

Venezuela: The Domino that Won't Fall Continues from page 1

More than 300 rural campesino leaders have been assassinated by mercenaries, as well as Chavista leaders, which the mainstream press hardly ever mentions. Between 2013 and 2017, there were 123 victims of the opposition violence who were lynched, beheaded, burnt, assassinated. Violent opposition events are then interpreted by the NGOs as human rights abuses by government forces, and never as abuses by the paid opposition mercenaries that kill, maim, destroy and disrupt the peace.

International NGOs such as USAID, NED, NDI, and IRI are agents of destabilization of the Venezuelan political order. The local NGOs that they support are spies and saboteurs that defame the government internationally and spread malign propaganda. In Venezuela alone, between the years of 2002 and 2012, NED (National Endowment for Democracy) spent more than \$100 million and created 300 new NGOs backing the opposition groups. These local NGOs "spin" accusations against the government, creating tensions within the country and criticism abroad.

Social problems that are commonplace in other countries are blamed on the socialist policies of Maduro's government, such as, for example migration. It is not true that millions of Venezuelans have fled the country. Ironically enough the CIA World Fact Book reports the difference between people leaving Venezuela in 2018 exceeding those arriving in the country by only 38,000, not several million as is so often reported.

But human rights especially have become the latest weapon against Venezuela, a politicized punching bag distorted out of all recognition. The latest human rights travesty was the blatantly biased report by former Chilean President Michelle Bachelett. Eighty-two percent of those interviewed for the report lived outside the country. The report deliberately ignored copious information provided by the Venezuelan government about nutrition and all kinds of social programs. Bachelett's report contained 70 factual errors, and it was rejected outright by the U.N. Human Rights Council on July 9, 2019.

The Venezuelan upper classes want to regain the largess of the state on which they depended until the election of Chávez. The supposed "capitalist" class in Venezuela, with relatively few exceptions, is a comprador class, with strong links to foreign capital. It is a parasitic private sector dependent on lucrative import transactions with the help of state funds, loans and contracts. A private sector such as this prevented Venezuela from developing a thriving diversified economy.

Venezuela has the largest known petroleum reserves in the world. That it takes 43 days for an oil tanker to go from the Middle East to Texas, while it only 4 days from Venezuela, makes Venezuelan oil especially attractive to

the USA. This is a powerful clue to the USA's desire to utterly control Venezuela. John Bolton openly stated that the goal is to gain control of Venezuela's oil. President Trump said, gangster-like, that he did not understand why they were not at war with Venezuela "because they have all that oil and are right on our back door."

One of the most enduring legacies of President Hugo Chávez has been the Venezuelan Constitution, which combines participatory democracy with socialist and communitarian features. It enshrines human rights hitherto muted or absent, such as the rights of women, children, all indigenous people, the handicapped and the environment. It closed some of the loopholes by which the upper classes had ruled, and it asserted the sovereignty of Venezuela over its own resources. Its impact inside the country has been immense. It has also been influential in the region, having inspired the new constitutions in Ecuador and Bolivia.

The Bolivarian constitution expresses the longing for rights and sovereignty of a majority of the people that had long been marginal to the affairs of state, whose human rights were only nominally recognized, and answers their desire for an alternative society to "savage capitalism," as Hugo Chávez used to call it. The Venezuelan working classes recognize that, however faulty, the state now defines itself by their interests and that the anti-democratic sector of the opposition makes no promises they could possibly believe.

The current U.S. aggression is not simply against a regime but against the Venezuelan nation itself, with plans to dismember it - as they did in the past in Colombia (to create Panama and own the Canal), and more recently in Yugoslavia, Kosovo and Ukraine. The USA wishes to divide it up among their willing allies: the oil rich western borderlands for Colombia, the eastern Esequibo for Guyana, the southeastern Amazonian borderland for Brazil, and Paraguay will have its huge debt to Venezuela forgiven. In what is left of the nation, Canada gets the gold mines and the U.S. oil corporations get the oil. We cannot allow this to happen.

The Bolivarian Revolution has had many successes that in any other country would have been universally hailed as such. The achievements have been ignored, muted, denied or disparaged by the USA, its allies and the disgraceful corporate mainstream press. Since January 2019, for example, the New York Times, Wall Street Journal and the Washington Post have run a combined 800 articles on Venezuela. Only four of them refer to the Bolivarian government's social programs and achievements and then only to dismiss them. However, the achievements have been recognized by many other countries, by the UN and several of its agencies, and other international organizations.

UNESCO declared Venezuela illiteracy free in 2005. From 1990 to 2010 there was a 50% reduction of poverty, with extreme poverty reduced to 4.4%. In the same period infant mortality was

halved - from 25 deaths per 1000 to 13 deaths per 1000, lower than Colombia, Ecuador, Brazil and Peru. Venezuela provides universal free health services and subsidized drugstores. From 1990 to 2012, malnutrition was reduced from 13.5% to 3.6%. By 2017, the illegal sanctions practically returned that rate to the previous high at 11.7%.

