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# VOICE OF REVOLUTION

Publication of the U.S. Marxist-Leninist Organization

May 10, 2019

USMLO 3942 N. Central Ave, Chicago, IL 60634



usmlo.org

## Venezuelan People and Armed Forces Repel Another U.S.-Backed Coup Attempt p.3



## Embassy Protectors in DC Stand Firm p.4

### MAY DAY, INTERNATIONAL WORKERS' DAY

## For an Anti-War Government, Peace Economy and a Democracy Where We Decide

The U.S. Marxist-Leninist Organization (USMLO) salutes all those organizing and participating in May Day actions across the country and worldwide. We stand united with

the workers of all countries in demanding an end to U.S. wars and interference and in defending the rights of all.

In the U.S. immigrant

**May Day • 20**

### TRUMP MAKING FURTHER ATTACKS

## Students and Workers Stand Up for Rights of Refugees and Immigrants

Students at Johns Hopkins organized a month-long sit-in demanding the university end all contracts with Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) and use the funds instead for an immigrant defense fund. They also made the connection between ICE repression in their communities and a university plan to have a private armed police force. As their chants brought out, *No Justice, No Peace, No Armed Police! No Justice, No Peace, No ICE in Our Streets!* Communities in Wisconsin, Arizona and elsewhere are also taking their stand against

detention centers and for the rights of migrant families. As well, asylum officers — civil servants who are distinct from ICE and Customs and Border Patrol (CBP) and not an armed force — are speaking out against new protocols that are forcing people with legitimate claims and fears back to Mexico. Many May Day actions also stood up for immigrant and refugee rights, including the right to driver's licenses and other basic requirements of daily life. All are standing up for rights and for a rule of law that actually

**Standing Up for Rights • 12**

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## I • Venezuelans Repel Another U.S. Coup Attempt

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On May 1, International Workers' Day, it was reported that hundreds of thousands of Venezuelan workers and supporters of the Bolivarian revolution filled the streets of cities around the country in what is reported to have been one of the country's biggest mobilizations in years. May Day took on extra meaning this year coming just one day after the people's forces played a decisive role in repelling the latest attempt by U.S.-backed forces to overthrow the country's constitutional government. People came out in their tens of thousands to surround the presidential palace and seat of the Bolivarian government as soon as news broke that a coup attempt with the involving military forces was underway.

In the early hours of April 30 the opposition leader and self-proclaimed "president" Juan Guaidó, hand-picked and promoted by the U.S., sent out a message calling his supporters into the streets. He made it sound like a significant section of Venezuela's military had switched sides and taken over a military base in Caracas. But the truth was something else. Except for a very small number of officers who broke ranks, the Bolivarian Armed Forces stood firm in defense of the constitution and remained loyal to their Commander-in-Chief, President Nicolás Maduro. What is more, the handful of senior officers involved in organizing the mutiny lied to their subordinates to trick them into taking part in their treasonous mission, claiming it was for a different, legitimate purpose. When it became clear to those being manipulated what they would be part of, the vast majority wanted nothing to do with it and left. One National Guard member was filmed testifying about what had taken place and who put them up to it.

The response of the working people to the treachery that unfolded on April 30 was swift and decisive. They rose to repudiate the coup forces, who repeatedly call for U.S. military intervention, as demanded by their U.S. backers. Working people surrounded Miraflores Palace, determined to defend the right of all Venezuelans to live in peace, as a sovereign and independent people, free to elect governments of their choosing and to chart their own course without bowing to imperialist threats and interference. Despite the massive U.S. sanctions, a crime of collective punishment meant to bring the Venezuelans to their knees, they instead stood tall and united in defending their rights.

Within a few hours of being summoned to the streets, a large crowd of opposition supporters that gathered in an affluent area of Caracas had dispersed, being blocked from marching on Miraflores to confront government supporters and security forces protecting it.

By early afternoon a handful of renegade armed forces members, a few opposition politicians and a couple of hundred vandals



In response to attempted coup April 30, 2019, working people surround Miraflores Palace.

commanded by Guaidó, having seized control of nothing, found themselves alone and cut off on the overpass of a freeway, some firing weapons, others hurling rocks and Molotov cocktails at the nearby military base before scurrying off to save their skins. Twenty-five members of the military took refuge in the Brazilian Embassy, while the large majority of the Armed Forces stood against the U.S. and its puppet Guaidó to firmly defend the sovereignty of Venezuela and her elected government.

Despite the utter failure he presided over on April 30, Guaidó called on his supporters to rally in the streets again on May 1 and every day after that to continue with the "final phase" of "Operation Freedom" saying they should stage rolling strikes building to an eventual general strike. While an opposition counter-demonstration to the massive Workers' Day march led by President Maduro did take place on May 1, observers reported it was far short of being the "largest march in Venezuela's history" that Guaidó called for. The broad May Day actions in Caracas and across the country standing firm for Venezuela's right to be and ready to resist all U.S. plans, were among the largest in recent years.

