

New Rebellion Builds

The chronically unstable political situation in Venezuela boiled over on Oct. 22, when a group of 14 active-duty generals and admirals from all four military forces announced that they were rebelling against the Hugo Chávez government, under the constitutional right to civil disobedience against any government which violates the Constitution. None of the 14 have current troop command—they had been involved in an earlier unsuccessful ouster of Chávez on April 11 of this year—but they called upon other military and civilian forces to join them, announcing they would set up camp in the main plaza in the Altamira section of Caracas until Chávez resigns.

After some hesitation, the civilian opposition leadership—labor, business, and political parties—threw their support behind the officers, and announced they will use the Altamira plaza to centralize collection of two million signatures by Nov. 4, to force a referendum on convoking new elections. A march is planned for Nov. 4 from the

plaza to the National Electoral Commission, to deliver the petitions.

The day prior to the call to rebellion by the 14 officers, on Oct. 21, a 12-hour national strike organized by the country's trade union and business federations and opposition political parties, had shut down an estimated 85% of the country's businesses.

So far, the Chávez government has responded with great trepidation and restraint; it has dismissed the opposition as insignificant, even “clowns,” but has not moved either to arrest the officers, or to repress the thousands gathered in the plaza. Even more significantly, the Chávez government has leashed in its Bolivarian Circles shock-troops, whose leadership is pressing to attack the protestors.

Although the Jacobin Chávez regime is increasingly despised in the country, for its slavish subservience to the IMF's economic policies and the resulting poverty and institutional chaos, the opposition remains wedded to those some economic policies, and has failed to propose any actual solution to the crisis. —*Dennis Small*