

Report

FALL 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

HONDURAS: Good News Amid the Chaos and Repression



Edwin Espinal before the Honduran attorney general’s office after his release from prison. Photo: Karen Spring

ers, healthcare workers and students in Honduras and many groups in the US, Canada and Europe.

For the last decade I have returned to Honduras many times to join delegations as an investigator of human rights issues, as a monitor of two national elections and as an investment advisor for clients who want their money to do good in Honduras. I have not dared to travel alone in Honduras during this time because I do not feel safe traveling after dark, even with a driver.

This is distressing since when I first arrived in Honduras fifty years ago in the early days of the Peace Corps, I felt completely safe traveling alone, even hitching rides from Honduran truck drivers, when no other transportation was available. Now when in the capital city, Tegucigalpa, we are cautioned not to go alone to the corner grocery store, for fear our cell phones will be robbed. Even the local *gasolinera* is guarded by security, complete with AK-47s!

continued on page 2

By Maria Robinson, Task Force Board member

Ed. Note: Last fall, the Task Force on the Americas Report published letters from Honduran political prisoners Edwin Espinal and Raul Álvarez from La Tolva maximum security prison, where they were being held in detention on trumped up charges. On August 9 news spread that Edwin and Raul had been released pending trial after 19 months of incarceration. The government has not provided any proof, and it is likely to be fabricated. Pressure from human rights

groups in Honduras and worldwide has also been intense but it remains to be seen whether this trial will be tainted or allowed to reach a legitimate outcome.

On the way home from prison Edwin’s first stop was at an ongoing demonstration to thank his supporters. The worldwide campaign for their release was led by Honduras Solidarity Network co-coordinator Karen Spring, who will be the guest speaker at TFA’s Annual Dinner on September 21. The movement spread from many human rights groups as well as huge segments of Honduran society. It included teach-

CONTENTS

Honduras	2
Colombia	3
Venezuela	4, 5, 6
Argentina	7
Puerto Rico	8
Cuba	9
Brazil	10
Action Alerts	12

continued from front page

Ever since the US and Canadian backed military coup ousted popular President Mel Zelaya in 2009, the number of people fleeing the country has risen dramatically. While personal security is a factor there are many more reasons that have contributed to what is now a full scale migration crisis.

Since coming to power in 2014 Honduran President Juan Orlando Hernandez (JOH) has ruled the country with an iron fist and with the blessings of the US. Nevertheless, in an attempt to reestablish any sort of democracy, a strong determined opposition of many sectors of society sprang up. In 2017 opposition candidate Salvador Nasralla appeared to be well on his way to victory when the vote count was suspended; when it was resumed many hours later, JOH was eventually declared the winner.

This blatant stealing of the election generated widespread resistance, which in turn led to greater repression by JOH's militarized public security. Meanwhile all social indicators of health, education and quality of life have plummeted.

Hondurans are now paying much more for household electricity because the National Electrical Energy company (ENEE)'s services were privatized in 2014 as part of the structural adjustments demanded by the International Monetary Fund (IMF). Electricity bills have increased by over 100% in the last two years and continue to rise. Before this law was passed, poor households were given government subsidies; now those subsidies are eliminated. And power outages are endemic.

When Hondurans go to the public hospitals, they now must purchase all medical supplies and medications before doctors are able to attend to their healthcare needs. This includes very basic supplies like painkillers, thread for stitches, prescription medications, etc. Families must literally go to a medical store looking for these supplies, which can be difficult to find and super expensive. The healthcare system significantly deteriorated after millions of dollars were stolen from the social security in-

stitute (IHSS) in 2014/2015 and the Honduran government approved a new healthcare law. Meanwhile, as the Honduran government constructs new US-style prisons, no new hospitals are being built and old ones are not being repaired.

Although elementary and high school



Honduran refugees waiting in detention camp in Chiapas Mexico. Photo: Moises Castillo

education is 'public,' it is not free. Every school and government institution requires families to pay user fees. Parents of children wanting to go to school have to purchase uniforms, school supplies, pay for security guards, and cleaning services. If they cannot pay these costs, then they cannot go to school. These user fees have been continuously increasing year to year. There is a slow effort by the Honduran government to privatize education particularly since the teachers' unions were broken up in 2012 and a new education law was passed shortly after.

Food prices, particularly of staple foods like beans, eggs, chicken, etc., are constantly increasing, and while the minimum wage is supposed to be between \$300-\$400/month, it is not enforced. Since there is no real rule of law, rules and regulations are systematically violated, especially by large companies including those from the US.

The few long-term, stable jobs that existed before are even fewer now. Most employment is extremely precarious and the jobs that one can get from companies are often only for three months. The Honduran government implemented the Temporary Labor Law as an 'emergency' response to jump start the economy after

the coup it allows companies to hire workers for only three months at a time with no benefits. Long-term employees with benefits and pensions have been increasingly laid off (especially in North American-owned sweatshops) and replaced with temporary people, and often the same people, under the three-month program.

Gas prices continue to increase. Most poor people travel by bus and absorb the rising gas prices. If traveling between cities, most vehicles pass through toll roads because one of only two highways that connect the north to the south of the country, has been privatized.

