

Red Machine Searching for Votes

Fabiola Zerpa.-

The story describes the process implemented by the state-owned oil company Petroleos de Venezuela—managed then by Rafael Ramirez—during election campaigns for the mobilization of militants of the ruling party, the United Socialist Party of Venezuela (*Partido Socialista Unido de Venezuela*), during the elections that took place between 2005-2010. Documents and interviews with employees and former employees revealed an organizational network involving several departments of the company—coordinated by the Directorate of Planning—in the organization and provision of company funds, facilities and staff to ensure a favorable and substantial participation in the elections.

Internal sources also indicated—although could not provide evidence—that the company paid in cash per diems, transportation and refreshments on election day. Then the company, with the same teams formed for mobilization, prepared reports and assessments on voter turnout, especially in areas of influence of PDVSA within the country.

The activities developed by PDVSA employees with company resources included the set up of “red points,” or PSUV muster points near polling stations in schools; verification of the votes (including the “1x10 lists”, where each voter had to make sure 10 other people voted); providing refreshments for activists, witnesses and polling station officers of the ruling party; delivering payments to motorcyclists and bus drivers; hourly reports to the situation room on voter turnout; and determining the precise moment to activate “Operation Trailer,” i.e. to pick up voters at home and bring them to the polls. Employees reported that for every election they were pressured to participate in campaign activities of the ruling party.