



# Tories throw Libya lies at Venezuela

*Hague hijacks Libya conflict to attack Chávez while imperialist powers prepare for war*

by Rafael Rodríguez,  
Hands Off Venezuela

Never one to let the facts get in the way of good propaganda, on 21 February 2011, British Foreign Secretary William Hague proclaimed that Libyan leader Muammar Gaddafi had fled to Venezuela. “I have seen some information that suggests he is on his way there at the moment,” said the Tory minister.

This information was widely repeated over the following days as fact in both liberal and conservative media, coming from such a reputable source as the Foreign Office. It was perfect news for the mainstream press in Britain, giving them the opportunity to smear the Bolivarian movement by labelling President Chávez “guilty by association” with the Libyan leader, and fit nicely in their portrayal of Chávez as some kind of Latin American Gaddafi. The only flaw in the plan was that the story was one big lie.

It is very revealing that the right-wing media and politicians in Britain which denigrate Venezuela as a “dictatorship” hardly had a word of criticism of the rulers of Tunisia and Egypt until their overthrow was imminent.

Far from being a “dictatorship” President Chávez and the Bolivarian movement have consistently demonstrated in one election after another that they have the support of the majority of the Venezuelan people. But democracy in Venezuela is not a case of the people ticking boxes and letting different sectors of the ruling class take turns to run the country, as with most liberal democracies. For instance, the system of communal

councils gives ordinary people huge control over their communities and their daily lives, the very essence of democracy and the very opposite of a dictatorship.

The recent and continuing uprising of the masses in many countries in North Africa and the Middle East against corrupt and dictatorial governments which have been tied politically and economically to multinational corporations and Imperialism are to be applauded and welcomed, such as the overthrow of Ben

Ali and Mubarak in Tunisia and Egypt respectively.

These developments run parallel with the Bolivarian revolution. Indeed they are part of the same worldwide struggle for a fairer and better society as the demands of the masses in the Arab world have been both political; freedom of organisation, speech, assembly and elections and economic; for jobs, lower food prices and equality. Just as we must stand against imperialist intervention in Venezuela and Latin America, we must

also stand against such intervention in Libya and elsewhere.

The Bolivarian Alliance for the Americas, or ALBA, a coalition of left-leaning Latin American countries founded by Venezuela and Cuba, have opposed international military action in Libya, saying that any intervention would be a disguised attempt at seizing the North African country’s oil supply. A statement on Libya from the Hands Off Venezuela steering committee can be found on [www.handsoffvenezuela.org](http://www.handsoffvenezuela.org).



## British workers, migrant workers: One class – one fight!

It’s no secret that working people are bearing the brunt of the Tory cuts, and are leading the fight against them. The Latin American Coalition Against the Cuts (COLACOR) is a newly born network of Latin American organisations and groups in the UK. We oppose the cuts being imposed on the working class and want to raise our voice to-

gether with other migrant communities and with the native working class.

A successful meeting was held on Sunday 27 February in Elephant and Castle which attracted a large number of people from the community, but also from many sections of the anti-cuts movement. At the meeting and in the vibrant Latin

American bloc we led on the 26 March anti-cuts demo (above), we, the Latin American community, had the opportunity to raise our voice, to be heard, to become visible and to show our solidarity with all workers and people fighting against the cuts, no matter where they come from. This is only the beginning of the fight.

# Sanitarios Maracay expropriated at last

by Jorge Martín,  
Hands Off Venezuela

On 19 December 2010, Venezuelan president Hugo Chávez decreed the nationalisation of Sanitarios Maracay, a bathroom ceramics plant in the state of Aragua which used to supply 44% of the Venezuelan market for bathroom ceramics. The factory had been occupied by the workers in November 2006, when the owners tried to make all workers' redundant and re-hire them individually, destroying the trade union and doing away with collective bargaining rights.

The workers organised through a factory council and regular mass meetings of the workforce. They restarted production and became a symbol of the movement for workers' control in Venezuela. The Hands off Venezuela campaign was active in organising international solidarity and a number of delegations visited the workers and learnt from their experience. This was one of the cases in Venezuela where workers managed to restart production before the factory had been expropriated.

The struggle went through a number of different phases

and the workers faced an uphill battle against the bureaucracy of the state, the different wings of the UNT trade union leadership and the sabotage of suppliers and customers. After a long war of attrition against this inspiring example of workers' control, the occupation of the main plant, run by hundreds of workers, came to an end in August 2007.

