

Report

SPRING 2019

PUBLISHED BY MARIN INTERFAITH TASK FORCE ON THE AMERICAS

“The US Appears to be Destined by Providence to Plague the Americas with Misery in the Name of Freedom.”

-Simón Bolívar, 1829

We Condemn US led Aggression against Venezuela



Statement from TFA, February 1, 2019

For almost two decades the US has tried to destabilize and overthrow the independent and socialist inclined government of Venezuela.

In 2002, the US supported the attempted coup against President Chávez. That attempt failed but the US policy of subversion through economic, diplomatic and information war has continued. With the death of Hugo Chávez and coming to power of Nicolás Maduro, the US has escalated its efforts and promoted the hardcore opposition including elements who erected street blockades

(*guarimbas*), vandalism and violence in 2014 and 2017.

The Venezuelan Supreme Electoral Tribunal and Supreme Court have certified Nicolás Maduro as the winner of the 2018 presidential election. Although the radical opposition boycotted the election, Maduro ran against multiple candidates including moderate opposition leader Henry Falcón. Following Venezuela’s constitutional process, Maduro was sworn into office on January 10.

Donald Trump, who became president in the highly flawed US election process, wants to decide who the president of Venezuela is. He says it should be Juan Guaido, whom most Venezuelans had never heard of just a few weeks ago. The US interference and manipulation is so extreme that the US and their subordinates were declaring Guaidó to be the president of Venezuela even before he declared it.

This is a clear case of foreign inter-

ference in a sovereign country. It is a violation of international law and the UN Charter which specifies the equality of sovereign states and forbids intervention.

The US is interfering, discouraging negotiation and promoting conflict which can only lead to violence. We denounce this interference and call on all who believe in international law to speak up clearly and loudly against this intervention. It is for the Venezuelan people to determine their course and resolve their differences in keeping with their own constitution and laws.

Please let your congressperson know what you think. With few exceptions they have been sickeningly silent or complicit regarding this aggression. A couple pleasant exceptions who warrant support and thanks are Ro Khanna (D – CA) and Tulsi Gabbard (D – HI).

If severe conflict and violence breaks out in Venezuela, we hold the US government significantly responsible.

Farewell from Venezuelan Consul General to TFA



Antonio Cordero, Photo: Bill Hackwell

Ed Note: This note was written to the TFA Board the night before Antonio Cordero returned to Venezuela after being summoned home due to the hostilities of the US Government.

Dear Task Force on the Americas,

First of all my most cordial greetings to all of you. You were very special people to me during my time in the United States. From the beginning I admired and appreciated your constant effort to give me space and let me participate in activities that would show the reality of your struggle against the vilest political repre-

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sentatives who seek to hide the truth, but thanks to people like you they can never do it. Sometimes I felt, due to the amount of responsibilities and obligations that I had, that I did not live up to the commitment and support that the Task Force on the Americas unconditionally provided me. When my daughters and I were facing seemingly urgent and unsure situations here, just knowing that you all were there unconditionally, gave me a lot of peace. I did my best and

I am very proud to get to know the people of TFA who always made me feel like one more member of your prestigious group.

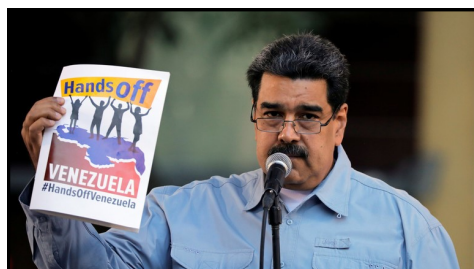
I leave you all with two things; first a big abrazo to you along with my thanks and eternal friendship to the beautiful family of people who make up the Task Force on the Americas. It fills me with pride and tranquility to know that Venezuela and all the just causes in the world can count on people like you, dedicated to spreading the truth and contributing towards a world without tyranny and

evil.

I extend an invitation to you that when in Venezuela you have a house and a home where you can come and be welcome anytime. It would be an honor to receive you and show you Venezuela and its people, a nation dedicated to human beings and to the promotion of peace and love in the world.

*Antonio Jose Cordero Rodriguez
Consul General of Venezuela in San Francisco
January 25, 2019*

Open Letter to the People of the US from President Maduro



President Nicolás Maduro Moros

If I know anything, it is about people like you. I am a man of the people. I was born and raised in a poor neighborhood of Caracas. I matured in the heat of popular and union struggles in a Venezuela submerged in exclusion and inequality. I am not a tycoon, I am a worker of reason and heart and today I have the great privilege of presiding over the “new” Venezuela, a country rooted in a model of inclusive development and social equality. This new Venezuela was founded by Commander Hugo Chávez in 1998 and inspired by the legacy of Simon Bolivar.

We live today in a historical trance. These are days that will define the future of our countries between war and peace. Your national representatives in Washington want to bring to our borders the same hatred that they planted in Vietnam. They want to invade and intervene in Venezuela - they say, as they said then - in the name of democracy and freedom. But this is not true. Accusations of illegally taking power are as false as the weapons of mass destruction in Iraq. This is a false case too, but it can have dramatic consequences for our entire region.

Venezuela is a country that, by virtue of its 1999 Constitution, has broadly

expanded the participatory and protagonist democracy of the people and that is unprecedented today, as one of the countries with the largest number of electoral processes in its last 20 years. You might not like our ideology, or our appearance, but we exist and we are millions.

