



EYEWITNESS VENEZUELA: Bolivarian process revealed in a place called Chuao

by Larry Hales, Denver FIST

One judge of the revolutionary process ongoing in the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela is how far it reaches. To understand how deep the process is, how far and wide-reaching the aspirations of the Venezuelan people are, one needs to look in remote areas long neglected before the revolution began. One needs to seek out a little town called Chuao.

Chuao is not easily accessible. It is surrounded by mountains and rainforests to the south, part of Rancho Grande and Henri Pittier National Park, and by the Caribbean Sea to the north. To get to Chuao, one has to traverse mountains, pass through dense rainforests or go by boat from the beach of Puerto Colombia for justice.

With the attacks on the Rev. Wright, the continued attack on communities of color, an election season and a growing economic crisis that is sure to exacerbate misery for working people—now is the time to affirm the self-determination of oppressed peoples and stand together in solidarity with the Black struggle.

Part of the state of Aragua, located in the north-central region of the Bolivarian Republic, Chuao is a fishing village known for producing world-famous cocoa beans.

According to UNESCO, Chuao has been continually inhabited since the 16th century. The population now is primarily Afro-Venezuelan, whose descendants were brought from Africa as chattel slaves by the Spanish colonizers.

Many tourists flock to Chuao now, as it is just across the bay from Puerto Colombia, has a large Afro-Venezuelan population and a distinct culture, and is renown for its cacao cultivation, with beans that come from pods that look like huge fruit.

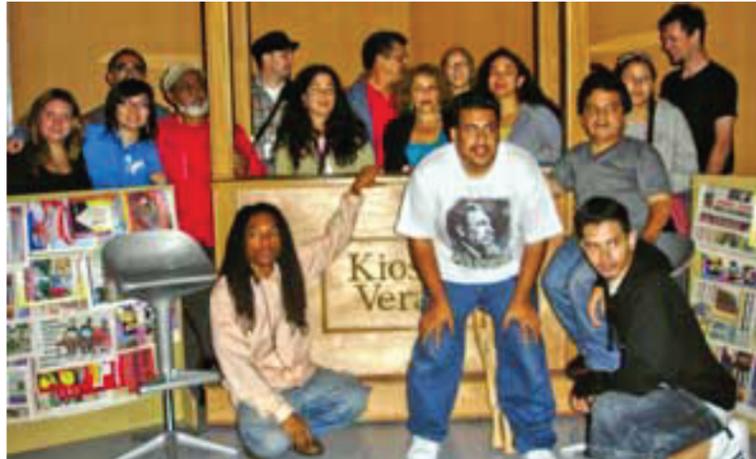
However, before the Bolivarian process, Chuao was in extreme disrepair. The people lived in near isolation, as access to the rest of the country was tenuous, and the people lived in severe poverty. The roads were not paved, the septic system inadequate, leading to many illnesses, and the communally built homes were crumbling. The people of Chuao had no access to health care. They assert that they survived by practicing a “primitive” form of socialism.

Their primary means of subsistence, fishing, was threatened because of bottom-trawling, a commercial fishing method in which a huge net is dragged along the ocean floor, destroying the seabed, killing coral, displacing boulders and removing seaweed.

According to the April 28 issue of Venezuela Analysis, “Restrictions were placed on trawling with the Enabling Law in 2001, forcing the commercial fishing companies to only use the method in deeper waters, thus benefiting local fisherman.” The practice has now been completely outlawed under the new Law of Fishing and Agriculture, passed in March.

President Hugo Chavez said of the new law, “We have approved the law prohibiting trawling because we decided that what we had done was not enough. ... We will help [commercial fishers] convert over to traditional fishing methods.”

Because of the conditions imposed upon the people of Chuao—conditions that go all the way back to coloniza-



Larry Hales, squatting left, and Mike Martinez, center in front of banner, of FIST during U.S. delegation to Venezuela.

tion, slavery and neglect by successive governments—the people of Chuao had begun to leave, putting the town and its culture in danger.

But now the roads in Chuao are paved, as part of an ongoing process to revitalize the town for its original inhabitants. The septic system has been rebuilt. Houses have been rebuilt, and there is now a health clinic that provides free medical care. A fish house was built so that fish can now be frozen and stored, and the government has leased the people of Chuao boats at 1 percent interest to be paid over 25 years.

