

VENEZUELA:

A SUI GENERIS REVOLUTION

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1. Hugo Chávez Frías—military man who had attempted to remove corrupt president Carlos Andrés Pérez from office in February 1992 by means of a military rebellion with civil support—won the elections as President of the Republic six years later, with an important majority vote of 56 %.
2. Convinced even before that upheaval, that the country's decade-old deep structural crisis could be solved only by means of a true social revolution, he decided to launch his revolutionary process beginning with a Constituent Assembly to change the corrupt and inefficient political and legal structure of the country, and--using the new rules of the game--unleash the social and economic transformations the country needed.
3. This he attempted in February 1992 by means of an insurrection, which is not the same as a military coup, for he has never lost sight of the need of people's participation. That attempt was defeated and he was sent to prison, but both then and after, during his trips throughout the country, he always had the people in mind and was organizing a new upheaval. Later, however, in view of the country's new reality, he decided to participate in the elections. He kept his strategic goal of calling for a Constituent Assembly—the only thing that changed were his tactics.
4. His is a *sui generis* process: completely deformed by the media and misunderstood by the left because it breaks away from all previous patterns: **First**, it is the result of Chávez' overwhelming victory in the elections, it follows the institutional path in spite of all the provocations set by the opposition. **Second**, it has been classified ideologically as an undefined process, because instead of adopting Marxism as its guiding ideology, it has chosen Bolivarism. **Third**, it is headed by a military man who was bold enough to promote a military upheaval against the regime, with the support of many military men within the government. **Fourth**, this is a populist military man. **Fifth**, he has no vanguard party to head the process. **Sixth**, he has been incapable of eliminating corruption, one of his main goals for struggle. **Seventh**, he has yet to show important economic changes, and he faithfully pays the country's foreign debt.
5. In view of all this, can one define this as a revolutionary process? I think that what is going on in Venezuela will be easier to understand if we analyze these objections, and it will become more evident why I do believe that Venezuela's process is a revolutionary one.

1. A DEMOCRATICALLY-ELECTED GOVERNEMENT

1) HOW TO CREATE A FAVORABLE PUBLIC OPINION

6. Chávez decided to enter the 1998 presidential elections in spite of the fact that he lacked all economic means or space in the mass media—he didn't even have a consolidated political party, since the Movimiento V República representing Chávez had just been organized, with a specific aim in mind: the electoral process. Many people thought he was just daydreaming.

7. This weakness, however, was compensated for by his charismatic personality, that the country first saw on the National TV Station after the 1992 failed armed rebellion, when he publicly recognized his responsibility—all this in a country where no political leader has ever had the guts to take such a stand. He took responsibility and pronounced his famous sentence: “For the time being!,” clearly telling his people that he had not given up the struggle.

8. This attitude created a favorable public opinion toward him and his project, in a country whose scepticism for both politics and politicians pervaded broad sectors of society, including the middle sectors.

2) NO PREVIOUS GOVERNMENT HAS GONE THROUGH SO MANY DEMOCRATIC CONSULTATIONS

9. As we have already explained, he won the presidential elections by a large majority. After that he went through five consultations, proving at the polls that he could count on strong popular support: Referendum to call for a Constituent Assembly; election of its constituent members; Referendum to approve the new Constitution; elections to reaffirm the mandates of the president, members of the National Assembly, governors, mayors, councilmen, parish boards; and elections for the board of directors of the Confederación de Trabajadores de Venezuela (CTV).

10. Except for the last case, where there are so many irregular measures (the present CTV board of directors declared itself elected but never published the relative documents to prove it), in all other elections the Movimiento V República has won by a large majority.

11. But alleging the need for democracy, the opposition now wants to remove from office a man who has won six democratic consultations: four elections and two referenda. Never before in the history of the country has a political regime been submitted to so many democratic consultations.

2. IDEOLOGICALLY UNDEFINED?

12. Ideologically, it is considered an undefined process, because Marxism is not its guiding ideology. It must be explained, however, that though the Movement is not Marxist, it is not anti Marxist either.

13. Chávez tries to base his project on ideas rooted in national traditions. He is inspired by three main figures: Simón Bolívar, Simón Rodríguez, and Ezequiel Zamora.

14. Is it logical for a revolution carried out in the 21st century to find inspiration in great men from the 19th century? The truth is that today, some of their ideas are still valid in the Venezuela.