I address these words to the people of the United States of America to warn them that some sectors in the White House intend to invade Venezuela, and of the gravity and danger in this, with unpredictable consequences for my country and for the entire American region. President Donald Trump also intends to disrupt the dialogue promoted by Uruguay and Mexico with the support of CARICOM for a peaceful solution in support of Venezuela. We know that for the good of Venezuela we have to sit down and talk, because to refuse to dialogue is to choose force or violence as the way. Keep in mind the words of John F. Kennedy: “Let us never negotiate out of fear. But let us never fear to negotiate.” Are those who do not want to dialogue afraid of the truth?

The political intolerance towards the Venezuelan Bolivarian model and the desires for our immense oil resources, minerals and other great riches has prompted an international coalition headed by the US government to commit the serious insanity of militarily attacking Venezuela using the excuse of a non-existent humanitarian crisis.

The people of Venezuela have suffered painful social wounds caused by a criminal commercial and financial blockade, which has been aggravated by the theft of our financial resources and assets in countries aligned with this demented onslaught.

And yet, thanks to our system of so-

cial protection, of direct attention to the most vulnerable sectors, we proudly continue to be a country with high indexes of human development and the least inequality in the Americas.

The American people must know that this complex aggression is being carried out with total impunity and in clear violation of the Charter of the United Nations, which expressly outlaws the threat or use of force, and establishes other principles for the sake of peace and the friendly relations between the Nations.

We want to continue doing business with the United States, as we have throughout our history. But the politicians in Washington are willing to send their sons and daughters to die in an absurd war, instead of respecting the sacred right of the Venezuelan people to self-determination and safeguarding their sovereignty.

Like you, people of the United States, we Venezuelans are patriots. And we shall defend our homeland with all the pieces of our soul. Today Venezuela is united in a single shout. We demand the cessation of the aggression that seeks to suffocate our economy and socially suffocate our people, as well as the cessation of the serious and dangerous threats of military intervention against Venezuela. We appeal to the good soul of the American society, who are victims of their own leaders, to join our call for peace, let us be all one people against warmongering and war.

Long live the peoples of Americas!
Nicolás Maduro.

Source: Int'l Committee for Peace, Justice and Dignity, February 6, 2019

The Voice of a Venezuelan American

By Antonio Pinto, Task Force Board member



Antonio Pinto, Photo: Yarrow Sweningsen

I support President Maduro, the only democratically elected and constitutionally legitimate president of Venezuela. That is the reality. The dangerous fantasy is what the corrupted transnational corporate media wants you to believe, in criminal complicity with the violent extreme right-wing opposition in Venezuela and their fascistic handlers and financiers in the US and Europe. They are the actual corporate dictators directing violations of human rights and orchestrating economic war, chaos and violence to create the conditions for then justifying an illegal foreign military intervention in Venezuela.

Since elections are not in their favor and assassination attempts continue to fail, they've recently come out of the closet in desperation revealing their faces and violent interventionist motives. It's the progressive Maduro government that, while facing intense sabotage and real difficulties, is protecting Venezuelans from pillaging and enslavement by the fascist corporatists who want to invade and steal the oil, gold, water and other abundant precious resources that rightfully belong to Venezuelans.

The recent appointment of convicted war criminal and genocidal psycho-Nazi, Elliott Abrams as special US envoy to Venezuela should shine a bright light in those deluded minds still believing there is a shred of humanitarian intent behind any actions taken by the Trump administration regarding Venezuela. Ultimately they want to eliminate any traces of the progressive social advancements accomplished by the Bolivarian revolution which started in Venezuela with Hugo Chavez and continue today with Maduro. The accomplishments in social benefits for the people, such as universal free healthcare, free public education including higher education, and the many decent, free homes built for the people, reaching 2.5 million during Maduro's term are too much of a good example.

Source: *Task Force on the Americas*, February 20, 2019

Weapons against Venezuela: Stolen Money and False Aid

By Bill Hackwell, Task Force Board member

A US created show-down at the Colombian border city of Cúcuta to force "humanitarian aid" into Venezuela has failed. Frustrated at the results, two trucks with aid were set on fire on the Colombia side followed by the worldwide corporate media dutifully blaming it on Venezuela while Washington looks for other means to overthrow the proud and resilient government of Nicolás Maduro. This aid has become so politi-

cized that even international aid agencies like the Red Cross, Caritas, and the United Nations refuse to touch it knowing that it is a Trojan Horse.

The aid is part of a plan by the United States to send \$20 million in aid, despite the fact that the legitimate government of Venezuela does not want to have anything to do with it and instead is demanding the return of more than \$23 billion dollars frozen in accounts being held in the US, Canada and Europe that they consider stolen from their public treasury; money that could have been spent on the necessary import of food and medicine for the benefit of the entire population

The sending of "humanitarian aid" to Venezuela by the US is being presented as an emergency and something humane and necessary to the international community. It is a pretext for an escalation of tensions and the Bolivarian government of Maduro has made it clear that if their concern were genuine they would unblock the funds that the world's financial system has dammed up.

The self-proclaimed US picked, wannabe, "president in charge," Juan Guaidó and his group of conspirators carrying out a coup d'état against Maduro were dreaming of riding into Venezuela



Recent demonstration in Caracas

with the paltry aid to "save" the Venezuelan people. Clearly this aid has nothing to do with any suffering of the Venezuelan people and everything to do with turning up the heat of the regime change strategy of Washington to undermine the democratically elected president of the country.

Venezuela has an extensive national food assistance program called CLAP (Local Committees for Supply and Production) that is functioning normally, delivering every 15 days directly a box of essential food to 6 million families.

Maduro has made it clear that Venezuela does not need charity and if the

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Task Force on the Americas Report is published quarterly by the Marin Interfaith Task Force on the Americas.

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ON THE HOME FRONT

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stolen money were returned, “Venezuela will move forward by its own means as it has always done throughout its history.”