The cacao plantation is now in the hands of a co-operative of 130 people. Cooperatives can be entered into at anytime, and people entering can leave of their own will and take back their initial investment. The government issues loans and provides training and advice so that the co-ops can be productive for the members and the rest of society.

On his show “Alo Presidente,” which was filmed from the beach of Chuao in April, President Chavez remarked on the increased production of cocoa beans there. Production went from 5,000 kilograms in 2005 to (continued on page 11)

ExxonMobil gets rich, the earth dies

By Caleb Maupin, Cleveland FIST



EYEWITNESS VENEZUELA (continued)

20,000 in 2007. “The production quadrupled, a growth of 300 percent, and that’s going to continue to go up,” he said. (Venezuela Analysis, April 2 8)

Chavez also announced that a processing plant is being built in Aragua, so that instead of cocoa beans being shipped to foreign processing plants—where 60 percent of the beans harvested in the Bolivarian Republic currently go—they can be processed by the people of Venezuela to the benefit of the same people.

Because its infrastructure is being rebuilt, Chuao and its 1,500 inhabitants can now flourish. Whether they stay or leave, the decision does not have to be made because of poverty and neglect. The unique culture—including the feast of Corpus Christi where dancers dressed in costumes and devil masks dance to drum rhythms—can continue, thrive and develop alongside the material changes. ■

North Carolina People’s Assembly (continued)

residents by the end of August, and roadblocks will take place throughout the month in North Carolina, particularly focusing on Alamance and Henderson counties.

Sabra commented on the economic downturn and the need for more jobs that has created divisions between Black and Latin@ workers: “Meanwhile, the

Workers in the U.S. are suffering the horrors of an economic crisis. They are losing their homes and being laid off in record numbers. They are forced to pay skyrocketing prices to fill their gas tanks and to put food on the table. But the big corporations and bankers aren’t suffering with them.

In fact, ExxonMobil, the giant oil company, just reported the “largest ever quarterly operating profits for a U.S. company,” according to the Associated Press (July 31). While workers suffered, ExxonMobil raked in an unprecedented \$11.68 billion in three months.

ExxonMobil has another record—a record of crimes the oil giant committed against the people and the environment. ExxonMobil’s recklessness in the famous Exxon Valdez oil spill caused 11 million gallons of oil to be dumped into the ocean. The state of Alaska says this “is widely considered the number-one spill worldwide in terms of damage to the environment.”

Record profits do not stop this oil giant from pressing for more and more wealth. Greed, the fundamental driving force of the capitalist economic system, is alive and well in the boardrooms of ExxonMobil. Now the company wants to revoke the regulations preventing offshore drilling and drilling on Federal Wildlife

U.S. government is spending billions of dollars every day to finance Israel, the war on Iraq and now on Iran and building bombs. ... We need to stop fighting amongst ourselves for the crumbs off their table.”

In a renewed spirit of unity, led by the Fruit of Labor cultural artists, assembly participants closed the

Reserves in Alaska!

ExxonMobil has spent millions of dollars to undermine and counter the scientific fact of global warming. While the horrors of ecological disaster loom, ExxonMobil has funded efforts to deny reality.

ExxonMobil is what the capitalist system is all about. Workers in Venezuela have realized that. The Chavez government has used the nationalized oil company profits to serve the needs of the people, thereby eliminating profits for the rich as the motivation behind oil production. As a result, in Venezuela, a gallon of gasoline currently costs less than 50 cents. The revenue reaped from oil production goes to building schools and health care clinics, not to line some capitalist’s pockets.

There is no fundamental difference between ExxonMobil and other major capitalist corporations. They all exist to make profits. Period.

The workers in Venezuela and Bolivia had the right idea when they stood up and fought back. As workers continue to suffer here, a real and lasting solution to the economic crisis demands a struggle to smash these heartless bloodsuckers of the working class, take back the earth’s natural resources, and build a world where the ruthlessness, exploitation, and corruption incarnated in ExxonMobil can no longer exist. ■

convention by singing: “We will not stand for exploitation. We will not stand for racism. We will not stand for injustice.”

The writer is a union organizer with UE Local 150 and with the youth group FIST, organizing high school students to fight against the war and military recruitment. ■