15. Bolívar, the most outstanding figure in Latin America's struggle for independence from Spain, never spoke about class struggle but he did refer to the need to abolish slavery and his beliefs always take popular sectors into account. Perhaps, his most important contribution was understanding that Latin America must become integrated. Already in his own time he understood that there was no future ahead for our countries unless they confronted as one both body both the European countries and the United States. In the second half of the 19th century he was already able to foresee that the "United States of North America seemed destined by providence to plague America with misery on behalf of freedom." On the other hand, Bolívar's political philosophy conceived democracy as a political system responsible for giving the people the greatest happiness, and he also believed that a military man must never take aim against his own people.

16. Simón Rodríguez, Bolívar's teacher and friend, was also a fine pedagogue and social reformer. He strongly defended the originality of our Latin America, its multi-ethnic composition, and the need to integrate indigenous people and black slaves into the continent's future societies. He strongly advocated for the creation of original institutions adapted to our realities, and he rejected the imitation of European solutions, convinced that "We either invent or we err."

17. Ezequiel Zamora was a liberal general who fought against the conservatives during the federal war of 1850. He encouraged total war against the oligarchy and the distribution of land to the peasants.

18. We can then see how these men constitute a democratic ideological nucleus defending national sovereignty, with an anti-imperialist and anti-oligarchic stand, that must no doubt be enriched and improved but that is already imbued with a series of key ideas to launch the revolutionary process.

3. A DIFFERENT KIND OF ARMY

19. Some people reject the Bolivarian revolutionary process because it has a military leader and because of the outstanding role played by the military in numerous State institutions and governmental plans.

20. They say the military participate in the repressive corps of the bourgeois State, that they are permeated by bourgeois ideology, that there is no way to save them. I believe this is a very rigid attitude and that we cannot generalize the situation—rather, we must analyze each individual case in which the armed corps participates in the State.

21. The Chilean army that led the coup d'Etat against Allende can't be compared to the Venezuelan army, because starting with Chávez' generation, it never trained its cadres in the School for the Americas, but in Venezuela's Military Academy, by then already greatly transformed. The so-called Andrés Bello Plan gave it college standing. Army cadres started studying political science, learned about their predecessors who believed in democracy, studied analysts of Venezuela's realities. Many of these military men ended up being specialists in different subjects at college level and they started exchanging ideas with other university students.

22. They studied Clausewitz in military strategy classes, together with Asian strategists such as Mao Tse Tung, and Chávez was very impressed by some of Mao's ideas, particularly when he declared that the troops' morale is much more important than any sophisticated technological weapon; or that the people is to the army as water is to fish.

23. This generation comes to life when the country had almost found peace, when very few guerrilla groups had survived, so it didn't have to fight against them, but rather, when it visited rural areas where these guerrillas might find refuge, instead of guerrillas they discovered the incredible poverty reigning there. Ruling bourgeois ideology in our countries wants to convince us that poor people are poor because they are drunkards, because they lack initiative and the will to work, because they aren't intelligent, and this ideology generally permeates our armed forces; but the Venezuelan military men are able to see that behind poverty stands the Venezuelan oligarchy, concentrating riches, and the United States, whose vocation it is to sow the poverty.

24. Reaching the frontier with their platoons, some of the young military cadres would share their rations with the poor people of the region.

25. Within the Venezuelan Armed Forces, on the other hand, there has never been a military caste like that of other countries. The sons of very poor families, from the countryside or from the cities, can occupy high posts within the military corps.

26. Add to this the commotion provoked by the Caracazo for Chávez' generation. They refused to be used as an instrument for repression. Some of the more conscientious commanders refused to use their soldiers to repress the people. I interviewed a military man who told me how he had decided to organize the looting of a supermarket when he saw hungry people attacking it. He told the people to organize in queues: one for meat, one for rice, another for dairy products—but no one could take any cash register, because those people didn't need them at all, they would be actually taking advantage of the situation to steal.

4. BUILDING A NATIONAL AND AN INTERNATIONAL FORCE

27. You cannot understand the Venezuelan process if you don't look at the world context. Today's correlation of forces is very negative for the progressive forces of the world: the defeat of socialism in Eastern countries, particularly in the USSR, has eliminated the socialist camp, with all its symbolic and practical weight, and the United States has become the first world military power, and since it has no counterpart, it can now organize a military adventure in spite of world opinion. A very different situation reigned in the world when the Cuban revolution came into being, or when Allende led the Chilean process forward.