In a recent press conference Maduro said, “Take all that humanitarian aid and give it to the people of Colombia, where there is a lot of need. This is a macabre game, you see? They squeeze us by the neck and then make us beg for crumbs. They offer us toilet paper like Trump threw at the people of Puerto Rico after Hurricane María.”

The economic war against Venezuela started a while back but now as the threats of military war escalate it is really ratcheting up.

In 2017, financial service provider Euroclear blocked nearly \$1.65 billion for the purchase of medicines and food for the Venezuelan population.

Similarly, in 2018 nearly \$2.5 billion were blocked, while England already in 2019 has retained \$1.2 billion (in gold) and the US took \$7 billion in assets of *Petróleos de Venezuela (PDVSA)*.

Recently the Trump administration issued sweeping sanctions against state oil company PDVSA, freezing all profits generated by Venezuela’s refining subsidiary Citgo, and has vowed to starve Maduro’s government of any and all revenue.

There are some glaring historical similarities to the situation now in Venezuela where the US has in the past used sanctions as a deadly economic weapon directed at a population. It is the strategy of slow steady strangulation to bring a country standing in opposition to imperialism to its knees, like Chile in 1973 when the Nixon Administration was destabilizing the Popular Unity government of Salvador Allende

and he ordered then Secretary of State Henry Kissinger, “Let’s make the Chilean economy scream.” Or who, with any conscience, could forget in 1996 after US led economic sanctions had resulted in the deaths of more than 500,000 Iraqi children that Secretary of State Madeleine Albright went on 60 Minutes and calmly said, “We think the price was worth it.”

The six-decade-long unilateral US economic blockade of Cuba is another example, one that is not just historical but current as well, that so far has cost the Cuban people over \$130 billion in revenue. They too have been deprived of needed medicine and food but Cuba has prevailed through revolutionary determination, principle and the international solidarity that Venezuela now needs.

Source: *Resumen Latinoamericano*, February 24, 2019

TFA Needs Your Support Like Never Before

Dear Friends and Supporters of Task Force on the Americas,



TFA members protesting US intervention in Venezuela, Oakland, CA. Photo: Bill Hackwell

These are dangerous and urgent times we are living in. With the US threatening a military intervention in Venezuela we have switched a good deal of energy to this emergency, but at the same time we are trying to maintain the regular financial support we give to a number of projects in Latin America, including a grassroots radio project in Haiti, the Venezuela Analysis news blog, the Guatemala Accompaniment Program, Nicaragua agricultural projects, Honduras Solidarity Network and also Zapatista education projects in the highlands of Chiapas.

We do not want to sound alarmist but if we cannot find funding sources soon our support to these projects is at risk of ending.

Unlike many progressive organizations, our Board of Directors is made up of committed involved activists. It is not a board that connects us to foundations or big funding sources. We have relied on the support of individuals such as you.

Beginning as Marin Interfaith Task Force in the 1980s, our history includes advocating in Congress, organizing eyewitness delegations, being election observers, working on humanitarian aid projects, documenting and advocating on behalf of refugees and against US interventions and aggressions.

In the past six months we have participated in International Conferences in Dublin against US/NATO military bases and in Havana on the equilibrium of the world. We want to continue and do more to help break the media lies and distortions about events in Venezuela, Nicaragua, Cuba and beyond. Our Board members are known writers, organizers and participants in demonstrations and campaigns opposing the aggression of our own government against the developing world and their resources.

We want to continue at this level of energy and commitment but we can’t do it without you.

We are asking you to step up and adopt one or more of our ongoing projects. We also need scholarship money to support the next generation to continue TFA’s work for a world filled with peace and justice. (See enclosed coupon)

Thanks for being in this with us!

CUBA: Int'l Conference for Peace and "World Balance"



Alicia Jrapko speaking at solidarity panel, Photos: Bill Hackwell

By Roger Harris and Alicia Jrapko, Task Force Board members

Close to 700 conferees from 65 countries convened in Havana, Cuba January 28-31, for peace and "world balance." This, the fourth such conference, was dedicated to honoring the ideals of Cuban national hero José Martí who died in 1895 at the age of 42 fighting for independence from colonial Spain.

An overarching theme of the conference was the urgency for international solidarity with the democratically elected Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro who is under attack by the US and its minions.

The wide-ranging conference addressed the "most pressing issues that have an impact on humanity" from global warming, to feminism, to cyber democracy, to sustainability. Well known personalities from all over the world included Spanish intellectual Ignacio Ramonet, Brazilian liberation theologian Frei Betto, historian of Havana Eusebio Leal, and Aleida Guevara, daughter of Che.

The first plenary session was attended by newly elected Cuban President Miguel Díaz-Canel and leading members of the Cuban government and Communist Party. They sat on the mainstage without fanfare or even significant security, other than a few unarmed men in *guayabera* shirts standing in the background; considerably less security, say, than the average US high school student must pass to get to

class.

Yuri Afonin of the Russian Federation Communist Party observed that the open colonialism of Martí's time has been replaced by today's neo-colonialism.

With the collapse of the USSR/Eastern Europe, imperialism was given a green light. The planet has gone back to the 19th century as capitalism tries

to impose its neoliberal hegemony.

Yeidckol Polevnsky of the newly triumphant MORENA Party in Mexico strongly advocated for respecting sovereignty and self-determination among nations. She denounced US interference in Venezuela and Nicaragua. Likewise,



Roger Harris and Rick Sterling participate in conference in Cuba

the representative of the ruling Chinese Communist Party called for non-interference. Venezuelan Minister of Culture Ernesto Villegas warned: "The US has unleashed a culture of war."