Only a small group of workers' remained firm, and continued the struggle in very difficult conditions. Following the nationalisation of the factory, they are again in charge and production restarted in March 2011.

The nationalisation of Sanitarios Maracay was part of a plan to build 150,000 new homes in 2011 in order to deal with the emergency created by the floods in December, which left many without a roof over their heads.

Given that one of the key challenges faced by worker-run factories in Venezuela is hostility from private sector suppliers and clients, such initiatives are a key way that the government

can support worker-run businesses. As such, the house building programme should also be expanded to include other suppliers such as the nationalised cement companies and the renationalised steel maker SIDOR.

At the same time as Sanitarios Maracay was nationalised, President Chávez decreed the nationalisation of Alvenca, an aluminium window frames maker. The owners of Alvenca had abandoned the factory four months earlier, owing the workers millions of Bolívares in wages and social security contributions. Alvenca workers then

occupied the installations and had been demanding the expropriation of the factory.

"These companies were bankrupted by capitalism" said Chávez in explaining the decision. In both cases, workers were also putting in practice Chávez's public call for workers who are faced with mass layoffs or violations of their rights to occupy the factories.

Workers at plumbing parts factory INAF, in Aragua, argue that their company should also be expropriated. They have been producing under workers' control since they occupied the plant in June 2006 after a conflict over issues including health and safety, and back wages and benefits. After a long struggle Chávez decreed the expropriation of factory in June 2010, but this has not yet been fully implemented and the workers continue producing on their own, without any access to finance, markets and no official support.

These examples of workers control should serve as a proof that "workers can run factories without bosses, but bosses cannot run factories without workers", and idea which has become the motto of the factory occupation movement in Venezuela and beyond.



## Union leaders jailed for striking in Venezuela? Not so simple...

by Jorge Martín,  
Hands Off Venezuela

"Venezuela union leader Ruben Gonzalez jailed for strike". This was the headline on the BBC news website on 1 March 2011. The article was written in such a way as to give the impression that the government of president Chávez is denying workers the right to strike, and that those who dare end up in jail. The story however is more complicated.

Ruben Gonzalez was a trade union leader at the state-owned iron ore company Ferrominera, part of the CVG industrial group in the southern state of Bolívar. He was put on trial as a result of a strike action in 2009 by a group of workers over unpaid back wages. His trial was scandalously delayed for 16 months, and finally,



Venezuelan trade unionist Rueben Gonzalez, not in jail

he was sentenced to 7 years and 6 months in jail.

Faced with strong protests by trade union activists, including those of the Bolivarian UNT, a Supreme Court judge then overruled the local judge and ordered Ruben Gonzalez to be released

on probation.

The story from the BBC was never updated, so the reader will get the impression that Ruben Gonzalez is in jail. There was no mention of the protests by pro-Chávez trade unionists. No context was given as to the fact that the judicial system is

still largely composed of reactionary magistrates who regularly side with the bosses against the workers and with the counter-revolutionary opposition against the Bolivarian revolution.

There was no mention to the fact that the giant state-owned CVG steel and aluminum complex is now undergoing the most important experiment of workers' control anywhere in the world. This, which was demanded by the workers in a meeting with president Chávez, is facing the stubborn resistance of the old managers who would like it to fail and are using their power to try and push workers' against the idea of workers' control.

The BBC "story" was yet another example of subtle distortion of the truth by leaving important facts out of the picture and not following up the news as they develop.

