

Report

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Latin America: Wall Street's Neoliberal War and Hillary's Role

By Eric Draitser professor and founder: *StopImperialism.com*

Ed.Note: Includes minor edits

What is little discussed amid all the talk of impeachment and corruption in Brazil is the larger context: how international finance capital is working with Hillary Clinton and other US political elites to reassert the Washington Consensus in Latin America; how the right-wing throughout the region is collaborating in this project; and how this is manifesting in the targeted countries. Though the pieces of this puzzle may be partially concealed, it is time to put them all together to see the big picture.

As the world waits for the next episode of the unfolding Brazilian drama, it is critical to note why the spectacle that is this "impeachment" process is happening. Having been elected, and re-elected, four times, Dilma Rousseff and the Workers' Party are undeniably the single-most popular political formation in Brazil, a country known for its deep divide between a wealthy right-wing elite, and the masses of workers and poor people who predominantly support the left.

With this dynamic it is unsurprising to find that the government is being ousted by a coalition of right-wing extremists, from those who unabashedly support the US-installed Brazilian military dictatorship, to those who simply want to see Brazil follow a more neoliberal model of economic development. However, what might be surprising to some is the key role that powerful financial interests have, and will continue to have, over this process, and any future Brazilian government.

In mid-April, just as the impeachment vote was set to take place, Reuters revealed that Brazil's right-wing Vice President Michel Temer was already preparing the shortlist of his presumptive cabinet once Dilma and the Workers' Party is removed. Temer tabbed Paulo Leme to serve as either finance minister or head of the Central Bank. Leme is the Chairman of Goldman Sachs's operations in Brazil, making



The Daily Beast

him perhaps the pre-eminent representative of Wall Street in the country.

One cannot discount the significant influence companies like Goldman Sachs have beyond just their actual holdings in the country. For instance, Wall Street finance capital is very well connected to Brazil's richest man, Jorge Paulo Lemann, a multi-billionaire who owns Heinz Ketchup, Burger King, is the majority stockholder of Anheuser-Busch and Budweiser, and is a close associate of Warren Buffett. With his pedigree in finance capital, it is no surprise that Lemann, and the interests he represents, has been financially backing groups involved in the street protests calling for impeachment.

It should be equally unsurprising that other key protest groups have been funded directly by other Wall Street interests, in particular the infamous Koch Brothers. Charles and David Koch are key moneymen behind the Free Brazil Movement (MBL) and Students for Liberty (EPL) via the Atlas Economic Research Foundation and Atlas Leadership Academy, both of which spawned some of the key protest leaders.

It should come as no surprise then that key

players in the impeachment push in Brazil seem to be taking their orders directly from, or at the very least collaborating with, officials in the US. In fact, the day after the impeachment vote was taken, Senator Aloysio Nunes was in Washing-

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ton for high level meetings with Republican Senator Bob Corker, who is the chairman and ranking member of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, and Democratic Senator Ben Cardin, a key supporter of Hillary Clinton. Nunes was also scheduled to meet with Undersecretary of State Thomas Shannon, the third highest ranking State Department official, and the lead on Latin American affairs, as well as representatives of the lobbyist organization Albright Stonebridge Group, headed by Clinton-backer Madeline Albright.

In effect, these meetings indicate a desire on the part of the coup plotters to collaborate with all sides of the Washington Consensus—Republicans and Democrats, private capital and government agencies—to execute a smooth, US-backed transition in Brazil. It seems that all those lucrative speeches Clinton made to Goldman Sachs weren't simply to impress the Wall Street giant with promises of how financier-friendly her administration would be at home, but also to demonstrate just what commendable customer service she could provide to her patrons in foreign policy too. To see just how those two work hand-in-glove, one needs to simply look South from Brazil at the shining example of Argentina.

In November 2015, Mauricio Macri edged out his rival to win the presidency of Argentina. But while the victory was a clear win for the right-wing in Argentina, it was, in effect, the political equivalent of a hostile takeover by Wall Street. Within days of the electoral triumph, Macri had already unveiled his key economic team which was loaded with Wall Street insiders and representatives of Big Oil, among other industries.

Under Macri, the economy of Argentina is now firmly in the hands of Alfonso Prat-Gay (finance minister), a longtime Wall Street banker, neoliberal ideologue, and former president of Argentina's Central Bank. Francisco

Cabrera (formerly of banking giant HSBC) takes over as industry minister, while another neoliberal ideologue Federico Sturzenegger now serves as president of the Central Bank. The new energy minister Juan Jose Aranguren is the former president of the Argentine division of the oil giant Shell.

Macri has made no pretense about his administration being a proxy of finance capital and big business, as his economic team obviously demonstrates. And Macri himself made this readily apparent with his capitulation to the demands of billionaire vulture capitalist Paul Singer in February, with Argentina agreeing to pay nearly \$5 billion (75% of the claim) to Singer's group which had been holding out against the steadfast refusal of the Cristina Fernandez government to submit to the will of Wall Street billionaires. With this single act, Macri demonstrated for the world, and especially for the financiers in New York and London, that Argentina is open for business.

There is no doubt that one of the targets in Latin America remains raw materials and commodities: both Brazil and Argentina are recognized as major sources for energy and other commodities, while Venezuela remains one of the world's leading oil producers. So from that perspective alone, these countries are obviously highly prized by the Wall Street jackals. But it goes much deeper than that as Latin America is now seen as a focal point of the broader drive to extend US-Wall Street-London hegemony both economically and politically.

Perhaps the centerpieces of this push are the much-discussed Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) and Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP), which would create a corporate supranational trade infrastructure that would essentially subordinate individual nations to the hegemony of corporations and capital. Naturally, the left-progressive forces in Latin America, and their allies, have been the major stumbling block to implementing the TPP and TTIP. But that is now set to change.

Macri has signaled his desire to use Mercosur as a vehicle for entering into TTIP, the massive free trade agreement that would open up participants to European and US capital. He has equally indicated his desire to move closer to the Pacific Alliance countries, three of which (Chile, Peru, and Mexico) are already on board with the TPP. Such moves are made possible by two important factors.

First is the removal of the Rousseff government which, though willing to engage in dialogue on TTIP, has been unwilling to subordi-

nate itself to the interests of Washington and London capital.

Second is the looming election of Hillary Clinton, who remains the principal representative of Wall Street in the US presidential race. Though her long-standing ties to Goldman-Sachs and other powerful banks are well documented, her reverence for free trade in the service of US policy, despite her vacuous campaign rhetoric, is well known.

Clinton unabashedly lied during Democratic national debates on the issue of the TPP, saying that she now opposes it, despite having been in favor of it as late as 2012 while Secretary of State when Clinton said the TPP "sets the gold standard in trade agreements." While she now masquerades as a protectionist opposing a deal that would be bad for working people, she has demonstrated her unflinching support for this type of so-called free trade in the past.

Conversely Donald Trump has actually indicated his opposition to the TPP, though it should be noted that his argument that it would benefit China is laughable. Still, Trump is not enamored with this sort of free trade agreement, and is less than reliable when it comes to being able to bring the necessary parties together in order to achieve it. Hence, Hillary Clinton once again emerges as the Wall Street choice.

Perhaps this is why Charles Koch, recently admitted that he might support Hillary Clinton in the face of a Donald Trump nomination. Indeed, this is now the stated position of a number of highly influential right wing neocon thinkers and strategists including Max Boot, who described Clinton as "vastly preferable," Robert Kagan who sees Hillary as "saving the country," and Eliot Cohen who described Clinton as "the lesser evil by a large margin."

And why are these right-wing neocons, coupled with the neoliberal ideologues of the liberal wing of American politics, all lining up behind Hillary Clinton? There's one simple answer: Clinton will deliver the goods. And when it comes to Latin America, the biggest prize of all is political change in the service of economic exploitation and control.

Since the rise of Hugo Chavez, Latin America has gone its own way, democratizing and moving away from its former status as a "America's backyard." With Hillary Clinton and Wall Street working hand in hand with their right wing proxies in Latin America, Washington looks to reassert its control. And it is the people of the region who will pay the price.

Source: counterpunch.org/2016/05/04/

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BRAZIL: Time for Media Outlets to Call this a “Coup”

By Glenn Greenwald, Andrew Fishman and David Miranda

On May 23, Brazil awoke to stunning news of secret, genuinely shocking conversations involving a key minister in Brazil’s newly installed government, which shine a bright light on the actual motives and participants driving the impeachment of the country’s democratically elected president, Dilma Rousseff. The transcripts were published by the country’s largest newspaper, *Folha de São Paulo*, and reveal secret conversations that took place in March, just weeks before the impeachment vote in the lower house took place. They show explicit plotting between the new planning minister (then-senator), Romero Jucá, and former oil executive Sergio Machado—both of whom are formal targets of the “Car Wash” corruption investigation—as they agree that removing Dilma is the only means for ending the corruption investigation. The conversations also include discussions of the important role played in Dilma’s removal by the most powerful national institutions, including Brazil’s military leaders.

