

IRAQ AND VENEZUELA: TWO COUNTRIES, ONE STRUGGLE!

FROM THE VENEZUELA SOLIDARITY NETWORK



HOW HAS THE U.S. RESPONDED TO IRAQI AND VENEZUELAN DEMOCRACY MOVEMENTS?

- Iraq was home to the largest secular democratic movement in the Arab world—but it was a movement, which was not submissive to US political or corporate interests. This is one reason the US supported Saddam Hussein during the 70s and 80s. US dissatisfaction with Hussein did not occur until after he had killed, tortured, and/or incarcerated hundreds of thousands of democracy activists and unionists.
- President Bush calls Venezuela's President Hugo Chavez a dictator, and Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi calls Chavez "a thug." But what do Venezuelans say? Pres. Chavez has handily won three elections, certified by the Organization of American States, the Carter Center, and the European Union. The Venezuelan people have elected Bolivarian candidates to all branches of government, voted to ratify a new constitution, and are involved in all levels of political life. The US has responded by supporting attempts to overthrow Venezuela's elected government, sabotage its economy, and buy its elections.

HOW DOES THE LIBERAL DEMOCRACY THE U.S. GOVERNMENT WANTS FOR IRAQ CONTRAST WITH VENEZUELA'S PARTICIPATORY DEMOCRACY?

- "Liberal democracy" is all about opening national resources for exploitation by global corporations. The US is urging passage of the Iraqi Oil Law that would turn over 66 to 75% control of Iraqi oil fields to Shell, Exxon, ConocoPhillips, BP, and Chevron. Recent polls show that 2/3rds of all Iraqis oppose the oil law. But...in liberal democracy, what matters is what the corporations want, not the people. After all...neither the Iraqi nor the US people wanted this war. Who did?
- Venezuela's popular government is based on "participatory democracy." People have a direct role in managing, protecting and benefiting from natural resources like oil. It is no accident that Exxon and ConocoPhillips, eagerly awaiting the opening of Iraqi oil fields, are pulling out of Venezuela rather ceding it majority control in all oil development. With participatory democracy, we come closest to what the word democracy means in the first place: the people rule.

IS THERE MORE MEDIA FREEDOM IN IRAQ OR VENEZUELA?

- The Iraqi Media Network was set up by the Pentagon and is run by a defense contractor--Scientific Applications International Corp. Occupation troops seized a TV station in Mosul for broadcasting reports from Al-Jazeera. Ismael Zayer, former editor-in-chief of the US funded Al-Sabah newspaper, told the Washington Post that, "We thought that Americans were here to create a free media" but "instead, we were being suffocated." Since the beginning of the occupation, 112 journalists have been killed, plus 40 support workers, compared with 66 journalists in Vietnam between 1955 and 1975, and 68 journalists during World War II.
- Venezuela allows low-power radio broadcasts without restriction— there is no "pirate radio" in Venezuela, since such stations are legal. In fact, the government grants millions of dollars to community operated media centers. Corporate run, opposition media constitutes the largest sector of media. Even though stations such as RCTV participated in an illegal coup against the elected government in 2002, it wasn't until 2007 that its license to use public airwaves was revoked. RCTV is still broadcasting via cable and satellite.

HOW DOES LIFE IN IRAQ, AFTER BEING "LIBERATED" BY THE US INVASION, COMPARE WITH LIFE IN BOLIVARIAN VENEZUELA?

- One million Iraqis have died in this occupation. Eight million Iraqis are sick and dying and in need of aid. Forty percent of Iraqi professionals, and one third of doctors, have left the country. Since 2003, 2,000 doctors have been murdered. From 1960 to 1990, the mortality rates for children 5 years old and under went from 171 deaths per thousand, to 50, and the infant mortality rate went from 117 deaths per thousand births to 60. However, 17 years of Gulf War I, sanctions, and the current occupation have reversed that trend: the mortality rate for children under five has increased by 125% since the first Gulf War--the highest rate of increase in the world.



educational system was once considered a regional model. Even during the sanctions that prevented its funding of schools, attendance was still nearly 100%. In 2006 it had dropped to 30%. The literacy Iraq has dropped to 74%.

Half the Iraqi people live on \$1 or less per day, while every day, the US government spends \$50 per Iraqi to fund the occupation. Iraq has over 2 million internally displaced refugees, and 2.5 million who have fled the country. Only 202 Iraqi refugees were accepted into the US last year.

- The Center for Economic Policy Research's Marc Weisbrot writes about life in Venezuela:

"...The government is currently running a budget surplus, despite billions of dollars of increased social spending that now provides subsidized food to 40 percent of the population, health care for millions of poor people, and greatly increased education spending. The official poverty rate has fallen to 38.5 percent from its most recent peak of 54 percent after the opposition oil strike. But this measures only cash income; if the food subsidies and health care were taken into account, it would be well under 30 percent."

At least 13 million Venezuelans—almost half the population—have taken advantage of educational services made available by the government. The literacy rate for Venezuelans over 15 is 93%.

Over 5 million acres have been turned over to poor and indigenous communities, with heavy machinery provided to work the soil, as part of ongoing land and agricultural reforms. The government built 15,000 homes for the poor in 2004, with plans to build 120,000 more.

DOES OIL HAVE ANYTHING TO DO WITH U.S. POLICY TOWARD IRAQ AND VENEZUELA?

- Iraq has 112 billion barrels (bbl) of proven oil reserves, and estimates indicate that there are 200-300 bbl more of unproven reserves. If there are as many as 300 bbls of oil, that would mean that Iraq harbors one quarter of world oil reserves.
- Venezuela has 80 bbl of proven oil reserves. However, in its Orinoco River basin, estimates indicate that there may be as much as 1.3 trillion barrels of unconventionally available oil reserves. Some 300 bbl of those reserves are recoverable under current technologies. If the 1.3 trillion barrels estimate is accurate, that would make Venezuela home to the largest oil reserves in the world.

The US/Corporate Empire "justified" going to war with lies and fabrications. The only beneficiaries have been companies like Dick Cheney's Halliburton, Bechtel, and Blackwater. Big oil companies are waiting in the wings to start collecting their mega-profits. Likewise, US/Corporate lust for oil—and its fear and loathing of participatory democracy—is behind the attempts to destabilize elected government in Venezuela.

Iraq, under occupation, is an example to the world of what it means to be under the boot heel of the US/Corporate Empire. Venezuela is an example of what it means to begin to break free of that Empire. The Venezuela Solidarity Network believes that US foreign policy is connected, especially in regards to Iraq and Venezuela. Join us in opposing this inhumane war and standing in solidarity with the people of Venezuela. Write us or give us a call!

Email: vsn@afgi.org Call: 202-544-9355 www.vensolidarity.org

MARK YOUR CALENDARS:

Venezuela Solidarity Teach-In, Washington DC. March 14-16, 2008.

Sponsored by the Venezuela Solidarity Network.

**Venezuela Solidarity Network
1247 E St., SE,
Washington, DC
20003**

