

# Report

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## Lamenting Venezuela’s “Humanitarian Crisis” While Blocking Its Resolution



*US sanctions have bolstered the popularity of Maduro*

**By Roger Harris, Task Force board member**

A New York Times headline screams, “As Venezuela collapses, children are dying of hunger.” Lurid pictures show dead infants. A companion “Article of the Day Teaching Activities,” asks: “Why do some young children choose to live on the streets instead of at home with their families?”

The key to understanding the wellspring of the Times’ indignation about humanitarian issues confronting Venezuela is hinted at in the by-line to the article: “Venezuela has the largest proven oil reserves in the world.” The stakes are high for the US empire.

The back story is that the Times and the rest of the corporate media have cheered on US government policies that have contributed to the current grave situation in Venezuela, while obstructing solutions other than regime change. Although the Times caterwauls about the Venezuelan president’s “drive to

dictatorship,” the newspaper of record fails to support mediation between the current government and elements of the now demoralized opposition who are willing to accept an outcome short of regime change. Rather, the Times blithely opines, “No nation should have to suffer such a leader.”

Regime change in Venezuela would only put into power an unpopular opposition with no plan or inclination to address economic recovery. When the Venezuelan people went to the polls in the two most recent elections they supported the present Maduro government despite the difficulties that the Times so melodramatically cherry picks. The voters knew survival would be worse under the US-backed opposition.

While there is no denying the economic emergency that Venezuela is currently facing and the concomitant suffering it is causing its people, understanding its context is essential to seeing a way out.

After a string of oligarchic governments dating back to 1959 and the neoliberal economic collapse and deterioration of living conditions for working people in Venezuela of the 1990s, Hugo Chávez was elected president in 1998. He instituted measures which displeased Washington and its sycophantic press, including: using Venezuela’s vast oil wealth for social programs, rather than enriching the rich; promoting an independent foreign policy, while creating regional alliances; encouraging and empowering popular participation in the affairs of state.

A coup in 2002, backed by the US and cheered by the Times, failed to remove Chávez. Instead, Chávez’s Bolivarian Revolution enjoyed spectacular successes as it openly declared itself socialist, a term anathema to the US government and its corporate media.

Poverty rates were reduced by half; extreme poverty rates were cut even more. Community radio stations, communes, and cooperatives were created. Well over a million homes were built for the poor. Regional alliances, excluding the US, came together. And the majority of people affirmed and reaffirmed what has become known as Chavismo in election after election.

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Then in 2013 Hugo Chávez died, and his successor Nicolás Maduro became president of Venezuela in a closely contested election. Maduro inherited not only the mantle of Chavismo, but a constellation of challenges that would have plagued Chávez himself had he continued: widespread and deeply ingrained corruption coupled with bureaucratic inefficiencies, a dysfunctional currency system, and an ingrained and recalcitrant criminal element.

Furthermore, Chávez had granted amnesty to the perpetrators of the 2002 coup. These same “golpistas” are now among the leadership of a violent opposition to Maduro. What appeared to be a gracious gesture in 2002 has come back to plague and threaten the very existence of the Bolivarian Revolution.

Yet all these challenges to the success of the Bolivarian Revolution in Venezuela pale in significance compared to two cataclysmic external factors: the collapse of the oil market and the active hostility of the US.

The social programs that Chávez had instituted as well as aid to other countries had been subsidized by an oil commodity boom. Meanwhile, the costs of the existing inefficiencies and corruption were partly obscured in an economy flush with petrodollars. Then the bottom fell out of the oil market. Last but by no means least has been the enduring hostility of the US empire, promoting, funding, and emboldening both the internal opposition and Venezuela’s international opposition such as US client narco-states Colombia and Mexico.



The result is that, despite bold measures, the economy and by extension living conditions in Venezuela continue to trend downward.

In an unbroken trajectory, the US empire has worked to overthrow the Bolivarian Revolution in Venezuela from its inception. George W. Bush tried to depose Chávez in the failed military coup of 2002. His successor, Barak Obama, declared Venezuela “an unusual and extraordinary threat to the national security and foreign policy of the United States” and imposed sanctions on Venezuelan officials. Now Donald Trump has echoed Obama’s nonsense about Venezuela posing a national security threat to the US and doubled down with new sanctions and even threats of military intervention.

The US policy is not based on mutual respect for national sovereignty and the rule of international law, but aimed at regime change in Venezuela. The Times and the other corporate media are mouthpieces for this policy. While crying crocodile tears about the suffering of the Venezuelan people, they support policies that relentlessly exacerbate human misery as a means of undermining popular support for the Bolivarian Revolution. These media are the promoters of the very conditions that they hypocritically claim to be opposing.

The recent US sanctions are designed to prevent economic recovery in Venezuela. The sanctions cut off needed access to international credit and block the Venezuelan government from restructuring its debt. President

Trump’s executive order in August, which barred dealings in new debt and equity issued by the Venezuelan government and its state oil company, has frozen over \$3 billion in Venezuelan assets.

Some of the consequences of the economic war against Venezuela have been that funds were frozen for the import of insulin, even though Venezuela had the money; Colombia blocked a shipment of the anti-malaria medicine Primaquine; payments were suspended to foreign suppliers for three months delaying the arrival of 29 container ships carrying supplies needed to process and produce food products.