The transcripts are filled with profoundly incriminating statements about the real goals of impeachment and who was behind it. The crux of this plot is what Jucá calls “a national pact”—involving all of Brazil’s most powerful institutions—to leave Michel Temer in place as president (notwithstanding his multiple corruption scandals) and to kill the corruption investigation once Dilma is removed. In the words of *Folha*, Jucá made clear that impeachment will “end the pressure from the media and other sectors to continue the Car Wash investigation.” It is unclear who is responsible for recording and leaking the 75-minute conversation, but *Folha* reports that the files are currently in the hands of the prosecutor general. The next few hours and days will likely see new revelations that will shed additional light on the implications and meaning of these transcripts.

The transcripts contain two extraordinary revelations that should lead all media outlets to seriously consider whether they should call what took place in Brazil a “coup”: a term Dilma and her supporters have used for months. When discussing the plot to remove Dilma as a means of ending the Car Wash investigation, Jucá said the Brazilian military is supporting the plot: “I am talking to the gener-

als, the military commanders. They are fine with this, they said they will guarantee it.” He also said the military is “monitoring the Landless Workers Movement” (MST), the social movement of rural workers that supports PT’s efforts of land reform and inequality reduction and has led the protests against impeachment.

The second blockbuster revelation is Jucá’s statement that he spoke with and secured the involvement of numerous justices on Brazil’s Supreme Court, the institution that impeachment defenders have repeatedly pointed to as vesting the process with legitimacy in order to deny that Dilma’s removal is a coup. Jucá claimed that “there are only a



Photo: Brendan Smialowski/AFP/Getty Images

small number” of Court justices to whom he had not obtained access. The only justice he said he ultimately could not get to is Teori Zavascki, who was appointed by Dilma and who Jucá viewed as incorruptible in obtaining his help to kill the investigation (a central irony of impeachment is that Dilma has protected the Car Wash investigation from interference by those who want to impeach her). The transcripts also show him saying that “the press wants to take her [Dilma] out,” so “this shit will never stop”—meaning the corruption investigations—until she’s gone.

The transcripts provide proof for virtually every suspicion and accusation impeachment opponents have long expressed about those plotting to remove Dilma from office. For months, supporters of Brazil’s democracy have made two arguments about the attempt to remove the country’s democratically elected president: (1) the core purpose of Dilma’s impeachment is not to stop corruption or punish law-breaking, but rather the exact opposite: to protect the actual thieves by empowering them with Dilma’s exit, thus enabling them to kill the Car Wash investigation; and (2) the impeachment advocates (led by

the country’s oligarchical media) have zero interest in clean government, but only in seizing power that they could never obtain democratically, in order to impose a right-wing, oligarch-serving agenda that the Brazilian population would never accept.

The first two weeks of Temer’s newly installed government provided abundant evidence for both of these claims. He appointed multiple ministers directly implicated in corruption scandals. A key ally in the lower house who will lead his government’s coalition there, André Moura is one of the most corrupt politicians in the country, the target of multiple active criminal probes not only for corruption but also attempted homicide. Temer himself is deeply enmeshed in corruption (he faces an eight-year ban on running for any office) and is rushing to implement a series of radical right-wing changes that Brazilians would never democratically allow, including measures, as *The Guardian* detailed, “to soften the definition of slavery, roll back the demarcation of indigenous land, trim house-building programs and sell off state assets in airports, utilities and the post office.”

But unlike the events of the last two weeks, these transcripts are not merely clues or signs. They are proof: proof that the prime forces behind the removal of the president understood that taking her out was the only way to save themselves and shield their own extreme corruption from accountability; proof that Brazil’s military, its dominant media outlets, and its Supreme Court were colluding in secret to ensure the removal of the democratically elected president; proof that the perpetrators of impeachment viewed Dilma’s continued presence in Brasília as the guarantor that the Car Wash investigations would continue; proof that this had nothing to do with preserving Brazilian democracy and everything to do with destroying it.

For his part, Jucá admits that these transcripts are authentic but insists it was all just a misunderstanding with his comments taken out of context calling it “banal.” “That conversation is not about a pact for Car Wash. It’s about the economy, to extricate Brazil from the crisis,” he claimed in an interview this morning with UOL political blogger Fernando Rodrigues. That explanation is entirely implausible given what he actually said, as well as the

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VENEZUELA: Chavismo in Crisis

By *Gabriel Hetland, professor of Latin American studies and sociology*

Seventeen years have passed since Hugo Chávez took office in February 1999. During Chávez's 14 years as president, Venezuela rejected free-market orthodoxy and embraced a model of state-led redistributive development. This model was successful on a number of fronts. Under Chávez, Venezuela more than doubled state spending on healthcare and education, cut poverty and unemployment in half (with extreme poverty reduced by almost two-thirds), and became the most equitable country in Latin America. Robust oil-driven economic growth fueled these social gains, with countercyclical spending offsetting periods of economic decline.

Critics continue to label Chávez a dictator, but his democratic credentials were considerable. Chávez's party won 16 of 17 elections held between 1998 and 2012, in many cases by large margins, with Jimmy Carter labeling Venezuela's electoral system "the best in the world." Electoral participation increased substantially during this time. And Venezuela made progress towards becoming a "protagonistic and participatory democracy." Chávez also helped usher in an era of greater Latin American independence vis-à-vis the US and did more than any other leader in recent decades to popularize socialism.

Since Chávez's death in March 2013, however, the government has faced several serious challenges. Nicolás Maduro, Chávez's handpicked successor, narrowly won the April 2013 election to succeed Chávez. This led to violent protests from the opposition which, along with the US government, initially refused to accept the result. Following the ruling party's convincing victory in the December 2013 municipal elections, a new round of violent protests consumed Venezuela, beginning in early 2014. Protestors succeeded in disrupting the country for months but failed in their goal of removing Maduro from office.

In the wake of the crushing defeat of the ruling United Socialist Party of Venezuela (PSUV) in the December 2015 parliamentary elections, *Chavismo* faces what is arguably its most severe crisis yet. The election has empowered the opposition, which has a

two-thirds supermajority in the National Assembly and enjoys full support from the US government and regional right-wing forces. The most serious threat to *Chavismo* is from the radical-right opposition, which has already indicated plans to roll back the social gains achieved by the Bolivarian Revolution and remove Maduro from office through a recall referendum.

To avoid this scenario, the government must begin to rapidly and effectively confront the economic and political challenges it faces. In particular, the Maduro government, and the popular movements that constitute *Chavismo*, must address three critical weaknesses that have plagued *Chavismo* for years: Venezuela's extreme dependence on oil; the contradictions generated by a political-economic model that combines aspects of capitalism, socialism, and statism in an ad hoc rather than planned manner; and the PSUV's highly

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explicitly conspiratorial nature of the conversations, in which Jucá insists on a series of one-on-one encounters, rather than meeting in a group, all to avoid provoking suspicions. Political leaders are already calling for his resignation from the government.

Ever since Temer's installation as president, Brazil has seen intense, and growing, protests against him. Brazilian media outlets—which have been trying to glorify him—have suspiciously refrained from publishing polling data for many weeks, but the last polls show him with only two percent support and 60 % wanting him impeached. The only recent published polling data showed that 66 % of Brazilians believe legislators voted for impeachment only out of self-interest—a belief these transcripts validate—while only 23% percent believe they did so for the good of the country. Last night in São Paulo, police were forced to barricade the street where Temer's house is located due to thousands of protesters heading there; they eventually used fire hoses and tear gas. An announcement to close the Ministry of Culture led to artists and others occupying offices around the country in protest, which forced Temer to reverse the decision.

Until now, The Intercept, like most international media outlets, has refrained from us-

centralized leadership structure.

Venezuela's dependence on oil is a perennial problem that, while not beginning with Chávez, did become more acute during Chávez's presidency. Between 1998 and the present, the percentage of Venezuela's export earnings derived from oil increased from 68.7% to 96%. Oil revenues continue to account for nearly half (40-45%) of the government's budget. The high price of oil from 2003 to 2008 and 2010 through mid-2014 made the social gains achieved by *Chavismo* possible. It is important, however, to point out that these gains would not have been possible had Chávez not wrested control of the state oil company, PDVSA, away from managers who ran it in a quasi-private manner through early 2003. Chávez's efforts to assert state control over PDVSA were a leading factor in the 2002 coup

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ing the word "coup" even as it (along with most outlets) has been deeply critical of Dilma's removal as anti-democratic. These transcripts compel a re-examination of that editorial decision, particularly if no evidence emerges calling into question either the most reasonable meaning of Jucá's statements or his level of knowledge. This newly revealed plotting is exactly what a coup looks, sounds, and smells like: securing the cooperation of the military and most powerful institutions to remove a democratically elected leader for self-interested, corrupt, and lawless motives, in order to then impose an oligarch-serving agenda that the population despises.