The so-called "dropping homicide rate" cannot be trusted because the homicide statistics are reported by the corrupt Honduran police. The rate dropped when the police took over counting homicides. Honduran institutions don't really work. When someone needs to get a birth certificate or get background checks needed for employment for instance, they are forced to wait in long lines in government agencies that seem

to have no accountability to respond or provide the service that only they can supply.

Henry Kissinger once stated the simple truth that the US has no permanent friends only permanent interests. The US military presence in Honduras including the strategic Soto Cano Air Base has a permanence about it but President JOH not so much. As protests continue to escalate, the standard of living spirals downward and government corruption runs rampant, something has to give with this illegitimate government. Just this last week JOH was hastily summoned to Washington DC for meetings. Meanwhile Hernandez's government is facing credible allegations of association with drug trafficking. The president's brother, Antonio Hernández, is in jail in the US after having been indicted on drug trafficking charges in late 2018. There are signs the US might be getting ready to let JOH go, not because of his connection to the drug cartels but because they doubt he can keep a lid on the growing resistance of the Honduran people.

Source: Task Force on the Americas, August 19, 2019

TASK FORCE ON THE AMERICAS ANNUAL DINNER



Saturday September 21 at 5:30 pm socializing, 6:30 dinner

Unitarian Universalist Congregation of Marin, 240 Channing Way, San Rafael, California

Featuring Karen Spring, Coordinator of the Honduras Solidarity Network

We could not be happier nor prouder to have longtime Honduran Solidarity activist Karen Spring as our keynote speaker at this year's TFA dinner. Karen will be coming directly from Honduras to give us an update on the release from prison of her husband and political prisoner, Edwin Espinal, along with a report on the struggle there against the US-backed regime of Juan Orlando Hernández and the refugee crisis.

Our annual dinner is TFA's most important fundraising event of the year and an essential part of our work. Latin America is right now at a critical crossroads between neoliberalism on one hand and self-determination and sovereignty on the

other, and we want to do our part in promoting the latter. The solidarity activists and writers who comprise the Task Force most active members cannot continue at the current level without your financial support, and now is when we need it most.

We look forward to your attendance at the dinner, which will be a celebration of solidarity, complete with good company, the music of well-known duo Madeleine Zayas and Fena Torres, arts and crafts sales, and as always, terrific vegan and non-vegan food. If for some reason you cannot make it, we still hope you might make a generous donation.

We are asking for a \$50 - \$100 donation. You can easily make your reservation online at <https://www.brownpapertickets.com/event/4328093> or you can mail a check made out to: Task Force on the Americas, PO Box 925, Larkspur CA, 94977

North American Coalition for Peace in Colombia

By Alice Loaiza, TFA Board member

A new coalition with an initial twenty-five organizations is forming in the United States because of the urgent political crisis in Colombia, a country that flies under the radar of the corporate media because of its subservient relationship with the US. No blaring headlines about human rights violations in Colombia are ever heard.

The North American Coalition for Peace in Colombia came together with other international coalitions to defend the Peace Accords of 2016 that ended 50 years of war which the Duque/Uribe

government, in obedience to the empire of the north, is doing everything possible to destroy.

Paramilitary groups, in conjunction with the Colombian military and the highest offices of government, have assassinated over four hundred former FARC members since the Accords were signed.

The new coalition denounces the growing attacks and intimidation of Indigenous communities in mineral rich areas who are standing up for what is rightfully theirs. Community leaders are also being gunned down in coca regions to protect narcotics trafficking for the country that exports the largest amount of cocaine in the world.

In the last TFA newsletter we ran an article that demonstrated how Colombia was a special kind of US Puppet and indeed it is. Colombia acts as a hostile neighbor at its border with the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela as part of the regime change strategy of the US. It also acts as a center for intelligence collection for military intervention throughout Latin America. This makes the North American Coalition for Peace in Colombia critical in the struggle for



Children mourn the death of community leader. Photo: Pablo Serrano

peace in the region because the decisions concerning Colombia's foreign policy and hostile operations are designed here.

The Task Force on the Americas is honored to join this coalition and we ask other organizations to do the same. To find out more about it and see our points of unity please visit: <https://afgj.org/call-for-a-north-american-coalition-for-peace-in-colombia>

Source: *Task Force on the Americas*, August 25, 2019

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

Newsletter Committee:

Editorial: Bill Hackwell
Carol Costa
Dale Sorensen
Roger Stoll

Production: Alicia Jrapko

Photography: Bill Hackwell

Distribution: Faye Hinze

XXV São Paulo Forum Shows that Venezuela is not Alone!

By Alicia Jrapko, Task Force Board member

From July 25 to 28 the XXV São Paulo Forum took place in Caracas, Venezuela, with the participation of 190 organizations, political parties, social movements, workers movements, parliamentarians and intellectuals from Latin America, the Caribbean and several continents.

The date chosen for this historic meeting had a symbolic character to it. During those four days a number of coinciding historical events were celebrated, such as the birth of the Liberator Simón Bolívar, the assault on the Moncada Barracks that marked the beginning of the Cuban revolution, and the 65th anniversary of the birth of Commander Hugo Chávez.

The Forum of São Paulo is the oldest continuing event of progressive unity in Latin America. The first Forum was held in the city of São Paulo Brazil in 1990 as an initiative of the historic leader of the Cuban revolution, Fidel Castro Ruz and the then leader of the Workers' Party of Brazil (PT), Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva. The two put out a call to political parties and organizations from Latin America and the Caribbean to discuss alternatives to

neoliberal policies. Since then the Forum adopted the name of the city where it was born. Twenty-six countries from Latin America and the Caribbean make up the member countries of the Forum.