TFA board member Alicia Jrapko had the honor of participating in a well-attended panel with two members of the Cuban 5 - René González and Fernando

González – and hero for Puerto Rican independence Oscar López, all of whom spent time in US prisons and were freed due in large part by international solidarity efforts.

René González observed that many internationals, some of whom were at the conference, fought with the Sandinistas in Nicaragua against the US-backed dictator Anastasio Somoza and many more would now do the same if Venezuela must defend itself. Fellow Cuban 5 hero Fernando González observed: "we must unite to defend these causes because the enemy is the same... *yanqui* imperialism."

On the same panel, Adán Chávez, brother of deceased Venezuela President Hugo Chávez, spoke of the 2002 US-backed coup that lasted less than three days because the people rose up against it. Today, he reported, the civic-military union is stronger than in 2002 and will defend the process towards socialism.

TFA board members Rick Sterling and Roger Harris gave presentations analyzing the Project of the New American Century and US regime-change efforts in Latin America, respectively. Also attending was TFA board member Bill Hackwell.

Cuban Foreign Minister Bruno Rodríguez Parrilla closed the conference saying: "We inhabit an unequal planet like never before. We live in a world of enormous and growing imbalances, which cause great threats to international peace and security, to justice, and to the dignity of human beings." He stressed that US imperialism is clinging to a unipolar order, which is historically discarded and unsustainable.

The international conference adjourned, dedicated to an inclusive multi-polar world where, in the words of José Martí, *patria es humanidad* (homeland is humanity).

Source: *Task Force on the Americas*, February 5, 2019

MEXICO: AMLO, Zapatistas and The Maya Train



By Roger Stoll, TFA community member

Ed. Note: *The struggle for indigenous rights, Zapatista autonomy and AMLO's progressive agenda is an ongoing discussion within TFA's Board.*

Mexican President Andrés Manuel López Obrador (AMLO) took office in December. His victory comes after a decades-long electoral effort by left and center-left forces which overcame Mexico's history of institutionalized election theft. AMLO's proposals to improve social welfare include two million subsidized apprenticeships for unemployed youth, free higher education, ending the war on drugs, doubling pensions, and reducing poverty through development. He also hopes to end imports of oil and food through domestic production.

Major projects for development and security include: planting a million hectares with commercial fruit and other trees in the south of the country; the Trans-isthmus Corridor (a dry canal from the Gulf of Mexico to the Pacific Ocean); mining operations; expansion of special economic zones (areas of business-oriented regulation); establishing a National Guard with 50,000 new soldiers.

But AMLO's signature megaproject is undoubtedly the Cancún-Palenque train, dubbed "The Maya Train," connecting many of the most important archaeological sites in Mexico. The train will be 1500 kilometers long (more than half on existing right-of-ways) with 12 stations and will run through five states: Tabasco, Chiapas, Yucatán, Campeche, Quintana Roo. The train is expected to draw four million tourists, bringing development to these regions of the south and southeast which, despite cultural and historical riches, remain

impoverished.

Indeed, in Mexico poverty and inequality, as well as associated violence, corruption and impunity are severe. In 2016 Mexico's official poverty rate was 43.6%, with the highest rates in the poorest states of the south. Nearly 32,000 died as a result of violence in 2017, and the total killed in the drug war has been estimated at 250,000, with 37,400 missing and unaccounted for. Violence against women and femicide are significant and rising, and Mexico remains among the most dangerous countries for journalists.

Yet the panoply of proposed megaprojects face determined resistance from the Zapatistas and scores of indigenous organizations. The Zapatista National Liberation Army, the Indigenous Revolutionary Clandestine Committee, the National Indigenous Congress and the Indigenous Governing Council issued a sweeping communique opposing the train, the new National Guard, the Trans-isthmus Corridor, and the other megaprojects.

While the train and other projects were approved by national referendum, the communique charges violation of International Labor Organisation Convention No. 169 (indigenous rights to prior, free and informed consultation and consent). The more profound objection is to what tourism brings. "In order to lodge, feed and entertain [tourists] they will have to build hotels, restaurants, bars, discotheques, brothels, laundries, and a thousand other things," and they will "extract water from rivers and underground layers, bring down jungles, and pave *milpas* [plots of land for corn cultivation]." This could threaten the Zapatista's autonomous government and systems of health, education and social services.

The Letter from the Zapatista Women to Women in Struggle Around the World (February 13, 2019), laments that their lands "will no longer be for us but for the tourists," becoming "plantations for the production of lumber, fruit, and water," and "mines to extract gold, silver, uranium, and all of the minerals the capitalists are after." The indigenous will be made into "peons, into servants who sell our dignity for a few coins every month." Capitalists and the government, they charge, "can't even provide safety for all of the women who continue to be beaten, raped, and murdered in their

worlds," while in the Zapatista zones, "not a single woman has been murdered for many years." Traditional life, with its *milpa* agricultural system, is also threatened. An endangered jaguar species may be threatened by the train, as might the region's freshwater aquifer, one of the largest in the world.

The Zapatistas are likely correct that their autonomy and traditional indigenous communal life will suffer disruption, dislocation or worse. Inevitably, under capitalist development, "All fixed, fast-frozen relations, with their train of ancient and venerable prejudices and opinions, are swept away, all new-formed ones become antiquated before they can ossify. All that is solid melts into air, all that is holy is profaned..." (*The Communist Manifesto*, K. Marx, F. Engels (1848))

The megaprojects, even guided by liberal, socially conscious AMLO, will surely have grave costs. Moreover, the Mexican government has neither the funds nor the political space to offer the poor anything other than development led by resource extraction, commercial agriculture, maquiladora production and tourism, ultimately in the service of wealthy classes and nations. Imposed by the international financial institutions and neoliberal trade regimens like NAFTA (and recent reboot), this development model pauperized millions of indigenous farmers in the 90s by burying Mexico in cheap, subsidized US corn. Nor will Mexico's new government be permitted to recapture the proceeds of government assets (e.g., PEMEX, the state oil company) and spend them on social programs, as Venezuela was able to do for a time with oil. The IMF has expressly forbidden it.

