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Venezuela

Attempted coups

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After having been swept away at the elections of 1998 to 2000, the opposition began to regain hope from 2001 onwards when the government introduced new legislation; laws which protected small fishers against industrial fishing, laws on land which implemented a timid but necessary agrarian reform, new tax laws which introduce the concept of taxation in a country where nobody was used to it.

The opposition embarked on a strategy of permanent destabilization; economic destabilization by the leaders of the oil industry and the local and international employers, permanent demonstrations of the middle and upper classes relayed through the media, and military destabilization.

Economic sabotage culminated in the lockout of December 2002-January 2003. The country's key industries were brought to a halt, while the big food companies stopped production, creating serious shortages for the poor. In the shanty towns without access to town gas, families had to cook with charcoal in the absence of supplies of bottled gas. Meanwhile, international reserves melted away following a massive flight of capital (\$50 billion in summer 2002).

Since December 2001, Venezuela has experienced a whole year of demonstrations of the opposition calling for the resignation of the head of state. Some attracted hundreds of thousands of participants. Support for these demonstrations is presented by the media as heroic opposition to the 'Castro-Communist dictatorship' of Chavez. Between programmes, advertisements for the opposition are broadcast. Some journalists describe the situation as a media coup d'état.

Since the defeat of the lock-out of December 2002-January 2003, the opposition continues to pin its hopes on a military uprising, turning its propaganda towards the denunciation of Venezuela's protection of the Colombian FARC. The goal is to put Venezuela on the list of 'rogue states' and provoke an extreme tension with neighbouring Colombia, the US's foremost ally in the region (it was the only Latin American country to have supported the war in Iraq).

If the degree of radicalism of the Bolivarian revolution is to be assessed by the radicalism of its opposition, there is no doubt that Venezuela is in the vanguard of the anti-imperialist movement in Latin America!