1) BUILDING AN INTERNATIONAL FORCE

28. Aware that he cannot lead an isolated social revolution within the world correlation of forces, the first thing the Bolivarian leader does on taking over the Republic is build an international force to support the Bolivarian process. He has encouraged several South American and Caribbean integration movements to consolidate a unitary position; he has privileged Venezuela's relations with its partners within the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC), and has begun weaving relations with other centers of world power, such as India, Russia and China, while strengthening its ties with emerging nations, such as the Group of 15 countries for South-South cooperation, and the Group of 77, that now includes more than 120 developing nations. In the southern hemisphere Chávez has made an alliance with Brazil to oppose ALCA and has become a member of Mercosur.

29. Instead of ALCA he now speaks of ALBA (DAWN): Alianza Bolivariana para las Américas (Bolivarian Alliance for the Americas).

30. To show his will to cooperate, he has also promised to give eleven Central American and Caribbean countries a preferential status for the sale of oil, and he has strengthened his ties with Cuba.

2) BUILDING AN INTERNAL FORCE

a) A favorable correlation in institutions

31. After the approval of the new Constitution, thanks to different elections that gave these mandates a new legitimacy, Chávez was able to begin his government with an ample majority in the National Assembly; with governors who supported his project in most of Venezuela's states, and with legal institutions ready to implement the new Constitution. But this situation has changed with the progress of the revolutionary process, as we shall see later on.

b) Organizational weakness in social and political matters

32. The process starts out very weakly in the popular organizational sphere. Compared with Allende's Chile or Lula's Brazil, with consolidated leftist parties and strong social and trade union movements, Venezuela's leftist parties aren't strong enough. The Movimiento Revolucionario Bolivariano 200 (MBR-200) itself, founded by Chávez in the 80s, had a very small group of members; and the Movimiento V República, founded just to participate in the 1998 presidential elections, is an electoral party that grew like an avalanche bringing with it many opportunists who knew that they would be elected only if associated with Chávez. Nor does the country have any strong social movement: neither the neighborhood popular movement nor the trade union movement have not been able to become autonomous, and for the past fifty years they have always depended on the party in power, be it Acción Democrática or COPEI.

c) Call to refound the MBR-200 and reactivate the Círculos Bolivarianos

33. Aware of these weak points and of the absolute need for an efficient political instrument to implement his program, and in particular to promote a popular organization to channel the huge support of the Venezuelan population to his government, on May 7, 2001, Chávez stated publicly the need to refound the Movimiento Revolucionario Bolivariano. And he launched yet another initiative: that of the "círculos bolivarianos," calling all the people, under whatever circumstances, to organize in small groups and make the Constitution known, taking on some concrete task: solve some problem in the neighborhood, create a cooperative, get a credit from the bank, etc.

34. Apparently, he wants the MBR-200 to become a movement of movements, uniting *the social forces participating in the process* that are not necessarily militating in any party at the present time, in order to *organize society before transformation comes about*, during the Movimiento V República rule.

35. According to some people, he must *build what today is nonexistent: a popular and social movement with a centralized and democratic leadership, where you could also find representatives of student, peasant and women's dispersed yet existing groups. This would mean the unity of the popular and social movement in an interrelation with the more advanced and progressive groups of the revolutionary sector. The MBR-200's greatest*

challenge would be to guarantee the presence of those huge majorities (who participate) and imbue this process with an ideological and political strength together with an organizational one. (1)

36. This Bolivarian leader is fully aware of the need to organize the people, and this need becomes increasingly evident because he is starting to lose institutional terrain.

d) Political Command of the Revolution

37. Together with this attempt to organize the population, Chávez is also trying to define a single leadership for the process: the Political Command of the Revolution. He is calling on renowned members of leftist parties and is naming Guillermo García Ponce, a former communist leader, at the head of this command. But for reasons it would be too difficult to explain here, four years after coming to power, the Bolivarian process doesn't yet have the political instrument it needs to assume the huge challenges before it.

5. RADICALIZATION OF THE PROCESS AND ITS CONSEQUENCES

a) The opposition becomes more radical

38. Probably, quite a few of Chávez' national and international present-day detractors were just hoping for him to stop at simple oral promises, just like so many other Latin American politicians; for the new Constitution to become empty words; or that they would be able to twist his arm through the usual methods: exert pressure and grant favors.

