to:

Organise solidarity with the struggling women workers of Gotcha within the British trade union movement.

To request from the Bolivarian government of Nicolas Maduro the expropriation of the factory, so that the company can be nationalised under the democratic control of the workers themselves.

President Obama: we are a nation of peace



The Government of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela rejects with all the force of its Bolivarian dignity the statements made by the president of the United States, Barack Obama, in Mexico City on May 3, 2013.

Once again, President Obama attacks the legitimate government of Venezuela which was elected on April 14 through a transparent electoral process,

whose results were recognized by electoral companions coming from the whole continent and other countries of the world, including the Electoral Mission of the Union of South American Nations (UNASUR) as well as by all the governments of Latin America and the Caribbean and other continents. (...)

It is a source of outrage for the Venezuelan people, and especially the families of those who

died on April 15, 2013, that you would falsely claim that "the entire hemisphere has been watching the violence, the protests, the attacks on the opposition.

Certainly, and despite the self-censorship of the media's large "information" corporations against Venezuela, the hemisphere witnessed how the losing candidate of the opposition and his call to hate and violence in the streets caused the political assassinations of nine compatriots, Bolivarian leaders, pro-Chavez people committed to the revolution (...)

As for the rest, what the whole hemisphere and all of humanity watch in horror are the events at the illegal prison of Guantánamo where torture and other cruel treatment degrading to human beings has been practiced for more than a decade. This is one of the most shameful chapters of human history.

The noble of the world are shocked by the manner in which you have failed in your promise made in 2008 and 2012 to shut down that prison which is an embarrassment to the people of

the United States, a great people. (...)

We are a nation of peace that works arduously alongside our Latin American and Caribbean brothers in order to achieve the true unity of our peoples, in order to be free and sovereign and consolidate ourselves as a zone of peace. (...)

President Obama, your statements promote the emergence of a Pinochet in Venezuela. (...)

We alert all the independent governments of the world, the peoples and their political and social organizations to the U.S. government's plan to provoke the so-called "dogs of war" in Venezuela in order to justify an imperialist intervention. (...)

We call all friends of the Venezuelan cause to display the most active solidarity with our people. Today, just as Bolívar said in 1818, we repeat "fortunately, a handful of free people have often been known to defeat powerful empires."

Compatriots, let us take up the sling of David to face this new aggression by Goliath.

Caracas, May 4, 2013.

Hands Off Venezuela Conference 2013

Over 50 activists, trade unionists, youth and Latin American activists, met in London on May 4 to discuss about the legacy of Hugo Chávez and the challenges facing the Bolivarian revolution. The meeting reaffirmed our rejection of the opposition claims of electoral fraud and renewed our commitment to defend the democratically expressed will of the Venezuelan people to elect Nicolás Maduro as president.

The first speaker was Yaruma Rodríguez, cultural attaché to the embassy of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela in the UK, who brought greetings and apologies from Ambassador Samuel Moncada who is currently in Venezuela. He started by describing the benefits to workers in the newly approved Labour Law. Yaruma also explained in detail the functioning of the Venezuelan electoral system in order to refute opposition allegations of fraud. He explained how voters have to identify themselves, their ID cards are checked against a picture database and then their fingerprints also checked. Voting is electronic but then each voter receives a paper receipt in order to confirm the vote which is put in a box. After the closing of the polling stations, 56% of all polling booths are chosen at random for an audit, which involves checking the machine registered vote against the paper receipts. This audit is public and takes place in front of witnesses from both the Bolivarian and the opposition campaigns. Further-

more, the actual voting system underwent a whole series of audits which were witnessed by opposition and socialist technicians.

We then screened a number of short clips of Hugo Chavez. This included part of his BBC Hard Talk interview, when he stated that “there can be no democracy under capitalism, only in socialism can there be genuine democracy”; his statement at the Copenhagen climate summit that “socialism is the only way to save the world and you can only do it through revolution”; his rebuttal of “the stupid people of Fox News”, as well as his defence of socialism and thanks to the Hands Off Venezuela campaign during his visit to London.