These recent developments synergize with the on-going economic war by the traditional oligarchy in Venezuela, which takes the form of withholding goods from the market to create shortages, trafficking in contraband, and manipulation of the currency.

While hurting the people, the irony of the US sanctions is that they have bolstered the popularity of the Maduro government and exposed the complicity of the opposition.

A Times video, “Strongmen who’ve started blaming ‘fake news’ too,” fingers the corporate media’s usual suspects: Russia, Iran, China, and Myanmar. Highlighted among the “strongmen” is Venezuela’s President Maduro, who is mocked for thinking that “fake news was part of a western conspiracy to hurt his country.” The Times self-servingly attempts to rebut Maduro, claiming that surely his view cannot be the case because the very news that Maduro criticizes is from the US, which has “a free and vibrant press.”

In short, the Times laments the consequences of the policies it supports, while opposing solutions short of regime change. The hostility of the Times to the Bolivarian Revolution is not predicated on humanitarian grounds. If it were, the Times would be defending its gains rather than polemicalizing for a neoliberal counter-revolution.

The Venezuelans should be allowed to solve their own problems. The responsibility of the US citizenry and its press alike should be to oppose interference by our government and demand that it stop sanctioning Venezuela and stop meddling in its internal politics.

Source: *Counterpunch*, December 29, 2017

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## Honduras: History Always Repeats Itself



*By Katu Arkonada, Bolivian representative of the Network in Defense of Humanity*

G.W.F. Hegel said that the great events of world history appear twice. Karl Marx added: the first time as tragedy, the second as farce. Events in Honduras confirm the two old philosophers' thesis that history repeats itself: the *coup d'état* against President Mel Zelaya in 2009 as tragedy, and the electoral fraud of 2017 as farce.

On June 28, 2009, hooded soldiers seized President Mel Zelaya, in his pajamas, and spirited him out of the country to Costa Rica, transferring him through a military base shared by Honduras and the United States. Zelaya was accused of trying to hold a referendum on whether a Constituent Assembly should be convened, although his true crime was in turning away from those who in 2006 had brought him into office at the head of the Liberal Party. In 2008, he deviated from the party's politics by promoting Honduras' entry first into Petrocaribe (Venezuela's generous international system of oil for barter) and then into ALBA (Cuba-Venezuela initiative for international trade solidarity), which in the same year allowed for a 60% increase in the country's minimum wage.

The attack was not only against a progressive government, but against the weakest link in ALBA, after a decade which saw the rise of left governments throughout the region. Moreover, Honduras held a key geopolitical position in Central America as a CIA training base for the Nicaraguan Contras in the 1980s. In 2009 Honduras became a laboratory of the "smart power" that then Secretary of State Hilary Clinton advocated: a combination of "hard power" (military *coup d'états*) with "soft power" (judicial power together with media manipulation and media blackouts). Eight years later, LIBRE (Liberty and Reunification Party) entered elections in an "Opposition Alliance" with two other parties, PINU (Innovation and Unity Party) and PAC (Anticorruption Party), choosing the leader of the PAC, well known television host Salvador Nasralla, as presidential candidate. Opposing Nasralla was Juan Orlando Hernández ("JOH"), candidate of the National Party and president since 2013, who ran despite the constitutional prohibition of article 2392 barring presidential re-election. (Mel Zelaya was the victim of a *coup d'état* for a far smaller offense.)

On November 27, the day after the election, the TSE (Supreme Electoral Tribunal) published a report showing that with 57% of the vote counted,

Nasralla and the Opposition Alliance led JOH by more than 5%. In most of the world's electoral systems, a lead of 5% with more than 50% of the vote counted is considered an irreversible lead. But not in Honduras, where after a more-than-suspicious crash of the computer system, which lost 5 thousand *actas* (tally sheets on which votes are recorded), the TSE offered a new count in which JOH led Nasralla by 1.6%. The fraud was complete on December 18 when the TSE published the final results making official JOH's victory over Nasralla by 42.9% to 41.5%. And all of this in the midst of a curfew declared December 1st that left more than 30 killed by security forces.

The Organization of American States (OAS), which has never been known to have any sympathy for progressive governments and whose head of its Electoral Mission, Bolivarian Tuto Quiroga, former vice-president under dictator Hugo Banzer, would be even less likely to have such sympathy, was compelled to issue a report on December 17, backed up by a press release from the General Secretary, noting: "Deliberate interference with the information system, elimination of data trails, the impossibility of learning the number of times the system was vulnerable, open or empty electoral urns, the extreme statistical improbability of the reported levels of participation inside a precinct, freshly printed ballots and other ballot irregularities, added to the narrow margin of victory, make it impossible to determine the winner with the necessary degree of certainty."

Here was a *coup d'état* that was a tragedy for the Honduran people and Latin America and an electoral coup that has been a farce for the entire international community. We must learn from history so as not to repeat it.

*Ed. Note: Since the 1950s Honduras has had an agreement with the US allowing it to use any military base or airport in Honduras. About 500 US Marines are stationed at the Palmerola military base.*

Source: *La Jornada*, January 28, 2018, translation, TFA editorial

## How Nicaragua Grabbed My Heart



By Diana Bohn, Task Force board member

I wrote this in response to a request from Chuck Kaufman of the Alliance for Global Justice for contributions from others whose lives were changed by their first visit to Nicaragua.