39. When they realized that Chávez could neither be bought nor bent and that he was determined to carry the revolutionary process forward, they decided to oust him through a military coup, unleashed in December 2001, when the government publicly declared for the first time that with the backing of the National Assembly, it would affect Venezuelan oligarchy's economic interests with 49 laws: the Law of the Land, the Law of Fisheries, the Law on Carbohydrates, the Law of Micro Credits, and the Law of Cooperatives.

40. We must take into account that our Latin American oligarchies have nothing in common with the bourgeois sectors of northern countries. They have never been willing to surrender any of their privileges and allow for a better distribution of riches among the population, as the European bourgeoisie has done. John Kennedy, the liberal President of the United States, clearly understood that the only way to prevent the Cuban revolution from extending all over Latin America was to trace a plan for the development of our countries and a better distribution of wealth; his Alliance for Progress, however, failed because the majority of our oligarchies never answered his call—and until now they have refused to give up any of their privileges.

b) Some people are lost on the way

41. The reaction of the right scared some of Chávez' comrades, including Miquilena, his political operator during the whole constituent process and the elections carried out to legitimate his mandate. Since the President didn't back up to appease the opposition and was firmly determined to carry the revolutionary process forward, Miquilena suspended his support—and that of many people who had been named in different institutions thanks to his influence—and became one of the leaders of the opposition. This explains Chávez' negative relation of forces within the District Attorney's Office (most of whose members are against him); in the Supreme Court of Justice (11 of its 20 judges believe there was no

coup d'Etat on April 11); and in the National Electoral Council (five are against him and one supports the government).

c) Insurrection of the oligarchy: the April 11 coup

42. The insurrection unleashed by the oligarchy in December 2001 to oust Chávez from office attracts important middle sectors of society and some of the popular ones. It is not headed by the traditional parties—which disappeared from the political sphere during the electoral processes—but by Fedecámaras (an association of employers), the Confederación de Trabajadores de Venezuela (CTV), the top hierarchy of the Catholic Church, and the media, who played an outstanding role as collective organizers of the opposition.

43. After an unsuccessful strike, a military coup ousts Chávez from office on April 11, 2002, and sits Pedro Carmona, the highest executive officer of Fedecámaras, in the presidential chair. He immediately decides to do away with the new Constitution and dissolve all public powers, and his followers begin physical attacks against Chávez' officials.

44. He is supported not only by the putschist generals but also by the Spanish and US ambassadors. The United States and El Salvador are the only governments in the world who hurriedly recognize the usurper.

45. General Medina Gómez, Venezuela's military attaché in Washington, had just arrived that morning at the Tiuna fort, headquarters of the putschist commando, together with some advisers from the State Department. (2) At 9 p.m. the US military attaché in Venezuela and his adviser arrived on the scene. Meanwhile, Air Force radars had detected three traces on their screens: two frigates and a helicopter coming in from Curacao; the helicopter entered Venezuela's air space.

46. The victory of the opposition was short-lived. A few hours later, with the news that Chávez had not resigned and that he had been made prisoner, a huge wave of people left their *cerros* and popular neighborhoods for the barracks and Miraflores, the presidential palace, demanding the return of their President. In less than 48 hours those very people, together with the overwhelming majority of the Armed Forces who have always been faithful to Chávez, came out victorious: Chávez was once again President of the Republic.

47. According to the Bolivarian leader, this goes to disprove the saying: "Hungry love does not last," for those who came out to support him were precisely the hungriest masses. So how can this be explained? Because thanks to Chávez, the people recovered their dignity, and they now feel that someone is listening to them, taking care of them. They know that for the first time in history, they have a President who is their president. They understand that if he is not able to solve their social and economic problems, it is because the oligarchy won't let him, not because he is unwilling to do so.

d) Representatives who no longer represent

48. In all revolutionary processes, some people get lost on the way, and changes take place in the awareness of both the popular sectors supporting the revolutionary process, and of the opposition.

49. History has shown that Lenin was right when he declared that at times of deep social commotion (or of revolutionary epochs), the actors tend to show their true intentions and the people learn in very few days much more than they could ever learn in years through books.

50. The April 11, 2002, coup allowed the population to know who was who: the putschist commanders within the Armed Forces took off their masks; the fascist intentions of many politicians in the opposition, who declared themselves to be democrats, became very evident. So the political awareness of the people kept growing.