Today the scenario of all Latin America is very different from previous forums. Of the two leaders who brought the idea of the São Paulo Forum to life, one is no longer physically present and the other one is serving an unjust sentence in a Brazilian prison for having had the audacity to lift 30 million Brazilians out of poverty. The triumph of the Bolivarian revolution in 1998, with the popular election of Hugo Chávez, opened the door to a new continental stage where progressive projects sprouted up in Brazil, Argentina, Uruguay,

Bolivia, Ecuador and El Salvador. The current situation is very different than it was then. The integration of Latin America is now in jeopardy, and a number of countries in the region are led by puppet governments subordinate to the designs of the US government. Venezuela has held on but it is in the crosshairs of the empire to bring about regime change at all costs. This reality made the Forum to be held in Venezuela all that more important. Never before in the 29 years since its inception, has the host country been more besieged and

For those delegates coming from the United States they had to go through a series of added hurdles just to get there. After the suspension of diplomatic relations in January 2019 traveling to Venezuela has become more difficult with no direct flights from the US and no consulates to grant visas. Nevertheless, activists were creative and found the way to be present, including representatives of the Collective for the Protection of the Venezuelan Embassy in Washington DC who occupied and protected the embassy for thirty seven days.

During the opening ceremony of the Forum, the First Vice-President of the United Socialist Party of Venezuela (PSUV) and president of the National Constituent Assembly, Diosdado Cabello set the tone when he told the enthusiastic audience "No one will be able to do it alone, it is the unity of the people that is necessary. The more they insist, the more we are going to solve our problems. Here in Venezuela the right wing will not be able to govern. The right likes elections when they win; when the people win they don't like it. The right doesn't respect the process. They can't, their nature doesn't allow them to.



Forum participants joined the Venezuelan people in the street. Photos Alicia Jrapko

blockaded than Venezuela today and it is here where the destiny of the Great Homeland lies in the balance.

Despite the difficult situation in this South American nation, whose only crime in the eyes of US imperialism has been to divert their vast natural resources for the betterment of those who had been poor and dispossessed, approximately 700 people merged with hundreds of Venezuelans in this critical four-day meeting to discuss the burning questions of Latin America and also to reinvigorate the same spirit of regional integration sown by those who founded the Forum. Overall those in attendance came to show the world that Venezuela is not alone.

The right wing is the same everywhere. We feel the support of the people but those people also need our support. We resisted and marched with the conviction that we are going to win. The people here don't get depressed because with Chávez they learned to have a voice. We have even been threatened with everything including a military invasion, but we are willing to defend the Bolivarian revolution, which is a revolution for the peoples, not just for Venezuela. No one can do it alone." Other speakers included Monica Valente, of the Brazilian Workers Party

continued on page 5

continued from page 4

and the Executive Secretary of the São Paulo Forum, and the Ambassador of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela to Cuba, Adan Chávez. Also Julio Muriente Pérez, member of the National Hostosian Independence Movement of Puerto Rico. Muriente also talked about the popular victory that just took place in Puerto Rico. “Thousands of Puerto Ricans raised the flag of dignity forcing the corrupt Governor Ricardo Roselló to resign.” he said, as the audience stood up cheering. “It wasn’t that he resigned, the people took him out.”

It is important to note that this was not just a talking conference but a meeting of activists who on Saturday went out to the street along with thousands of Venezuelans to call for the US hands off Venezuela and all of Latin America. In all meetings inside and the rally outside, participants expressed their support to the only president of Venezuela elected by popular will, Nicolás Maduro Moros.

During the last day of the São Paulo

Forum, Venezuela’s President Nicolás Maduro reiterated his gratitude to the members of the Protection Collective of



Venezuela’s Embassy in Washington. “Their performance reflects high morals for the defense of the dignity and sovereignty of the Venezuelan people,” the

president said. He presented the activists with a replica of Simon Bolívar’s sword.

The closing ceremony took place after a walk to the Cuartel de la Montaña, in the 23 de Enero neighborhood, where the remains of Hugo Chávez rest. Present at the closing were Presidents Nicolás Maduro, President of Cuba Miguel Díaz Canel, Diosdado Cabello, and Mónica Valente.

The Forum issued a Final Declaration of support for Venezuela, Cuba, Nicaragua and other progressive governments under attack by US imperialism and demand for the freedom of Lula and other left-wing leaders imprisoned for political reasons.

What the XXV São Paulo Forum demonstrated most were the essential and immeasurable examples inherited from Fidel to guide the revolutionaries of Latin America and the Caribbean. These are the unity of the left progressive forces and the practice of internationalism.

Source: *Global Research on August 1, 2019*

VENEZUELA: Myth of US Humanitarianism



Dan Kovalik. Photo Bill Hackwell

By Bill Hackwell, Task Force Board member

Ed. Note: Dan Kovalik is a human rights, labor rights lawyer and peace activist. He currently teaches International Human Rights at the University of Pittsburgh School Of Law and is a member of the advisory board of the US Chapter of the Network in Defense of Humanity.