I too had my heart grabbed by Nicaraguans and the Nicaraguan struggle against US imperialism by my coffee picking experience. I went on a coffee brigade very similar to that of Chuck's trips, at end of '88/beginning of '89. It was my first time south of the border, except to visit Baja and Puerto Vallarta Mexico – quite a contrast!

Picking coffee was right up my alley, having grown up in the Willamette Valley of Oregon picking fruits and vegetables throughout most of all my summer vacations from age 11 through high school. Many of the kids I knew did that, catching a bus at 5:30 am each day. (I guess child labor laws came in after that).

Coffee picking was similar except for the steepness of the terrain.

We coffee pickers dubbed it “Ski Nicaragua” because of the frequency with which we slid down the muddy hillsides.

I was overwhelmed by the whole experience of that trip! Looking back at my journal, I am amazed at the breadth of the trip; not just picking coffee, but also a great number of informative meetings with a number of sectors as well as entertainment! As did Chuck, I also noted that not only could we not pick nearly as much coffee as the Nicaraguans, but I was also concerned that we were causing damage to the coffee plants. Three friendships I made on that trip continue to this day.

I was certainly hooked on Nicaragua, and the following July I took my 19-year-old daughter to a Nicaragua Center for Community Action (NICCA) work brigade to Pio Doce, southwest of Masaya, to help build a school. A community member had access to a school bus and took us along with community members to the volcano, the beach, and to the huge 1989 July 19 “Triumph of the Revolution” celebration. That was just before the US government got the Sandinistas to “Cry Uncle” and vote in the neoliberal UNO party. (So much for meddling in elections. It is apparently only OK for the US to do so.)

After that I helped organize and participated in NICCA work brigades, in collaboration with Union of Ranchers & Farmers, first in Matagalpa, then

for several years during the 90s in the municipality of San Ramón nearby. The *brigadistas* lived with families and worked with the farmers to establish sustainable agriculture procedures promoted by the Programa Campesino a Campesino (Peasant to Peasant Program), terracing hillside fields to help prevent soil erosion, cultivating, and planting various crops to make sure the people have something to eat and to sell throughout the year. (See film, Basic Basket.)

No longer organizing brigades, NICCA continues raising funds for that program as well as for Grupo MOES, an organization that works with marginalized women in Estelí, and with the Center for Legal Assistance for Indigenous People (CALPI)

I also became active in Campaign for Labor Rights, and Alliance for Global Justice. I continue to work to make the Sweatshop-Free Berkeley ordinance effective. As with most everything, these kinds of efforts are never made.

I also worked with Potters for Peace for many years and helped make the film, The Road to Hope/Potters for Peace.

All this is to say, one thing leads to another, and the coffee-picking trip was certainly a life-changing experience.

Source: *Task Force on the Americas*, January 18, 2018

## IMMIGRATION: Protestors Surround ICE Offices



Hundreds of protestors blocked streets and the entrance to the office of Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) in San Francisco on February 28 to protest against the widespread raids against immigrant families in the Bay Area. At least 232 primarily Latino immigrants were arrested in four days in what can only be described as racist terror sweeps, coming on the orders of the Trump Administration. ICE claimed that they were only arresting those with criminal records but most were arrested for being in the country illegally.

Oakland Mayor Libby Schaaf is now under attack for warning the community that the raids were coming. “What she did was no better than a gang lookout yelling the police are coming,” said acting ICE director Thomas Homan, and some conservative publications called for her arrest.

A cornerstone of the Trump vision from day one has been to characterize all immigrants as criminals or potential terrorists. People immigrate for a multitude of reasons but most have come primarily to the US for the possibility of work because neoliberal policies have devastated the economies of their homelands. Economies of many Latin American countries rely on remittances sent back home from those working in the most dangerous, lowest paying jobs in the US. A quick look around reveals that it is immigrants who are working the construction sites, the restaurants and hotels, including Trump's. They are the landscapers, the dishwashers, the nannies and the scapegoats for the current crisis of capitalism.

Source: *TFA editorial*, March 1, 2018

## PUERTO RICO: An Island Adrift



*By Ricardo Alarcón de Quesada,  
former President of the Cuban  
National Assembly*

Under the title, “An Island Adrift,” in 1944, Juan Bosch published an article in solidarity with the struggle for the independence of Puerto Rico. It was one of the countless journalistic, political and literary works that the great Dominican writer produced during his prolonged Havana exile, several of which he dedicated to the cause of our sister island.

Despite the time elapsed, almost three-quarters of a century, a similar text with the same title could be written today: “Adrift by the seas of history, without direction, without destination, goes Puerto Rico: for four and a half centuries.”

Now the situation is worse. Hit by fierce hurricanes, especially the most recent and brutal one named Donald Trump, the island faces a critical moment in its history.

At the time Bosch wrote his eloquent prophecy, Franklin Delano Roosevelt governed in Washington, promising the American people a ‘New Deal’ to benefit workers and the poor and offering the peoples of the continent a ‘Good Neighbor’ policy. But his promises did not outlive him.

Both projects were reduced to ashes long ago, swept away by the savage capitalism and unbridled warmongering practiced, one way or another, by all US administrations since WWII.