Despite the economic blockade, there has been an increase in food security through a food distribution network, nutrition programs, subsidized packages (CLAP), free school meals and communes producing food for cities. Thousands of communal councils, communes and collectives of all sorts are organizing, planting, feeding and building, helping Venezuelans endure the aggression to which they are subjected. They direct and implement many of the government social programs, and most of them are led by women.

In 2019, the UN recognized Venezuela as one of the top countries for guaranteeing people's right to housing. This housing achievement of Bolivarian Venezuela is unrivaled in any other country to date, providing 2.7 million housing units in integrated housing zones with all public services programs between 2012 and 2019. Nine-and-a-half million Venezuelans have been given a new home.

The failure of the USA and its allies to destroy Bolivarian Venezuela may indeed turn the Pink Tide that Chavez helped inaugurated into a Red Tide, protecting Cuba, Nicaragua and Bolivia, and encouraging other regional governments to exercise real self-determination that does not suit the interests of the USA and corporate capitalism. The fate of Venezuela's Bolivarian Revolution will determine in great measure the triumph or failure of any sort of socialism as a viable alternative to savage capitalism.

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On August 7th Venezuela's Vice president Delcy Rodríguez denounced the seizure of a ship containing 25 thousand tons of Soy in the Panama Canal due to a new U.S. "Total blockade" while calling on the United Nations to take action against the "serious aggression" that impede Venezuela's "right to food."

The Venezuelan senior official explained that the owner of the vessel carrying the merchandise of food was informed by the insurance company that it was prevented from moving that cargo to Venezuela.

The shipment seizure comes just days after Trump signed an executive order Monday that imposes a near-total blockade on government assets in that country, which includes an embargo against food suppliers, among other basic inputs. This is the first time in 30 years that Washington has taken such an action against a sovereign country.

Small Farms in Crosshairs

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Many would love to permit their micro farms, but the numbers have been run. It is so expensive to permit a farm in Humboldt County that one must grow more than 10k sq. ft. to justify the basic costs. Even at 10k sq. ft. it leaves very little room for a single person to survive, let alone a family or crew. Monocrop mega farms shouldn't be the basis for the legal industry in the Emerald Triangle, that's not what we represent. Yet that is what this current system of compliance rewards and is creating.

Our local government is waging a war against its own community ultimately for being poor, or for failing to navigate a process put in place for mega farm corporations. Small farmers were set up to fail by the Humboldt County Government. This is one reason the current military actions are so offensive. It feels as if the military is hitting small farmers over a head with their rifles demanding that they stop being poor. What have these farms done wrong exactly? **Do you actually think anyone would choose to not be legal and grow anyway if they had other options?** No, no logical person would risk everything they have to cultivate a plant purely out of anarchy or spite.

The County incessantly screams "environmental damage" left and right to justify this ongoing war, and while I don't doubt that there are legitimate environmental crimes out there, many of the supposed crimes are entirely arbitrary and baffling. From septic tanks to compost toilets, the restoration of clear-cuts, to rainwater ponds and "junk" cars, no property owner or industry (don't get me started on corporations) is held to such strict standards as those in Humboldt County. For example I met an abatement recipient who was charged tens of thousands a day for non-existent plants and a classic car he was working on which was sitting on a movable trailer.

I also spoke with ex-Planning and Building Department employees who describe scenarios where mega farmers with connections to county officials enjoy a rubber stamp permit process. I have witnessed other connected people get abatements, cleared instantly, while others in the same position are left footing bills in the thousands, while under total attack.

It's not what you know, but who in Humboldt County without question. When you hear environmental crimes, it's crucial to not get caught in county propaganda, and take a second look. The bust stories featured in the media are used as a tool to keep people asleep.

Legalization is not what it claims to be. If you haven't tried to navigate the permit process in Humboldt County for yourself, you shouldn't have an opinion on the matter.



I work in a criminal law office, often working on cannabis related cases. I have sat through countless permit and abatement meetings, Planning and Building Department meetings with lawyers and staff, Board of Supervisors meetings, as well as protests and community organization meetings. I have heard the stories that would make anyone gasp in disbelief and horror. The narratives used to paint small family permaculture farms as some evil player, is not what is actually happening.

**Honsal said,
"Marijuana continues to be a real driver of crime here in the county."**

Is a plant or homesteading the "problem?" After a decade's long worthless drug war somehow the sheriffs office has failed to connect the dots between increased crime and the continual criminalization of cultivation.

When people advocate for their military attacking their own community they are really advocating for the corporate take over of cannabis. They are championing the loss of a culture, while small farms are criminalized and have their lives threatened. We are fighting for our very lives and what we value as a community. It's easy to mislead and to be misled, what takes courage is standing up for what is right no matter how unpopular. You don't have to cultivate cannabis to acknowledge that the military going after small farmers is

**"the theater of the absurd,"
a "manufactured crisis" and just plain wrong.**

- Shakti