If Dilma's impeachment remains inevitable, as many believe, these transcripts will make it much more difficult to leave Temer in place. Recent polling data shows that 62% of Brazilians want new elections to select their president. That democratic option is the one Brazil's elites fear most, because they are petrified that Lula or another candidate they dislike (Marina Silva) will win. But that's the point: If what is being avoided and smashed in Brazil is democracy, then it's time to start using the proper language to describe this. These transcripts make it increasingly difficult for media outlets to avoid doing so.

Source: theintercept.com/2016/05/23/new-political-earthquake-in-brazil

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against him and the 2002-2003 management lockout.

The coexistence of capitalist, socialist, and statist features and the lack of a clear plan for moving away from capitalism and statism and towards socialism has generated a number of perverse consequences. Between June 2014 and December 2015 the price of oil fell by two-thirds, from over \$100/barrel to less than \$37/barrel. This is one of the key factors behind the severe economic crisis that currently engulfs Venezuela. Official data is not available—the government stopped releasing it in early 2014. It is estimated that Venezuela's economy contracted by four percent in 2014 and by 10%, or more, in 2015. Inflation was estimated at 62.2% in 2014 and may have topped 200% in 2015. Poverty and unemployment have been rising though it is unclear by how much. There have also been widespread, persistent shortages of innumerable goods, from coffee, eggs, and toilet paper to auto parts, cement, and industrial inputs. One of the reasons the opposition won the December 2015 elections so handily was widespread popular frustration with shortages and long lines found throughout the country to purchase regulated goods, withdraw money from banks, or even take a bus home. While talking with voters on the day of December parliamentary elections, I was repeatedly told that Venezuelans wanted “change” and “an end to the lines.”

The government blames the shortages

and long lines on an “economic war” waged by the opposition and big business. The argument is that businesses have been hoarding goods in an effort to generate opposition to the government. For their part, business owners say they have cut back on production because they lack the dollars needed to obtain imported inputs necessary for production. Polls suggest that a majority of Venezuelans do not see the economic war as the primary factor leading to the economic crisis, and that even those *Chavistas* blaming the economic war feel that the government is losing the battle.

To a significant extent Venezuela's economic crisis and the economic war itself, should be seen as a result of the contradictions of the country's highly uneven “transition to socialism.” Under Chávez (and continuing under Maduro) important sectors of the economy have been partially decommodified, in particular the areas of healthcare, education, social service provisioning, and the sale of food staples and basic goods. Chávez re-nationalized oil production in 2001 and nationalized the country's steel, telecommunications, and electric industries in 2007 and 2008. These actions have been framed as furthering the construction of “twenty-first century socialism.” In practice, however, the government has done relatively little to advance the socialist goal of establishing genuine worker and community control over economic decision making. Most state-owned enterprises

in Venezuela approximate statism, with state actors, rather than private property owners or workers and communities, controlling economic decisions. Additionally, capitalism has certainly not disappeared in Venezuela: between 1998 and 2008 the private sector actually *increased* its share of economic activity, from 65.2% to 70.9%. Finally, the growth of a black market for goods means that the government's efforts to decommodify areas of social and economic life have been considerably hampered.

Atenea Jiménez, a founder of the *Red Nacional de Comuneros* (National Communards Network), which brings together 500 of Venezuela's 1,000 communes, commented on the challenges of guaranteeing the population access to cheap food when private businesses play an integral role. “It's amazing that right now the private sector controls all of this [food],” Jiménez said. “Even for *Mercal* and *Bicentenario* [state-run stores that sell food and basic goods at highly subsidized prices], the trucks that bring the goods are privately owned. So we're just handing everything right to the bourgeoisie!”

Two of the main problems in Venezuela—inflation and scarcity—are related to the country's dysfunctional currency exchange system. Chávez implemented currency controls in 2003 to combat capital flight. This led to a gap between the official and black market exchange rates. In the last year this gap has widened at a galloping pace: in late 2015 the black market rate was 150 times greater than the official rate. To facilitate needed imports, the government provides certain businesses and individuals dollars at the preferential rate of 6.3 to the dollar. There is an immense incentive for these individuals and businesses to turn around and re-sell these dollars on the black market, where profits of up to 15,000% are possible! Since needed goods are not being imported, this perpetuates problems of scarcity and rampant inflation.

Economists sympathetic to the government have argued for years that Venezuela should abandon its system of currency controls and implement a “managed float.” This would involve a series of devaluations of the *bolívar* until the gap between the official and black market rates is eliminated. To bring this about, the government must, however, confront privileged sectors inside and outside the



Mural of Simon Bolívar in Petare neighborhood of Caracas. Photo: Gabriel Hetland

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COLOMBIA: Constitutional Court Opens Doors to Peace Accords

Translated by Carol Costa TFA board member

The ex-Attorney General Eduardo Montealegre has petitioned the Constitutional Court of Colombia to treat any peace agreement between the Colombian government and the FARC in Havana, Cuba as a “Special Treaty of Peace” and thus binding on the Colombian State. The Court appears to be seriously considering this petition and would invite the FARC to appear in court to give its position on the petition.

This measure would protect the Peace Accords from being disregarded by authorities of the present government as well as governments in the future. The accords would have constitutional stature. Also, it

would aid in bringing the conflict to a close and provide a clear way ahead for the implementation of the agreements. A vote on the measure would not be necessary but options would be left open for a popular endorsement or a National Constitutional Assembly.

The petition was heralded by political leaders who support the Peace Accords. “I support the decision by the Constitutional Court of Colombia to make the accords a special treaty of Peace,” said Colombian senator Iván Cepeda.

Carlos Lozano, director of the publication *Semanario Voz* and spokesman for the political and social movement *Marcha Patriótica*, highly praised Montealegre on Twitter and said that the proposal was feasible.

Leader of the FARC negotiating team, Iván Márquez said “*Elevation of the agreements in Havana to that of a Special Treaty of Peace is the optimum way to guarantee their legal security,*” and he thanked the magistrate Jorge Iván Palacio for his invitation to the FARC to appear in court.

If Palacio’s initiative succeeds, the FARC could officially express to the Constitutional Court its position on whether the negotiations with the Colombian government have status worthy of a treaty. It would be an unbelievable scene marking a milestone for a democracy in transition that is trying to overcome a conflict that has lasted 52 years.

Source: *Semanario Voz*, May 2, 2016

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state that benefit from the current system. The existence of these sectors, in particular the so-called *boliburguesía*, is a consequence of the country’s hybrid political-economic model, underlining the need to move beyond it.

To make progress on these issues, the PSUV must confront the gap between its leadership and base. A week before the December 2015 election, Omar Machado, a community organizer from the, 23 de Enero *Chavista* neighborhood in Caracas, told me, “People are upset because part of the party has become embedded in power. The party doesn’t recognize true leaders, grassroots leaders,” he argued. “It’s led by candidates who have been parachuted in.”

Jiménez echoed this view, commenting that, “There’s a rupture within *Chavismo*, between grassroots *Chavismo*, which is living through the most difficult situation of 16 years of revolution, and the state and party leadership, which are one and the same. There’s a big difference between what the base is feeling [and what the leadership sees],” Jiménez said. “There’s no space for articulation between the popular movement and the party.” The only way to eliminate corruption is with more participation.

Grassroots *Chavistas* are not ready to abandon Maduro or the government. Yet they are demanding that the government cor-

rect its course and listen to their ideas. According to Jiménez, “The people are asking for a rectification and for a solution to the most basic problem we have: food. The government hasn’t done enough to resolve this. As the popular movement, we have concrete plans for how to resolve this, which we’ve put forward to Maduro, but unfortunately they haven’t paid attention to this.” The proposal of the *Red de Comuneros*, Jiménez explained, is to create a network for the production, distribution, and consumption of food, which would be controlled not by the state or the private sector, but by the communes themselves.

Jiménez said this proposal can only work if there are high levels of popular participation and genuine popular control. This is necessary to avoid the corruption and bureaucracy that has engulfed other projects put forward by the government, such as communal council distribution of cell phones (which are increasingly expensive and hard to find in private and state-run stores). “The only way to eliminate corruption is with more participation,” Jiménez maintained, adding that during “200 workdays” focused on community-led food distribution “not a single item was misplaced, and nothing was resold” because it was a “collective process.”

Johnny Murphy, an activist from Carora, a city in Lara state, put forward a similar argument. Like Jiménez, Murphy

said the threat of the opposition means that revolutionaries must support the PSUV. Doing so, however, is just the beginning. “Yes, we have to vote for the revolutionary deputies,” Murphy told me. “But we have to think of a process of to put forward a new revolutionary direction, and to create a collective leadership. We are committed to giving all of our support to Nicolás Maduro, whom Chávez designated as the head of the revolution. But we say *Nicolás Presidente, el pueblo insurgente.*”

Murphy advocated for movement leaders to “occupy more spaces, create more spaces for popular power, and create a communal state and a communal economy,” which, in his words, “doesn’t rob people, doesn’t damage people, doesn’t destroy and doesn’t harm people.”