The call for ongoing opposition street actions likely signals that the U.S. is pushing Guaidó and the domestic oligarchs that back him, to unleash a new round of destabilizing street violence like the deadly actions of 2014 and 2017. They too failed in their aim to achieve U.S.-orchestrated regime change and these new attempts no doubt will as well. The aim of such street violence, much like the burning of the so-called humanitarian aid trucks by opposition forces in April, is to generate casualties and make it appear President Nicolás Maduro does not want aid and is "brutally repressing peaceful democracy activists." Both claims are repeatedly made by the U.S. government and echoed in the media — no matter what the facts are — to provide a justification for U.S. invasion or any aggressive moves the U.S. decides to make.

### U.S. Responds to Failed Coup Attempt

When U.S. efforts failed to produce the desired result, with Venezuela's Minister of Defense and other high officials spurning

U.S. attempts to buy them off as if they were mercenaries with no honor, the White House ramped up its psychological warfare. U.S. National Security Advisor John Bolton and Special Representative for Venezuela Eliot Abrams, notorious serial liars and war mongers, began spinning stories of a “deal” they had allegedly gotten for Maduro to step down until Russia stepped in and told him not to, and other tales about widespread mistrust and looming betrayals in government and military circles. None have materialized as psychological warfare is not based in fact and is meant to sow doubt and destabilize conditions. These efforts are occurring in the context of the massive U.S. imposed sanctions, already responsible for tens of thousands of deaths of Venezuelans and for blocking medicine and food. Under such conditions any new claims by the U.S. that they are intervening to provide “humanitarian aid” are simply more of the psychological warfare — directed against people in the U.S. as well as those in Venezuela.

President Trump again chose to blame Cuba for the failure of the U.S. and forces it commands to achieve regime change, something by its very nature which is undemocratic as it is organized by foreign forces. Trump threatened Cuba with a “full and complete embargo” and “the highest-level sanctions” if it did not stop what he called its “military interference” in Venezuela. He

ignored what Cuba has declared many times over: that it has no troops in Venezuela, and that there are no Cubans taking part in military or security operations there, which, it adds, U.S. intelligence agencies well know.

Trump, using the Secret Service, is also orchestrating an attempt to take over the Venezuelan Embassy in Washington, DC. The building is owned by Venezuela and the U.S. is duty bound to protect it, and all embassies, under the Vienna Convention. Taking it, or any embassy, by force is considered an act of war as it is an attack on the sovereignty of the given country. The effort to install Guaidó’s forces in the embassy is also a means to try and force the Venezuelans to take over the U.S. Embassy in Caracas. The U.S. could then use this to justify open military intervention in Venezuela. The militant stand of the many U.S. individuals and organizations involved in occupying the Venezuelan Embassy in DC, organizing political discussions and forums inside while blocking forces outside is to be applauded and supported (see below). Together the people of Venezuela and the U.S. are standing against war and for rights and in doing so strengthening their relations and showing that peaceful and diplomatic means are needed to solve problems, not the use of force.

*(With files from TML Weekly, Venezuelanalysis, teleSUR)*

### PROTECTING VENEZUELAN EMBASSY IN DC

## We Are Still Here and We Are Not Leaving

### *Embassy Protection Collective*

The Embassy Protection Collective formed on April 10, the day after the Trump administration manipulated the Organization of American States (OAS) to change the rules so they could recognize their puppet, Juan Guaidó, as president of Venezuela. The OAS could not get the required two-thirds vote to recognize a government so they changed the rules to a mere majority and barely got that. By then, the U.S. had allowed their Guaidó coup forces to take the Venezuelan military attaché building in Washington, DC and three diplomatic offices in New York City.

The Trump administration is allowing extreme violent right-wing Guaidó supporters to blockade the embassy. Despite a standoff in the last week, we had a series of victories over those forces and remain steadfast protectors of the embassy.

We adopted a theme song for the Embassy Protection Collective, “We’re Still Here” by Holly Neer. The chorus begins with:

*We’re Still Here  
Choosing Love Over Fear  
When the Lines Are All Drawn  
We’re Still Here*

### **Challenges and Victories**

We woke up on April 30 to the news that Juan Guaidó was going to attempt a coup again, which made us wonder why he needs to conduct a coup if he is the “president.” We were alerted by our Venezuelan allies that this second coup attempt would be

easily defeated, which it was, but to expect coup-supporters in the U.S. to protest at the embassy.