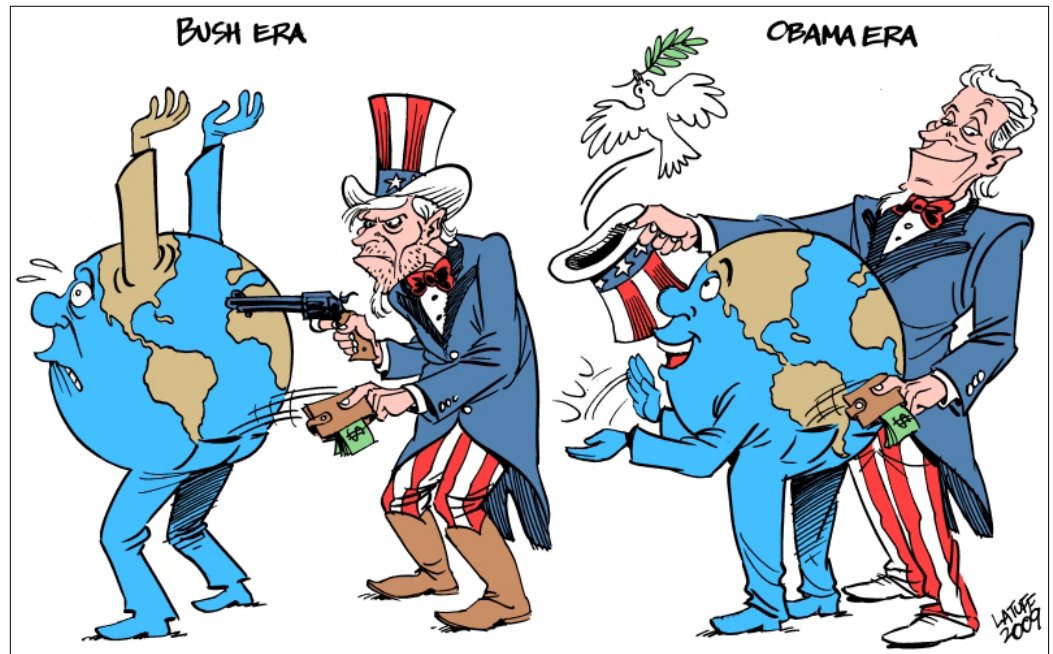
# Imperialist intervention in Venezuela continues

by Matt Stevenson,  
Hands Off Venezuela

While the Venezuelan people quietly get on with the daily task of building and strengthening a revolution, dangerous foreign intervention and plots to bring down the Bolivarian Revolution continue as strong as ever. The Empire has not ceased its war on Chávez.

Following last year's violation of Venezuelan airspace by U.S. spy planes and drones, and at least \$40 million in US taxpayers' money given to anti-Chávez groups in Venezuela in recent years, President Obama's 2012 national budget requests yet more additional funding specifically for anti-Chávez groups inside Venezuela. This at a time when social spending inside the US is being cut.

Although the budget request is wrapped in double-speak describing how the millions of dollars of funds are to be used, it has been revealed that US taxpayers' money has been used primarily for subversion and destabilisation inside Venezuela, and channelled to a very select group. This is one example of how the threats from both inside and outside of Venezuela against the majority-backed government are co-ordinated. Inside Venezuela they involve opposition-aligned business leaders, media outlets, politicians and pseudo-civil rights groups, and their close ties and personal relationships with American Government officials. If you



thought under Bush things were bad, nothing has changed with Obama.

## PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS

With presidential elections taking place in Venezuela in 2012, the ground is being set to help prepare a "candidate" to oppose Chávez at the ballot box. The opposition's blind hostility to the revolutionary process will not change, but their face will. Leading opposition figures inside Venezuela have been caught on record openly detailing the strategy for next year's presidential election. They have recognised that Hugo Chávez is too popular for anyone who strongly opposes him to stand any chance of winning an election. They simply don't have the numbers. For this reason, they are seeking a "Chávez-lite" candidate, hoping to co-opt the population with a more representative candidate and rhetoric rather than the hard-right candidates selected in the past.

There are still Colombian paramilitaries operating in parts of Venezuela, but they and their backers are acting with less

abandon and recklessness now, aware that they have failed so far to achieve their objectives and instead proved Chávez correct when he talks publicly of foreign plots. Tactics have changed. The hard line agenda to discredit and remove Chávez has not. In recently released cables revealed by Wikileaks, William B. Wood, then U.S. Ambassador to Colombia, wrote in 2006 that Uribe "authorises clandestine cross border operations against the FARC as appropriate while trying to avoid a repeat of the crisis generated by the capture of FARC official Rodrigo Granda". Wikileaks documents also reveal the frankness with which Colombian officials understand their role in their use of diplomacy with Venezuela. While speaking with the U.S. Ambassador, Jose Obdulio Gaviria, an Uribe adviser, told him: "We are the perfect hypocrites."