In the weeks following the government’s December loss there have been a number of proposals, made by the government and the *Chavista* movement, to “deepen the revolution” and engage in a process of renovation. Unfortunately, it is unclear if the government is prepared to fully acknowledge its errors and take on the powerful interests that are likely to resist efforts to dismantle bureaucracy and corruption and move towards socialism. Unless the government does this, and quickly, its days are likely numbered.

Source: *nacla.org*, 5/13/2016



TASK FORCE ON THE AMERICAS

In solidarity with the social justice movements of Latin America and the Caribbean

Voluntary contribution to the Second Cycle of the Universal Periodic Review of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela for the Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review (Review Period 2012-2016)

To: Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights

From: Task Force on the Americas

1. Task Force on the Americas (TFA) is a non-governmental organization initiated in 1985 under the name Marin Interfaith Task Force. TFA operates primarily on volunteers with a nominally paid small staff. We receive no funding from any government agency or large foundation and rely on donations from our members. We have expanded from initial work supporting El Salvador refugees to doing work all over Latin America and the Caribbean. TFA does education work in North America and lobbies the U.S. Government and politicians. We provide material support and funding for schools in Haiti and Guatemala. We also lead delegations in partnership with organizations such as the National Lawyers Guild and Alliance for Global Justice. Over the past ten years we have organized over twenty delegations to many different countries in Latin America.

2. Since February 2004 we have organized and led many delegations to Venezuela. The most recent delegations were in July and December 2015. We were in Venezuela in July in partnership with the National Lawyers Guild (NLG). The team included ten attorneys including two past presidents of the NLG plus another ten people from various professions. In December we led another observation team and observed the situation in Caracas, Barquisimeto and rural Lara before, during and after the National Assembly election. We are submitting this report based on our long study and experience with Latin America and our specific first hand observations and discussions in Venezuela, especially during 2015.

3. Regarding Article 2, discrimination on basis of race and gender, Venezuela is an interesting mix of people with European, African and Indigenous heritage. Government officials, police and military authorities seem to be well integrated with substantial inclusion of both women and people of African/Indigenous descent in positions of authority. It is common to see dark skinned female officers for example.

4. Regarding Article 9 regarding arbitrary arrest or detention, we have seen accusations that Venezuela was arbitrarily arresting people with the most prominent example being Leopoldo Lopez. It is claimed that Lopez was unfairly convicted. It is asserted that street protests in February 2014 were “peaceful” or “largely peaceful”. However, in sharp contrast with these claims, we have talked with numerous Venezuelans and seen videos which confirm that there was substantial violence including 43 deaths and over 100 serious injuries during the Spring 2014 “*guarimbas*”. We had the opportunity to meet privately with Venezuelans who were actual victims of the criminal street protests and violence. One woman lost her husband who was killed by the protesters. Another woman recounted how the protesters attacked the government run childcare center where her daughter was being looked after. A man who was missing part of his arm described how protesters in Tachira state (bordering Colombia) threw a small bomb explosive into the cab of his truck. These are just a few of the stories. Forty-three people were killed in the “largely peaceful” protests. The majority of these victims were government supporters or bystanders. (Ref 2) Leopoldo Lopez and others were not arrested or detained arbitrarily; they were tried and convicted for initiating or participating in the violence. The street riots and blockades were launched under the banner of “*la salida*” which technically means “the exit”. It is generally understood that the goal of the protest was to force the exit or overthrow of the government. North American mainstream media portrayed the situation as very dire, very violent and near breakdown. Regarding Lopez, he is not the innocent “freedom fighter” sometimes portrayed by well-funded NGOs and misguided foreigners. There is video evidence showing him leading in the arrest (and subsequent beating) of the Minister of the Interior during the short-lived coup of 2002.(Ref 3)

To read the entire letter visit taskforceamericas.org

CUBA: Little Red Tractor goes to Front of US Investment Line

By *Bill Hackwell, activist and photographer*

How could it be that while hundreds of US corporations are lined up at the starting gates, chomping at the bit to invest, export and unleash a flood of products into Cuba, that a small company in Paint Rock Alabama that produces tractors has not only jumped to the front of the line but has sealed the first deal approved by Cuba and the US Treasury Department. The key was simple; present a product that Cuba needs and develop a trusting relationship.

The Cleber company will now become the first US manufacturer to open shop in Cuba since 1959 assembling small tractors at the new world class port of Mariel outside of Havana. The tractor is a modern inexpensive version of a 1948 Allis Chalmers model designed for 100 acre farms. The model stopped being manufactured in 1955 as agro business was wiping out most small farms in the US. In Cuba today over 70% of the agricultural land is now leased by small private farmers and cooperatives on plots around that size. The tractor is designed to be easily repaired in the field and can also be converted into a backhoe, a forklift or an excavator. It will eventually be battery powered through solar panels. The name of the tractor being introduced to Cuba is Oggun after the deity of iron in the Afro-Cuban religion of Santeria.

The first thing that one of Cleber's founders Saul Berenthal did was to go to Cuba and spend considerable time not just talking to Cuban government officials but also meeting with contacts at the economics department of the University of Havana to get a sense of the Cuban view of the new period and what it was they needed. Berenthal also studied the Cuban Foreign Investment Law of 2014. This law, which was discussed at all levels of Cuban society before it was implemented by the National Assembly, was considered a necessary adjustment to allow more foreign investment and how that investment was going to be processed, monitored and authorized. While opening some areas the law also explicitly states that no foreign investment can be made in the areas of public health,



US Made Cleber (Chalmers) tractor to be assembled in Cuba

education sectors, or in any institution of the armed forces.

It is not like Cleber is producing the Oggun without calculating a profitable return but the difference here is they are not applying Wall Street's arrogant idea of what should be happening in Cuba right now and that is the reason Cuba allowed their project to move forward. The bankers and corporate investment view can be seen and heard in all corporate media outlets that Cuba should be opening up its markets. When Obama goes to Cuba in a few weeks his main message will be to urge the Cubans to move faster in making all aspects of the Cuban economy accessible to US businesses. But Cuba has set up its safeguards and they will control the pace of this new window of development. It may be hard for the capitalists to understand that just because they have lots of products to sell does not automatically mean Cuba is interested. The country that has stood up to a hostile empire for over 55 years will make decisions as to who they do business with by a process that includes investment projects examined first by the Ministry of Foreign Trade who relies on the Business Evaluation Commission and then the ultimate decisions being made by the Council of State. The decision to accept or reject an investment proposal will be based on an evaluation of not how profitable it is but how that proposal

will contribute to the improvement of the standard of living of the Cuban people and the betterment of the social indexes of Cuban society that despite the blockade are some of the highest in the Western Hemisphere. In other word ethical investments for the collective good versus investment dictated by profit.

Since the rapprochement between the two countries began on December 17, 2014 the main thrust of the US remains regime change but through different less confrontational methods. Their fantasy is that once the flow of capital begins to penetrate Cuba there will be no stopping it. There is no doubt that that Cuba is now facing its biggest challenge, perhaps since the triumph of the revolution itself, but no one should underestimate Cuba and its commitment to their socialist model.

In the ongoing negotiations with the US Cuba has only insisted that it be treated with mutual respect and that their sovereignty is not on the table. Those who want to do business with Cuba should remember that and the simple words of Saul Berenthal, the maker of the little red tractors from Alabama. "In the Cuban business culture, you always have to present the project, not only in economic terms but what are the social benefits."

Source: *Resumen Latinoamericano, North American Bureau, February 16, 2016*

Honduras and Haiti: Hillary Clinton's Actions

By Karen Attiah, *Opinions editor*

If there was anything refreshing about the Democratic debate in Miami, it was that for once, questions on foreign affairs centered on a region other than the Middle East, China or Russia. Debate moderators asked Sen. Bernie Sanders and Hillary Clinton tough questions on child deportations, as well as their policies on Cuba and Puerto Rico. Referring to the influx of unaccompanied minors, Sanders had this to say: *"Honduras and that region of the world may be the most violent region in our hemisphere. Gang lords, vicious people torturing people, doing horrible things to families. Children fled that part of the world to try, try, try, maybe, to meet up with their family members in this country, taking a route that was horrific, trying to start a new life. Secretary Clinton did not support those children coming into this country. I did."*

Clinton is on record saying deporting children would send a "responsible message" to families to deter them from coming into the United States. But when it comes to Honduras, Sanders as well as the moderators missed a key opportunity to bring up Clinton's record in Central America and the Caribbean, and specifically how her State Department's role in undemocratic regime changes has contributed to violence and political instability in Honduras and Haiti today.