In the 1940s, Luis Muñoz Marín and

his Popular Democratic Party (PPD) still championed the independence of the island. Later they would subordinate the fundamental question of national sovereignty and would accept, under Washington’s patronage, the so-called “Associated Free State” (ELA), a clumsy disguise that changed nothing about the harsh colonial reality.

Thanks to tax exemptions and other privileges, the territory was flooded by North American capital displacing local producers and promoting a massive emigration to the north. Substantial investments in infrastructure gave it an air of modernity. Imperial propaganda spared no effort to sell the beautiful island as a model for the rest of the continent. At the same time, the US filled the small territory with bases and military installations, turning it into a fortress that was a key piece of its aggressive and interventionist policy throughout the continent.

This propaganda also managed to hide two critical aspects of Puerto Rican reality. On one hand is the systematic persecution and repression of the patriotic movement, often violent and overt, at other times covert and subtle, yet always overwhelming; and on the other is Washington’s rejection of each and every request made by the Puerto Rican people, including the PPD, to modify the colonial relationship and make it less damaging to their legitimate interests.

In fact, the ELA was a lie from its birth. There was never an “association” between Puerto Rico and the United

States, and to call “free” the monster thus created was an affront to its victim, the Puerto Rican people, as well as a gross insult to language itself. All efforts promoted by the island to establish areas of autonomy failed in the face of imperial insolence.

With the passage of time, the colonial metropolis was also changing. The US continues to be the main economic and military power on the planet but its domain is no longer absolute and undisputed, as it was at the end of WWII. It has had to eliminate several important legal arrangements that had favored its investments on the island, and this investment capital left in search of other more lucrative markets.

The economic model imposed on the colony ended in a resounding failure: local authorities had to acknowledge their inability to pay the public debt of more than \$70 billion and they struggled uselessly in search of an impossible solution for a country entirely subject to a foreign power.

In confronting a problem independent nations face every day, Puerto Rico, lacking its own sovereignty, found all possible negotiations closed to them. In Washington, Congress and the Administration agreed to establish a so-called Fiscal Control Board, which today is the true authority administering the territory and whose task is to force Puerto Ricans to pay what they are supposedly obliged to, by means of imposing draconian measures of austerity that have raised unemployment, eliminated basic social services and increased emigration.

To make matters worse, the island was hit by two powerful hurricanes, Irma and María, especially the latter which almost completely ruined the island. The losses caused by these meteorological phenomena are estimated to be more than \$90 billion. Thousands of families lost their homes, and four months later a large part of the population has no electricity or potable water. Many schools have not reopened and no one knows when or how the collapsed infrastructure will be repaired. Neither do we know the precise figure of how many people lost their lives due to María; independent investigations estimate that it is more than a thousand.

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## El Salvador's Metallic Mining Ban, Water Rights and Mangroves



*EcoViva/ TFA delegation with Association for the Development of El Salvador*

**By Carissa Brands, Task Force board member**

*Ed. Note: Carissa Brands, who is a passionate environmentalist and works on environmental issues in the US, was part of a delegation to El Salvador at the end of October 2017 to explore the issues of mining, mangroves, and water rights. The trip was co-sponsored by TFA and EcoViva. This article is based on her observations.*

After 12 years of struggle, El Salvador banned metallic mining on March 29, 2017. As the first country in the world to ban metallic mining, despite current “Free Trade Agreements,” it is a victory for the people, their environment and sovereignty, and an important part of the effort to establish in law the people’s right to water.

Extracting gold is especially damaging to the environment. The extraction of one ounce of gold uses one to two tons of rock. The rock is crushed, mixed with toxic chemicals, such as cyanide or mercury, and water, then

left to settle in toxic ponds. Once the rock settles to the bottom, the gold dust floats to the surface and is skimmed off. The toxic water byproduct leaches through the pond’s thin plastic protective barriers into the soil and groundwater, or is dumped into rivers. This process is often preceded by severe deforestation, in a country that already is one of the most deforested in Latin America, second only to Haiti.

The Prohibition on Metallic Mining bans any corporation or entity within the country or international corporation from exploring for, extracting, exploiting, or processing metallic minerals above or below ground within El Salvador. It also bans the use of toxic chemicals, such as cyanide and mercury, which contaminate the waters, land, and people of El Salvador. All prior permissions and concessions have been nullified, such as those granted to mining giants Gold Corp, Commerce Group, and Oceana Gold (previously Pacific Rim), the principal exploiters of gold and polluters of water, for which they paid very little to the country—less than one percent of profits.

Many entities participated in the 12-year process to ban metallic mining. Local groups networked with larger national organizations to build support for the ban within communities most affected by mining. The resistance against metallic mining gained the support of international solidarity organizations, caused a shift in the media’s portrayal of the struggle, and ultimately pressured Salvadoran government officials to change regulations and the law. Despite mining corporations’ “green mining” campaigns and promises to bring jobs, women’s health clinics, and other social projects to communities, their efforts to defeat the passage of the mining ban failed.

Organizations such as CIS (Center of Interchange and Solidarity), CRIPDES (Association for the Development of El Salvador), UNES (Salvadoran Ecological Unity), ADES (Association of Social and Economical Development), and MUFRAS-32 (Movement United with Francisco Sánchez, 1932) had already been working with communities in social, ecological, and economic development projects as the struggle for the mining ban gained momentum. These organizations joined community leaders in educating the people to reject the mining companies’ propaganda and understand the ban as protection of their water, health, territory, and sovereignty.