51. But it is not only the people who have become more aware and more radical—the counterrevolution has also radicalized its attacks against the government and its sympathizers are growing. Undecided groups of the middle sectors--that usually follow behind those they believe to be the stronger ones, greatly influenced by the panorama shown by the major media, which tend to make people believe that opposition is much stronger than it really is--have joined the ranks of the opposition.

52. As a result, many representatives no longer represent their voters. So many of them were elected because the people had identified them as Chávez' followers, and now they have turned their back to him! That is the specific case of Alfredo Peña, mayor of the metropolitan area.

53. So if the government wants to follow an institutional path, it must implement all the mechanisms created by the new Constitution, revoke the mandate of all those who no longer represent their voters, and elect new people. There are only two possible paths: that of a revocatory referendum, and that of a constitutional amendment to anticipate general elections. Chávez' followers have already begun the process to revoke the mandate of several representatives of the opposition, including Alfredo Peña.

54. It is important to understand that the new Constitution of Venezuela foresees four different kinds of referenda: **consulting referendum**, for problems of national scope, like knowing if the people agree with oil privatization, or if they agree with Venezuela's membership in ALCA; **revocatory referendum**, foreseen by the Constitution to submit to popular consultation whether an officer can keep his post after having fulfilled at least half his mandate; **approving referendum**, to submit international agreements, conventions or treaties for their approval; and finally, **abrogating referendum**, to submit the possibility of abolishing laws or decree-laws.

6. IF THESE RULES OF THE GAME WERE NOT ACCEPTED TO REVOKE THESE MANDATES, THERE WOULD BE COMPLETE ANARCHY: ANY MINORITY GROUP DISSATISFIED WITH AN ELECTED OFFICER COULD COLLECT SIGNATURES TO QUESTION HIS MANDATE. AND ON TOP OF ALL THE EXPENSES AND LOSS OF TIME THIS KIND OF CONSULTATION WOULD IMPLY, THERE WOULD BE NO STABILITY WHATSOEVER IN ANY POST. THE MASS MEDIA ORGANIZE THE COUNTERREVOLUTION

55. 56. The role played in April by the mass media as organizers of the counterrevolution was so obvious that they are now talking about the first media coup of the 21st century.

56. 57. Except for one TV channel, with very limited technical resources and unable to cover the whole country, and two or three friendly radio stations, the overwhelming majority of the important means of communication, controlled by the major economic groups, have been responsible for a bitter and systematic opposition to the Chávez administration. What we see in Venezuela is not freedom of the press but rather, lewdness of the press, where the media are being used in violation of all ethics: they ignore most of the actions taken by the government and deform or just plain lie about those that they do

mention. They have eliminated all their entertainment and publicity, playing instead: (a) minute-by-minute reports of the actions carried out by the opposition; (b) manipulated images that attempt to give the idea that the strength of the opposition is much greater than it really is; (c) exacerbated propaganda against a democratically-elected regime; and (d) orientation of the opposition as a process, constantly giving it instructions of what it has to do.

57. 58. In view of the passive attitude of the government, still waiting for the legal means that will allow it to act, the popular sectors decided to go on the offensive, boycotting private TV channels, refusing to buy newspapers, and menacing to boycott products that print propaganda in these mass media. Their owners have publicly recognized that their sales have fallen significantly.

58. 59. The government recently announced that it would not allow this unethical use of television. These channels can be as private as they want, but they are using a concession given by the State, which has the right to revoke it if they don't accept the rules. It's the same as the case of the owner of a car, who has received a driver's license, which can be revoked if he does not comply with traffic rules and regulations. There are ongoing investigations against Envisión, Radio Caracas Televisión, and Globovisión before deciding to revoke the concession of the radio-electronic spectrum they are using. The National Assembly is studying a bill for Social Responsibility in Radio and Television. The opposition has so far prevented its approval because of lack of quorum, or registering 60 speakers for each article of the bill, and work sessions have been going on for months.

59. 60. We hope that if the government does adopt harsh measures against these mass media—which not only do not report on what the government is really doing but is misinforming on its activity, creating in both children and adults a true collective psychosis with what they define as “Chávist hordes”—it will receive the support of those who are really in favor of true freedom of the press throughout the world, freedom that has nothing in common with the lewd way it is being applied in Venezuela.

60. 61. The government has several means to report on its project and to prepare the people ideologically; one of them being the radio and television Sunday program “Aló presidente,” where Chávez speaks to the people for several hours in a very simple way, sharing their way of thinking. But the program does not cover the whole country, because this governmental channel still lacks the necessary technical resources.