In November 2008, then-Honduran President Manuel Zelaya called for a poll on a non-binding national referendum to draft a new constitution, drawing the ire of the military, the Supreme Court and the opposition, which alleged that Zelaya wanted to end the term limits that prevented him from running again. In June 2009, Zelaya was overthrown by the military, held at gunpoint, and forcibly flown to a US military base in his pajamas. The United Nations and the Organization of American States (OAS) called the ouster a military coup, but the White House and Clinton's State Department were loath to call it such despite the fact that a cable from the Honduran Embassy said, *"The Embassy perspective is that there is no doubt that the military, Supreme Court and national congress conspired on June 28 in what constituted an illegal and unconstitutional coup."*

Instead of condemning the figures behind the uprising, suspending support to the illegitimate government of Zelaya's successor, Roberto Micheletti, and demanding a restoration of the democratically elected Zelaya, Secretary Clinton decided to move on. In her memoir "Hard

Choices," Clinton wrote that after the coup, she went about hatching a plan with other leaders in the region *"to restore order in Honduras and ensure that free and fair elections could be held quickly and legitimately, which would render the question of Zelaya moot."* The US pushed for elections, and in November 2009, despite a boycott by opposition leaders and international observers, elections were orchestrated by the same figures behind Zelaya's ouster.

Since the coup, violence and assassinations, as well as persecutions of journalists and social justice advocates, have skyrocketed in Honduras. The high-profile murder of the Goldman prize-winning indigenous leader and environmental activist Berta Cáceres is yet another tragic example of the abhorrent human rights record in Honduras under the government that came to power via the 2009 coup and subsequent elections pushed by Clinton. Between 2010 and 2014, 101 environmental activists have been killed in Honduras, according to Global Witness. Clinton's camp has said that allegations about her role in the 2009 coup are "nonsense."

Regarding Haiti, Miami was a fitting setting for a debate that focused on immigration and the Latino vote. However, considering that the debate was held in a state that is home to nearly half of the US' Haitian population, the debate was a missed opportunity to ask Clinton serious questions about her actions and policies in Haiti, a country where she and her family have wielded immense power and influence over the course of the past two decades.

This time, the scene is Port-au-Prince, Haiti, in January 2011. Though the uprisings in Egypt were in full swing, then-Secretary of State Clinton paid a personal visit to Haiti shortly after the first round of the country's presidential election, on Nov. 28, 2010. It quickly became clear that the pop singer-turned-candidate Michel Martelly, whom The Post in 2002 characterized as "favorite of the thugs who worked on behalf of the hated Duvalier family dictatorship before its 1986 collapse," was Washington's pick to win. Though the voting was badly marred by irregularities (the US had pushed for quick elections), the OAS went even further and declared—without evidence—that Martelly had qualified for the final round over the incumbent party's candidate. Rather than rerun the preliminary round and let the Haitian people choose, Clinton reportedly pressured then-President René Préval with the loss of US and international aid unless the election results

were changed to fit the OAS's recommendation.

Préval's electoral commission backed down, and Martelly won an election with only 25 percent turnout. Fast-forward to today, and Haiti is still in the grips of a political crisis. In Martelly's four years in office, Haiti never held a election, and as terms ran out on parliament members, only 11 elected officials were left in the country. A New York Times article documented the criminal activities of his friends and aides, who had been charged with crimes ranging from kidnapping to rape, murder and drug trafficking. Martelly stepped down at the end of this term in February amid violent rallies for his removal and disputed election results, without a successor in place. The country has postponed its elections yet again, and fresh political standoffs are underway, despite the US spending \$30 million on Haiti's elections.

Jonathan Katz, former AP correspondent in Haiti and author of "The Big Truck That Went By: How the World Came to Save Haiti and Left Behind a Disaster," had this to say in an interview about Clinton's record in Haiti: *"There's nowhere Clinton had more influence or respect when she became Secretary of State than in Haiti, and it was clear that she planned to use that to make Haiti the proving ground for her vision of American power. By now I'd imagine she was expecting to constantly be pointing to Haiti on the campaign trail as one of the great successes of her diplomatic career. Instead it's one of her biggest disappointments by nearly any measure, with the wreckage of the Martelly administration she played a larger role than anyone in installing him being the biggest and latest example."*

Manolia Charlotin, a Haitian journalist based in New York, said Clinton's actions should draw questions as to how Clinton would act should she become president: *"What does that mean as to her approach to foreign policy? To have a secretary of state visit a country, to make a stop, and as a result of that meeting, you have an illegal selection of leaders? How does that decision promote the American views of democracy?"*

In both Honduras and Haiti, Clinton chose to shy away from letting each country's voters choose their leaders when the going got tough. American voters, the people of Honduras, the people of Haiti and anyone who cares about democracy and human rights should know whether Clinton as president would be a promoter of such values.

Source: *The Washington Post*, 3/10/2016

HAITI: Election Verification Commission

By Marilyn Langlois, Haiti Action Committee

On a visit to Haiti in late April with Task Force on the Americas, a California-based organization in solidarity with the social justice movements of Latin America and the Caribbean, we witnessed another example of Haitians resisting US attempts to facilitate continued looting of the country's resources and sabotage its democracy.

Democracy has been sorely missing in the island nation ever since the 2004 coup d'etat backed by the US, France and Canada, which ushered in a two-year reign of terror, followed by the unjust exclusion of Haiti's largest and most popular political party, Fanmi Lavalas, from participating in any elections until August and October, 2015. The most recent president, Michel Martelly, had been pushed fraudulently to the forefront of sham elections in 2011 by then-US Secretary of State Hilary Clinton. Haitians we met with did not appreciate this interference, as he stole public funds, privatized valuable natural resources, and instituted a paramilitary security force reminiscent of the notorious Duvalier era.

The October 25, 2015 first-round presidential election was riddled with massive irregularities, voter intimidation, ballot-box stuffing and tampering with tally sheets, as has been widely reported and documented. People we met with from different sectors, including two of the presidential candidates, affirmed the nature and extent of the electoral fraud. Yet the US has pushed for a quick run-off between the ostensible top two vote-getters, which Haitians have successfully resisted with persistent, large scale street demonstrations.

Physical structures can symbolize power or lack thereof. The Haitian National Palace, seat of government and source of national pride for 200 years, was severely damaged in the 2010 earthquake and has since been leveled. All we could see was a tall fence surrounding the now-empty site. On the other hand, shortly after the 2004 coup, the US Embassy was relocated from a modest downtown Port-au-Prince building to a newly constructed gigantic, fortress-like compound outside of town, surrounded on all sides by United Nations "MINUSTAH" military bases.

Our group, consisting of seven US citizens and one Canadian, met with Michael Gayle, Deputy Political Counselor in the US Embassy,

to discuss the electoral crisis. As we underwent rigorous security protocols upon entering the compound—passport check, metal detectors, handbag search, no cameras or cell phones allowed, no wandering around on your own, no going to the restroom unaccompanied—I kept wondering, what is it they're afraid of?

Our conversation with Mr. Gayle, while cordial and friendly on the surface, revealed the condescending and colonialist nature of the US government's attitude towards Haiti. His claim that Haitians have a poor history of participation in elections was refuted by Dale Sorensen one of our delegation members who had observed the 1995 and 2000 presidential elections in Haiti, both of which had gone smoothly with strong voter turnout and no major problems reported. He further suggested that "both sides" were to blame for cancellation of local and parliamentary elections between 2011 and



President, Martelly greets Secretary of State Clinton during 2012 visit to Haiti

2015, and that there was cheating on "both sides" during the 2015 elections, when in fact outgoing president Martelly and his party were clearly responsible in both cases, with help from well-paid foreign political operatives.

Mr. Gayle stressed the urgency of having a stable elected government in order to reassure outside investors (no mention of reassuring the citizens that their votes were counted!). When asked why the US isn't more concerned with the integrity of the elections than a delay in seating the government, he paused and then denied electoral fraud was widespread or affected the ultimate outcome. His concluding remark, "When capabilities are so low and challenges are so great, where do you draw the line about how flawless the process has to be?" was indicative of the self-serving US policy of dis-

missing Haitian people's intelligence, skills and aspirations.

After the US Embassy visit, our next appointment with one of the 2015 presidential candidates offered a refreshing contrast. At the office of Dr. Maryse Narcisse of the Fanmi Lavalas party, we were warmly welcomed in an open air and relaxed atmosphere, where supporters from various communities were engaged in lively discussions. Dr. Narcisse told us how all of the candidates and parties except a few associated with Martelly had come to consensus on heeding the people's demands and proposing a framework for a verification commission to do an in-depth and transparent evaluation of the 2015 elections. She said her party is not afraid of the results because people were fed up with the 2010-11 elections and insist on free and fair elections this time. She pointed out that while the current Provisional President has little power, he can appoint the verification commission and take steps quickly to assure a fairly and justly elected government is in place, which could then tackle the broader social and economic issues the country faces.

As a US-based delegation, our message to Mr. Gayle of the US Embassy in person and to the US State Department in a press conference we held in Port-au-Prince was to stop pressuring Haitians to accept a seriously flawed electoral process and respect Haiti's sovereignty in rectifying the situation.

On April 28, we learned that provisional President Privert convened the election verification commission and was given 30 days to complete the process. On May 30, based on a review of a 25% sample of polling places, results reveal an 85% level of fraud and irregularities in the October 25, 2015 vote. The commission called for election results to be annulled.



Image of Haitian maroon revolutionary
"The spirit of the Haitian people will never break."