Yet AMLO's megaprojects offer economic development. And the poor of Mexico, especially in the south, are desperate for livelihoods. Forced to leave their villages and country, even their children, they flee north for work just to send money home. To them, staying in one's own country and working in the tourist industry might not seem the worst fate.

This is the terrible dilemma forced on the AMLO government, the Zapatista movement, and the people of Mexico.

Source: *Task Force on the Americas, February 15, 2019*

NICARAGUA: Food Sovereignty and Political Sovereignty



ATC delegation in Front of National Palace

By Carolina Dutton, participant on the recent ATC agro ecology delegation to Nicaragua and a TFA Board member

Violence and chaos engulfed Nicaragua between April and July 2018. Since I began hearing about the “uprising” and “police repression” I read everything I could to try to understand what was happening. I visited Nicaragua twice in the 80’s to pick cotton and coffee and to support the budding revolution that was being subverted by an economic blockade and a contra war financed by the United States. I was puzzled by how the Nicaraguan police force, which is greatly trusted by the people in the neighborhoods it serves, and which has served as a model for community policing, would suddenly become violently repressive overnight, and how Nicaragua, the safest country in Central America, a country that has not been plagued by gang violence and drug cartels would suddenly become so violent. A country whose government for the last 11 years has instituted affordable and quality health care, education, social security, assistance to small farmers etc. was suddenly beset by student protests and massive road blocks. It didn’t make sense. Information was completely polarized. I needed to find out what was really going on.

An agro ecology delegation sponsored by the ATC (*Asociación de Trabajadores del Campo, Association of Rural*

Workers) seemed like a way to hear the viewpoint of people from below. I also visited a Nicaraguan friend and her family in which the younger generation are professionals. There are many truths in Nicaragua. Nicaragua is polarized and fake news is rampant. I will therefore only recount stories which were the personal experience of the person who told them.

The ATC is an organization of labor unions, peasants, farmworkers, and cooperatives. It was founded in 1978 in a time of repression and

was part of the guerilla struggle. The ATC worked on literacy campaigns and promoted Agrarian Reform. Many ATC members fought in the war against the US funded contras in the 80’s. The ATC aims to improve quality of life in the countryside and works with cooperatives, young people, women and other rural workers.

The ATC is part of *Via Campesina* whose goal is food sovereignty. Nicaragua is almost 100% food sovereign thanks to government support of small and medium sized farmers. Nicaragua produces most of its basic foods; 100% of the corn, beans, dairy, meat, fruits, vegetables, and coffee and 80% of the rice. Nicaragua is one of the few countries in the Americas not dependent on imports for basic foods. This can help withstand an economic blockade by the US and large importers, like the one that is calling the current crisis in Venezuela.

The campesinos we spoke with in the six locations we visited feel great loyalty to their government. They owe their livelihood to the land distribution in the 80’s when each family was given five *manzanas*. Women have an economic independence and freedom they never had before. Through the ATC they have fought for and won land titles in their names, labor laws and protection of their rights.

On the other hand I heard discontent from people (mostly professionals) including those with Sandinista sympathies

who told me that the Sandinista party is not very open to diverse ideas, decisions are made from the top, and those who advocate a different way are not given opportunities in government. At the same time people are grateful that in the past 11 years, since the Sandinistas have led the government they have legalized land titles for small farmers, provided free quality education, school supplies, and meals for all children, scholarships for higher education of youth, quality health care for all, built road infrastructure throughout the country, and children’s playgrounds and parks in every neighborhood.

Nicaraguans have experienced decades of war; first against the US backed dictatorship of Somoza and then against the US financed contras, for 10 years. The war mentality can set in very quickly for a people traumatized by years of war. A 70 year old respected Sandinista militant who lost his sister, a nurse, to a contra ambush in the 80’s has always gotten along with his neighbors. When a road block was set up at the end of his block suddenly he became the enemy. Neighbors who saw him leave his house to do errands reported that he was spying on the opposition.

Farmers told us that the attempted coup was mostly an urban conflict. Farmers continued working the land and producing food which was a substantial part of why the coup was not successful. Although there was little disturbance in small towns and communities, highways were plagued by road blocks which made it difficult to transport supplies or get products to market.

These road blocks, called “*tranques*” in Nicaragua were often manned by people from outside the country. Women were raped in the *tranques* including a woman police officer. An off duty policeman was stopped on his way home, tortured, and killed. Members of the Salvadoran Salvatrucha gang were arrested at the road blocks and large sums of money were somehow available to pay them. There was a “combo” that the *tranquistas* could order which included arms, money, rum, and drugs.

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Nicaragua, continued from page 7



The ATC flag with a delegation participant

We met a leader of JUNEL (the National Union of students of Nicaragua). She is a student at The UNAN (Universidad Autonoma de Nicaragua) in Managua which was destroyed during the protests. No computer was left intact. Some of those who began the take-

over of the university were “political science” students who received scholarships from the US to become opposition student leaders. People from JUNEL went to defend the University but when they saw arms were being brought in they retreated. They watched trucks enter carrying alcohol, drugs, and arms.