This was followed by Alan Woods, founder of the Hands Off Venezuela campaign and a friend of Hugo Chávez, who spoke at length about the legacy of the late Venezuelan president and revolutionary leader. Mixing personal anecdotes with political analysis Alan described the crucial role which Chávez had played in the Bolivarian revolution. “There was a chemical reaction between the revolutionary masses and the president”, he said, “the fed on each other.” Coming from a military background, “he joined the Army so he would be able to play baseball”, he dared to challenge the power of the oligarchy and of imperialism.

Alan Woods explained some of the main achievements of the revolution, in the fields of health care, education, housing, etc. but also underlined that this was not



Trade union and youth activists discussing solidarity with Venezuela

even the main reason for the mass support for Chavez, which had to be found in a different factor: “Chavez gave voice to the poor, the working people, the dispossessed, those who had never had a voice before”, said Alan explaining that this was the reason why millions turned out at his funeral.

Alan also stressed the role Chavez had played in bringing back the debate about socialism, describing how this was received with enthusiasm by the workers and peasants gathered at the Teresa Carreño Theatre, but with horror by many bureaucrats and careerists in the Bolivarian movement. The Bolivarian revolution can only be completed by expropriating the oligarchy, Alan underlined.

The afternoon session was centered on the report by Yenny Cortez, from the Gotcha occupied textile factory in Aragua, Venezuela, our guest speaker. She explained in detail the struggle of the women workers of Gotcha, starting from their immediate demands for full rights and benefits against the employer, their attempt to organise a union, and how this led them to occupy the premises and eventually to re-start production under workers’ control.

She explained how their struggle was part of a wider movement of occupied factories and the movement for workers’ control. “We have had to struggle not only against the old owners and for nationalization under workers’ control, but also against bureaucrats within the state institutions who are sabotaging workers’ control,” she said. The way forward is to create a “workers’ state, one which is controlled by the workers and peasants, to show the bureaucracy

that we are fully prepared to take over the running of society and brush them aside.”

This was a moving speech which showed the transformation of ordinary working people in the process of the Venezuelan revolution.

The next speaker was Jorge Martín who explained in detail the attempted coup carried out by the opposition after the April 14 elections. “The mass media have talked of ‘post-election violence’, but never mentioned that the 9 people killed were all Bolivarian, socialist supporters,” he said. He also went on to discuss why the election result had been so narrow. “In effect, between 600 and 700,000 people who voted for Chávez on October 7, 2012, then voted for the opposition candidate on April 14,” Jorge said, “and this is the result of the fact that the revolution has not been completed and the capitalists are continuing to sabotage the economy”.

Throughout the Conference there was lively debate, which also dealt with the question of what can we do here in Britain to defend the Bolivarian revolution. There was a strong feeling that our campaign is not just about abstract solidarity with a far away country, but above all an activist movement fighting for revolutionary change in Britain as well. In this respect the policy of HOV of getting involved in the struggle against austerity cuts and linking up with other Latin American campaigns and groups in Britain was reaffirmed.

The resolutions were voted and amended, the financial report was approved and a new steering committee elected in the best democratic traditions of the revolutionary movement.



Yenny Cortez, Gotcha textile factory addressing HOV Conference

The legacy of Hugo Chavez

by Jorge Martin,
HOV International Secretary

Venezuelan president Hugo Chávez passed away on March 5 at 4.25 pm local time. His death, though somewhat expected, came as a shock. In the following days millions took part in the funeral procession, waited many hours (in some cases days) to see him at his chapel of rest and then accompanied him to his final resting place next to the militant Caracas parish of 23 de Enero.

The descriptions of Venezuela after the death of Chavez by the world's mass media paint a picture of war zone crime levels, an authoritarian "regime" and a crumbling economy. The only conclusion one could draw is that millions of Venezuelans, are gripped by collective madness.