Source: www.haitisolidarity.net, 5/6/2016

HAITI: US has Undermined Food Sovereignty and Food Security

By Carolina Dutton, member of April delegation to Haiti

Until the 1970's Haiti produced almost 100% of its food. Most Haitians were small agricultural producers. In 1986 when Baby Doc left power, Haiti still produced 80% of its basic food needs, particularly rice, sugar, poultry, and pork. Currently Haiti produces only 20% of its food, including the basic grain, rice.

International aid from the US began on a large scale in 1972 after Baby Doc Duvalier came to power. This aid, most of which was never seen by the people, was largely distributed through USAID, the World Bank, and the Inter-American Development Bank. Haiti's subsequent dependence on foreign aid has taken the control of the food supply and the Haitian economy away from the Haitian people and put it in the hands of the US. When Duvalier left power in 1986 the US pressured the new government to liberalize the economy by slashing import tariffs and reducing agricultural subsidies.

Although Duvalier went along with the low wage assembly plants and free trade zones for export manufacturing, his government did not lower tariffs on food products. It wasn't until Bill Clinton was president that Haiti was forced to lower tariffs on rice. Rice from "Riceland", a large cooperative of southern farmers based in Arkansas, and subsidized by the US government, flooded the Haitian rice market at prices cheaper than the cost of production. Small Haitian farmers couldn't compete. Many were forced to leave their farms and move to Port au Prince, increasing the urban population beyond the city's capacity for housing, infrastructure or jobs. The free trade zone agricultural sector paid such low wages that people had little buying power. Haitians are very resourceful and many found work and still work in the informal economy buying and selling used goods, food, charging cell phones, etc.

After his election in 1990, President Aristide tried to protect domestic food production, especially rice. Pressure from USAID, the IMF, and the Haitian elite prevented him from raising tariffs on food imports. The US blocked international assistance during Aristide's short second term in order to prevent his democratically elected government from providing for its people. When economic and political pressure did not work to keep Aristide by raising the

minimum wage and protecting small farmers, the US backed coups so that Aristide could never serve out either five-year term.

Haitian rice is now too expensive for most Haitians. We visited SOPUDEP School where children are fed a meal of mostly rice and some beans every day, often their only meal that day. The school would love to support Haitian farmers but the only way to afford to feed all the children is to buy the cheaper US subsidized rice facilitated by Bill Clinton. After the earthquake in 2010 Clinton was forced to apologize:

"Since 1981 the US has followed a policy, until the last year or so when we started to rethink it, that we rich countries that produce a lot of food should sell it to poor countries and relieve them of the burden of producing their own food. It may have been good for some of my farmers in Arkansas, but it has not worked. It was a mistake. I did that. I have to live every day with the consequences of the lost capacity to produce a rice crop in Haiti, to feed those people."

Yet Clinton's policy has not changed. In his role as coordinator and distributor of post earthquake reconstruction aid he has not supported Haitian small farmers but instead free trade industrial and agricultural zones. US management of aid since the earthquake has guaranteed US control of reconstruction and development, forcing a neoliberal agenda. The goal has been to restructure the Haitian economy to maintain corporate monopoly on food production and food imports and exports. Of the 270 million in earthquake aid funneled through USAID for agriculture and food, 40% has gone to US nonprofits and 50% to US corporations including Monsanto. Monsanto distributed about 500 tons of corn seeds after the earthquake "to increase agricultural productivity." Much of this money was distributed to the Chemonics Corporation. 53 million has gone to large-scale agricultural projects such as Jatropha, a biofuel which is poisonous and inedible, and to distributing Monsanto seeds which are infertile. As a leader of the peasant organization MPP (Mouvman Payizan Papay) says, "The Haitian government is using the



Photo: Carolina Dutton

Rice from Arkansas at SOPUDEP School

earthquake to sell Haiti to multinationals."

The presidential candidate from outgoing president Martelly's party is Jovenel Moise, the "Banana Man." His company Agritrans dispossessed 800 peasant families who had legal possession of the their lands, bulldozing their houses, crops and grazing land in 2013 to create the first agricultural free trade zone in Haiti and plant bananas for export. Agritrans received 6 million dollars in state loans to pump ground water for irrigation. His plantations are green and lush, yet small farmers never receive any money from the government to irrigate the arid land. Small farming families cannot feed their children during the current three-year drought. Many are being forced to sell their tools just to feed their families. Agritrans now exports 40 containers of bananas a week to Germany. The German client is now demanding 150 containers a week. Haitians have to buy bananas from the Dominican Republic.

Recently the US has announced a plan to send 500 metric tons of surplus peanuts to feed hungry Haitian children. Peanuts are a drought resistant crop. Haiti has been experiencing a drought for the last three years. When other crops fail, Haitians rely on peanuts. Half a million farmers, mostly women, grow peanuts to sell locally. Haitians are afraid importing subsidized peanuts will undercut local farmers as rice imports did, displacing more farmers, and making Haiti even more economically dependent on the US.

The recent drought has also affected the Haitian millet crop. In late 2015 a gray leaf spot fungus devastated the millet crop so whole fields appeared burnt in an instant. Haitian millet takes

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HONDURAS: Four Arrested for Murder of Berta Cáceres

By *Brigitte Gynther, Latin American Liaison, SOA Watch*

On May 2, the Honduran authorities arrested four men in relation to the murder of internationally renowned activist Berta Cáceres. Two are retired or active members of the Honduran Armed Forces and two have ties to DESA, the company building the Agua Zarca hydroelectric project that Berta was campaigning against. With even the Honduran government investigators now admitting the assassins have ties to the Honduran Armed Forces, it is time once and for all for the United States to end financing and training of the Honduran security

forces. Berta's family and COPINH continue to call for the Inter-American Human Rights Commission to investigate the case. It is hard to believe that the Honduran government has the political will to investigate the higher-ups who may have helped plan or known about Berta's murder; as Berta's daughter Laura Zuniga Cáceres told

The Guardian, "The Honduran state is too closely linked to the murder of my mother to carry out an independent investigation."

Early on, there were clear signs that the Honduran authorities were manipulating the investigation and interrogating COPINH members. Even with an international outcry demanding investigation into the years of threats and persecution Berta suffered for her defense of the Gualcarque River, it took 11 days for the investigators to go to DESA's installations. Even then, the investigation was declared secret and the lawyers for the family excluded. Berta's daughters and COPINH members took the demand for justice internationally, speaking out in the US and Europe, calling for an end to US and European security aid to Honduras given Berta's assassination and the ongoing persecution of social movements. Last week, the European Investment Bank canceled a \$40 million loan to Honduras, citing Berta's murder as the reason. Shortly thereafter, the Honduran government apprehended four men with ties to the military and DESA, ad-

mitting for the first time that Berta was assassinated for her activism.

Those arrested include Sergio Rodriguez, Environmental and Social Manager for DESA, who Berta denounced was threatening COPINH during a protest against the Agua Zarca project on February 20, as well as Geovanny Douglas Bustillo, retired Honduran lieutenant, who previously served as head of security for the Agua Zarca project. The other two arrested include Mariano Díaz Chávez, reported to be an active Major in the Honduran military, and Edilson Atilio Duarte Meza, reported as a retired captain in the Honduran

Honduran Armed Forces, been investigated? Have the directors of DESA, including those who belong to the powerful Atala family, one of the families many believe was behind the 2009 military coup in Honduras, been investigated? Has Julian Pacheco, Secretary of Security, been investigated? Did the US Embassy or US Military officials know of the plans to murder Berta?

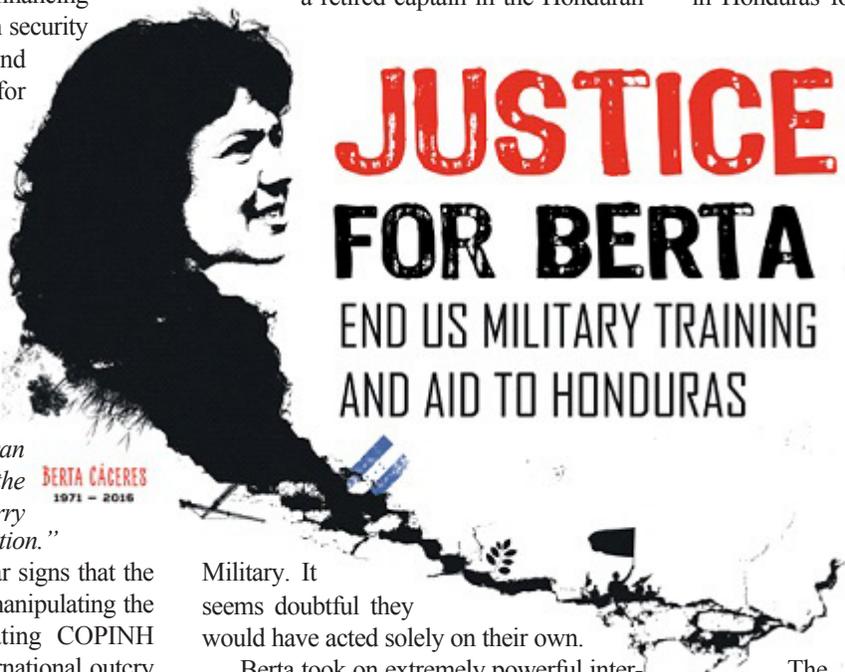
Those may be very dangerous questions to ask. Honduran opposition journalist Felix Molina, well-known throughout the country for his resistance radio show that was one of the clearest voices against the military coup in Honduras for years, posted very similar

questions just after the arrests. Hours later there was an attempt to attack him but he got away, only to be shot four times in the legs later that night. Luckily the bullets missed arteries and veins and Felix is still alive, though in the hospital. Felix is renowned for his journalism and radio programs critical of the powers at be.

