Venezuela, it seems, is a riddle to the audiences of the mainstream media. Yet the riddle conceals a fact. A conflict between opposing interests is roaring in the country, and attempts to stoke that conflict are being intensified by the imperialist-interventionist quarter as the day for a vote on the proposed Constituent Assembly—July 30—nears.

Every day the mainstream media showers its viewers with news reports that are partial and biased. Here are some examples from the past several weeks:

1. A Venezuelan diplomat to the UN has decided to break with the government and resigned. The diplomat called on President Nicolas Maduro to resign immediately.
2. Recent protests have led to the deaths of more than 100 persons.
3. Venezuela’s chief prosecutor has confirmed a second death in Thursday’s protests. The chief prosecutor said she was investigating the death.
4. Maduro has decried the general strike called by the opposition a crude attempt to sabotage the country’s economy.
5. Maduro has also denounced an opposition attack outside the offices of VTV, Venezuelan state TV.
6. Opposition protesters and pro-government forces threw rocks at one another while the Venezuelan National Guard launched teargas and rubber bullets.
7. Streets in opposition-friendly neighborhoods in eastern Caracas were almost entirely devoid of activity during the strike. Some businesses remained open in parts of the capital traditionally loyal to the ruling party but foot and vehicle traffic was significantly reduced.

Other news

Yet there is a significant number of other news stories on Venezuela that the mainstream media chose not to report:

1. Citing the Proletarian Agency of Information, a grassroots media group, on 20 July 2017 Venezuela Analysis reported: In the industrial city of Barquisimeto, many workers have made efforts to maintain production despite several cases of sabotage by business owners, administrators and protestors. In the case of DISICA, a private company that supplies state oil firm Petróleos de Venezuela, S.A. (PdVSA) with iron construction material, the workers “continue working and have not stopped operations.”
2. The same news report said: State-owned Lacteos Los Andes, a diary company, has alleged that since early hours of the afternoon, they have been under attack by opposition groups armed with home-made mortars and Molotov cocktails. The groups “tried to set [...] fire to an industrial gas tank.”

3. Workers complained of delays caused by opposition barricades.

4. Opposition mayors supported the strike.

5. Working class neighborhoods have largely been unaffected by the strike.

6. Maduro told VTV: “The 700 largest companies in the country are working at 100 percent of their capacity.”

7. The government said: Almost all 2.8 million public employees including employees of PdVSA turned up to work. The PdVSA management said it was not affected by the strike. (Ryan Mallett-Outtrim and Katrina Kozarek, “Venezuela Divided Over Opposition’s General Strike,” Venezuela Analysis, July 20, 2017.)

8. Any change to the constitution by the proposed constituent assembly, once elected, will need to be put to a referendum.

9. The death of Hector Anuel, a citizen, assaulted by opposition protesters in Anzoategui state. Anuel’s death sparked a social media outrage, after footage went viral that seemed to show his charred corpse being beaten by opposition protesters. According to news outlet La Tabla, Anuel was killed after being hit by a home-made mortar used by opposition protesters. The shot itself was allegedly caught on camera. Anuel was burned, before being pummelled with stones and other debris. In the footage alleged to show his death, Anuel appeared unarmed. (Ryan Mallett-Outtrim, “Venezuela Shocked by Graphic Footage of Alleged Mortar Killing [2],” Venezuela Analysis, July 19, 2017.)

10. The Bolivarian government made no attempt to stop the opposition-organized “vote taking” even though it had no legal standing (and, therefore, was no more than a circus). Initially, the show was described as a “referendum” and a “plebiscite”. It had the logistical support of the National Assembly, the regional governors and opposition mayors. The propertied classes and imperialist camp also extended full support to the so-called referendum, which should be seen as part of attempts to organize a parallel government. Five rightist former presidents from Latin American countries were allowed to observe the proceedings. They made fiery speeches demanding Maduro’s exit. All these leaders are entangled in corruption cases, and they have not hesitated to use repressive power against workers and peasants in their respective countries. (Jorge Martin, “Venezuela: July 16 opposition ‘consultation’ countered by a Chavista show of strength [3],” In Defense of Marxism, July 20, 2017)

11. The opposition-organized show mobilized a large number of people. However, long queues at “polling stations” in some areas of the capital city were due to a small number of “polling stations.” For example, in Catia, there was one polling station for 90,000 people. Moreover, the opposition leaders have admitted: people could vote more than once. There is already a video showing a person voting three times in one hour in the right-wing stronghold of Chacao. Furthermore, at the end of the day, they burnt the ballots and the registers, which demolishes all scopes to check the opposition announced result. This is the political force, “which has been accusing the Bolivarian revolution of election fraud for the last 15 years!” (ibid.)