During the 12-year struggle, mining companies waged a campaign of terror against community leaders. In just one example, Hector Berrios, a lawyer, activist, and director of MUFRAS-32, was threatened by death squads purported to be working for mining companies. They broke into his house, stole computers and information, and placed photos and dolls of his family in the house indicating in which order they were to be killed.

According to Berrios, they tortured, strangled and killed his friend Marcelo Riveras, then threw his body down a well in the town of San Isidro in 2009.

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# CENTRAL AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN

*Mining, continued from page 6*

The Salvadoran Attorney General intervened and compelled the coroner to list the cause of death as self-inflicted. Environmental activists Ramiro Rivera and Dora Sorto (eight months pregnant) were also killed by mining company henchmen in 2009. According to Berrios, the accused gang members were convicted and jailed, but the torturer and mastermind of the murders, Rodrigo Chavez, Vice President of Pacific Rim, was never convicted.

Despite resistance in the streets being met with arrests and violence, anti-mining activists and protesters fought back by occupying central squares in the departments of Cabañas and Chalatenango to gain attention and support for a mining ban. Creative ways to engage people, especially youth, to join and support the movement flourished with murals, festivals, and music. Youth empowerment programs promoted the protection of the environment, water, and land through radio, music, art, and social media.

In the earlier years of the resistance, the Catholic Church was pro-mining, but eventually sided with the prohibition. Many people came to support the ban when their priests began to support it. Many priests even marched in the streets with the people.

Ultimately, in March of 2017, the Legislature passed the bill, fulfilling the campaign promise of President Salvador Sánchez Cerén, FMLN (Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front) to ban metallic mining. Seventy of the eighty-four members of the legislature voted in favor of the ban, including a few from the right-wing party, ARENA (Nationalist Republican Alliance).

In addition to their continuing struggle over mining's social, environmental and economic damage, the Salvadoran people are fighting to secure access to a clean and steady supply of water by seeking a law declaring that water is a human right. While the majority of Salvadorans have no access to clean drinking water, corporations such as Jumex and Coca Cola maintain access to water 24/7. When the ARENA party was in power, it granted these large corporations permission to extract, exploit, and pollute water while they reap profits and pay nearly nothing—and they have no legal obligation to protect the water or watersheds. A law estab-

lishing the people's right to clean water would be another step toward establishing greater sovereignty for the people of El Salvador and create a significant roadblock to the corporations that seek to exploit them and their land.

The Mangrove Association, supported by EcoViva, educates their own communities about the importance of protecting the mangroves of Jiquilisco Bay in the Department of Usulután. The mangroves benefit the people by protecting them from water pollution and hurricanes, and by providing a sustainable source of food. The association supports other projects, such as youth empowerment programs, media and radio, women's cooperatives, and literacy campaigns.

The Mangrove Association and other groups in El Salvador collaborate with La Vía Campesina to find better ways for Salvadorans to meet their basic needs. Agroecology (sustainable and ecologically restorative food production) is slowly gaining momentum within some communities as an alternative to the extremely destructive, extractive and unhealthy sugarcane industry. Communities can ensure their own health and food security by meeting their needs for food, fuel, and medicine on a familial, communal, and national level.

Salvadorans know they are going to face more challenges to protect their hard-won victories. For example, ARENA has promised to overturn the mining ban if elected to the presidency in 2019. And since the Salvadoran people are also facing other, possibly more, pressing issues that the FMLN party has little control over, such as severe economic problems and the increase in gang violence, the FMLN will be facing tough opposition from the conservative party, which promises economic growth and a firmer hand in the fight against gangs.

Just as the people of El Salvador continue to express their solidarity with the struggles of other Central American countries in the fight against global corporate domination, international solidarity with the people of El Salvador in their fight for self-determination and against the extractive industries has never been more important.

Source: *TFA, January 10, 2018*

*Puerto Rico, continued from page 5*

More than 200,000 Puerto Ricans have sought refuge in the US in a wave of migration that does not seem to stop.

To top it all, along came Trump. This extraordinary character, who has done nothing to alleviate the Puerto Rican tragedy, not only remarked that the island's supposed debt must be reimbursed, but also promoted a tax reform that among other things taxes products coming from the island to the US at 20%, which will make economic recovery an unattainable chimera.

In the midst of the disaster, the people are determined to rebuild their country, without federal aid and in the face of the corruption and ineptitude of those who claim to represent it.

What Juan Bosch anticipated so long ago appears to be coming true. In the hour of disaster, the workers, the dispossessed, the downtrodden, finally united in pain and hope, will be the only ones capable of saving their country.

Source: *ajiacomix, translation Walter Lippmann, January 26, 2018*



*"Puerto Rico Rise Up". Against the neglect of the US government*

## Broad Sections of Argentine Society Protest Macri's Rush to Neoliberalism



hitting working class communities of Argentina hard.

This protest served as a stepping stone to what was to follow on February 21 when over 400,000 union members and their supporters paralyzed the streets of the capitol in the largest expression of opposition to Macri to date. Hugo Moyano, leader of the truckers union, described the massive response as one blow against the current “policies of hunger.”