Many of the youth who began the protests had no political experience. President Daniel Ortega was out of the country for medical treatment when Vice President Rosario Murillo announced the new social security law which was probably misunderstood. The people demonstrated and violent police repression was reported by the press. When there was an outcry, the government responded by pulling the police off the streets. Then opposition protester and paid delinquents began to destroy Sandinista symbols and public buildings.

People organized themselves to defend town centers and other public buildings. Sixty-five public buildings, four to five schools, and a couple of clinics were destroyed. Many more buildings would have been destroyed if there had not been hundreds surrounding buildings to protect them. At first few people showed up to protect the town centers and people were killed. Later more peo-

ple showed up including ex-combatants and it was effective. Nonetheless, when people organized to dismantle the *tranques* in Monambó 11 people died.

I learned that the so called paramilitaries” who were sent to do the work of the police, who had returned to their barracks were really volunteers, ex-combatants and others who came out to protect the neighborhoods.



Worker in ATC camp

Source: Task Force on the Americas, February 25, 2019

HAITI: Popular Uprising Continues



Haiti Uprising, Photo: haitiinfoproj

Since February 7th hundreds of thousands of Haitians have been demonstrating in the streets of cities and towns throughout the country. Chanting “We are hungry, we can’t take it anymore,” protesters demand that the totally corrupt and fraudulently elected president, Jovenel Moise, resign immediately.

A new report by a government watchdog group documents \$4.2 billion of profit from Venezuela-supplied Petrocaribe oil has disappeared, unaccounted for. Meanwhile, teachers have not been paid for months, and sanitation services are nil. High inflation makes even the basics unaffordable for many people. Haitians throughout the country demand to know what happened to the money, while police and members of Moise’s PHTK Party attack demonstrators with impunity, reminiscent of the Duvalier *ton-ton macoutes* death squads.

To read the statement issued by the Haiti Action Committee and for updates and activities go to: www.haitisolidarity.net

Source: Haiti Action Committee, February 15, 2019

BRAZIL: Bolsonaro Wants to Plunder the Amazon



Amazon River Basin, Photo: WWF

By Leila Salazar-López, journalist

The rise of President Jair Bolsonaro of Brazil has put the environment and human rights in peril. His promises to open the Amazon for business could result in huge deforestation and the release of vast greenhouse gas emissions. His threats to slash fundamental environmental and indigenous rights standards that help keep the Amazon standing are a threat to climate stability.

Bolsonaro, however, wouldn't be the only one to blame for devastating the Amazon. Companies that accept his invitation to reap profit from Amazon destruction, and the financial institutions that provide the capital, will also bear great responsibility. And those poised to benefit from Bolsonaro's reckless policies include US companies and financial institutions. Two of the largest publicly traded agribusiness firms operating in the Brazilian Amazon, Archer Daniels Midland and Bunge, are US based companies. Agribusiness, in particular soy and beef production, is a leading driver of forest loss and human-rights abuses in the Brazilian Amazon, and ADM and Bunge are two of the largest soy traders in Brazil. As producers seek more and more land for growing crops and grazing cattle, they push ever deeper into the Amazon. According to a report published in 2014, an estimated 90 percent of deforestation in the Brazilian Amazon is due to agribusiness activities.

Where would these powerful agribusiness companies get the capital they need to bulldoze deeper into the Ama-

zon if they should take Bolsonaro up on his offer to eliminate environmental protections? In no small part from US-based asset managers BlackRock, State Street and Vanguard, which are shareholders in all five of the largest publicly traded agribusiness companies operating in the Brazilian Amazon. As a group of researchers recently demonstrated, the "Big Three" asset managers hold 15 percent to 20 percent of all of ADM and Bunge's available shares. (Finance researchers call ownership above 5 percent of all shares "blockholding" and generally assume it to imply significant influence).

This means they have the potential to exert pressure on the very companies that could either moderate or enable Bolsonaro's threats to the future of the Amazon – and the climate. Many Americans, in turn, have a direct relationship with those asset managers, since those firms manage many pension funds and retirement accounts.

Of course, Bolsonaro's agribusiness-friendly agenda should not be seen in isolation. Previous Brazilian administrations also worked to undermine environmental and human-rights protections to benefit the industrial exploitation of the Amazon. It required the concerted efforts of Brazilian indigenous and social groups and their global allies to force governments and corporations operating in the Amazon to curb deforestation, which until recently had been relatively contained.

Long before Bolsonaro's rise, numerous agribusiness companies made commitments to end Amazon deforestation from their supply chains. Both Bunge

and ADM, for example, have committed to eliminate deforestation in their supply chains, although they haven't always lived up to those promises. In May 2018 Bunge was fined for activities related to illegal deforestation, and some deforestation-watchers have criticized its subsequent policy update as inadequate.

BlackRock, for its part, has supported the Paris Climate Accord, and its chief executive, Larry Fink, has been called the "conscience of Wall Street" for his exhortations to companies to "benefit all of their stakeholders, including shareholders, employees, customers and the communities in which they operate."

Yet Mr. Fink's most recent letter to investors, published this month, makes no direct mention of climate change, and BlackRock's statement after Brazil's election in October appears to celebrate Bolsonaro's win, lauding his commitment "to building on the reform agenda put in place over the past two years."

Though the role of asset managers might seem far removed from the felling of trees in the Amazon rain forest, the world's largest asset managers could play a pivotal role in safeguarding the global climate by way of their investments in companies operating in biomes crucial to climate stability like the Amazon rain forest. The world could have less than twelve years to turn this sinking climate ship around, as the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change's most recent report makes clear.

Bolsonaro's rise to power will test companies' promises to be responsible. Will leading global agribusiness companies be complicit in Bolsonaro's assault on the Amazon and its people, thus sacrificing their commitments, their reputation and our climate? And will financial institutions like BlackRock heed their own calls for companies to pursue purpose and not just profit? Or will they put short-term profits ahead of the planet's future?