In the battle of ideas against a corporate media that inundates the minds of people into thinking that any and all things the United States does in the

world are peaceful and well-intended, having voices that break through the deception to explain the reality is essential if real change is to take place.

One of these voices is progressive author and longtime supporter of anti-imperialist movements in Latin America, Dan Kovalik who is currently on a week-long tour in California with his new book, *The Plot to Overthrow Venezuela*.

Stops on the tour included a meeting in Berkeley organized by KPFA Pacifica Radio station, several events in Los Angeles, and other appearances in Oakland, San Francisco, San Mateo, Sacramento and Corte Madera.

In front of a well-attended event in San Francisco’s Mission District Kovalik spoke at length about the myth of US humanitarian interventionism when it comes to the crisis in Venezuela. “How can it be that the US could have humanitarian answers for the problems that Venezuela is enduring when they are the originators of an economic blockade of life essentials that they keep tightening? I was just in Los Angeles and was shocked to see the level of homelessness in the middle of that city. If they can’t provide for housing for the poor, health care for all or jobs with a living wage

here, how could they possibly deliver a humane intervention in Venezuela or anywhere else for that matter? What their plans are if they can’t bring down the Maduro government through well financed and violent coercion then they are more than willing to strangle the entire country into complete economic collapse. It is either one or the other; that is exactly what they plan to do. Every time that the US says that it is intervening in a country on humanitarian grounds the exact opposite result takes place.”

Also speaking in San Francisco were David Paul, from the Embassy Protection Collective, and Alicia Jrapko speaking from the International Committee for Peace, Justice and Dignity who was recently in Venezuela to participate in the São Paulo Forum. TFA board member Roger Harris, who coordinated Kovalik’s tour, introduced him at the meeting. The event was organized by the Task Force on the Americas and the International Committee for Peace Justice and Dignity.

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

VENEZUELA: US Strangulation of Economy Officially Becomes an Embargo

By *Misión Verdad* news

The Trump Administration has reached a new zenith in its destructive acts against the Venezuelan economy and society by extending the coercive and unilateral measures against the Bolivarian Republic to the level of an embargo. According to *The Wall Street Journal*, this measure consists of a “total economic embargo.”

Once again through his often-used Executive Orders the US president is strengthening all prohibitions against any commercial relationship with the Venezuelan state by any US company or companies doing business with the US. The measure imposes an embargo on Venezuelan assets on US soil, including CITGO, a subsidiary of Venezuela’s state oil company PDVSA.

According to the Miami based *El Nuevo Herald*, Trump “substantially expanded the sanctions” against Venezuela by “taking the economic blockade imposed on Venezuela to extremes similar to those applied to North Korea, Iran and Cuba.”

The new measure, according to the *Herald*, would essentially “allow the application of sanctions against any individual or company that sustains operations or provides any type of support to the Caracas regime,” which puts into place a deepening of the asphyxiation against Venezuela.

The complexity of the measure means that any oil company, financial entity or any economic activity of trade in goods and services that has any link with the United States will be subject to punitive actions, applying the methodology of “sanctions” that Washington unilaterally executes against countries behind the back of international law. This would include extraterritoriality jurisdiction of any subsidiary of a US company operating in another country.

According to international jurispru-

dence, the only entity empowered to issue sanctions is the UN Security Council, and for that express reason, the measures taken by the US government against Venezuela are illegal.

To explain it in detail, Venezuelan State programs such as the Local Supply and Production Committees (CLAP),



Trump signs another Executive Order against Venezuela. Photo: NBC

which import food, or the program that purchases medicine internationally for the public health system, will undoubtedly be seriously affected. The CLAP program provides basic food supplies distributed by communal councils to six million Venezuelan families.

The provision of essential public services, such as electricity and water, which depend largely on US technologies and which are supplied by companies linked to that country, could be further compromised by the impossibility for these suppliers to enter into direct or indirect agreements with the Venezuelan state.

In a letter to Congress reported by Reuters, Trump saying, “I have determined that it is necessary to block the properties of the Venezuelan government in light of the continued usurpation of power by the illegitimate regime of Nicolas Maduro.” The measure will be applied to “all assets and interests owned by the Venezuelan government that are in the United States, or that are under the power or control of any person in the United States.” According to *The Wall Street Journal*, this is “the first time

Washington has applied measures of this kind against a government in the Western Hemisphere in more than thirty years.” No congressional representative uttered a sound of opposition to this order, that will impact the elderly and children the most.

The measure calls into question any act of alienation, transfer and confiscation of CITGO assets by order of a US court, such as the ruling of the US Court of Appeals in favor of *Crystallex*, a company claiming \$1.8 billion of CITGO property.

But the embargo measure grants the US government’s total control of those assets in an exercise of clear discretion, which indicates no compensation of the losses of the assets of the Republic. In other words outright theft of everything Venezuela owns.

What Washington would be imposing is a clear intrusion into the affairs and sovereignty of another country, by giving an ultimatum that the popular reelected government of President Maduro must be removed from power and the presidency transferred to the self-proclaimed “president” Juan Guaidó, imposed by instructions from the White House. In other words, Washington is suggesting to holding “free elections” in the midst of a consummated coup plot.

The measure is announced on the eve of another meeting of the Lima Group, this time with the presence of Trump’s Security Advisor, John Bolton. The US is not a member country of the Lima Group but is there to give them their orientation and marching orders.