On March 6 more than 70,000 teachers accompanied by militants of social and popular organizations and labor solidarity associations marched again in Buenos Aires to the Ministry of Education. Among them were the workers of the State Workers Association (ATE) that had just begun a general strike. As in the US today, the main demand of the public teachers was for an increase in salaries. Handwritten banners and posters in the march read: “Quality teaching with salaries that allow us to eat.”

These frequent mass protests on the streets of Argentina are an indication of a vibrant and growing opposition to one of Washington's closest allies in the region.

Source: *Resumen Latinoamericano*, March 7, 2018

**By Bill Hackwell, Task Force board member who covered the protests in Buenos Aires**

More than 40,000 workers of the Confederation of Workers of the Popular Economy (CTEP), the Classist and Combative Current (CCC) and Neighborhoods On Their Feet (Barrios de Pie) marched along with members of social movements and trade union organizations to the headquarters of the provincial government of Buenos Aires in La Plata, in a national day of struggle directed at all the governor offices in Argentina, in opposition to the Macri administration's policies of austerity and neoliberalism which have increased the prevalence of hunger in the country.

In La Plata they demanded the Governor of the Province of Buenos Aires, María Eugenia Vidal, issue a social and food emergency by allocating 25% of the public budget to the local cooperatives to address the growing needs of the poor and unemployed.

Meanwhile in Buenos Aires rush hour traffic was snarled as hundreds of vehicles flooded the main routes to the Capital to bring their provincial and municipal demands to the national government. Thousands of public sector union workers marched early in the afternoon, along with social movements

and the organized unemployed, led primarily by women.

Major mobilizations also took place in Catamarca, San Juan, Salta, Tucumán, Chaco, Santa Cruz, La Rioja, Mendoza, La Pampa, Rio Negro and other provinces as well. The protests were a continuation of earlier demonstrations against Macri in December demanding an end to the economic adjustments and layoff policies that are





## Trump's Racism Toward Haiti Is not an Aberration



*By Nia Imara, an artist, an astrophysicist, and activist with the Haiti Action-Committee.*

On January 22, thousands in Haiti's capital protested vulgar comments made by Donald Trump about the nation.

Trump's racist comments about Haiti and African countries, made January 11 on the eve of the eighth anniversary of the terrible earthquake in Haiti, were vulgar and unacceptable, but they are not an aberration. Rather they reflect the reality of US policy toward so-called "underdeveloped" black and brown nations.

In the wake of Trump's comments, politicians and media figures rushed to defend Haitian and African immigrants, asserting how hardworking they are; what unique, important contributions they make to America; and reminding us of the hackneyed fallacy that "America was built by immigrants." By reasoning on these grounds, commentators allow Trump and those with similar anti-immigration rhetoric to dictate the terms of the argument.

US policy toward Haiti has been consistently racist, violent, oppressive, and exploitative. Trump's particularly crude brand of racism is only the most recent manifestation of timeworn, bipartisan discrimination against black and brown people.

The exclusion of Haiti by the United States began with the Haitian Revolution of 1791-1804, more than 200 years ago. Between 1791 and 1810, more than 25,000 whites and free blacks who

supported the old regime fled the island to port cities like New Orleans and Philadelphia, sparking an early American refugee crisis. The free black migrants were viewed with suspicion by slaveholding politicians, including President Washington and his Secretary of State, Thomas Jefferson.

After Haiti defeated France in 1804, President Jefferson refused to give the new nation diplomatic recognition. France's coffers were drained by years of war to preserve its most valuable colony, and Jefferson exploited this opportunity by acquiring the Louisiana Territory (stolen Native American land) for a song. The United States, predisposed to be conciliatory toward a fellow slave-holding nation, aided France and other European powers in implementing a diplomatic quarantine of the new black nation.

As noted by Robert Lawless in Haiti's Bad Press and Paul Farmer in The Uses of Haiti, the United States prevented Haiti's participation in the Western Hemisphere Panama Conference of 1825. US slavery continued for more than half a century following its abolition in Haiti; it wasn't until 1862 that the US Government recognized Haiti's independence.

Democratic President Woodrow Wilson, widely known as a racist, sent the US Marines to invade Haiti in 1915. The Marines transported Jim Crow customs to the island, instituted forced labor, and massacred thousands of Haitians, all in the name of "stability." In 1919, the troops murdered thirty-two-

year-old Charlemagne Peralte, leader of the Cacos peasant movement that resisted the occupation. As a warning against continued rebellion, they attached his dead body to a wooden door for public display. Washington's lasting legacy was the creation of the Haitian Army.

For decades after the official end of the nineteen-year-old occupation, dictators used the American-made army as an instrument of repression against the people.

The infamous dictator, François "Papa Doc" Duvalier, was given tens of millions of dollars by Washington during the first four years of his reign, which coincided with the Eisenhower Administration. In his book, *An Unbroken Agony*, Randall Robinson discusses how Papa Doc and his notorious Tontons Macoutes killed an estimated 50,000 people during his rule. Later on, in Paul Farmer's words, JFK "provided the bloodthirsty killer with military assistance as part of the general program of extending US control over the security forces in Latin America."