In fact, the extremist Venezuelan coup supporters showed up that morning and tried to take over the steps in front of the building. A team of embassy protectors took a stand on the steps and stopped them from taking over the entry. More violent extremists showed up throughout the day, causing police to erect a barricade between us in front of the embassy. We sang almost non-stop to keep ourselves from engaging with them while they blew sirens and other loud noises and insulted and threatened us shouting racist and misogynist comments and using lewd gestures. Police refused to pass food and water to us or to allow our allies into the space in front of the embassy. We held that space through the night by taking shifts.

In the courtyard behind the embassy, the pro-coup forces harassed, intimidated, threatened and assaulted our allies outside who bravely prevented them from entering the building while folks inside set up reinforcements to stop them from coming in the door. This lasted until 1:00 in the morning.

The next day, May 1, we agreed to cede the front steps if the police would protect the front porch and doors from damage. We moved inside to focus on protecting the embassy from within, thinking the police would honor their duty to protect the embassy from harm. That afternoon, Carlos Vecchio, Guaidó’s fake “ambassador” showed up, with the intention of taking over the embassy.

We were ready for him to enter and be forced to remove us.

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## PEOPLES OPPOSING ATTEMPTED COUP AGAINST VENEZUELA

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As he came to the front porch to speak, we stood resolute behind him holding signs and chanting, 'No Coup.' When he began to speak, we cut off the power to his sound system and out-shouted him. Vecchio was forced to flee, chased by reporter Anya Parampil who asked him, "Where are you going next, the White House?" A representative vaguely told the crowd they were "working on a process to evict us." The coup failed in Venezuela on April 30, and failed again in Washington, DC on May 1.

The coup supporters started setting up tents around the embassy that night and blocking our people from entering the building as police stood by and did nothing. When members of CodePink brought food the next day, surrounded by clergy, they were stopped from delivering it. Ariel Gold of CodePink and Chris Herz tossed bread and other foods onto a patio to us. They were arrested and charged with "hurling missiles" at a building.

We pushed back at police for not allowing the food in, and they provided a blockade for our members to come down and get the groceries. Coup supporters stole hundreds of dollars worth of the food. We were also able to get some medications in that day for people who required it. Since then, we have struggled to get supplies. When we lowered a rope from a window and successfully brought up four bags of food, the coup supporters rushed a barricade and assaulted our allies. It was our people who were threatened with arrest even though they were the ones who were knocked to the ground.

An older gentleman from the neighborhood wanted to bring us toothbrushes and toothpaste. He was swarmed by the violent extremists. When he tried to pass between two people to get to the door, he was thrown to the ground violently and seriously injured. He was arrested, not the ones who threw him down. It has become common for police to arrest the victims of assault, not the people who committed the assault.

These seem to be U.S.-trained regime change operatives who use violence, psy-ops and intimidation against us. Some are pro-U.S. Nicaraguans and Cubans, not Venezuelans. They have unlimited resources. They are constantly bringing in more supplies. From early in the morning, we are surrounded by them and subjected to their sirens, banging of pots and pans, loud music, taunts and threats of physical harm.

They have tried to break in numerous times. They drilled through a door to the garage and damaged the lift gate with a sledgehammer. On Friday night, they banged on the doors so hard for hours that they were damaging them. We had to fortify the old wooden doors so they would not break through. The Secret Service watched while they did it and not only let them but refused to say they would protect our safety. When we called them, they said we should ask the Venezuelan government for help. It took hundreds of calls from supporters to get them to stop.

The Secret Service is allowing them to do all they can to



intimidate us very likely under orders from the White House. They want the extremists to frighten us so we leave the embassy. Their actions have had the opposite effect. They have united us in our determination to protect the embassy.

Despite being barricaded in the building and cut off from access to supplies, we are victorious. We are still here and there is little chance of eviction because we are violating no laws. We have built a powerful and united community that works together to protect the embassy and to keep the violent extremists and Trump administration out.

### Surrounding the Embassy with Love and Resistance

The Trump administration realizes that entering the Venezuelan Embassy in violation of the Vienna Convention would set a precedent that could put U.S. embassies around the world at risk. As a result, they are allowing right-wing extremists to harass and threaten us and try to starve us out. That is their only hope of taking over the embassy.

We refuse to give in no matter what they do. Our lawyers are making sure there is a record of the incidents, a record we have in large part due to our media, Anya Parampil of The Grayzone Project and Alex Rubinstein of Mintpress News. We also have to give a shout out to TeleSur, who was with us until the pro-coup forces arrived and now is providing coverage from the outside. Allies outside are identifying the pro-coup actors. We wrote to the State Department and Secret Service about the violence and have told them we will hold decision-makers and police officers responsible for their actions. But mostly, we have responded to these intimidation tactics with solidarity and have strengthened our resolve to protect the embassy.