If these influential companies don't take a clear and principled stand against Bolsonaro's promises to open the Amazon for business, they will also bear responsibility for abetting his plunder of the world's largest tropical rain forest.

Source: *New York Times*, January 20, 2019

GRENADA: 40th Anniversary of the Revolution



Prime Minister Maurice Bishop of Grenada, (center) with Presidents Daniel Ortega and Fidel Castro

By Roger Stoll, TFA community member

Forty years ago this March, the Caribbean island nation of Grenada, population 110,000, made a revolution.

Prime Minister Eric Gairy had for years headed a neocolonial dictatorship on behalf of Grenada's minute capitalist class and British and US interests. A private and brutal militia known as the Mongoose Gang was tasked to silence Gairy's political opponents. Though the island was rich in agricultural resources, like nutmeg, mace, cacao and bananas, too much of its population lived in poverty.

On March 13, 1979, after years of unarmed struggle, the New Jewel Movement, under the charismatic leadership of Maurice Bishop, successfully executed a nearly bloodless coup. The new government built a mixed economy on

socialist principles. With the organizational, administrative and economic planning genius of Bernard Coard, Bishop's childhood friend, Grenada made rapid social progress. The revolution became immensely popular, with good reason.

With the new government, aided and advised by Cuba, literacy rose from 85% to 98%; the ratio of doctors to patients doubled; new labor laws brought 80% of the population into unions; unemployment plummeted from half the population to 14%; new laws criminalized the sexual victimization of women, ensured equal pay for equal work and mandated maternity leave. Free health care and secondary education were introduced, and scholarships provided free college education abroad.

In the first four years of the revolution, Grenada's economy grew by 9%, in the midst of a worldwide recession. Agricultural diversification brought significant reductions in food imports and increased exports.

But from its birth, the revolution was menaced by the US. Though tiny, Grenada greatly troubled the US. State Department memos revealed why: Grenada's population spoke English and was predominantly of African descent, so the revolution and its success would have special appeal to African Americans.

President Carter's administration welcomed exiled former Prime Minister Gairy to the US, where he made broad-

casts against the Grenadian government. The Carter administration also worked to cut US tourism to the island and denied recognition to Grenada's ambassador. President Reagan's administration followed suit, blocking economic development assistance from international finance institutions.

The US invasion and takeover of the island on October 25, 1983 was plotted years in advance, rehearsed in exercises called "Amber and the Ambergines," a transparent reference to Grenada and the nearby Grenadine islands. Hundreds were killed battling the invasion, including two Soviet military officers and 24 Cuban engineers.

Bishop and other leaders were killed in a tragic conflict within the government days before the invasion. After the invasion, soldiers and surviving political leaders, including Coard, were tried for the killings on scant and dubious evidence. The trial was paid for and managed by the US and denounced by Amnesty International. The defendants, known as the Grenada 17, spent decades in prison. The circumstances of the killings remain mysterious, in part because of the US theft and concealment of much documentary evidence.

But for a time a tiny nation in the belly of the beast made a beautiful revolution.

The Grenadian Revolution,
¡Presente!

Source: *Task Force on the Americas*, February 22, 2019

El Salvador: New President Supports US Interventionism

By the Committee in Solidarity with the People of El Salvador (CISPES)

Ed Note: *this article edited for length*

On February 3, after outspending all opponents with an estimated \$9.4 million campaign, Nayib Bukele, who ran on the right-wing Grand Alliance for National Unity (GANU) ticket, was elected president of El Salvador. The 37-year-old millionaire who gained notoriety as mayor of the capital city, San Salvador, with the leftist Farabundo

Martí National Liberation Front (FMLN) party before forming his own political movement, New Ideas, was elected with 53% of the vote. In the US, many liberal media sources have framed Bukele's win as a triumph for democracy, but the future president's staunch support for a US interventionist agenda in the region gives plenty of cause for alarm.

GANU, with New Ideas, garnered a total of 1,434,856 votes (53%), winning across all of El Salvador and among Salvadorans in the diaspora. Hugo Mar-

tínez of the FMLN, which has held the presidency since 2009, won just 14% of the vote in an election with lower turnout than in recent presidential elections.

Nearly 40 Members of Congress sent a letter to Secretary of State Mike Pompeo calling on the Trump administration to declare neutrality ahead of the 2019 presidential elections. The State Department remained relatively quiet in the lead-up, but US Ambassador to El Salvador Jean Manes and high-ranking US

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*Bukele speaking on election night,
Photo: Bukele Twitter*

officials wasted no time in congratulating Bukele and celebrating the right-wing's return to executive office in El Salvador. Afterwards, Ambassador Manes met with Bukele and committed to playing a hands-on role between now and June 1 when Bukele takes office.

After months threatening to cut aid to El Salvador in retaliation for the FMLN government's foreign policy decisions, the Trump administration seems enthusiastic. A tweet from US National Security Advisor John Bolton makes clear what the US expects: "Today, I spoke with Bukele to congratulate him and express

US support. We discussed ways to strengthen the US-El Salvador friendship and to collaborate to restore democracy in Venezuela and counter Chinese predatory practices in the hemisphere."

