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# The Coup

## Chronicle of a Coup

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### Saturday, April 6, 2002:

15.00: The CTV (Workers Confederation of Venezuela) calls a 24-hour general strike for Tuesday the 9th over wages. The employer's association Fedecámaras and other groups joined it.

### Sunday, April 7:

12.25: President Hugo Chávez announces the dismissal of seven high executives from Venezuela's state-owned oil company, Petróleos de Venezuela, S.A. (PDVSA), because of their continued conflict with new management named by the government on March 16.

14.30: Chávez orders a 20 percent increase in the minimum wage beginning May 1. Fedecámaras announces its opposition.

### Monday, April 8:

16.00: The military occupies PDVSA production plants to support striking administrators.

17.00: The government begins broadcasts on about 10 small radio and TV networks to counter the effect of the strike.

### Tuesday, April 9:

6.00-16.00: The government blocks 16 commercial radio networks broadcasting information about the strike. The commercial TV networks retaliate by adopting a split screen approach: half of the screen shows the official version of events in accordance with Venezuela's broadcast regulations and other half the network's view.

10.00: The 24-hour general strike begins with a noticeable drop in daily activity. The government says the strike is failing.

17.40: The CTV extends the general strike by 24 hours.

### Wednesday, April 10:

12.40: The government puts military garrisons on alert.

12.55: The CTV threatens to declare an indefinite strike.

14.00: The general of the National Guard, Rafael Bustillo, asks the military not to use force against the strikers.

19.15: The CTV and Fedecámaras declare an indefinite general strike, with the aim of getting Chávez to leave office.

20.20: Defense Minister José Vicente Rangel announces Chávez will speak to the country about the escalation of the strike

21.40: Rangel speaks in Chávez' name. He urges dialogue and that a coup be ruled out.

### Thursday, April 11:

10.00: The largest group of strikers occupies PDVSA's headquarters in Caracas.

11.30: Official sources confirm Chávez will not attend the Rio Group summit of Latin American presidents in Costa Rica, as had been planned.

12.30: The CTV and the Fedecámaras' president, Pedro Carmona, urge a big crowd of people to march to Miraflores Palace, the presidential offices, to demand Chávez' resignation.

14.09: The military high command says Chávez continues as president, that there have been no arrests and that he has the military's backing.

14.30-18.00: Violence erupts around Miraflores, with gunfights and confrontations between Chávez supporters and the opposition march trying to get to the palace. There are between 12 and 24 dead and 110 wounded.

15.00: Attorney General Isaac Rodríguez offers to mediate the sharpening conflict.

15.45-17.15: Chávez' last address to the nation asks

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- for dialogue but also calls the strike leaders “irresponsible”, undermining his intent.
- 16.25: Chávez takes the commercial TV and radio networks off the air due to their non-compliance with broadcast regulations. Throughout Chávez’ address, which broadcast regulations require be carried, the networks use a split screen to show the street fighting alongside his address.
- 17.30: Troops from Caracas’ Fort Tuina leave their barracks and deploy tanks at the entrance to the main southern highway, cutting off Caracas from one its key arteries.
- 17.40: The Catholic Church urges peace and admits there is a social “fracture”.
- 18.30: Business people and unions blame the government for the dead at Miraflores and denounce the use of sharpshooters firing from the presidential headquarters.
- 19.00: About 10 National Guard generals headed by General Héctor Ramírez deny Chávez’ authority and ask for his resignation.
- 19.50: The ex interior and justice minister, Luis Miquilena, Chávez’ principal backer, asks for a constitutional outcome and support for dialogue.
- 21.20: A convoy of tanks and trucks with 200 men heads for Miraflores from Fort Tuina to support Chávez.
- 21.37: The generalship of Army rebels against the “abuse” committed by Chávez against civilians.
- 21.50: Government authorities attribute the Miraflores massacre to the Bandera Roja, which is opposed to Chávez’ government.
- 22.00: The studios of the state network Venezuelan Television are occupied. It halts broadcasting. All of the commercial networks resume broadcasting.
- 22.10: General Rafael Damiani calls on troops loyal to the government not to use arms.
- 22.30: Chávez’ family, including his wife, Marisabel Rodríguez, depart on a flight to the city of Barquisimeto.
- 23.50: The political police DISIP do not recognize Chávez’ authority.
- turned himself over to the military rebels.
- 1.29: Army Commander Efraín Vásquez, principal spokesperson for the rebels, confirms two military officials in the Miraflores Palace are negotiating with Chávez to vacate the presidency.
- 2.30: On the streets, people raucously celebrate Chavez’ eventual departure.
- 3.10: The Navy announces that it has joined the coup
- 3.20: Rincon announces he has asked Chávez to resign and that has done so. At the same time, the top military brass joins the coup.
- 4.00: Chávez is under arrest in Fort Tuina on charges stemming from the Thursday massacre at Miraflores.
- 4.51: Carmona announces he will assume the presidency, heading up a transition civilian-military government. The new government will begin issuing executive orders immediately.
- 14.04: The Attorney General says Chávez has not resigned.
- 17.39: Carmona assumes the presidency, announces a decree repealing many of Chávez’ reforms, says there will be elections within a year, and removes high government ministers from office, including legislators and judicial officials.
- 18.10: The sacked president of the National Assembly, William Lara, denounces the persecutions of Chávez loyalists and the “illegality” of the new regime.
- Saturday, April 13:
- 12.30: Groups supporting Chávez demonstrate in Caracas, looting businesses.
- 13.34: General Raul Baudel and a paratroop brigade in Maracay announce support for Chávez.
- 16.09: Jess Briceo, a new minister, acknowledges Chávez did not resign.
- 16.37: Army Commander Efraín Vásquez says the provisional government has made mistakes. He makes military support for it conditional.
- 16.42: Marisabel Rodríguez says her husband did not resign. She says he was kidnapped and is being held prisoner.
- 17.11: Carmona restores state powers and announces changes to his Friday decree.
- Friday, April 12:**
- 1.10: Communications media say Chávez has

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- 17.53: The head of the National Assembly, William Lara, says the Assembly does not recognize the transition government.
- 20.12: Leaders of Chávez supporters broadcast from Venezuelan Television and announce they have occupied Miraflores.
- 20.32: The mayor of Caracas, Alfredo Pea, says nine people died in the demonstrations today.
- 21.52: Ministerial officials make a TV broadcast from Miraflores.
- 22.11: Chávez' vice president Diosdado Cabello assumes the presidency, sworn in by Lara.
- 22.12: Carmona announces his resignation and recognizes Cabello.

## **Sunday, April 14:**

- 2.50: Deposed president Chávez returns to Miraflores Palace to reassume his post.

## **Sunday afternoon from El Universal (Mexico City)**

In a speech to the nation, Chávez assured there would be neither reprisals nor a witch hunt against the opposition. He also said those who provoked the bloodshed would not go unpunished. He denied he had ever resigned and noted he had the support of heads of states worldwide. Crowds celebrated his return in Caracas. Carmona was placed under house arrest. Soon after he fled to Colombia claiming persecution. He now resides in Miami.

## **UPDATE**

In December 2002, in another attempt to oust Chavez, CTV and Fedecamaras organised a General strike, which despite causing widespread economic damage – particularly in the oil industry – failed.

In February 2003, the Venezuelan authorities, after what they claimed had been a prolonged and thorough investigation, issued a warrant for the arrest of Carlos Ortega. Ortega has since fled to Costa Rica.