A highlight of the week for us, after many difficult days, was to see hundreds of Embassy Protectors show up outside May 5. They chanted with us and sang. We ended the night with revolutionary music blasting from the second floor embassy windows and dancing together even though they were on the sidewalk across the street and we were inside the embassy. The extremists' banging of pots, strobe lights and blasting sirens at us only added to the festive atmosphere.

Today, more Embassy Protectors returned to show solidarity and express their love. We also started receiving many messages of solidarity and appreciation from individuals and social

movements in Venezuela. This means the world to us. We are surrounded by violent, right-wing, regime change forces who are trying to wear us down. These are the same actors who held violent protests in Nicaragua and Venezuela. They are making death threats, threatening women with rape and mocking us, all in a posh Georgetown neighborhood. It is surreal.

We recall the mass mobilizations in Charlottesville, Boston and New York when right-wing, racist, misogynist hate-filled people came there and we urge such mass resistance to join with us now. This is a critical struggle. If the embassy is overtaken, it will set us on a path to war in Venezuela, and chaos and devastation to the region. If we can continue to protect the embassy, Venezuela and the United States will have time to negotiate with third countries to serve as protectorates for their embassies and this could begin a path to peace. Perhaps Trump will even see that the Bolton-Abrams-Pompeo team has misled him and reverse the disastrous policy course he is on. There is no reason to steal Venezuela's resources, the U.S. should respect Venezuelan sovereignty and negotiate agreements as has been done previously.

We are asking people to come to DC to surround this embassy with love and resistance...

### Take Action

If you absolutely cannot come to DC, please contact your member of Congress to make them aware of the situation. Tell them:

- The US is required to protect embassies under the Vienna Convention, but is allowing the Venezuelan Embassy to be damaged when the Secret Service could easily protect it.

- The United States' coup in Venezuela has failed. Maduro is the legitimate elected President of Venezuela and is recognized by the United Nations and over 140 countries.

- The Secret Service is violating the human rights of the Embassy Protectors by failing to ensure safe passage in and out of the embassy and access to supplies. We are literally under siege.

Review the Declaration of the Embassy Protection Collective and sign on to show your support.

And finally, please make a donation as we have incurred many unexpected costs for this mobilization. *Venceremos!*

# Sign, Call, Mobilize to Defend Venezuelan Embassy in Washington, DC

## *Embassy Protection Collective*

We are asking our allies to surround the embassy with love and resistance to quell the hatred and violence coming from right-wing extremists. Bring supplies for the protectors such as coffee, food, hygiene and cleaning products, socks and T-shirts.

We are asking everyone to contact your member of Congress to demand that they:

- Respect the Vienna Convention of 1961 and protect the integrity of the embassy.

- Obey DC law by not evicting us from the premises without due process.

- Recognize that the elected and legitimate government of Venezuela is the administration of Nicolás Maduro as have the United Nations and over 140 countries.

The Embassy Protection Collective, a group of organizations and individuals, is residing and working in the Venezuelan Embassy in Washington, DC at the invitation of the elected Venezuelan government as an interim protectorate. We have taken on the responsibility for maintaining, cleaning, and caring for the building until a permanent protectorate for the embassy, in the form of a mutual formal agreement to find third-party host countries to safeguard the Venezuelan and U.S. embassies in Washington and Caracas, respectively is established. We have received innumerable messages of support and love from around the world. We are safe in the building, and our will is strong.

The right-wing group occupying the exterior of the building is violently harassing and attacking individuals who are outside protesting U.S. intervention. They are also blocking entrances to the building, and have caused extensive damage to the building's

exterior — including destroying security cameras, drilling into doors and hitting the garage door with a sledgehammer.

Many of the Guaidó supporters outside the building are shouting the most vulgar racist, misogynistic and homophobic insults and death threats at Embassy Protectors and our supporters. Vidcotaped examples of this behavior have been published online.

The Secret Service has witnessed the violence of these forces against Embassy Protectors and our supporters and against the embassy building, and has done nothing to discourage them. While the right-wing protestors have perpetrated numerous acts of violence against us, we have maintained a consistently disciplined and peaceful presence. Nonetheless, in all but one particularly egregious case of battery, the Secret Service has only detained individuals protesting U.S. intervention in Venezuela. Examples of charges leveled against us include “Tossing Missiles”— the offense listed on Ariel Gold's arrest warrant for trying to throw lettuce to Embassy Protectors, as the right-wing group has been blocking people and supplies from coming in the building.

Allowing unelected, failed Venezuelan coup mongers — who are taking their orders from war criminal and genocide abettor Elliott Abrams and others in the Trump administration — to take the embassy would be an escalation of international aggression. It would also be a violation of Article 22 of the 1961 Vienna Conventions, on Diplomatic Relations, which is explicit that foreign embassies should be protected by the host government and their space should not be violated even when countries are at war or have severed diplomatic relations. Specifically, international law requires:

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## PEOPLES OPPOSING ATTEMPTED COUP AGAINST VENEZUELA

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The premises of the mission shall be inviolable. The agents of the receiving State may not enter them, except with the consent of the head of the mission.

