

# Timeline of a coup

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December 10th The Chamber of Commerce Federation (Fedecámaras), the nation's main business group, and the Venezuelan Workers Confederation (CTV), the largest union organization, lead a one-day "general strike" to protest 49 economic laws that President Hugo Chávez Frías has enacted using special powers granted by the National Assembly. The laws seek to advance nationalist, popular and ecological objectives. The most controversial measures would redistribute idle land to poor people and require that the state-owned Petróleos de Venezuela (PDVSA) have a majority stake in all of the country's future oil projects. Fedecámaras head Pedro Carmona Estanga declares the work stoppage a success. In poorer neighborhoods, however, businesses remain open and Chávez supporters hold a rally in support of the laws.

February 9th Chávez replaces PDVSA chief Gen. Guacaipuro Lameda and, within days, five of the company's seven board members. The new leader, Gastón Parra, and the new board members support strict adherence to quotas set by the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries to keep prices up. PDVSA managers say Chávez's appointments are political and unqualified. They will demand Parra's resignation.

February 18th Venezuela's ambassador-designate to Greece, Rear Adm. Carlos Molina Tamayo, calls on Chávez to resign. Molina is leading a dissident group of officers plotting for almost a year to force Chávez from power.

February 20th CTV President Carlos Ortega threatens more work stoppages. The federation has close ties to Democratic Action (AD), the oldest opposition party. AD and the nation's other traditional party, the Independent Political Electoral Organization Committee (COPEI), lack popular support after governing for three decades. That era's corruption and widening economic disparity gave rise to Chávez's 1998 election.

March 17th A work stoppage led by PDVSA managers and administrators fails to halt oil production. Chávez, threatening to militarize the company, says the managers don't have the country's interests in mind. He notes that most Venezuelans live in poverty despite the nation's oil wealth. Another work stoppage led by PDVSA managers interrupts oil production. But the three main oil unions, including the Petroleum Workers Federation (Fedepetrol), urge Venezuelans to go to work and defy calls for a general strike.

April 7th Chávez announces he has fired seven PDVSA managers and forced 12 others to retire. He also increases the public sector minimum wage 20 percent and urges the private sector to keep pace. He urges an end to the oil work stoppage, but refuses to negotiate with the CTV, saying its leadership is "illegitimate and does not represent the country's workers.

April 9th " Widening the work disruptions beyond the oil industry, Fedecámaras and the CTV lead a 24-hour "general strike." White-collar workers are prominent in protests.

April 10th Fedecámaras and the CTV extend the work stoppage another 24 hours. National Guard Maj. Gen. Rafael Damiani accuses Chávez of violence against oil company workers. Army Gen. Néstor González accuses Chávez of backing leftist rebels in Colombia.

April 11th Fedecámaras and the CTV declare that the work stoppage will continue indefinitely. At 11:30 a.m., leaders of business groups and the traditional parties gather at a private luncheon in Caracas with U.S. Ambassador Charles S. Shapiro at the mansion of media magnate Gustavo Cisneros. At about 1 p.m., tens of thousands of people march through Caracas to protest

Chávez's policies; business and union leaders demand his resignation. After the march reaches its announced destination, the PDVSA headquarters, the leaders make a surprise move, turning the crowd toward Miraflores, the presidential palace, where thousands of Chávez supporters have congregated, mostly from poor neighborhoods ringing the city. The two demonstrations clash, with city police and National Guard troops in the middle. The city police are under the control of Caracas Mayor Alfredo Peña, a rightwing Chávez opponent. Stone-throwing and tear gas cause confusion. At about 3 p.m., shooting breaks out in front of the palace. The shots, according to witnesses, come from surrounding buildings, a bridge one block from the palace, police and crowd members. At least 17 people are killed and more than 100 wounded, mostly Chávez supporters. The media blame Chávez and his allies for the gunfire. As crowds surge toward the palace, armed forces chief Gen. Lucas Rincón Romero disobeys an order from Chávez to call in tanks and troops. Chávez orders all TV stations to broadcast a speech in which he warns Venezuelans "not to fall into provocation." Private stations split the screen so they can continue broadcasting the violence. The government cuts transmission signals from them. Early in the evening, nine top military officers demand Chávez's resignation. The nine include army commander Gen. Efraín Vázquez Velasco, a U.S. Army School of the Americas graduate.