## IGNORANCE OR DISTORTION

Worryingly, the Wikileaks cables detail how internal discussion with the US Government is based on inaccuracies. They are full of comments demonstrating either ignorance, or a strong distortion of the facts. A former US Ambassador to Caracas wrote: "The quality of healthcare in Venezuela has declined as the

GBRV (Government of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela) has shifted resources from the traditional medical system to 'Barrio Adentro'." Hard evidence shows the opposite to be true. Every Venezuelan, for the first time in the country's history, has access to high quality, free healthcare, from the preventive care level, up to complex, high-tech treatments and interventions.

"The Embassy cables on Venezuela don't just reveal a distortion of Venezuela's reality, which is an attempt to portray the Chávez administration in a negative light, they also provide insight into who the US government sources are and how US diplomats operate as spies in the country," comments Eva Golinger, a journalist and lawyer who has had years of experience of deciphering classified US government documents, initially to prove US involvement in the coup which briefly removed President Chávez from power in 2002.

Hands off Venezuela will continue to defend Venezuela's sovereign democratic revolution, especially at this crucial time when its vision is an example to uprisings all over the world, while attempts to further discredit the achievements and leadership of the Bolivarian Revolution do not cease.



# Opposition media compares Chávez to Hitler yet again

by Jorge Martín  
Hands off Venezuela

As happens every so often, the Venezuelan right wing media and their international counterparts are once again raising a hue and cry over alleged threats to freedom of the media and freedom of expression in Venezuela.

So, as I walked down to the newspaper stand in Parque Central in Caracas I had visions of newspapers with blanked out front pages, as was usually the case during the IV Republic. However, what I found was very different. The front pages of most of the papers (El Universal, El Nacional, El Nuevo País, 2001,

El Mundo, Reporte Diario de la Economía, La Razón, etc.) were extremely critical of the decision of the national assembly to pass an Enabling Act giving Chávez emergency powers. In fact, "critical" is too soft a word to describe their reaction. Many of them were hysterically denouncing the move as dictatorial.

However, one front page that really caught my attention was TalCual. The daily opposition paper, edited by former leftist turned rabid reactionary Teodoro Petkoff, had a headline boldly proclaiming "Going towards a dictatorship" and a caricature of Chávez giving a Nazi-style salute.

In any democratic country such a provocation would probably lead to legal action against the editor. Not in Venezuela. The editorial, written by Petkoff himself, calls the democratically elected president an "ignomus" and uses extremely derogatory nicknames of his own making to refer to him.

The concluding paragraph compares Chávez with Hitler: "This is what Adolf Hitler did. On March 24, 1933, the Reichstag, the German Parliament, gave him special powers for indefinite time and to legislate over any issue. The Reich-



stag never met again; from then on Hitler ruled in a dictatorial manner. With this violation of the constitution..." The fact that granting the president enabling powers is within the constitution seems irrelevant to Petkoff. It is not even the first time he has made the allegation that Chávez is Hitler reincarnate. On 1 February 2007 Petkoff published a "Heil Hugo" front page with a picture of Charlie Chaplin as Hitler.

Despite all the protests of Petkoff and the rest of the reactionary media, nationally and internationally, about the so-called dictatorial Chávez, elections and referenda are held very often in Venezuela, and the people have time and time again given support to the Bolivarian revolution, in the ballot box and on the

streets, defending it against the coup plots of the "democratic" opposition represented by Petkoff.

Teodoro Petkoff, who was once a leftist, joined the Caldera government in the 1990s, where he was in charge of the privatisation of most state owned companies, following the diktats of the IMF. He supported the April 2002 coup against president Chávez and published a famous editorial entitled "Chao Hugo" celebrating his undemocratic removal. He is one of the main leaders of the opposition and acted as the main advisor to the opposition presidential candidate Manuel Rosales in the December 2006 elections. Petkoff concludes his editorial with this statement: "Chávez has started to walk, now for real, the path to a dictatorship. Will the country swallow it?" This sounds like a very ominous threat, particularly coming from someone who supported the coup in April 2002 and has played a role in every single undemocratic plot of the reactionary opposition to remove Chávez and put an end to the Bolivarian revolution. The problem in Venezuela, clearly, is not one of lack of freedom of expression, but one of incredible and dangerous leniency with the sworn enemies of the democratic will of the people.



Spot the difference?

## 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 independent 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](mailto:britain@handsoffvenezuela.org)

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

Name:

Address:

Post code:

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