The receiving State is under a special duty to take all appropriate steps to protect the premises of the mission against any intrusion or damage and to prevent any disturbance of the peace of the mission or impairment of its dignity.

The premises of the mission, their furnishings and other property thereon and the means of transport of the mission shall

be immune from search, requisition, attachment or execution.

### TAKE ACTION:

Sign + share the petition (<https://solidaritycenter.ourpowerbase.net/civicism/petition/sign?sid=8&reset=1>)

Make the calls:

- DC Mayor Muriel Bowser: 202-727-2643
- State Dept. Office of Foreign Missions: 202-895-3500
- Secret Service DC Field Office: 202-406-8800

# Tell Congress to Promote a Peaceful Solution in Venezuela

*CodePink for Peace*

CodePink is part of the Venezuela Embassy Protection Collective, a group of organizations and individuals residing and working in the Venezuelan Embassy in Washington, DC at the invitation of the elected Venezuelan government. We are there to serve as an interim protectorate keeping the embassy safe from right-wing Guaidó supporters, who have been harassing them and preventing the delivery of food and medicines into the building. Many of the activists, including CodePink team members, have been assaulted but the police have been refusing to arrest the thugs surrounding the embassy.



CodePink disrupts Atlantic Council meeting and Eliot Abrams

The U.S. is orchestrating a coup in Venezuela that is likely to lead to bloodshed — even civil war — and U.S. economic sanctions are leading to more misery and death. Instead of meddling in the internal affairs of another country, the U.S. should be supporting peaceful dialogue facilitated by mediators such as Mexico and the Vatican. We have seen the effects of past U.S. backed coups in Latin America — Guatemala in 1953, Chile in 1973, Honduras in 2009. It always turns out disastrous for the people, as is evidenced by people fleeing U.S.-orchestrated violence across Latin America and seeking refuge at the U.S.-Mexico border.

There is legislation in Congress to promote a peaceful solution. H.R. 1004 in the House and S.J.Res. 11 in the Senate make it clear to President Trump that without congressional authorization — authorization he does NOT have — he may not use military force in Venezuela.

Contact your Congressional representatives now to tell them to obey international diplomatic law and protect the integrity of the embassy, as well as ensure the safety of the peace activists at the DC Venezuela Embassy, who must be kept safe from violence and harassment, and must be allowed to receive food, water, and

medicine. Tell them to support H.R.1004 in the House and S.J.Res.11 in the Senate.

### Sample Message

Dear [Congress person's name will go here],

The U.S. has a long and sordid history of supporting coups in Latin America — Guatemala in 1953, Chile in 1973, Honduras in 2009 — and it always turned out disastrous for the people. It is urgent that you speak out against the Trump administration's policy of regime change, including the possibility of a military intervention,

by supporting H.R.1004 in the House and S.J.Res.11 in the Senate.

U.S. economic sanctions have devastated Venezuela's economy, exacerbating food and medicine shortages, widespread poverty, and mass migration. The people of Venezuela need sanctions to be lifted and dialogue between the Maduro government and the opposition. Mexico and Uruguay have offered to mediate, as has the Pope. A democratic process, not a coup, should be supported and no matter what, we must not let the U.S. get into another war.

As your constituent, I ask you to co-sponsor Representative David Cicilline's legislation, H.R. 1004, in the House and Senator Jeff Merkley's legislation, S.J.Res.11, in the Senate, making it clear to President Trump that without congressional authorization, military force may not be used in Venezuela.

Please also demand that the safety of the Embassy Protection Collective—a group of organizations and individuals staying inside the Venezuelan Embassy in Washington, D.C. at the invitation of the elected Venezuelan government as an interim protectorate to stop the building from being taken over by non-elected, non-president Juan Guaidó. Many Collective members have been assaulted by Guaidó supporters, who have been preventing the delivery of food and medicines, and the police have refused to arrest the thugs harassing the peaceful activists.

# Activists Remain In Venezuelan Embassy With Gratitude From Foreign Ministry

*Margaret Flowers and Kevin Zeese, Popular Resistance, April 25, 2019*

Thursday, April 25, the day activists anticipated the Secret Service might evict them from the Venezuelan Embassy, turned into a day of growing support for and attention to the Embassy Protection efforts. Activists are making it clear that they are in the Embassy with the permission of the foreign ministry. In fact, on Wednesday night (April 24), Carlos Ron, the Vice Minister for Foreign Affairs for Venezuela, sent a video message to the protectors:

“Hello everyone. My name is Carlos Ron. I’m Vice Minister for Foreign Relations for Venezuela. We want to first of all, thank you all for standing up for international law, for the well-being of the Venezuela Embassy in Washington. It’s been important to hear your voices, to hear your call for the respect of Venezuela’s national sovereignty, for the respect of popular will in electing President Maduro and for safeguarding our embassy and our premises.

