

VENEZUELA



Organising a co-operative at the Hilton

What's happening at the hotel?

The Anauco belongs to Hilton International of Venezuela, a private company. The buildings are the government's.

The hotel is being closed down by the company, breaking the contract. We are organising a co-operative, to get the concession so we won't be unemployed. We the workers will run the hotel ourselves.

Most of the staff support the revolution. The managers are with the opposition. That's the way it usually is. Since job security came in,

we're all talking openly about the revolution, because we're protected, they can't get rid of us. When they did, they had to pay us double. Many workers went down to the Ministry of Labour and they had to re-employ us. So the company couldn't stop us talking freely. What the bosses said to us, though, is that the restaurant was no place for us to be talking politics.

Have your rights changed?

Yes. Now we've got the protection of Article 62 of the constitution. Before, people used to

keep quiet. They did all sorts of things to us and we kept quiet. Now, as the president started opening our eyes and opening our minds... I really don't know what he opened. Now everyone protests. Anyone they do anything to protests, and demands their rights. When Chavez came to power the people woke up. Before that they used to walk all over us. Many businessmen still want to walk all over the workers. So I'm calling on those businessmen to catch up. Because now, we workers know

the constitution, and we know our rights. The President says that we should come to him with solutions, not problems. We have to take advantage now of Chavez being in power. Because he said that we should form co-operatives, that the government will help us.

I've been threatened. The security manager called me and told me that I mustn't revolutionise his hotel. I don't care because I'm fighting for my future. All I want is to carry on and to help my workmates. And to fight for the revolution! And long live Chavez!

Oil workers, retired workers and community defeat oil coup



The constitution prevents privatisation of the oil industry, so that its revenue can be used to end poverty. In December 2002-January 2003, oil executives, the corporate media and corrupt union leaders tried to stop the revolution by stopping the oil industry.

Nelson Nuñez, President of SITRAPETROL, the oil workers union, told us how they defeated the "oil coup":

They called a strike in December, telling everyone that they would carry on until Chavez left. We as trade union leaders put out a statement telling workers this was not a strike over workers' demands, it was a "golpista" strike, an anti-government conspiracy.

Within 24 hours we became travellers, going in a small plane to all the oil sites, telling workers that this was not a strike, and that Carlos Ortega [the "golpista" leader of the CTV union] did not represent the workers.

Almost all the workers stayed, more than 180,000. These are the workers of the industry, those who operate the machines, the rigs, the plants, the wells, who

open the valves, control the gas. The real workers.

There was sabotage of all kinds by the managers. They cut cables, they removed all the industry's data.

The company INTESA ran all the computer systems with its own staff - it was based in a CIA office right here in Venezuela. The US, through the CIA, knew everything because the production programme was invented by them. INTESA managed all that. INTESA took all the data and crashed all the computer systems.

To re-establish all that, we had to look for technicians, retired people. It was a 24-hour, day-and-night struggle because there was a serious danger, not only to the workers but to the whole country. They wanted to blow up the refinery and everyone around. They had no compassion for anyone! I have no words for what they did, it has no price, no limits. It was that serious.

But the worker of this industry has such principles, such great experience and great concern for security above all. We even practise it in our own

homes. We had to proceed with a lot of care, a lot of caution. Check and double check step by step everything they had reversed and wasted until we could safely say: turn on the engine, turn on the compressors, turn on the well, open the valve, and for nothing to go wrong.

We must acknowledge the oil workers of this country. They gave themselves entirely. Many grassroots people participated, joining with us to re-establish production.

Today most of the trade unions are getting together to form a new federation called UNT [Workers National Unity]. The workers can see that the CTV of Carlos Ortega is an empty house. There's no one there.

What do you think about relations with the US union federation AFL-CIO, which has supported Ortega?

I don't know if UNT will have relations with this federation which is "golpista", funds terrorists, and of course wants nothing to do with the process of change we're fighting for. When the time comes, we'll discuss this relationship.

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We tell the story of women so we can defend more effectively a revolution that is a lever for all of us fighting to survive and build a world that values the life and contribution of everyone.

We learned that women were the first to come down from the hills, risking their lives to press the soldiers, each of them some mother's son, to unite with the people and save the revolution.

We learned that they had formed co-operatives, Bolivarian Circles (grassroots organisations that work to improve water, electricity, housing, health, literacy... and to defend the revolution) and housewives' trade unions everywhere. Since women are the carers, who take responsibility for everybody's survival, and since 70% of Venezuelan households are headed by women, it is not surprising that 6 out of 10 Circle members are women. Though some are in political parties, each community makes its own decisions, concentrating its efforts on improving services and getting resources (sometimes with soldiers lending manpower and technology). People are carrying out projects that would usually be in the hands of politicians and bureaucrats. In this way power is shifting from central control to control at the grassroots.

We learned that you can see the revolution on the faces of those who make it. The sisters and brothers in the 'Mano Amiga' Co-operative, at the Anauco Hilton hotel, the housewives, the single mothers... radiate commitment and solidarity, the enemies of greed and personal ambition. Since defeating the coup - by acting together as civilians and soldiers - the population, especially women, have become aware of their own power and the revolutionary process has been unstoppable.

U.S. trade unions: for workers or for the State Department?

On 11 April 2002 some top military men and the employers' organisation, with the support of the US administration, overthrew the elected Venezuela government. The trade union federation CTV, especially its president Carlos Ortega, was centrally involved. CTV has always benefited from the support of the AFL-CIO.

There is a long history of the AFL-CIO acting for the State Department throughout the world. In 1970-1973, it helped the Nixon administration to overthrow Chile's democratically

4 elected Allende government. As a result of this AFL-CIO-assisted coup, "The government crushed Chile's labor

movement, murdered thousands of unionists, and restored Chile's industry to its former US owners."

The AFL-CIO collaboration with the State Department and its implications for working people everywhere have been hidden from the membership - they just pay for it in many ways. As workers, waged or unwaged, we can't allow the power, credibility and resources of US unions to be used to scab on others.

Letter from the Strike to President John Sweeney, AFL-CIO, 16 March 2003. Some union locals have also condemned AFL-CIO collaboration with the State Department.



A woman on Puente Llaguno, who witnessed the "golpista" slaughter on 11 April 2002