12. There was an official dry run of the proposed Constituent Assembly (CA) elections—a presence of Chavismo’s strength—on the same day the so-called referendum was organized by the opposition. The dry run of the Constituent Assembly vote had a very high turnout, as evidenced by long queues in front of official National Electoral Council polling stations throughout the country. Even in big cities, where opposition support is greatest, long queues were common. Local councils of a number of these cities are controlled by the opposition. In many neighborhoods the queues were so long that the polling stations had to keep open until 8pm (four hours later than the scheduled time). There was even significant voter presence in Petare parish, which supported the opposition in recent elections. In Merida, many people waited in queues for hours and finally had to return home without participating in the dry run. (ibid.)

13. In a poll by Hinterlaces of over 1,500 Venezuelans the majority said they support a socialist economy, with the caveat that state-run enterprises need to improve their efficiency. The poll asked participants if “the best thing for Venezuela is a socialist economic model of production, where various forms of private property exist.” Three out of four Venezuelans agreed with this statement and only 1 percent was unsure. The results were released in a
speech by Oscar Schemel (a pollster with Hinterlaces) to local business leaders in Caracas. Schemel said data shows Venezuelans want a socialist state with private investment and a “mixed economy.”: “61 percent of the population affirms that the economy must be led by the state, 86 percent think that the government should promote private investment, 78 percent consider that the government’s dialogue with businesspeople is more important than with the opposition, and 63 percent distrust the opposition.” While the majority of Venezuelans said they support socialism, 63 percent of the respondents said the government needs to become “more productive and efficient”, 32 percent said the current model should “change”, 74 percent said they would oppose any proposal to privatize PDVSA. When asked whether the electricity grid should be privatized, 67 percent opposed the suggestion while 69 percent opposed suggestion for privatizing state telecommunications giant CANTV. (Ryan Mallett-Outtrim, “POLL: 75% of Venezuelans support socialism, 63% distrust opposition” [4],” MR Online, July 23, 2017)

The mainstream media has failed to cover nearly all of these stories; when they have, the message has been distorted to fit the viewpoint of the US ruling class.

**Deaths**

Since the mainstream media incessantly flaunts its “objectivity” we can reasonably ask: how objective has their reporting been on deaths and killings over the last four months? Is there any mention of opposition-induced violence? Any reasonable assessment would conclude that opposition has played little, if any role, other than to protest; whereas most, if not all, have been murdered by Maduro and his security machine.

So far, the opposition organized unrest has left 105 persons dead (date last updated: July 18). There is confusion over the causes of and parties responsible for these deaths. An in-depth account by *Venezuela Analysis* (“In detail: The deaths so far” [5], July 11, 2017) showed the following:

Deaths caused by authorities: 13

Direct victims of opposition political violence: 20

Deaths indirectly linked to opposition barricades: 8

Deaths still unaccounted for/disputed: 44

Accidental deaths: 3

Persons dead during lootings: 14

Deaths attributed to pro-government civilians: 2

The mainstream media not only avoid giving any such breakdown, they completely ignore who murdered whom. They also ignore other pertinent details about the opposition protests:

1. Any details on the tactics most commonly used in opposition demonstrations.
2. How opposition protestors target day-to-day civilian activities and attempt to create a sense of terror.
3. Any investigation into the class affiliation of participants in opposition demonstrations.
4. The extent to which vandalism, arson, bombings are used; or the routine targeting of public institutions (such as clinics).
5. The assassination of Chavista supporters.

Any honest coverage would compel one to ask: are these opposition “crusaders” genuinely interested in “democracy,” or do they simply want the right to plunder and terrorize until they get their way by force? We simply cannot rely on the mainstream media to provide any insight into such pertinent questions.
Voting mathematics

The voting tabulations given by the mainstream media more often than not conform to the viewpoint of the Venezuelan opposition leaders and their supporters. A look into their very own figures on voting in the much touted “consultation” (or “referendum”) is a sterling example. Following are a few key points:

1. The opposition has stated that they had 2,000 polling stations and a total of 14,000 polling booths, which remained open for 9 hours, from 7am until 4pm. A few of stations remained opened later, but most closed much earlier. They report a total of 7,186,170 votes. When we divide that figure by 14,000 booths over 9 hours we get rough estimate of 57 votes per hour per booth. In other words, just over 1 vote every minute in each and every one of the polling booths: 9 hours straight! In one minute and five seconds every voter had to go to the table, show identification documents, have their details written down in the electoral register, receive a paper ballot, go into the booth and fill out the ballot, fold it and put it into the ballot box. Surely a “believable” estimate, commented Jorge Martin: “massive achievement for the opposition, one which breaks all election records and a few laws of physics”! (“Venezuela: July 16 opposition ‘consultation’ countered by a Chavista show of strength [6]”, In Defence of Marxism, July 20, 2017)

2. In Spain, there are 63,000 Venezuelans, according to the census taken on January 2017. Of these 9,000 are below the voting age, leaving 54,000. The opposition claims that 91,981 participated in the consultation. Now, there may be some discrepancies between the census and the real figures, but is it reasonable to accept that there are 38,000 more people than are actually registered officially? Are we not justified to doubt these figures?