“I just wanted to express to you on behalf of all of the people of Venezuela, on behalf of all of the Venezuelan government, how lucky we feel to have friends in the United States that are standing up for justice and are standing up for what’s right and for respect for the will of the Venezuelan people.

“We are glad to hear that you are meeting constantly in the embassy, that you have made it a place where debate, democracy and dialogue can really be established and can really flourish. Hopefully, this is what we can maintain in our premises for a long time.

“I know that today you have a very important educational meeting to talk about the way that our region, Latin America, has been constantly intervened by foreign forces and by foreign interests that have acted against democracy and against social justice.

“So, hopefully today will be a very fulfilling encounter and that we help each other to understand our region and to make sure that our countries respect international law and respect justice. So thank you very much for being there, for being in solidarity with us and please remember that the people of Venezuela are always in solidarity with the people of the United States. Thanks.”

The address was followed by a live event with John Kiriakou, a CIA whistleblower who exposed the torture program and went to jail for doing so. He gave an insider’s view of U.S. regime change efforts to a packed and energized room. Following the live event, embassy protectors met with their lawyers and discussed plans for holding the space as long as necessary so the Venezuelan and U.S. governments have time to complete negotiations over the disposition of their respective embassies.

Calls for support, which went out over the past few days, are having an impact. People arrived from California, Colorado, Massachusetts and surrounding states. People streamed into the embassy



throughout the day April 24, into the early morning hours and continued throughout April 25.

The police presence also grew. Secret Service agents and DC police lurked outside as guests arrived for the evening event. Throughout the early morning hours, Secret Service officers cruised by the embassy at regular intervals. At one point, police approached the building, triggering the activists’

planned mobilization response, but it was a false alarm.

Thursday morning, April 25, began with an excellent action by Ariel Gold and Lili Taj of CodePink, who interrupted Elliott Abrams at the Atlantic Council where he intended to speak about “the future of Venezuela.” Protectors then held a rally and press conference in front of the building. Cars and pedestrians slow down to check out the banners and placards.

There has not been any communication from the State Department in response to emails [sent concerning possible arrests]. When pressed, the Secret Service were unable to elucidate what charge they would use in an arrest since protectors were given the keys to the building and are here with permission of the elected government. Still, protectors know that police could come anytime and are prepared to hold the space nonviolently both as tenants/guests with the right to live here and to uphold the Vienna Convention.

Venezuelan Foreign Minister Jorge Arreaza had this to say about the Embassy Protection Collective:

“A month ago, the United States government illegally seized our consulate building in New York and two military attaché buildings in Washington. The building that houses our OAS mission and housed our embassy is property of the Venezuelan state. As you know one of our fundamental pillars is [support] from people’s movements from around the world, social groups, progressive groups around the world. These groups are helping us and their help is welcome. Because we have to protect the embassy. What the U.S. did in the consulate and attaché buildings is a violation of the Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations. We have to protect that Venezuelan building. It would be crazy for [the U.S. government] to enter illegally. Have we proposed that for the U.S. embassy in Caracas? Never. Now, if they do it, we would have to think about how to reciprocate in that case. I hope it doesn’t happen. I hope our compañeros and compañeras who have been bravely protecting Venezuelan assets can go home at ease over the next few days if the United States government decides to respect diplomatic and consular conventions and respect the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela’s assets. The action they have taken is a preventative one which we respect.” *La lucha continua.*

# Former U.N. Official: U.S. Goal Is to “Asphyxiate” Venezuela

*Alfred de Zayas Human Rights Corner*

The delivery of some twenty-four tons of medical supplies to Venezuela’s Maiquetia Airport on April 16 received little fanfare, in marked contrast to a debacle that occurred just weeks before.

That previous attempt to send aid to the increasingly desperate country came a day after British billionaire Richard Branson held a multi-million dollar concert, “Venezuela Aid Alive,” in the Colombian border town of Cucuta. Venezuela’s opposition in Bogota attempted to force a USAID shipment of food and other aid through Venezuela’s border.

The dramatic scenes of burning trucks and cargo made international headlines, with media and U.S. leaders alike blaming Venezuelan president Nicolas Maduro. U.S. National Security Advisor John Bolton warned via Twitter, “Masked thugs, civilians killed by live rounds, and the burning of trucks carrying badly-needed food and medicine. This has been Maduro’s response to peaceful efforts to help Venezuelans. Countries that still recognize Maduro should take note of what they are endorsing.”

An investigation from the *New York Times* later confirmed what journalists on the ground had been reporting all along — that the trucks were burned by opposition protesters themselves.