Whether or not all the intellectual authors of Berta's murder are ever brought to justice, one thing is clear: the US must stop financing and training the Honduran Armed Forces and other security forces.

The US-trained and supported TIGRES, with the stated goal of addressing drug trafficking, have spent significant time stationed at DESA's installations, guarding the Agua Zarca Project. Were any of the Honduran military (current or former) involved in Berta's murder trained by the US? Has the US ensured it does not fund the First Battalion of Engineers, which was stationed at DESA's installations and murdered Indigenous leader Tomas Garcia in 2013? When will US funding, training, and equipping of the Honduran security forces end? How many more people have to die?

The US is not the only one with responsibility for what is occurring in Honduras; earlier this month I accompanied Berta's



Military. It seems doubtful they would have acted solely on their own.

Berta took on extremely powerful interests in Honduras and the persecution of her while she was alive was done with the knowledge of very powerful people, with the Public Ministry prosecuting Berta in 2013 and the Secretary of Security, trained at the School of the Americas (SOA) in Psychological Operations, failing to ensure her protection. Now we are asked to trust the same Public Ministry with the investigation into her death. Without transparency in the investigation and the Honduran government's refusal to accept the offer of the IAHCR independent commission, one must ask if higher ups in the Honduran Armed Forces and government have been investigated in relation to Berta's murder. Has David Castillo, head of DESA with a background in military intelligence for the

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The Voice of Berta Cáceres

Excerpt from post by Laura Carlsen

In the context of predatory capitalism, human life is devalued. If people have to be killed to pave the way for profits, they will be; and, Berta Cáceres was a huge boulder in the road to converting Honduras into the latest laboratory for corporate globalization. She ended up on the growing list of defenders of the rights of indigenous peoples, campesino, LGBT, dissidents and others who have fallen in Honduras since the coup.

In addition to her activist role, Berta Cáceres had an extraordinary voice. Her indigenous worldview gave her spiritual strength and the clarity that Mother Earth must be constantly protected. Her anti-capitalist and anti-imperialist analysis provided her with a framework to understand and explain what was happening to her people by linking it to the national and global context. She believed in international solidarity to confront an international system that continually threatens the peace and wellbeing of indigenous people as well as the vast majority in all parts of the world.

Berta was profoundly feminist. She said that defense of the environment is by definition anti-patriarchal, that the defense of territory implies the fight for women's rights because patriarchy considers a woman's body as its territory.

It is this integral resistance that they wanted to kill. Berta Cáceres united sectors and issues, across borders. And by bringing paths together, she was building a broad road to freedom. That is the road she has left to her children, and to the many others who will follow in her footsteps

Source: www.counterpunch.org, April 1, 2016

Berta, continued from page 12

daughter Bertha Zuniga Cáceres, COPINH leader Asencion Martinez, and Rosalina Dominguez and Francisco Sanchez of the Rio Blanco Indigenous Council to call on the Dutch Development Bank FMO and the Finn Fund, both majority owned by the Dutch and Finnish governments respectively, to definitively cancel their financing of the Agua Zarca Project. FMO had seemingly ignored Berta's first attempt to inform them of the violence and human rights violations surrounding the Agua Zarca Project before they finalized the loan. Now, these banks share responsibility for the violence in the zone.

Francisco and other COPINH members in Rio Blanco have also been threatened for their opposition to the Agua Zarca Project. As Rosalina stated, "we do not want any more deaths." Yet, despite Monday's arrests, the project continues forward and the banks have yet to definitively withdraw. The US keeps financing and training the Honduran security forces, all too many of whom are deployed in the zone. Even worse, the US increased the number of Honduran military trained. Even worse, the US increased the number of Honduran mili-

tary trained at the SOA-WHINSEC this past year and is giving an extra \$750 million to Honduras, Guatemala, and El Salvador, for the ill-named "Alliance for Prosperity," known also as the Plan Colombia for Central America. This money only

serves to further embolden the repressive Honduran regime. How many more people have to die before the financing of repression is halted?

Source: SOAWatch.org, May 4, 2016

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Puerto Rico's Debt Deal

By Michelle Kaske and Maartin Z Brunn, journalists

After stating in 2015 that it was unable to pay its borrowings, Puerto Rico's government began talks with creditors and turned to Washington for help. Two agencies defaulted before the commonwealth proposed a voluntary plan in February to slash the debt load almost in half by repaying 39 to 72 cents on the dollar. Puerto Rico then upended months of negotiations by passing a debt-moratorium law that allows Governor Alejandro Garcia Padilla to suspend through January 2017 payments to investors on a wide swath of bonds. The island faces a \$2 billion bill for principal and interest payments on July 1. Under federal law, states can authorize bankruptcy filings by their municipalities, including public utilities, but as a commonwealth Puerto Rico can't. The US House of Representatives put forward a bill in May that would create a federal control board to oversee Puerto Rico's finances, manage any debt restructurings and enforce balanced budgets. In March, the US Supreme Court heard arguments on whether Puerto Rico can reinstate a local law that would give its utilities additional leverage in talks with lenders; a decision is expected by June. The island's plight affects most people with a mutual fund invested in the municipal bond market. Unlike the bonds of most states and municipalities, Puerto Rico's are exempt from local, state and federal taxes everywhere in the US. As a result, they are held by about half of open-end muni funds. The competitive advantage made it easy for Puerto Rico to double its debt in 10 years by selling bonds to plug annual budget deficits and pay for operating expenses—the same combination that brought New York City to the brink of bankruptcy in the 1970s.

Wall Street smoothed the island's path to fiscal debacle, reaping more than \$900 million in fees to manage Puerto Rico's \$126.6 billion of bond sales since 2000. After the US territory adopted a sales tax in 2006, investment banks worked with officials in San Juan to create new bonds backed by a portion of the proceeds. These helped the government, which employs more than a quarter of the workforce, put off cuts. Puerto Rico, ceded to the US in 1898 after a war with Spain, has a special tax status that dates to 1917 and the passage by the US Congress of the Jones-Shafroth Act. It has relied on tax breaks to drive economic development, attracting pharmaceutical, textile and

electronics companies. The US phased out the incentives from the mid-1990s to 2006, contributing to the loss of 80,000 jobs. Since 2006, the island's economy has contracted every year except one and its poverty rate is now almost double that of Mississippi, the poorest state. The population, now about 3.5 million, is shrinking and forecast to reach a 100-year low by 2050.

Republican lawmakers say a control board could make the politically unpalatable decisions Puerto Rico needs to repair its public finances. The island-wide government pays for schools and education—items normally handled by local communities in the states—and agencies that provide water and electricity are intertwined with the territory's funding. It has already closed scores of schools and proposed tightening an inefficient tax collection system, though critics say it hasn't done enough. The Obama administration and Puerto Rico's Governor Alejandro Garcia Padilla say federal oversight must be paired with a plan to give the island access to an orderly bankruptcy process that would help cut its liabilities and avoid protracted litigation. Bond investors and insurers oppose the move because it could force them to take losses; the conservative Heritage Foundation characterizes it as a bailout. There's concern that allowing Puerto Rico to use a court-ordered reorganization without a control board would fail to address the island's budget imbalances and overdue financial reports.

The Puerto Rico Oversight, Management and Economic Stability Act (PROMESA HR 5278) provides tools for debt relief and establishes a fiscal oversight board. The legislation

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nine months to grow but stores well and provides a good supply. Farmers were interested in millet seeds that grow in three months offered by international organizations until they discovered that they were infertile Monsanto seeds. Human rights lawyer Mario Joseph told us, "It's my heart work, accompanying people for the right to food." On April 8 he participated in a March for Hunger. He said that Monsanto seeds that the Haitian government has approved are a good example of how the US intervenes.

Haitian peasant organizations are fighting and marching in the streets to maintain the biodiversity of Haitian crops and Haitian control of seeds and agriculture. They are demand-

passed the Natural Resources Committee on May 25 and will soon be considered by the full House of Representatives. Eric LeCompte executive director of Jubilee USA stated that the "bill is not perfect and it is not the ultimate solution, but we hope it motivates Puerto Rico's government and creditors to negotiate a good faith agreement." He previously had testified to Congress that "the legislation contained mechanisms to prevent hold-out and vulture fund behavior."