7. PRESENT-DAY RELATION OF FORCES

1) THE APRIL COUP CREATES MORE FAVORABLE CONDITIONS

61. 62. The April 2002 coup d'Etat has strengthened the government instead of weakening it. It was a real present for the revolutionary process.

62. 63. **First**, because the actors took off their masks, and because now the people have a much higher political awareness. The President now knows whom he can count on within the military ranks and among civil cadres.

63. 64. **Second**, the fact that part of the top officers of the Armed Forces have shown their support for the coup d'Etat has allowed Chávez to start purging that institution, in spite of the unethical attitude of the Supreme Court of Justice, which has refused to submit the

putschist generals to trial. They have all lost their commanding positions and their presence is repudiated within their respective corps.

64. 65. **Third**, the opposition, initially united for the coup, is now divided after its failure. The fascists, on the one hand, are attempting a new military coup; on the other, the moderates would like to get rid of Chávez through institutional measures. The opposition evidently lacks a leader and a project for the country, other than a direct return to the past. But we must not underestimate its strength. It is only a minority, but a very active one, able to mobilize thousands of people in Caracas and other parts of the country, and it still wields an important influence in broad sectors of the middle class.

65. 66. **Fourth**, increasing sectors of the middle class, who opposed the process in the past, have now begun to understand that removing Chávez could lead to anarchy. They see the President as the only person able to make of Venezuela a country that can be governed, in the violent atmosphere reigning on both sides; his forceful ousting could unleash a civil war. More recently, the nefarious measures adopted by the opposition have also contributed to this feeling: closed schools, sabotage against the oil producing company, affecting broad sectors of the middle class. Another element behind this change in attitude of increasing middle sectors is the fact that the President has adopted a firm stand and confirmed that he is strong enough to stop the different tactics the opposition is using against him.

66. 67. **Fifth**, from April 12 on, the people have greatly improved their organization. Chávez has since used every occasion possible to call for an organized people, insisting that anyone wishing to support the process cannot remain on the sidelines. The *Círculos Bolivarianos* have multiplied throughout the country, taking on a great variety of forms. There are now 190 000 *Círculos*, with an average membership of seven people, which makes for more than 1 300 000 organized people. There are now new popular organizations, such as the *Comités de Tierras Urbanas* and different associations of the middle class, such as doctors, professors, lawyers, etc.

67. Trade union leaders of the different productive sectors, who criticize the *Confederación de Trabajadores de Venezuela*, on the other hand, are now working to create an autonomous trade union willing to support the process.

68. Those workers who get around by motorcycle getting things solved for different companies—whose members share great solidarity—have discovered that they could play an important role to communicate popular sectors among each other, and to dissuade the marches organized by the right.

69. These popular sectors have a much greater political awareness since April 2002, which increases after each new attack from the opposition: today they not only create *Círculos Bolivarianos*, *Comités de Tierras Urbanas*, citizen assemblies—each new offensive from the opposition provokes new forms of popular organization: groups to open schools closed by the opposition; agricultural and fishing groups to defend their rights and the laws implemented by the Executive Power; groups for consumer rights that promote boycotting the mass media; groups to protect gas stations and an adequate distribution of domestic gas; groups present where gas-transporting trucks are being filled, and caravans to escort these trucks; the movement known as *Clase Media en Positivo*, to support governmental decisions; groups to collect signatures for different purposes; the group that for over a month has set up camp at the *La Campita* oil company headquarters, protecting its facilities from possible sabotage from the opposition; groups surrounding the *Miraflores Palace* and

ready to defend it in case of threats from the anti Chávez forces; groups giving the needy social support.

70. Sixth, the different parties on the left, who used to support Chávez but with very critical attitudes, decide to reorganize and present a common front to support the government.

71. Seventh, part of today's public opinion is now against any other attempted coup. Both the OAS and the European Union, the OPEC and recently, the US government itself have expressed this attitude. The three-party commission including the Carter Center, the OAS and the UNDP to mediate in the conflict has had to recognize that Venezuela is going through a truly democratic process.

72. Eighth, since one of the greatest weaknesses of Chávez' defense plan was communication with his loyal soldiers, they have studied how the President can be in direct contact with troop commanders, in case higher officers cannot carry out their responsibilities.