Alfred de Zayas, an expert in international law who visited Venezuela as a U.N. representative in 2017, argues that Caracas has grounds to reject offers of “aid” coming from Donald Trump’s White House, given the precedent of aid being wielded as an instrument of U.S. foreign policy.

“We know from experience in Haiti, in the Dominican Republic, Nicaragua, that U.S. humanitarian aid has been used as a trojan horse,” de Zayas says in an interview. “They have brought in weapons for the Contras in Nicaragua which is something that was documented.”

Trump’s special representative for Venezuela, Elliott Abrams, was in fact charged for his involvement in a scheme of delivering weapons as aid to anti-government terrorists in Nicaragua.

According to de Zayas, aid is being “weaponized” by opponents of the Maduro government “in order to facilitate a coup d’etat.” But the most recent shipment of aid from the International Red Cross was accepted, like other aid coming from Russia, China, Cuba, and others.

“If humanitarian aid is offered in good faith, without strings attached, of course the Venezuelan government wants it!” says de Zayas.

## **Sanctions Main Source of Difficulties in Venezuela**

As the U.N. Rapporteur to Venezuela and Ecuador, de Zayas visited the country to meet with officials from Venezuela’s government and opposition, as well as members of numerous non-governmental organizations.

In his report to the Human Rights Council, he suggested that the country’s woes were largely a consequence of external pressures and measures.

“It was a country under an economic war, both an internal war, including sabotage, including contraband of subsidized medicine in Colombia, Brazil etc, and especially an external economic war with a financial blockade,” maintains de Zayas, who was the first U.N. official to visit the South American country in twenty-one years.

The collapse of global oil prices in 2014-2015 is widely regarded as the main driver of the severe decline of Venezuela’s oil-dependent economy. But critics of the Maduro government blame mismanagement and corruption for the continued woes, including mass shortages, hyperinflation, and more recently, rolling blackouts.

Others, including de Zayas, say Venezuela’s oil reliance was exploited to weaken the government, and shortages and inflation have been “induced” by credit agency ratings and the litany of sanctions leveled against the country.

“If you take advantage of that weakness, and then you block the possibility of the government to restructure its sovereign debt, and you make it practically impossible to issue bonds . . . you are trying to give the coup de grace to a country that could be the richest country in Latin America were it not being asphyxiated by the United States.”

## **U.S. Onslaught Against Venezuela’s Economy**

Since the presentation of his report in September 2018, de Zayas says measures to target Venezuela’s economy and government have significantly intensified, making the situation for ordinary citizens more dire.

U.N. Secretary General Antonio Guterres has warned that some 7 million Venezuelans are now in need of aid, as mounting sanctions continue besieging the economy, exacerbating shortages compounded by recent blackouts. And a report by the School of Public Health at Johns Hopkins underscored the deterioration of health indicators in the country—once a source of pride for the Bolivarian Revolution.

In their pursuit of Maduro’s ouster, the United States and its allies have continued their onslaught against Venezuela’s economy, such as seizing its oil assets on U.S. soil, including Citgo and its more than 5,000 branded service stations. Meanwhile, the Bank of England is refusing to allow Caracas access to its gold deposits.

According to de Zayas, these moves are “violations of fundamental principles of international law” meant to force a change in government by making Venezuelans suffer.

His observations have also been echoed by others including Idriss Jazairy, the United Nation’s current special rapporteur on unilateral coercive measures, who calls the sanctions being employed against Venezuela “a very blunt tool to achieve the proclaimed objective.”

U.S. officials are not exactly working to dispel this

characterization, with Secretary of State Mike Pompeo characterizing newly announced sanctions a “tightening of the noose.”

For de Zayas, the “aid” promoted by Washington cannot be

seen as sincere or legitimate, and will not be accepted by Venezuelans. “If you are the tormentor today, you can’t become the savior tomorrow,” he says.

# Illegal Economic Sanctions as Collective Punishment: The Case of Venezuela

*Center for Economic and Policy Research*

## Executive Summary

This paper looks at some of the most important impacts of the economic sanctions imposed on Venezuela by the U.S. government since August of 2017. It finds that most of the impact of these sanctions has not been on the government but on the civilian population.

The sanctions reduced the public’s caloric intake, increased disease and mortality (for both adults and infants), and displaced millions of Venezuelans who fled the country as a result of the worsening economic depression and hyperinflation. They exacerbated Venezuela’s economic crisis and made it nearly impossible to stabilize the economy, contributing further to excess deaths. All of these impacts disproportionately harmed the poorest and most vulnerable Venezuelans.

Even more severe and destructive than the broad economic sanctions of August 2017 were the sanctions imposed by executive order on January 28, 2019 and subsequent executive orders this year; and the recognition of a parallel government, which as shown below, created a whole new set of financial and trade sanctions that are even more constricting than the executive orders themselves.