After Papa Doc died in 1971, US support of the dictatorship under his son, Jean-Claude "Baby Doc" Duvalier, became even more entrenched. In the 1970s, both Haiti and El Salvador (another poor Latin American country maligned by Trump) were ruled by US-backed regimes that violently repressed their populations, in order to ensure a submissive, cheap labor force for US companies.

Under the repressive Duvalier dictatorship, which denied labor rights, the assembly sector proliferated in Haiti, and by 1980 the country became the ninth largest manufacturer of assembled goods for US consumption.

Today Haiti's export economy is dominated by apparel manufacture, such as cheap clothes sold at Walmart, and even parts of US military uniforms. More recently, after the earthquake, the State Department under Hillary Clinton pushed to build a new sweatshop in Haiti with money from USAID.

*continued on page 10*



move, he conveniently defined fleeing Haitians as “economic refugees,” in order to deny them political asylum.

In early 1992, acclaimed dancer Katherine Dunham went on a forty-seven day hunger strike, urging George H. Bush to change US policy toward Haitian refugees who, under his administration, were being held in deplorable conditions at the US base on Guantanamo. Among other actions, a series of hunger strikes by students and faculty, as well as one by Randall Robinson that lasted nearly a month in 1994, were undertaken to pressure President Clinton to change US policy toward Haitian refugees.

Many gains made under President Aristide’s second administration were reversed after the US-led coup in 2004. The Aristide government, for the first time in Haiti’s history, implemented a universal schooling program. Between 1994 and 2000, more

public schools were built in Haiti than during the entire period following the 1804 Revolution: 195 primary schools and 104 high schools.

In 2001, Aristide mandated that 20 percent of the government budget go toward education. The aborted Aristide administrations also dedicated a greater percentage of the national budget on health care than any previous administration. His government advocated for improved labor rights, and in 2003 it doubled the minimum wage to 70 *gourdes* a day (about \$1 today), affecting the livelihoods of more than 20,000 assembly factory workers.

But after the 2004 coup, many considered Haiti to be under a continued state of occupation. The country’s infrastructure steadily worsened over the next several years, and the 2010 earthquake was devastating. Far too many homes and lives were lost, and the Haitian people continue to suffer the consequences.

Obama’s response to the initial natural disaster was to send troops to

Haiti. Let’s recall how the US military held up thousands of tons of life-saving aid at the Port-au-Prince airport, since its first priority was to provide “stability.” Let’s remember too the stories and images, reminiscent of Hurricane Katrina, in which Haitians searching for food and supplies were depicted as “looters” or as members of “gangs.” But ultimately, perhaps the more significant parallel between Katrina and the Obama Administration’s response to the earthquake is that the US Government used reconstruction as a tool to aid the Haitian elite and multinationals.

If we consider Trump’s racism in the light of history, it is quite in keeping with that of his forty-four predecessors.

Black and brown immigrants do not have to prove their worth. When people try to defend them by asserting how hardworking and deserving they are, these assertions conveniently skirt around the looming truth that centuries of American and European colonialism, neocolonialism, and capitalist exploitation are responsible for the impoverishment that is so widespread amongst today’s black and brown nations. It’s as if a band of robbers looted a home, set it on fire, and then magnanimously defended the fleeing family’s right to sanctuary.

Additionally, the idea that “America was built by immigrants” conceals a larger, racist myth about the origins of this country. This country was built, in the first place, on genocide. It was built on stolen labor, on centuries of kidnap and the brutal separation of families, on the systematic oppression of the descendants of Africa.

It is not an accident that Trump mentioned Haiti and Africa together; the exploitation of African nations and Haiti by the United States and European allies is historically inseparable. Haiti has always proudly identified with its African roots, and the Africa in Haiti is still evident today.

In order to forge strong, meaningful bonds of solidarity with movements in Haiti and Africa struggling to rebuild their nations, after centuries of exploitation, let’s model ourselves after Katherine Dunham, who understood that our ties to each other go far deeper than any man-made borders.

Source: *Haiti Action Committee, January 24, 2018*

*Haiti, continued from page 9*

Even after the Haitian masses successfully ousted Baby Doc in 1986, the momentum of Duvalierism persisted, as the American-trained and -armed military continued its brutal terrorism against the people.

In the next two decades, Washington sponsored and actively participated in two *coup d’états* against the democratically elected governments of President Jean-Bertrand Aristide. Each resulted in years of violence and repression; each resulted in the killings of thousands of people; tens of thousands more were imprisoned without due process or were forced to flee their homes.

Soon after the first coup in 1991, President Bush ordered the Coast Guard to return refugees to Haiti. As a presidential candidate, Clinton denounced Bush’s handling of the crisis, but upon taking office he further extended the blockade. In a cynical

## Cuba's Infant Mortality Rate



*Gerardo Hernandez, one of the Cuban 5, with his wife Adriana*

Maintaining infant mortality rate below five per 1,000 live births for the 10th consecutive year is reason enough for Cuba to celebrate. But even more extraordinary is that the country has just achieved the lowest infant mortality rate in its history.

Preliminary data for 2017, made available to Granma by the Medical Records and Health Statistics Directorate, indicates that 114,980 births took place (about two thousand fewer than in 2016), while 465 babies under a year of age died, resulting in an infant mortality rate for 2017 of four per thousand live births, the lowest on record.

To appreciate just what this figure means, it's worth recalling that in 1970, 9,173 infants died, for a rate of 38.7 per 1,000 live births.