3. The opposition officially declared that 7,186,170 people had participated. Let’s assume that the figure is true. That would fall short of the 14 million they themselves had announced would take part, just days before July 16, and also short of the more conservative figure announced by Capriles as a litmus test for the day. The opposition also announced that “with this result Maduro would have lost a recall referendum.” This refers to the Constitution, which states that for a recall referendum to be binding on the sitting president, more people would have to vote for his recall than he actually won in the election. Unfortunately for the opposition, Maduro was elected with 7,587,579 votes in 2013, and thus would not have been recalled. More confusing yet, the figure they apparently plucked out of thin air are less even than the opposition candidate won in that presidential election, which was 7,363,980. (ibid.)

As one might expect, the mainstream media have totally misrepresented the news of the official dry run process of the Constituent Assembly, most claiming poor voter turnout. The Spanish El País informed its readers that in Caracas there was “little influx to some polling stations […]” where a few “looked empty.” Yet the four photographs published by El País were of very long Chavista queues, with a false caption saying the cues were of Chavistas going “to participate in the opposition consultation”! (ibid.)

Interventionist propaganda

The upper classes of Venezuela are trying to regain their lost fiefdom. The program of violence they are implementing, which has rocked Venezuela since April 4, 2017, is part of that effort.

Venezuelan bonds have crashed as result of the sustained unrest, with five-year debt yielding 36 per cent. Economic problems and corruption are wearing down the Bolivarian revolution’s social base; as leaders are forced into a policy of class conciliation, revolutionary mobilization are weakened; and, thus, creating conditions favorable to the upper classes. The disturbances the wealthy elite are creating is part of the imperialists’ intervention plan in Venezuela. The disinformation campaign carried out by the mainstream media is a key component of that effort. So, we should not be surprised by the profusion of Orwellian statements and the incessant vilification of Maduro, in mainstream coverage of Venezuela:
• “The proposed Constituent Assembly would disenfranchise millions of Venezuelans.”
• “If the Maduro regime imposes its Constituent Assembly on July 30, the US will take strong and swift economic actions.”
• Mercosur has asked Maduro to suspend his plan to rewrite the country’s constitution.
• A group of US lawmakers has warned of a new Cuba as Venezuela is trying to transform the country to serve its own people. Senator Marco Rubio of Florida said of Venezuela: “This is a dysfunctional narco-state.” Rubio also said: “How truly tragic would it be for [...] one of the most democratic societies in the hemisphere to become Cuba.” Senator Bob Menendez of New Jersey said: “We are talking about a nearly failed state in our own hemisphere.” Venezuela is a “nearly-failed”, “narco-state,” and yet is “one of the most democratic societies”? Which statement to believe?
• Maduro is just another Fidel. [Yes, they say this.] Cuban-American Republicans and Democrats agree: Maduro must be stopped.
• Rubio brought the wife of Mr. Leopoldo López, one of Venezuela’s opposition leaders, to the White House in February.

The US would obviously prefer to restore its allies to the throne in Venezuela so that they can go on plundering the country; so that surplus labor of the toiling people of Venezuela can be appropriated.

It might be argued that while most of the facts presented above are objective, some are biased. But that would miss the point, which is the wildly divergent narrative presented by the mainstream media. The interests of capitalists and imperialists are stated and restated incessantly; while those of millions of people of Venezuela are downplayed, distorted or ignored.

We cannot remain silent. We must recognize that many other countries may face (or are already facing) the same situation. Would an imperialist state allow some other state to decide/define:

1. The imperialist state’s constitution?
2. Who runs the imperialist state or who should be the president?
3. Its domestic politics?
4. Type of constitution, form of democracy and form of government?

Shouldn’t people of a country be allowed to decide the issues? These questions must be answered by those who support or downplay imperialist intervention in Venezuela and elsewhere.

No intervention should go unchallenged, whether in Venezuela or elsewhere. Piercing the edifice of mainstream media manipulation is a key part of exposing imperialist intervention, not least because it contributes to the political education of those fighting similar battles, leading to more effective organization and resistance.

* Farooque Chowdhury writes from Dhaka, Bangladesh. This article was originally posted in MR Online on 25 July 2017.

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Article-Summary:

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