The truth however is very different. Hugo Chavez has presided over a period of a massive rise in the living standards of the poorest sections in society. Between 2004 and 2012, poverty was reduced by half and extreme poverty cut by 70% and its Gini coefficient of inequality is Latin America's lowest. Governments in advanced capitalist countries cut education spending and increase tuition fees, Venezuela has doubled the educa-

tion budget from 3.4 to 7% of GDP, created 1.3 million new tuition free university places and eradicated illiteracy by teaching the basics of how to read and write to 1.5 million of its people. Venezuela has nationalised or renationalised key sectors of the economy (telecomms, steel, cement, etc).

In Spain 350,000 families have seen their homes repossessed by the banks in two years, the Bolivarian government has built and handed over the same amount of homes to families in need, in most cases free of charge.

Misión Barrio Adentro (Into the Neighbourhood) has brought primary preventative health care into the poorest areas of the country, with the help of Cuban doctors and nurses.

These are just some of the social programs of the Bolivarian revolution affecting the overwhelming majority of the workers and the poor, and significant sections of those who described themselves as "middle class".

There are however deeper reasons for the outpouring of grief and solidarity we witnessed. In Venezuela there is not just a progressive government carrying wide-ranging social reforms. There is also a revolution in course. Millions of working people, women,

the youth, peasants and the poor in general have become politically aware and organised in the last 14 years. They have had to come out to defend the Bolivarian revolution against the constant attempts of the oligarchy and imperialism to smash it: during the coup in April 2002, the oil sabotage and bosses lock out of December 2002, the guarimba counter-revolutionary riots of 2004, etc.

Hugo Chavez played a key role in raising the political consciousness of those who had always been excluded from the "democratic" process. He proved to be responsive to pressure from below (in relation to nationalisation of occupied factories, introduction of elements of workers' control, etc) as well as pushing the process forward himself. In 2005 he said that the revolution had to go beyond capitalism and towards socialism. He also stood up to US meddling in the region and championed the cause of Latin American integration.

All of this created a very strong bond of loyalty between Chavez and the revolutionary masses, something which the mass media, constantly referring to caudillismo and populism, is unable to grasp.

The revolution has not been completed and faces a number



Hugo Chavez, 1954 - 2013

of important challenges. The economy remains fundamentally capitalist and so is the state apparatus. It will now be down to those struggling for workers' control, the women and the poor in the communal councils, the peasants still fighting for agrarian reform and the revolutionary youth to complete the revolution towards socialism. There are of course, many criticisms which can and should be made, but for those of us struggling for a better world, a socialist world, the legacy of Chavez is overwhelmingly positive.

Join Hands Off Venezuela!

The international broad-based Hands Off Venezuela campaign was established in 2002 to generate awareness about Venezuela, especially within the trade union and progressive movements. Our main task is to promote the social gains of the Bolivarian Revolution and mobilise public opinion against imperialist aggression towards Venezuela.

The basic aims of the campaign are to:

- Give full support to the Venezuelan revolution, which has repeatedly proved its democratic credentials, in its struggle to liberate the oppressed of Venezuela.
- Defend the revolution against the attacks of imperialism and its local agents the Venezuelan oligarchy.
- Support the new trade union confederation, the UNT, as the legitimate voice of the workers' movement.
- To counteract the media distortions and lies about Venezuela and mobilise the maximum support for the above aims.

Hands Off Venezuela organises public events, film shows, speaking tours and delegations to Venezuela, provides news and information about the latest events and promotes solidarity and links both in Britain and internationally.

To get your trade union or other organisation affiliated, here are the recommended annual affiliation fees: National trade unions: £500, regional bodies: £250, branches/trades councils: £50, others: £25. Membership fees for individuals are waged: £7.50 and unwaged: £5 (suggested)

Contact us at britain@handsoffvenezuela.org

To join, please complete this form
and return to the address below

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