

## Document Citation

Title	<b>Politician to the people</b>
Author(s)	Melissa Levine
Source	<i>East Bay Express</i>
Date	2003 Oct 29
Type	review
Language	English
Pagination	35
No. of Pages	1
Subjects	
Film Subjects	The revolution will not be televised, Bartley, Kim, 2003



# Politician to the People

**BY**  
**MELISSA**  
**LEVINE**

In 1998, a passionate majority of Venezuelans elected a new president. His name was Hugo Chavez, and he was the first leader in generations to come from outside the ruling class. He vowed to redistribute Venezuela's oil wealth and to involve the people intimately in the political process. Openly comparing his populist movement to that of Simon Bolivar, he encouraged literacy, enfranchised many thousands of working poor, decried globalization, and promised to liberate his country of the "free-market policies imposed on Venezuela by the United States."

Oops.

In the fast-paced, riveting, and affecting documentary *The Revolution Will Not Be Televised*, directors Kim Bartley and Donnacha O'Briain set up shop in Venezuela to "get behind the layers of myth and rumor" surrounding Chavez' presidency. With nearly unlimited access to the presidential palace, they trace his administration from the early days of jubilant rallies and heartfelt handshakes to the shocking coup d'état that ousted the leader from power for two tense days in April 2002 — and, in a breathtaking display of popular will, through the revolution that brought him back. The directors could not have anticipated this level of drama, but they immediately commit to it, placing themselves in harm's way to record a view from inside that is otherwise uncovered. As a result, the film cuts to the quick.

Chavez is a warm, charismatic man whose demeanor invites connection with the people of his country. He's also gifted at

straight talk, giving authentic, unscripted speeches and communicating directly with the people via a weekly call-in television show. Compared with the steel-jawed opposition leaders and oil millionaires, who demonstrably lie through their teeth, Chavez is a savior, a leader who trusts the people, communicates with them, and holds himself accountable to his promises to them.

Meanwhile, Chavez' platform rankles the rich. First, he announces that he wants to distribute the country's oil wealth among the entire populace — that is, not just the wealthy 20 percent but the 80 percent of the population that is Venezuela's poor. Then, after September 11, Chavez expresses concern that the US military action in Afghanistan occasionally misses its targets. He holds up a photo of dead Afghan children and explains, with genuine sorrow, that they were bombed while eating a meal with their parents. "Yes, let's find the terrorists," he says, "but let's not have a carte blanche to do anything. You cannot fight terror with terror. We demand that you think before you act."

Uh-oh. As the world's fourth-largest exporter of oil, Venezuela had long been a comfortable, worry-free supplier to the United States. Before Chavez, we had exactly the kind of relationship that Washington seeks and, you know, occasionally "ensures" with oil suppliers. So what are we to think when, on April 11, 2002, the Venezuelan military suddenly and illegally reroutes an anti-Chavez

demonstration to the presidential palace, forces a violent conflict with pro-Chavez supporters, surrounds the palace, takes Chavez into custody, and erects a new government, all within 24 hours?

I'm going to hazard a guess here: The United States was involved. The film lets the events do the talking, but the evidence is loud, clear, and damning. The coup came about only after the two major opposition leaders visited officials here, and the man who assumed the presidency was Pedro



Carmona, head of the board that manages Venezuela's oil. Meanwhile, while Chavez was held captive on an unidentified island, a mysterious airplane appeared to cart him off to another country, presumably to render him unable to reassume power. In what country was that plane registered? Here's a hint: You're living in it.

I'm no mathematician, but as an American who takes in the news once every couple of weeks, I feel pretty comfortable with the following equation: oil-rich country + populist leader who resists globalization and redistributes wealth = US intervention. It's lucky for Venezuela the Bush administration couldn't even try to claim that Chavez had WMDs, though of course Bush had just unloaded some serious artillery in another part of the world. It appears that he had bigger fish to shock and awe.

With a plot so thick, sometimes it's hard to believe that this is a documentary and not a scripted drama. (Would that it were.) The action is constant: first a rally, as vast crowds pack the streets to cheer for Chavez; then demonstrations of another kind, with rich Venezuelans frightened of losing their wealth organizing against the leader. (With a comic lack of perspective, one member of the upper class claims that the poor have not

***The Revolution ... chronicles the action-packed saga of Venezuela's Hugo Chavez.***

struggled as she has.) A military occupation of the palace is soon followed by a standoff with the president. Finally, the film builds to a truly moving demonstration in which uncounted thousands of citizens brave gun violence to rally for the ousted Chavez. It's a remarkable display of activism.

What's more, the film is an object lesson in the politics of television. Immediately after the coup, Chavez' ministers struggle to deliver a message to the people, but the only station available to them — the state station — has had its signal cut. All other stations, owned by the oil oligarchy that opposes Chavez, broadcast lies. Even CNN (ah, CNN, you unsacred cow) broadcasts propaganda, offering an interview with Carmona in which he claims to retain power. Amazingly, even without televised assurance of who has control of the palace, the people of Venezuela take to the streets and demand their leader back. They don't care about what's on TV. They just want the truth, and they'll risk life and limb to get it.

This revolution may not have been televised, but it was filmed, and it is a glorious thing. ■