Early signals indicate a departure from the FMLN's foreign policy, which put peace and respect for national self-determination at the center. Soon after self-proclaimed president of Venezuela, Juan Guaidó was announced Bukele tweeted his congratulations and his desire for a new relationship. Federico Anliker, Secretary General of Bukele's New Ideas movement, confirmed that one of the new administration's foreign policy priorities will be to "evaluate" the country's diplomatic ties to Nicaragua, Cuba, and China, which, along with Palestine, are the countries where the FMLN's opposition to US intervention have frequently gotten El Salvador into hot water. Bukele has also blamed the FMLN for Trump's decision to cancel Temporary Protected Status (TPS) for over 300,000 Salvadorans living in the US, thus parroting the same false claims made by ARENA legislators.

Notably, before the election, Bukele had a meeting with the polemic Secretary General of the Organization of American States (OAS), Luis Almagro, on helping to create an international anti-

corruption commission in El Salvador. This became one of Bukele's core campaign promises. Main stream media outlets in the US have celebrated Bukele's win as the arrival of the long-awaited anti-corruption messiah as compared to the FMLN, a claim Bukele used to his advantage on the campaign trail. Very few charges have been filed against FMLN leaders, even by Attorney Generals who are responsive to right-wing and US interests.

US media that echo Bukele's claim that he has "defeated" a two-party system in El Salvador also belie the reality that there are, in fact, ideologically opposed political parties in the country that represent clear and self-identified class interests, a stark contrast to the paper-thin margin between US Democrats and Republicans on many issues. Bukele has neither abolished El Salvador's political system nor the reality of class struggle. By calling on the public to close ranks around Bukele, many major US media outlets have obscured the collateral damage that his incoming administration could cause throughout the region by once again allowing the oligarchy and the United States to call the shots.

Source: Committee in Solidarity with the People of El Salvador, February 20, 2019

HONDURAS: Protests Continue as Thousands Flee



Honduran migration continues, Photo: Sandra Cuffe

By Sandra Cuffe, journalist based in Honduras

Ed Note: *this article edited for length*

While thousands of migrants and refugees flee violence, unemployment, poverty and political persecution in Honduras, political turmoil continues to engulf the

country. Nationwide protests erupted on January 27, the first anniversary of the inauguration of Honduran president Juan Orlando Hernández's controversial second term after his 2017 re-election was consolidated by the US government despite widespread reports of election fraud.

The National Party has been in power in Honduras since 2010. On June 28, 2009, Honduran military forces opened fire on the home of elected president Manuel Zelaya, abducted him in his pajamas, made a stop at a US Air Force base and flew him out of the country. The US recognized the de facto president and supported elections later that year that were considered illegitimate by the broad resistance movement. Violent crime soared amid the political instability. Honduras soon held the distinction of having the world's highest per capita homicide rate outside of a war zone.

In 2013, Hernández was elected president and the National Party remained in power, consolidating control of all three

branches of government. Hernández had been president of Congress, which had previously carried out a technical coup against the judicial branch. The Honduran Constitution includes a strict one-term limit on the presidency. Honduran politicians found a way to circumvent the ban through a convoluted 2015 Supreme Court ruling facilitated presidential re-election.

An Opposition Alliance Against the Dictatorship was formed between the LIBRE party, the much smaller center-left PINU party, which was founded in the 1970s to provide an alternative to the two-party system and militarization, and Salvador Nasralla, a former television sportscaster whose anti-corruption platform garnered significant support. Nasralla became the presidential candidate for the opposition alliance, and he had a supposedly irreversible five-point lead when the preliminary results of the November 26, 2017, elections were first made public.

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Suddenly the electronic results transmission system went offline. When it came back online, Hernández began to overtake the opposition candidate. There had already been reports of vote-buying and election-tampering, but the sudden shift in results following the system outage sparked disbelief and outrage as Hernández emerged the victor. Hondurans were not the only ones to dispute the results. The election observation mission of the Organization of American States concluded that due to widespread irregularities there could be no certainty about the results, and called for new elections.

“Fuera JOH” (“Out with JOH”, the acronym for Juan Orlando Hernández) has been a rallying cry in Honduras and beyond ever since. Many Hondurans point to the Hernández administration, his re-election, and the violent state crackdown in response to protests as driving forces behind the exodus, and “Fuera JOH” chants have cropped up along the route of the refugee caravans, from their departure from Honduras all the way up to the US border.

Security forces shot and killed some 30 people, but protests continued. More than 1000 people were detained and some remain in militarized maximum-security prisons awaiting trial on protest-related charges. Hernández was officially declared the winner and US recognition of his victory quashed most hopes of changing the outcome, but protests continued. On January 27, Hondurans took to the street around the country, following a week of sporadic protests leading up to the anniversary of Hernández’s second time taking office. Police and military forces cracked down on some of the more than three dozen sites of rallies, marches, and road, highway, and border blockade actions, firing tear gas, using rubber bullets, and detaining protesters and a journalist. There were reports of military forces firing live ammunition. The TIGRES, an elite police unit trained by US Army Special Forces, were involved.

Honduras was the home base for US counterinsurgency operations and regional military training in Central America when guerrilla forces were battling US-backed dictatorships in Guatemala, El Salvador and Nicaragua.

Home to the only US Southern Command joint task force in Latin America, with the exception of Guantánamo, and to several forward operating bases used by US forces, Honduras maintains its pivotal importance to the US in Central America.

US government and military officials recently reiterated their support for the Hernández administration. On January 22, US Vice President Mike Pence called Hernández to “reiterate the strong and collaborative relationship” between the two countries and commend the Honduran president on his response to recent migrant caravans. The Honduran government had increased border checkpoints.

Amid political turmoil in Honduras and increasing links between the ruling party and drug trafficking, thousands continue to flee violence, unemployment, poverty and political persecution. A migrant and refugee caravan left San Pedro Sula on January 15, and the group has since grown and been joined by Salvadorans, Guatemalans and others.

Source: *Truthout*, January 31, 2019

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