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Chávez says he's unwilling to resign but would agree to "abandon his functions," a procedure requiring National Assembly approval. At 10:20 p.m., National Guard Gen. Alberto Camacho Kairuz announces that Chávez has "abandoned his functions" and that the armed forces are in control.

April 12: At 3:25 a.m., Rincón announces that Chávez has "resigned" and is in custody. At 4:55 a.m., Carmona announces he has been named president. By midmorning, the military moves Chávez to Fort Tiuna, the army headquarters, just southwest of Caracas. The Bush administration expresses support for the new government. Carmona names a cabinet that excludes labor representatives and leans heavily toward COPEI. Carmona stokes military rivalries by naming two navy officers to the cabinet—including Adm. Héctor Ramírez Pérez as defense minister—and none from the army. In the afternoon, 19 Latin American presidents, meeting in San José, Costa Rica, condemn the break in constitutional order and threaten to invoke an Organization of American States charter signed last year that requires sanctions against any coup in the region. In a decree announced at 5:45 p.m., Carmona dissolves the National Assembly and fires the Supreme Court. Carmona also suspends the nation's constitution, passed in 1999, and overturns the 49 laws. Chávez's daughter, María Gabriela Chávez, tells Cuban television stations her father has not resigned.

April 13: The government raids homes and detains many key Chávez backers, violating "basic standards of due process," according to Human Rights Watch. Chávez supporters in the poor neighborhoods of Caracas begin taking to the streets. Deadly disturbances break out across the country. Chávez, moved from Caracas to a naval base on the coast and later to the Caribbean island of La Orchila, refuses to sign a resignation document. Beginning about 1 p.m., unit commanders in the country's interior defy desk generals and declare their support for Chávez. At 1:30 p.m., Gen. Raúl Baduel, commander of a paratrooper brigade in Maracay, 40 miles west of Caracas, and four other senior field officers announce they are rebelling against the new government and begin to organize a

plan to rescue Chávez. By 2 p.m., tens of thousands of Chávez supporters have converged on the palace, demanding his return. Dozens of soldiers at a barracks opposite the palace raise their weapons and berets in support. The media black out the protests and broadcast cooking shows and movies. As dozens of generals and admirals argue among themselves at Fort Tiuna, the presidential guard retakes the palace. Carmona flees to Tiuna. At 4:30 p.m., Vásquez tells Carmona the military will withdraw support of his government unless he revokes the decree dissolving the National Assembly. At 5 p.m., Carmona reverses the decree, but the move comes too late. A few blocks from the palace, the assembly already is convening to appoint Diosdado Cabello, Chávez's vice president, as interim president, in accordance with the constitution. Cabello pledges to relinquish the post when Chávez returns. The Chávez cabinet meets at the palace. At 10 p.m., Carmona resigns as interim president. Four air force helicopters depart for La Orchila to transport Chávez back.

April 14: At 2:45 a.m., Chávez returns to the palace, where thousands of supporters are waiting. At 4 a.m., he addresses the country in a televised speech that recounts his arrest and congratulates loyal military members, especially a young officer who smuggled out a message from Chávez, announcing he had not resigned. He calls on the opposition to work with him to end the political crisis. After sunrise, thousands of Chávez supporters return to the streets to celebrate. Some loot stores and businesses. Chávez accepts the resignation of his allies on the PDVSA board. April 16: Visiting Caracas, César Gaviria, secretary general of the Organization of American States, calls on Venezuelans to find ways to "express dissent constitutionally," and reaffirms his support for Chávez as the country's legitimate leader. After brief detentions, Chávez's government releases all civilians that Carmona had appointed. Carmona himself is kept under house arrest as the government embarks on an investigation that could lead to criminal charges. The government also keeps a few dozen soldiers and officers in custody for questioning about their role in the uprising. Most, including Molina, will be transferred to house arrest tomorrow.

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Promoting & strengthening links with Venezuelan Trade unionists.

Co-ordinating Solidarity activities within Britain and working together with other groups promoting the Venezuelan cause.

Promoting news & documentaries raising awareness of Venezuela.

Supporting the right of the Venezuelan people to determine their own future free from external intervention.

Promote & undertake solidarity tours to Venezuela