73. Ninth, there are now channels to communicate regiments with nearby populations.

74. Tenth, the repressive and putschist attitude of the Metropolitan Police in the April 2002 events and other confrontations with the people has been the reason to put it under the direct dependence of the Comisión de Seguridad Ciudadana (Commission for Citizen Security)—and not mayor Alfredo Peña—when it must guarantee public order in the Distrito Metropolitano. This will go on until the Central Government is able to constitute and control just one National Police.

a) The institutional coup

75. All this leads us to believe that there will be no more successful military coups, which doesn't mean that the more reactionary opposition forces will not pursue their wish to forcefully eject Chávez from the government.

76. Aware of this situation, most of the opposition is now in favor of an institutional coup, and so they launch the initiative of a consulting referendum. Through a very active campaign, they announce that more than a million and a half signatures support the initiative. But the National Electoral Council invalidates more than 700 000 of them. Apparently, as has been denounced, the names and signatures of clients of some private banks have been used to fatten the list of subscribers.

77. Chávez has always said he is willing to submit to popular verdict, but within the legal framework of the Constitution, and that is the revocatory referendum. This process could begin on August 19, 2003, when he will be in the very middle of his mandate.

78. Recently, five of the seven judges of the Supreme Court of Justice's Electoral Tribunal have declared there are against the opposition's intentions with this consulting referendum to define whether Chávez should remain in power or not. It was very difficult for them to overlook the very explicit contents of the Constitution; but since many of these judges tend to support a winner, the fact that Chávez has been strong enough to defeat recent maneuvers of the opposition has led some of them to change their opinion.

b) The oil coup: the last remedy

79. With the possibility of a military or institutional coup now discarded, the strategy of the economic coup is stronger than ever.

80. They tried to paralyze the country economically, but what they really had was an employer lockout. Most of the workers were willing to go to work; it was really the company owners who closed the doors to their factories to prevent them from going in.

81. The strike's characteristics were more commercial than productive, taking place particularly in East Caracas, in residential neighborhoods. Shops were open downtown Caracas and in popular neighborhoods. Street vendors were the real winners: it was Christmas. In the rest of the states the situation varied greatly. Where the governors were Chávez' followers, most of the schools and stores stayed open; but where the governors were against him they put pressure on schools and shops to close their doors—yet, even then they never came close to what happened in East Caracas.

82. Aware that they couldn't paralyze the country, Venezuela's oil company executives launched their own offensive: since most of the oil workers didn't want to stop production, something had to be done to stop it by any means available. PDVSA's top executives began their criminal sabotage: thanks to their technical information and the complete control over their company's data; they changed the login to prevent access, interrupted the processes, seriously affected some of the facilities and almost blew up some of them—luckily, highly qualified personnel discovered the alterations in the temperature control system in some of these refineries. Finally, in spite of some contraction, oil production continued, so they decided to block both the internal transportation of crude oil and its export abroad, preventing ships from navigating. This oil coup also failed, unable to bend the government, but the country's economy was seriously damaged, and it will take at least two years to overcome its negative consequences.

8. A COUNTERREVOLUTION WITHOUT A REVOLUTION?

83. The complicated international relation of forces; the 1999 meteorological disaster; the heavy weight of the institutional apparatus it has inherited; the slow drafting of new laws to consolidate revolutionary victories, and the need to counteract opposition tactics to destabilize the government during its first four years have all prevented it from carrying out deep socio-economic transformations. This is what makes some people believe that Venezuela is a living paradox: there is a counterrevolution without there having been a true revolution.

84. To analyze this we must first understand what we mean by revolution. If by revolution we mean taking over power, destroying the State apparatus, and adopting drastic economic measures to expropriate the original owners of the means of production—then without a doubt you cannot say that what is happening in Venezuela is a social revolution.

a) Revolution as a process

85. But if we believe that a revolution is a process to turn political power over from a social group to another, and then start implementing deep changes in all aspects of society; and if we believe that the major task of such a process is to create the main subject of this alternative society we are trying to build, then we can say that the Bolivarian process is a revolutionary one.