Bolton said Monday that he expected a productive day in Lima, boasting of the conditions the United States has imposed on Venezuela to increase pressure on the Bolivarian Republic.

Source: *Misión Verdad*, translation, *Resumen Latinoamericano*, North America bureau on August 10, 2019

ARGENTINA: A Stunning Setback for Macri and Trump

By Alicia Jrapko, TFA Board member
who left Argentina in 1976 during the
Military Dictatorship

Primary elections are at best a gauge of which way the wind is blowing. Primaries were introduced in Argentina in 2009 to cut down on the number of candidates running in the presidential elections. Contenders must win a minimum of 1.5% to be eligible to stand for presidential elections. This year's primary, where voting is obligatory, was held on August 11. The results were shocking to all and seemed more like a referendum on the performance of incumbent president, and International Monetary Fund (IMF) darling, Mauricio Macri. When the dust settled and all the votes were counted, the left coalition backing Alberto Fernández and former president Cristina Fernández de Kirchner had nearly 50% of the votes and those supporting Macri had 32.1%. In electoral terms Macri got trounced.

In his frustration Macri's only response that night was his paternalistic instruction to the thousands dancing in the street to "go home to sleep."

The great irony here is that these are the very same voters who made a big mistake by voting against their own interests and for Macri in 2015, like a society docilely shuffling off to the slaughterhouse. But four years of authoritarian power that returned Argentina to the worst of economic times in the country's history, turning the nation into a suffering, devalued colony of Trump's imperialism, changed all that. This primary vote served as a way for the masses to stand up, do an about face and say enough is enough. And at least for now there is again a hope for democracy.

The upheaval created by years of the Macri administration resulted in his primary loss in every province, including in those that had voted him into office four years ago. But October 27, when the real vote takes place, is a long time from now.

Macri is not going to leave quietly and the days prior to the general election are dangerous for the country, especially regarding new currency devaluations and other economic issues. The international banking network is capable of anything, and let's not forget that Macri is connected at the hip to the IMF and to the whop-



Argentineans joyfully celebrate primary election results in the street

ping \$57 billion it loaned his government without parliamentary approval. Like all IMF deals, paying it back means ending subsidies and assistance programs, and more inflation.

In reality that huge loan achieved nothing but to fund capital flight to the benefit of the regime's friends and allies, while looting the country's wealth. According to official Central Bank data released by economist Ismael Bermúdez, the outflow of assets was about \$70.2 billion between 2016 and the first quarter of 2019.

The Macrist project had been held up as an exemplary model against populism. He was the hero of the first Davos summit he attended. But while they slapped him on the back they never invested a single peso in Argentina's productive capacity. Macri's friends came to speculate and borrow; they advised the IMF to indebt the country to the brim in order to control any future act of rebellion against the neoliberal policies of looting and dependence.

It is an illegal debt with the objective of aiding Macri's re-election campaign; failing that, the debt is designed to hamper any government that might succeed him, burdening the people for generations.

Let's pleasantly imagine for a moment that the Macri team is expelled from power in October and consider the possibilities of the next Fernández-Fernández Administration. Although socialism is not on the agenda, the opposition presidential candidate promised measures to repair the most serious damage

caused during the last four years. But the main issue will be Argentina's relationship with the IMF and the odious foreign debt caused by the current government. Though Fernández has repeated that "all payment will be fulfilled" and "Argentina will meet its debt," it would be good to stop putting out those types of promises. If

there is any obligation that should be met it should be to those millions of voters who deserve better than to be made to sacrifice the future of their children and grandchildren to pay the IMF debt. Making commitments to the IMF that can't be fulfilled can only mean decades of continuing poverty.

The August primary vote was a moment of resistance for Argentina and implicitly for all the countries of the region seeking to wrest control of their land and resources from the imperial grip. But the election in Argentina in October isn't the only one; Bolivia and Uruguay will also be holding elections and there are encouraging signs in both countries. While Argentina and Uruguay may make slight turns in a more humane direction the re-election of Evo Morales in Bolivia would mean a continuation of a project advancing towards socialism. Regardless, the elections are important because they would isolate the increasingly hated Trump clone Jair Bolsonaro in Brazil and put the brakes on attacks against the real targets of the Empire in Latin America: Venezuela and Cuba. While the corporate media have been cheering the end of the progressive cycle that began with Hugo Chávez, who followed the example of Cuba, there are signs that their celebration is premature.

Source: *Task Force on the Americas*, August 23, 2019

PUERTO RICO: Not Just a Puerto Rican Crisis

By Jesús Arboleya, historian and teacher at the University of Havana

Editor's note: *On Wednesday, August 7th, Puerto Rico's Supreme Court ruled that in the previous week Pedro R. Pierluisi had been unconstitutionally sworn in as governor. Wanda Vázquez, Attorney General of Puerto Rico, then took office to become the third Puerto Rican governor within five days.*

As of this writing it is unclear whether Puerto Rico has a governor. A popular struggle had challenged the constitutional legitimacy of Pedro Pierluisi's hurried appointment to the governorship after Ricardo Roselló was forced to resign in the face of popular demonstrations on a scale unprecedented in Puerto Rico's history.