Source: *Granma International*, Jan 1, 2018



## Cuba Develops World's First Lung Cancer Vaccine

*By Michael Voss, CGTN Cuba correspondent*

Cuba has developed the world's first lung cancer vaccine. Initial results are positive and it is also being used in several other Latin American countries. The vaccine has become the first Cuban-patented drug to be allowed to undergo clinical trials at a cancer research institute in the United States.

Caridad Gomez started smoking when she was 13. Four years ago, she was diagnosed with lung cancer. After undergoing intensive chemotherapy, she is now being treated with the world's first lung cancer vaccine.

CimaVax-EGF is a Cuban-developed drug aimed at preventing the recurrence of the disease. Fifty-six year old Gomez is now back at work and once a month she returns to the hospital for a series of intramuscular injections. "I feel good, I have even gained some weight. I've been using the vaccine for two years and four months now and so far I've felt really good," Caridad Gomez said.

Patients still have to complete a course of chemo or radio therapy before moving onto the vaccine. Dr. Yoanna Flores was involved in the clinical trials of the vaccine conducted at the National Oncology and Radiography Institute in Havana.

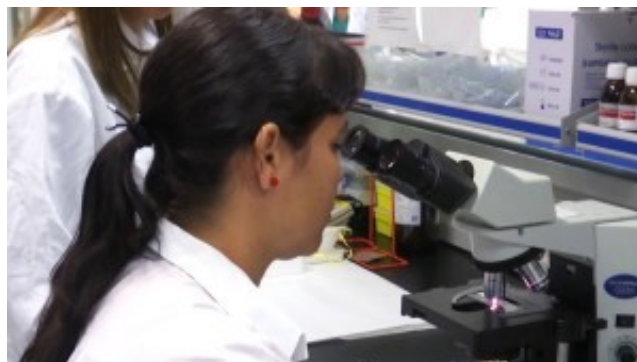
There are other lung cancer fighting drugs which work by attacking the cancer cells. What's different about the vaccine is that it helps the body generate its own immune system in a way that starves the cancer and stops it growing.

"It has revolutionized lung cancer treatment in our country," Dr. Flores said. "It's a new therapeutic weapon for treating and maintaining the disease. Patients are responding well and surviving for longer than those not being treated with it," she added.

Early results were so positive that in 2016, the Roswell Park Cancer Institute in the United States persuaded the US government to allow it to test the vaccine, the first time a Cuban produced drug is undergoing clinical trials in the US.

The vaccine is just one of an impressive array of cancer drugs developed at Cuba's Center for Molecular Immunology. This research center has been working on cancer treatments for more than 20 years. It already has drugs to help with pancreatic cancer and brain tumors. The lung cancer vaccine is the first vaccine developed. Now the research center is working on one for prostate cancer.

It was Cuba's former leader Fidel



Castro who decided to concentrate on developing a world class biotechnology sector and it's been well-funded ever since. Danay Saavedra is a senior scientist involved in the lung cancer vaccine and other projects at the Center for Molecular Immunology. "It's been a policy of the Government to develop our own means to help improve the health of our population and at the same time help improve the economy. This research center is one example of that," she said.

If the clinical trials now underway in the United States are successful it could open the door to other Cuban pharmaceutical breakthroughs becoming available to US patients. This in turn could prove an important new income source for the Cuban economy.

Source: *CGTN*, March 5, 2018

## Act Now on TPS!

Contact your Senators and Representatives (202-244-3121) and make sure they support the bills listed below that would extend Temporary Protected Status (TPS). Also contact anyone you know in other districts and states, especially those with Republican Representatives. Be sure to contact people you know in Unions and Churches to amplify the effort to get these bills passed:

1. American Promise Act (H.R. 4253) to provide individuals who currently receive TPS, and have resided in the US under these programs for a period of three years, the ability to apply for lawful permanent residence. Check <https://www.congress.gov/bill/115th-congress/house-bill/4253/cosponsors> to see if your representative is already a co-sponsor.
2. SECURE Act (S. 2144) "Safe Environment from Countries Under Repression and Emergency Act". Check <https://www.congress.gov/bill/115th-congress/senate-bill/2144/cosponsors?r=138> to see if your Senators are co-sponsors. (Senators Feinstein and Harris are co-sponsors.)

## Demand Release of Edwin Espinal Now!

Edwin Robelo Espinal has a long history advocating against the Honduran government that came into power as the result of a right-wing coup in 2009. He is a staunch defender of the Honduran people's human and voting rights.

Because of this he has been the target of threats and intimidation by state security forces and of slander in the media. He has been receiving protective measures since July 2010, when they were requested by the Inter-American Commission for Human Rights. Espinal has been framed on charges of arson and property destruction during a January 12, 2018 protest in Tegucigalpa and has been imprisoned since then.

Contact: **UN Office of the High Commission on Human Rights**

Email: [cescr@ohchr.org](mailto:cescr@ohchr.org)

**Honduras Department of Justice**

Email: [despacho\\_ministro@gobemacion.gob.hn](mailto:despacho_ministro@gobemacion.gob.hn)

**Heide Fulton – US Chargé d'Affaires in Honduras**

Email: [BronkeHM@state.gov](mailto:BronkeHM@state.gov)



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