Senator Sanders is pushing fellow Senate Democrats to reject the debt deal reached by the Obama administration and House Speaker Paul Ryan. In a letter to Senate colleagues, Sanders ripped the agreement to restructure the island's \$70 billion debt, arguing that the deal favors Wall Street creditors at the expense of residents in Puerto Rico. Sanders insisted that the US "must stop treating Puerto Rico like a colony." Sanders also takes aim at a provision that allows the Puerto Rican governor to cut the minimum wage to \$4.25 an hour, while giving Wall Street creditors excessive influence over the US territory's finances.

In particular Sanders takes issue with a new unelected oversight board created under the legislation to oversee Puerto Rico's finances because the majority of the seven-member panel would be controlled by Republicans with little input from Puerto Rican citizens. The board will have expansive power over Puerto Rico's economy.

Meanwhile, Hillary Clinton endorsed the bipartisan deal, although she made it clear that she has "serious concerns" about a handful of provisions in the legislation.

Sources: *BloombergQuickTake*, 5/23/2016; *jubilee.org*, 5/25/2016; *Political Playbook* 5/23/2016

ing that the food needs of Haitians are met through local, ecological small-scale farming, and that the government support small farmers with access to land, water and markets. Some of their banners read: "Down with industrial agriculture, *Jatropha*, and *Coca Cola*," "Monsanto means death to native peasant agriculture, poisoned earth, and food dependency," "Peasant seeds mean food sovereignty, health and life for future generations."

Sources: *A. Dupuy, NACLA*, July/August 2010; *M. Pulver, www.salon.com*, May 6, 2015; *Steckley and Bell, www.otherworldsarepossible.org*, January 2016

PANAMA: Barro Blanco Dam Proceeds

By Dale Sorensen, TFA

Ed. Note: In early 2013 the Task Force (TFA) organized a delegation to Panama led by Diane Dunn of Collective Voices for Peace. In Panama we learned of the struggle of the Ngäbe Bugle people to save their lands from being flooded by a hydroelectric dam. TFA became part of a coalition of human rights and environmental groups based in the US and Europe in solidarity with the Indigenous Ngäbe Bugle, to save their communities and culture. The coalition plans to send a letter to current President Varela asking for immediate suspension of reservoir flooding.

In 1981 the very first dam project on the river, Tabasará, was meant to supply energy to the Cerro Colorado copper mine. This project was ultimately canceled after being rejected by the local community. In 2007 the dam concession was given to Honduran-owned Generadora del Istmo, SA (GENISA) and renamed the Barro Blanco dam project. In 2008 GENISA took a stab at local consultation – they consulted a non-Indigenous town near the affected area. Later, the Environmental Impact Study of the project was approved and GENISA began to apply for carbon credits under the Clean Development Mechanism established under the Kyoto Protocol.

The Barro Blanco Hydroelectric Project (PHBB) works are located adjacent to the Ngäbe Bugle Comarca (territories) and would flood their homes, religious sites and threaten their means of subsistence as well as their cultural heritage. The waters of Tabasará would be used to generate electrical energy, with a power generating plant with an installed capacity of 28.56 MW and a mean annual generation of 124.83 GWh, with a 258-hectare reservoir.

Some of the Ngäbe population, the largest indigenous peoples group of Panama, live on or near the Tabasara's riverside. The Ngäbe Bugle, took to the streets on February 2012 to peacefully demand that all concessions granted without their approval be cancelled, including those for the controversial Barro Blanco Hydroelectric Power Plant Project/dam. Later protests organized by *the Movimiento 10 de Abril* and Ngäbe-Bugle communities, which blocked the Pan-Ameri-

can Highway for over a week, stemmed from the refusal of legislators to include article 5 of the proposed law 415 (previously agreed upon) to prohibit all mining and hydroelectric concessions within the region of the Ngäbe Bugle.

Violent repression by then-President Martinelli against the peaceful Ngäbe protests left four of them dead and more than a hundred adults and minors wounded. Communications were cut and human rights were severely violated. Local environmentalist and indigenous protests against the Dutch and German banks that financed the dam have restarted in recent weeks, as the project has continued despite a long-awaited United Nations report finding in favor of the indigenous community on the illegality of the dam.

In February 2015, Panama's Environmental National Authority (ANAM) temporarily suspended the construction of the Barro Blanco dam based on ANAM'S determination that the project failed to comply with its environment impact assessment. In August 2015 GENISA was fined \$775,200 for non-compliance, one of the grounds being failure to negotiate with, relocate and compensate those affected by the dam project and the "violation of the social and cultural rights of the affected Ngäbe people." The government is in violation of international law for its failure to adequately consult or obtain the free, prior and informed consent of the affected communities, as outlined in Article 10 of the UN declaration for indigenous rights, signed by Panama.

On May 22, the government announced

in a press release that GENISA would initiate the flooding of the dam reservoir which began on May 24, calling it a temporary test. But test flooding will allow for flooding of 6.7 hectares of the Ngäbe Bugle Comarca including flooding of homes in three communities. The people living in these communities are determined to stay and defend their sacred lands, regardless of the ongoing flooding. . These same communities will be drowned beneath a 258 hectare reservoir if the dam is completed.

After much protest a compromise agreement between the government and Ngäbe resulted in the passing of Special Law 11, in force since April 2012. It was signed by Silvia Carrera, the Ngäbe top *cacica* but was opposed by the affected communities. The law states that the Ngäbe Bugle people are to receive 5% of the projects annual billing and that, the contentious Barro Blanco dam will go ahead. The law also limits future mining concessions and hydroelectric projects subject to approval by indigenous authorities and a referendum of the area's residents. This indigenous population living by forest agriculture and fishing will be displaced. As well as destroying forest and villages, the reservoir will drown boulders covered with petroglyphs important to the Ngäbe culture. They residents of the flooded communities may be forced to move to relocation camps or urban areas to seek employment, which may result in erosion of cultural.

Sources; *Environmental Justice Atlas*, 3/15/2016 and proposed letter to President Varela of Panama, 5/25/2016

Solidarity Road Trip to the Border

US/Mexico Border Trip Planned from October 7 to 10 coordinating with the SOA Watch vigil in Nogales and Solidarity Visit with Maquiladora Workers in Ciudad Juarez (October 11-14)

On March 18, The Task Force hosted two women union organizers from Ciudad Juárez. Elvia Villescas of Las Hormigas, a community organizing project in Juarez and Veronica Rodriguez who was fired from ADC Commscope for trying to organize a union: were accompanied by Francisco Herrera social justice singer and songwriter.

Ciudad Juárez, just across the Rio Grande from El Paso, Texas, is the center of a growing rebellion of laborers in the border factories. Since September, workers have set up encampments, or *plantones*, in front of factories, they've marched through the streets, demanding recognition of independent unions. In response, the companies have fired hundreds and tried to stop the workers' movement from spreading.

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About 255,000 people work directly in Juárez' 330 maquiladoras, about 13% of the national total, meaning Juárez has one of the largest concentrations of manufacturing on the US/Mexico border and has some of the lowest wages, 18% lower than other border cities. Almost all the plants are foreign-owned. Eight of Juárez's 17 largest factories belong to US corporations, three to Taiwanese owners, two to Europeans, and just two to Mexicans.

The new workers' movement in Juárez began in August 2015 at four maquiladoras: Foxconn, ADC Commscope, Lexmark, and Eaton Corporation. Commscope manufactures laser optic cable, Lexmark makes cartridges for inkjet printers, and Eaton is an auto parts plant. On September 16, Mexico's National Independence Day, a group of 190 Commscope workers went to the local labor authorities at the Conciliation and Arbitration Board, and filed a request for a *registro*, to form an independent union. At Foxcom workers also asked for a *registro*. Both efforts were greeted by mass firings, which led workers to set up encampments in front of those plants. In the end the workers got their unions but the workers who organized were not rehired.

Elvia and Veronica came to the US to ask for solidarity. Both described living conditions based on wages of \$8 a day. They said that Juárez has become a huge metropolis built on the labor of tens of thousands of young women who have traveled north from small villages and rural areas.

The trip to the border is being proposed by the San Fran-

cisco Living Wage Coalition, the Marin Task Force on the Americas, and CISPES, in coordination with SOA Watch. The purpose is to highlight the issues of the militarization of the border and the broken immigration system, and the effects of free trade policies on workers in Mexico, specifically in the *maquiladoras* in Ciudad Juarez. This will be taking place before the November presidential elections to bring national attention to this trip.

The proposal is to have a chartered bus or car caravan to leave from San Francisco on October 6 to participate in the School of the Americas Watch border vigil from October 7 to 10 in Nogales, Arizona and then travel to Ciudad Juárez.

On October 10 or 11, we would then leave for Ciudad Juarez. We would be meeting with maquiladora workers, worker rights organizations and women organizing to stop the *femicides*. An organization in Juarez, Las Hormigas, would be coordinating the logistics and schedule.



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