Nevertheless, this is not the most important thing that's happened. With or without a governor, the world now knows that the US governs Puerto Rico, and that it is the superpower that now trembles as a result of its own contradictions.

The mainstream media tell us the protests stem from the report of a few cases of corruption in the government, along with the publication of homophobic and misogynous messages Roselló had shared with his colleagues. But the history of the governments of Puerto Rico is plagued with crimes much more serious than those, and they never produced a reaction of such proportions.

The mobilizations of the Puerto Rican people might be attributed to recent abuses and insults, like the indifference of the federal government to the destruction caused by Hurricane Maria, or the sight of Donald Trump throwing toilet paper to the hurricane victims, to remind them theirs is "a country of shit," as he has characterized the region.

However, beyond the disturbances of the moment, and the accumulated burdens of the colonial condition, lie symptoms of a fundamental problem stemming from the deterioration of the hegemonic power of the US.

At its peak, say by the end of World War II, the US could afford the luxury of maintaining the colony at its own expense. This was advisable because of Puerto Rico's military importance, since the island occupies a privileged geographic position for control of the Panama Canal and other Caribbean routes. It possesses deep-water coasts ideal for moving submarines through the Atlantic

showcase in Latin America. Thus large investments were made to show that it was a "good bargain" to be a colony of the United States. To follow the Puerto Rican model was in fact the advice Richard Nixon gave to Fidel Castro at their 1959 meeting. It is now seen to be a failed bargain, and this is the true political importance of recent events in Puerto Rico for the rest of Latin America and the Caribbean.

The conclusion to be drawn is that the United States is in no condition to maintain a colony that contributes little and costs much. Even less can it absorb the island as a state as the annexationists hope, who now compete with each other for power -- a power that has been blown to bits.

The recent demonstration of Puerto Rican people's power was an adrenaline rush for a people having to confront the hard truth of never having

had the power to determine its own destiny. Perhaps that demonstration of power is insufficient to transform the reality of the country, but it was a show of dignity much needed by Latin Americans within and outside the United States.

It is likely that most Puerto Rican citizens who went into the streets would not vote for independence in the event of another referendum. It is an apparent contradiction, given the outpouring of images of patriotism, that the colonialist mindset could not be eliminated. The explanation must be found in ideology. Among other things, the United States has spread the idea that independence for Puerto Rico is not economically viable for the country. A major conflict arises here, since in practice dependency has proved to be even less viable.

The dilemma for the United States is that even if, hypothetically, it could get rid of Puerto Rico, it will never get rid of Puerto Ricans, who were once baptized as US nationals for use as cannon fodder in their wars.

Source: *Progreso Weekly, translation, Resumen Latinoamericano, on August 14, 2019*



Ocean, as well as territories used for shooting ranges and training camps by North American armed forces. These attributes lost their importance for several reasons, including the Puerto Rican opposition movements, and the Pentagon began to lose interest in the island.

Another reason for the island's past importance to the US was the necessity at one time for the expansion of North American manufacturing, which found in Puerto Rico a tax haven, weak labor and environmental regulation, and lower wages than on the continent.

It was an epoch of some degree of economic growth, although with questionable social and environmental implications, among them the galloping increases in emigration, creating a Puerto Rican diaspora which today is four times greater than the population of the island itself. And emigration continues to increase. Industrialization failed in Puerto Rico for the same reasons of globalization that explain the deterioration of US manufacturing, which was worsened by the refusal of US industrialists to remain competitive at the cost of their bottom line.

Finally, in the face of the Cuban Revolution, it was expected that Puerto Rico would be presented to the world as a US

On July 26, Cuba Has a lot to Be Proud Of



Photos: Bill Hackwell

By Bill Hackwell, Task Force Board member

Today marks the 66th anniversary of the simultaneous assaults on the Moncada Barracks in Santiago de Cuba and the military garrison in Bayamo led by Fidel Castro and less than 200 combatants in what is known as the impossible storming of the heavens against the brutal US puppet dictator Fulgencio Bautista, who in the seven years before the Revolution, carried out a reign of misery and poverty punctuated by torturing and executing 20,000 Cubans.

The attacks marked a new stage of Cuba's quest for independence and sovereignty that is deeply ingrained in all Cubans. Fidel, however, made it clear that July 26 was not the beginning of the revolution; that it was born in 1868 when Manuel de Céspedes freed his slaves marking the beginning of the Wars of Independence against Spain. Heroic Moncada, which today serves as a middle school, was a dramatic reawakening of a flame that the imperial powers could never extinguish.

For the Cuban people July 26 is a day of great pride for all the gains they have made through determination and sacrifice against all the nonstop attacks and a unilateral blockade by the United States that has remained in place throughout the last 12 presidential administrations.

The ideals and principles of July 26 remain vibrant in Cuba and can be seen in the legacy of a people whose example has raised the bar of human conduct between each other and nations as well. While insistent and determined in maintaining their sovereignty, Cuba is the first to make and promote respectful agreements with other nations based on what is mutually beneficial while constantly promoting world peace as a goal.

Cuba opens its arms to the world not to profit off it but to make it a better place. Fidel Castro was the first world leader to sound an alarm about the global climate crisis back in the 1980s. When it comes to health and education Cuba is not just interested in that for their own country but for others too. Cuba is rightfully proud to export teachers to help combat illiteracy and has medical brigades working in 66 developing countries.