b) Accomplishments

86. One of the first accomplishments is the Presidency of the Republic having called for a Constituent Assembly and later, having approved a new Constitution that changed all the

rules of the political game and obstructed neoliberalism, taking a stand against the privatization of Venezuela's oil producing company and against latifundia; in favor of small fishermen and against transnational fishing companies; in favor of more cooperatives and micro credits; against privatization of education and in favor of free schooling; against privatization of social security. This Constitution also favors the rights of indigenous peoples; of boys and girls; the right to free information, and it supports a participatory system, where all citizens may play a leading role. But all these projects could have been stillborn if the government had not implemented laws to put constitutional principles into practice. And that is when—as we have already said—the oligarchy begins to understand the menace hovering over its economic interests, and takes immediate action.

c) Institutional restrictions

87. Not only has there been progress; we must also analyze the institutional restrictions that have prevented the process from achieving its goals with more impetus. Some accuse the government, for example, of having done nothing against corruption, though it has adopted important measures, such as the radical reduction (80 %) of secret expenditures and the corruption behind them. Executive Power has also sent to competent courts, hundreds of cases to be investigated and condemned. But the truth is that both the Public Prosecutor and the Comptroller's Office—which should have taken a stand in these cases—usually sabotage the investigations or come to an agreement with the affected parties and end up acquitting them.

88. Very little has been done with the bureaucratic institutions inherited by the government. It has been unable to eradicate the procedures and the vices of public officers, the majority of whom were incorporated in exchange for favors by the AD and COPEI parties, and there are still no laws to eliminate corrupt, incompetent and sabotaging officers.

d) The insurrection of the oligarchic group has strengthened the revolutionary actors

89. But most important of all is that the insurrection of the oligarchic group has strengthened the revolutionary actors. The April 2002 events and those at the end of that year and beginning of 2003 have qualitatively increased the political awareness of the people and the soldiers, the armed expression of the people. They didn't come down from their *cerros* nor rebel in their barracks against the putschist commanders because they had already received solutions to their materials needs; they only wanted Chávez to return to power. And the important thing is that their love for Chávez became a victory thanks to their action. That is when they began to see themselves as actors of their own destiny, subjects of their own lives. They now believe they can change history.

90. The sabotage against oil production and to destroy the country's economy has finally tipped the scales in favor of this process, which now includes the undefined sectors that were still to be found within the Armed Forces. Now their commanders are happy to take over PDVSA, or companies hoarding food, or ships boycotting oil distribution, and many other activities.

91. So revolutionary actors are increasing in numbers, awareness and fighting spirit. And this is precisely the biggest victory of the original Venezuelan process and what makes it revolutionary by definition. There hasn't been much progress in socio-economic transformations, but there has been an enormous progress in the constitution of the main actor of the new society they want to build. Chávez has contributed enormously to this

because he knows that a revolution aimed at solving the poverty affecting important sectors of the population can't be carried out without giving power over to the poor—those who are really and truly interested in pushing the process forward.

92. Today's revolutionary process must be seen more as a marathon than as a 100-meter race. If you start out with the impetus for a 100-meter race you will be defeated: your strength will run out way before you reach your goal. The present world relation of forces requires you to go slowly forward in order to reach your strategic goals. The important thing is to advance, and that in this slow march forward you consolidate the main actor of the revolutionary process, because he is the only one able to guarantee the final victory of the revolution.

EVENTS THAT HAVE TAKEN PLACE AFTER THE PRESENTATION OF THIS PAPER

93. Having failed to attain the goals foreseen by the oil coup and the strike, the opposition now suggests the conflict could be solved through the proposal submitted to former President Carter on January 30: the opposition promises to end the strike—that has already failed anyway—; and the government must promise to accept a solution at the polls: either a revocatory referendum that could be called for August 19, 2003, or an amendment to the Constitution to anticipate general elections; and to give their jobs back to the PDVSA workers who had gone on strike. But the government, who has so far dismissed more than 8500 workers, has rejected this last aspect.

94. Finally, in spite of the hard blow suffered by the opposition by the Supreme Court of Justice's position against the use of a consulting referendum to oust Chávez, the opposition has not lost hope of creating a delicate situation for the President and it has organized the collection of signatures in favor of his dismissal together with eight other proposals. They have apparently collected about 4 million signatures against Chávez in just one day, but according to experts' calculations, this is a totally unrealistic number. Nothing can surprise us coming from this constant twisting of the truth. Lie, lie, because something will always be believed—that is the slogan of the anti Chávez propaganda.

NOTES

1. Tarek William Saab, "Vigencia del MVR no está en peligro," interview, Caracas, Monday, May 21, 2001.
2. See registration in the Libro De Novedades de la Alcábalá 2, Tiuna Fort.