

THE REVOLUTION WILL NOT BE TELEVISED

On 23rd February 2006, WPJF held a screening of 'The Revolution Will Not be Televised', a 75 minute documentary highlighting the April 2002 coup against President Chavez (and his government) in Venezuela. Initially invited to Venezuela to film the President, the film-makers could not have known the great opportunity this invitation gave them to be present at such a politically momentous time. The events that unfolded during 3 days of filming resulted in a documentary with all of the highlights of a high concept film – manipulation, confrontation and triumph:

11 April – 150,000 middle class people and workers employed in the oil industry marched against Chavez's move to nationalise the oil industry. National news reported that National Guard and Chavez supporters clashed with protesters resulting in 10+ deaths and 110 injuries. Film footage, broadcast on privately owned TV Channels, showed Chavez supporters shooting directly down on to the 150,000 marchers.

12 April – The Head of Armed Forces announced that Chavez had resigned (this was later denied by Chavez). Pedro Carmona, one of the strike organisers (a wealthy businessman and former business associate of Bush) was appointed head of the transitional government.

13 April – As the people of Venezuela marched on the Presidential Palace in support of Chavez, Pedro Carmona's government set about taking apart Chavez's manifestos and policies. However, in their eagerness they made two crucial mistakes. Firstly, they retained the Palace Guards, still loyal to Chavez's government. Secondly, they failed to stop interviews with their own supporters, revealing how they had orchestrated the 11th April clash by careful manipulation of the media and military (the film footage shown of the strike and oil protesters had been carefully edited!). Later, when the full version of the footage was found, it showed that the pro-Chavez supporters had been protecting themselves from snipers, and that the street below them, allegedly containing 150,000 marchers, was in fact empty.

14 April – Whilst thousands of Chavez's supporters chanted and protested outside the Presidential Palace, Palace Guards implemented their plan and arrested the interlopers, Carmona's interim government collapsed, and Chavez returned to office.

The documentary raised a couple of key issues for me:

The vulnerability of any political party unable to represent the people it is supposed to serve.

Despite Chavez's attempts to bring about a new democracy and engage with more people on the ground, his government was overthrown (albeit temporarily).

Despite Carmona's government having the backing of the powerful, the rich and the media, his government was also overthrown.

Once a government loses touch with the people, policies become irrelevant. The real power lies with the people. The people of Venezuela knew this. It was their actions, their protests that determined who would govern Venezuela.

The dangers in assuming that developments in media/information provision can only benefit the pursuit of truth and democracy.

A significant amount of power within Venezuela lay (and still lies) with the TV stations. The manipulation of film footage was crucial to the Carmona strategy to oust Chavez. Relayed instantly across the world, the international press responded quickly with claims that a group of people under siege themselves were in fact the perpetrators of violence. Even following the arrest of the interim Government, privately controlled TV channels loyal to Carmona continued to mislead the people and control military responses by underplaying the seriousness of the situation. Later, Channel 8, the State TV station, was central in getting information out about what was happening, informing the troops that they had been deceived by the High Command and urging them to regroup.

Technological development, increasing the amount of and speed at which information can be delivered, also brings with it greater opportunities for deception and manipulation. Current thinking is that we are a more informed 'society', receiving instant news and potentially in a position to exert our own influence through various media. In reality, the full capabilities of the media are held by a very small percentage of the population. This small group is not restricted to using technology to maintain its power. It is also able to use our hunger for information (to overload us), our desire for truth and justice (to lie to us) and our willingness to discount what we know (to maintain our feelings of powerlessness).



Chavez supporters welcome the president back to the Presidential Palace.

I came away from the film that evening wondering if I'd ever allowed myself to be 'spoon fed' by the media, in order to maintain my own apathy? Still feeling pretty uncomfortable with my answer to that!

If you've seen the film and would like to make your own comments, then we would love to hear them either through the newsletter or through our E-Group. If you'd like to borrow the DVD get in touch (contact details on the back page)

www.chavezthefilm.com/html/film/home_film.htm

Hope to see you at the next film (details on the diary dates page and WPJF Website).