Just this past week Cuba's Latin American School of Medicine (ELAM) graduated another 500 doctors from 84 countries, most of whom received full scholarships. Brought into existence in 1999 by the Cuban government, ELAM has graduated nearly 30,000 doctors from 115 countries in these 20 years including 170 from the US, whose only cost was a moral one to go back and work in a community of need. This is not a token public relations program but one that has become the largest medical school in the world and a project that

the Cuban people have given to the world.

The World Health Organization has reported that Cuba has nine doctors per thousand inhabitants whereas the US has 2.3 doctors per thousand. And the Cuban Ministry of Health has just announced that Cuba, a country of 11 million, has over 2,000 citizens who are right now over 100 years old. This is not a fluke but rather the priority of a society that never discards people even after they are no longer productive or are living with a disability. All Cubans at all levels and capacity have access to health care, education, culture, sports etc., to keep them fully engaged their entire lives.

A Save Our Children report has ranked Cuba as the safest country in Latin America to be a child or adolescent (not to mention to visit), and UNICEF has declared that Cuba, despite the blockade, has no malnutrition. Cuba has eliminated Malaria through its preventative health model, Cuba has eliminated mother to child HIV transmission, Cuba has invented a new drug that arrests lung cancer, and Cuba's infant mortality rate per 1000 is four. Cuba's life expectancy is close to 80, social indicators better than many developed countries including the US; and on and



La Colmenita, Cuba's Children Theater

on.

So let's ask the question once again, why is it there is so much sustained hatred coming from consecutive US administrations? Well, it is because Cuba provides an inconvenient good example of what collectively striving for a better world looks like, an example that was catapulted onto the world stage with the attack on the Moncada Barracks on July 26, 1953.

Source: *Resumen Latinoamericano on July 26, 2019*

BRAZIL: The Amazon Rainforest is Burning as Bolsonaro Fans the Flames

By *Página 12* news

Brazil's National Institute for Space Research (INPE) confirmed with satellites what environmentalist organizations around the world had been announcing since President Jair Bolsonaro took office: the Amazon, often called the "Lungs of the World," is in danger.

Between January and August, 72,843 intermittent wildfires have been registered in the Brazilian Amazon rainforest due to the "development policy" undertaken by President Jair Bolsonaro in matters of agriculture and mining. Non-governmental organizations used the hashtag #PrayForAmazonia in the different social media throughout the week to try and get Bolsonaro's attention given the massive hectares of forests that are being scorched by fire.

"I used to be called Captain Chainsaw. Now I Am Nero, setting the Amazon on fire, but it is the season of the fire," said the President, arguing in the face of criticism that the fires are a natural process. The President even rejected the data provided by INPE, which had reported that fires increased by 83 % this year compared to the same period in 2018. At least 68 protected areas have been affected by the fires. The INPE director was dismissed by Bolsonaro under the accusation of fostering a "terrible" image of Brazil abroad with "fake" data.

The institute emphatically denied that fires may have increased due to the dry season or natural events on their own because "there is nothing strange about the climate this year or in the rainfall amount over the Amazon region." Fires may be common during the dry season but they are also caused by farmers who do illegal burning to clear lands and carry out their business, sheltered by the lack of government control and enforcement of environmental laws, and Bolsonaro's policies that favor corporate land-owners.

From August 8 to 14, INPE reported 9,507 new wildfires, especially in the Amazon Basin, home of the world's largest tropical rainforest and vital to counteract global warming. Fires have spread through the states of Acre, Rondonia, Mato Grosso and Mato Grosso do Sul, reaching the triple frontier between Bra-

zil, Bolivia and Paraguay.

With the world's largest river and source of natural resources where countless animal and plant species coexist, the Amazon is the home to 34 million people, including over 350 indigenous groups.

Social media users from around the globe have been demanding the media spread information about this environmental disaster. "While UN experts on climate change warn about the importance of taking care of the planet's land, soil and forests, the Amazon has been on fire for 16 days," highlighted a Twitter message.



It's not Fire, it's Capitalism

International institutions and companies, including NASA, showed satellite images of high concentrations of carbon monoxide in the areas where an environmental alert had been declared due to the increase of fires. NASA researcher Santiago Gasso posted on his Twitter account that the Latin American area covered by smoke was about 3.2 million square kilometers.

Bolsonaro, who welcomed the fact that US President Trump abandoned the Paris Agreement on climate change and refused to host the 2019 UN Climate Change Conference, seems oblivious to the problem.

Since he took office, Jair Bolsonaro made it clear that environmental protection would not be a priority for his administration. One of his first election promises was to merge two opposed ministries, Agriculture and Environment. The decision was adamantly rejected by environmental organizations because they warned that the ministry responsible for fostering agriculture and cattle raising business would be the same one in charge of granting environmental permits for production in preserved areas.

Because he could not swing that, Bolsonaro appointed as Minister of the Environment right-wing lawyer Ricardo Salles, previously in charge of a similar office in São Paulo, accused of changing proposals in a plan to manage an environmentally preserved area to favor private enterprises. Also, one of his first measures as Minister was stopping indigenous land boundaries, ordering that such decisions should first be analyzed by the Ministry of Agriculture.

