

# Rockefeller Men Plot to Oust Venezuelan Populist

**Opponents of Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez vow to redouble their destabilizing efforts as the international oil market and the U.S. economy suffer the consequences.**

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By Gonzalo Baeza

For the last few months, pressure has been stepped up by influential globalization advocates, high-ranking officers within the U.S. government, and the oil lobby as they seek to topple the leader of one of the world's largest petroleum-producing countries, implementing what some have euphemistically called "regime change."

The veiled destabilization attempts against a nation that supplies between 10 percent and 15 percent of the United States' oil needs reached a climax Jan. 15 in New York, as leading members of the Venezuelan opposition convened under the aegis of Bilderberger David Rockefeller's Americas Society.

The organization is a sister group of the Council of the Americas, both of which were founded by Rockefeller in 1965 as forums for top bankers and businessmen seeking to consolidate their political and financial operations throughout the Western Hemisphere.

Conference speakers discussed strategies on how to best dispose of Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez, twice elected by the largest margins in the country's history.

In spite of its popularity among the middle- and low-income sectors in Venezuela, the Chavez regime has been suffering since Dec. 2 a labor lockout masterminded by the local business elites.

Although attempts to paralyze the economy failed as a majority of workers refused to strike, Chavez's opponents have managed to interrupt the activities of the state-owned oil company Petroleos de Venezuela (PDVSA).

The impact of dwindling oil revenues has been significant given Venezuela's status as the world's fifth-largest oil producer and the fact that the commodity's exports account for half the government's income and one-third of the country's GDP.

According to Venezuela Energy Minister Rafael Ramirez, the economic stoppage has so far cost the country \$4 billion in lost oil sales.

Venezuelan congress member Timoteo Zambrano set the tone of the Americas Society's meeting by stating that the "international community can't maintain a passive position, it has to have a much more active role" in the country's crisis.

His stringent calls for foreign interference in Venezuela's affairs brought reminiscences of the botched April 2002 coup against Chavez and the alleged meddling of U.S. officials in the conspiracy.

As it was later disclosed, coup leaders held prior consultations with high-ranking U.S. officials such as Otto Reich—who at the time was assistant secretary of state for Western Hemisphere affairs—and Elliot Abrams, senior director of the National Security Council for "democracy, human rights and international operations."

Hosting the Americas Society meeting was the man whom *Newsweek* magazine referred to as the "suspected bankroller" of the April coup: Gustavo Cisneros.

An advisor member for globalist organizations such as the Council on Foreign Relations and Rockefeller's Americas Society, Cisneros was ranked by *Forbes* magazine last year as the world's 55th richest man on account of his \$5.3 billion fortune.

Although now serving as the CEO of the Cisneros Group—controller of America Online Latin America and Univision, the United States' fifth-largest television network—the Venezuelan tycoon used to be an advisor for Rockefeller's Chase Manhattan Bank as well as a liaison between the Rockefeller family and his country's government.



**Members of the Venezuelan National Guard block streets near the Miraflores Palace during the visit of former U.S. President Jimmy Carter in Caracas, Venezuela. Carter met with Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez in an attempt to break the deadlock in Venezuela's general strike. Many populists believe the U.S. government is trying to incite a regime change in Venezuela—a change to a more globalist-minded leader who might be open to "sharing" Venezuela's petroleum with U.S. oil interests.**

Cisneros is also known for his predilection for fishing in the Orinoco River, where he has shared his hobby with friends George Bush the Elder and Jimmy Carter.

Right after the New York meeting Carter was flown into Venezuela as Cisneros's special guest, enjoying the customary fishing trip at the billionaire's expense before starting his official visit Jan. 20.

Playing his trademarked role as facilitator of dialogue, Carter met the secretary general of the Organization of American States, Cesar Gaviria, one of the mediators between the Chavez government and Chavez's opponents.

Whatever credibility Carter might have enjoyed in Venezuela vanished after his fishing trip in the company of Cisneros.

## TARGETING VENEZUELA'S OIL

The question now remains as to what it is about Chavez that inspires the animosity of the international plutocracy.

Often described as a populist, his promotion of economic nationalism and large-scale social reforms in a country where 80 percent of its 24 million population lives in poverty has baffled commentators.

Whereas on the one hand the Venezuelan president is described in rightist quarters as a "Marxist" who refuses to privatize such state assets as the oil company PDVSA, the left has condemned him for the so-called "reactionary" character of his regime, backed as it is by the armed forces to which Chavez himself belongs.

Both the international mainstream press and the local business community hide the fact that the Chavez regime would not have come to be had it not been for the perennial corruption of his main political opponents: the Social Christian and Democratic Action parties, which alternated in power for four decades.

Thus, the country's majority poor population presently sits on top of vast oil riches, just as it has for many years.

Opponents of Chavez have repeatedly demanded a referendum on his mandate if not his immediate deposal.

The constitution provides for a binding plebiscite midway through Chavez's six-year presidential term in August.

The opposition, however, is not willing to wait that long even though, according to most opinion polls, it is highly unlikely that they could defeat Chavez in the ballots.

This is why they have set their sights on disrupting PDVSA.

Curtailed oil production in the country—some 2.7 million barrels a day under pre-strike conditions, of which nearly 1.5 million were exported to the U.S.—is, accordingly, an extremely effective way of putting the national economy on its knees.

Although PDVSA is a state company, it retains a degree of autonomy in both defining its business policies and appointing its executives. Because of this independence, most of its board of directors owes their appointments to pre-Chavez administrations.

In such a scenario, it was predictable that most of PDVSA's top echelon would conspire against Chavez just like it did during the April coup, once again issuing calls for company workers to join the labor lockout.

Their scheming was indirectly exposed by White House Press Secretary Ari Fleischer, who on Dec. 13 said that the Bush administration supported the call for early elections in Venezuela.

Fleischer's remarks came at a time when the stoppage seemed to be succeeding and oil production hit a record low of 200,000 barrels a day.

Workers loyal to Chavez decided to fill in for the absentees and by mid-January production had more than doubled that figure, producing enough oil to at least meet the country's needs. Their output was supplemented with oil shipments from Brazil, Ecuador and Russia, countries that opposed the unconstitutional efforts to overthrow Chavez.

In spite of its apparent success, the Cisneros-backed opposition did not count on both the economic and political consequences that an extended lockout would have for the only government in the Western Hemisphere that has so far supported their campaign: the United States.

The lack of oil started to be felt in the international markets as *The New York Times* reported on Jan. 11 how the retail price of gasoline in the United States had risen by at least a dime a gallon.

The most significant complication came, however, when the Bush administration realized that its planned invasion of Iraq would become even more costlier if yet one more oil market—in this case, the traditionally reliable reserves of South America's third-largest economy—remained shut down for long.

According to industry analyst Larry Goldstein, president of the Petroleum Industry Research Foundation, the U.S. government was counting on the fact that there would be enough spare capacity in the oil markets to make up for Iraqi oil.

"But no one then was contemplating lost Venezuelan oil. Now, we won't have enough spare capacity to take care of both events," Goldstein said.

As a by-product of Goldstein's lamentations, Venezuela's \$120 billion economy is estimated to have shrunk by as much as 25 percent in 2002, all thanks to the local saboteurs and their foreign abettors. ★