

# Venezuela: U.S. and Opposition's Private Sector Waging Economic War, Attacking Food Sovereignty

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Global Research, July 11, 2013

[Correo del Orinoco](#) 28 June 2013

Region: [Latin America & Caribbean](#)

Theme: [Global Economy](#)

The economic war by the opposition private sector against Venezuela continues apace. It actually began years ago as one of the prongs of Washington's pitchfork for the overthrow of the constitutionally and democratically elected socialist government here. The most well known attack on the economy was the managers' walkout and industrial sabotage of PDVSA the nationalized oil industry that nearly destroyed the economy but failed due to the brilliant response by the workers and the government. Since then, Washington and its opposition front in Venezuela have developed new strategies and tactics to wage war on the government with what Hillary Clinton called, "soft power".

## The Counter-Revolution and Its Fronts

There was the speculation by the stock exchange houses in Caracas, resulting in capital flight; the corrupting of the private bank officials resulting in the theft of millions of depositors' funds; infiltration of government bureaucracies by the fifth column to render services ineffective; the circulation of illegal drugs into Venezuelan youth, particularly in locales of the Chavista electorate; Colombian paramilitary groups crossing the border illegally to spawn violence and in some cases, executing labor leaders; the organizing and funding of the opposition by the US State Department for elections and violent street actions; the August 2012 attack on Venezuela's biggest oil refinery at Amuay; the sabotage of the national electrical system causing blackouts throughout the country; the opposition's denial of agriculture on vast stretches of their privately-held fertile lands; artificially-produced inflation by means of the parallel dollar market and attacks on the production and distribution of food and household items with their control of food processing and distribution and their hoarding and dumping of massive quantities of food to create shortages in the market. Of course each of these attacks against the revolution have been made-to-order for consumption by the US/European capitalist media to convince the public that the Venezuelan government is failing and more broadly that "socialism doesn't work".

## The Government Fights Back

It hasn't been easy but throughout the 14 years of Chavez' presidency the government has patiently and systematically responded to each new front opened by the opposition. Since the October 12, 2012 election won convincingly by President Chavez, the opposition has stepped up their attacks in a number of these areas and increasingly the new Maduro-led government has become more aggressive in defeating them. Shortly after appointing his cabinet following his April 14th election victory, he fired bureaucrats who have served as impediments to the revolution. Some of them simply didn't do their jobs, denying prompt and effective public services and others directly undermined the mission and work of the

revolutionary government. Maduro's purging of officials in Indepabis, Venezuela's consumer protection agency serves as one example and his replacement of directors in the national electric system is another. His appointment of Jesse Chacon as Minister of Electricity and their subsequent militarization of the nation's electrical depots has greatly reduced the number and length of the blackout sabotage across the country. As the government has gained more control of the electrical system, we have seen the opposition shift their focus to sabotage of food distribution.

## Sabotage Of Food Processing & Distribution

The sabotage of food processing and distribution has been going on for years. In the last two weeks of January, 2008, more than 13,000 tons of food were seized by the government as part of Chavez' Food Sovereignty Plan launched in order to fight speculation, hoarding and sabotage in the food distribution chain. Jorge Martin wrote at the time, "The main lesson is that food sovereignty is not compatible with capitalism". When he announced government measures to gain control of the food distribution system on January 22, President Chavez explained, "Among the responsibilities of the government, one of them is to attack the capitalist model, the monopolies and rackets, so that the people, the workers, together with the revolutionary government can take the country forward".

## 40,000 Tons Of Hoarded Food Seized Since January

Since last November, the opposition has stepped up two main fronts: manipulating the parallel dollar-bolivar exchange rate market causing the devaluation of the local currency, the bolivar and the hoarding and price speculation on basic food products typical of the average Venezuelan family's diet. Regarding the foods kept off the market, it's worth mentioning that most of it is under price controls which offers lower profits to the opposition food industries. There have been times when for weeks it has been impossible to find corn meal for making traditional repas or powdered milk or recently even toothpaste and toilet paper - in some areas - of the country. It seems the US and some European media has placed an extra emphasis on the shortage of toilet paper in a few locations of the country, perceiving the propaganda value for readers' imaginations - "OMG An entire country without toilet paper!!" We Venezuelans can only smile at this level of ignorance but we can sympathize given the blanket negative brainwashing to which the average news reader is subjected in the United States and Europe. But now that the government and the security forces are working in tandem with the local population and the Communal Councils for intelligence purposes, large amounts of foodstuffs have been found hoarded all over the country. Since January at least 40,000 tons of food has been found hidden in various locations. This sort of action is both political and economic - political in the sense that the population will blame the government for these artificially engineered shortages prejudicing its popularity; economic in the sense that it puts pressure on the government to raise the prices of basic foods thus sparking inflation.

## 400 Tons Of Hoarded Food Seized On June 18

Many people prefer to believe opposition claims that it is government mismanagement and policy causing shortages but on June 18th in Tachira state, 400 tons of basic foods were found hoarded in a secret warehouse in the city of San Cristobal. The products discovered were 195 tons of rice, one ton of ground coffee, 4,000 liters of cooking oil plus sugar, black beans, toilet rolls, canned sardines and tuna, lentils, peas, oats, mayonnaise, tomato sauce

and serviettes. All foods sold at regulated process. The discovery was made by a joint operation led by Tachira state governor, José Vielma Mora, in conjunction with the state police and the tax authorities (SENIAT). The fact that this merchandise was found in Tachira state, which borders with Colombia, could mean that the food was due to be illegally smuggled into Colombia and sold in supermarkets there at much higher prices than in Venezuela.

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