Bolsonaro took it even further by promising to open indigenous lands protected by the Constitution for mining and forest exploitation under the excuse that indigenous people would live off of those royalties. This plan could not be anymore condescending and disgusting to indigenous people who look at land as life and not as a commodity for capital investment. The President is also expecting to complete the construction of Angra 3, a nuclear power plant on the coast between the regions of São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro. The area destined for the project is Itaorna beach, well known for landslides that have historically revealed unstable soil. The plant would complement a large hydroelectric dam in Belo Monte, over the Xingu River which is part of the Amazon pluvial system.

Norway has directly accused Brazil of causing the deforestation of the Amazon and not properly investing the money deposited by that country and Germany into the Amazon Fund, created in 2008 for the prevention, monitoring and preservation of the region.

The Norwegian Government halted the remittance of 30 million dollars to Brazil. Mad, Bolsonaro shared fake news

continues on page 11

continued from page 10

in his social media profiles. "Look at the killing of whales sponsored by Norway," posted Bolsonaro, who usually complains that the media has a biased coverage. His tweet includes a video and photos of a whaling hunt with sad background music. The problem was the images had been taken in the Faroe Islands, a North Atlantic archipelago owned by Denmark.

The German Government had already blocked around 35 million euros (about \$39 million) last August 10 for different programs until deforestation figures had improved again, or at least when they stabilize. Bolsonaro in perfect Trumpian style said, "They can use that money as they please. Brazil does not need it."

Threatened by German Foreign Minister Angela Merkel to not send re-



This year almost 73,000 wildfires in the Amazon

sources to preserve the area, Bolsonaro responded with more scorn for the two countries: "She should keep the money and reforest Germany. And what was the other country? Sweden, Norway...? Oh! Yes, Norway, which is not giving a similar amount to Brazil. Send it to Angela

Merkel so she can reforest Germany."

The Interstate Committee on Legal Sustainable Development for the Amazon, made up of 27 Brazilian states, stated that they were going to bypass the federal government and were expecting "to have a direct dialog" with the countries that finance the Amazon Fund for its preservation. "The Amazon bloc deplores the positions of the

Brazilian Government that caused the suspension of resources of the Fund," reads the document that was signed by governors of the nine states of the Amazon region.

Source: *Pagina 12, translation Resumen Latinoamericano on August 21, 2019*

Support the Venezuelan Embassy Protectors

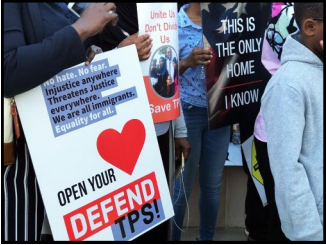
The Embassy Protectors Defense Committee was formed after the illegal raid of the Venezuelan Embassy by the US Secret Service and the arrest on May 16 of four members of the Embassy Protection Collective: Kevin Zeese, Margaret Flowers, David Paul and Adrienne Pine. For 37 days, with the permission of the legitimate government of Venezuela, members of the Embassy Protection Collective heroically refused to hand over the control of the Venezuelan Embassy to a representative of the US-appointed, self-proclaimed "interim President" of Venezuela, Juan Guaidó. Please sign the petition to the US Attorney's office to drop the charges against the Embassy Protectors. <https://defendembassyprotectors.org/defense-committee-members/>



Task Force on the Americas Stands in Solidarity with the Embassy Protectors

Immigrant Rights: Protect DACA, TPS and DED!

A Ninth Circuit panel is deliberating the Trump Administration's 2017 decision to strip legal protections from programs including Deferred Enforced Departure (DED), and Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) and Temporary Protective Status (TPS), putting immigrant lives in danger. The ruling will affect the legal status of 300,000 immigrants from Sudan, Nicaragua, Haiti and El Salvador and could affect another 100,000 from Nepal and Honduras.



What is really needed is not temporary stays of justice from Trump but legislation that **would create permanent protections for TPS, DACA, and DED holders.** Congress must act to pass legislation that keeps families and communities together.

The House has already passed the Dream and Promise Act (H.R. 6), which would create permanent protections and a roadmap to citizenship for TPS, DACA, and DED holders. Two similar bills have been introduced in the Senate, the Dream Act of 2019 and the Secure Act of 2019.

Reach out to your senators today and tell them to support the Dream and Secure Acts of 2019.

Colombia: Protest the Cover up of Duque on Sept. 27!



Protest for Peace in Colombia

September 27 is International Tourism Day and Colombian President Ivan Duque is trying to sell Colombia as a beautiful, safe and memorable vacation destination for tourists. What Duque does NOT include in his travel brochure is Colombia's hundreds of assassinations of social leaders and community activists, the poverty

and the massive displacement. The real living conditions of the Colombian people must be exposed. We want to expose these myths to make sure that people hear about the real living conditions of the Colombian people.

On Friday September 27 demonstrations will be taking place in cities across the US called by the newly formed North American Coalition for Peace in Colombia. Please join us in your area or help organize an action. In San Francisco the protest will take place in front of the Colombian Consulate, 595 Market St. from 12 pm – 1pm.

For more information go to: <https://afgj.org/call-for-a-north-american-coalition-for-peace-in-colombia>

Non-Profit Org.
US Postage
PAID
Permit # 14
Larkspur, CA
94977

Marin Interfaith Task Force on the Americas
P.O. Box 925
Larkspur, CA 94977
Time Value Material
Return Service Requested