We find that the sanctions have inflicted, and increasingly inflict, very serious harm to human life and health, including an estimated more than 40,000 deaths from 2017–2018; and that these sanctions would fit the definition of collective punishment of the civilian population as described in both the Geneva and Hague international conventions, to which the U.S. is a signatory. They are also illegal under international law and treaties which the U.S. has signed, and would appear to violate U.S. law as well.

## The August 2017 Sanctions

The August 2017 sanctions prohibited the Venezuelan government from borrowing in U.S. financial markets. This prevented the government from restructuring its foreign debt, because any debt restructuring requires the issuance of new bonds in exchange for the existing debt. Thus, these sanctions prevented the economy from recovering from a deep recession which had already taken a large toll on the population, which along with the economy was more vulnerable to these sanctions and the ones that followed as a result of the economic crisis. Real GDP had already declined by about 24.7 percent from 2013 through 2016, and consumer price inflation for January to August 2017 was probably somewhere between 758 percent and 1,350 percent at an annual rate.

It is important to emphasize that nearly all of the foreign exchange that is needed to import medicine, food, medical equipment, spare parts and equipment needed for electricity generation, water systems, or transportation, is received by the Venezuelan economy

through the government’s revenue from the export of oil. Thus, any sanctions that reduce export earnings, and therefore government revenue, thereby reduce the imports of these essential and, in many cases, life-saving goods.

The August 2017 sanctions adversely impacted oil production in Venezuela. But following the August 2017 executive order, oil production crashed, falling at more than three times the rate of the previous twenty months. This would be expected from the loss of credit and therefore the ability

to cover maintenance and operations and carry out new investments necessary to maintain production levels. This acceleration in the rate of decline of oil production would imply a loss of \$6 billion in oil revenue over the ensuing year.

This by itself is an enormous loss of foreign exchange, relative to the country’s need for essential imports. Imports of food and medicine for 2018 were just \$2.6 billion. Total imports of goods for 2018 were about \$10 billion.

The loss of so many billions of dollars of foreign exchange and government revenues was very likely the main shock that pushed the economy from its high inflation, when the August 2017 sanctions were implemented, into the hyperinflation that followed.

Other executive decisions made by the Trump administration resulted in the closure of Venezuelan accounts in financial institutions, loss of access to credit, and other financial restrictions that have had severe negative impacts on oil production as well as the economy, as detailed in this paper (see <http://cepr.net/images/stories/reports/venezuela-sanctions-2019-04.pdf> for full paper).

The most immediate impact of the January sanctions was to cut off Venezuela from its largest oil market, the United States, which had bought 35.6 percent of Venezuela’s oil exports in 2018, or about 586,000 barrels per day on average. In the week of March 15, U.S. imports of Venezuelan oil fell to zero for the first time, and they remained at zero for another two weeks before rebounding to a fraction of their 2018 average.

The Trump administration also intervened to pressure other countries, including India, not to buy the oil that had been previously imported by the U.S. For example, on March 28, Reuters reported that “[t]he United States has instructed oil trading houses and refiners around the world to further cut dealings with Venezuela



or face sanctions themselves, even if the trades are not prohibited by published U.S. sanctions...”

These threats are effective because the U.S. government can sanction foreign financial institutions who do not comply with its demands.

As a result of these and other efforts Venezuela’s oil production declined by 130,000 barrels per day from January to February. In the six months prior, it was declining by an average of 20,500 barrels per day. Then in March it fell another 289,000 barrels per day, for a total of 431,000 barrels per day. This is an economically devastating 36.4 percent plunge in oil production just since the January sanctions.

This drop, if maintained over the next year, would cut another \$6.8 billion from Venezuela’s available foreign exchange earnings. This is about 21 percent of export earnings from 2018. However, oil export revenues in 2019 are projected to fall by a cataclysmic and unprecedented 67.2 percent from 2018, as a result of the impact of tightening sanctions.

The January sanctions also froze many billions of dollars of Venezuelan assets that could have been sold in order to maintain essential and life-saving imports, or to stabilize the economy. These included most of the government’s \$9 billion in reserves that are in gold; trade credits worth an estimated \$3.4 billion; and CITGO, with estimated net assets of \$5.2 billion.

After the January sanctions and the recognition of Guaidó as “interim president” — which made him, according to the Trump administration and other governments recognizing the parallel government — the legal owner of any funds transferred or goods bought by the Venezuelan government, Venezuela’s access to correspondent banks for international transactions was mostly wiped out. This included access to necessary credits for imports of medicine, food, and other essential goods.

The sanctions have also contributed substantially to the length and economic damage of power outages, including the severe electricity crises in March.

For example, the sanctions have limited Venezuela’s access to diesel fuel, which is needed for its backup thermal generators. Further, Venezuela’s electrical sector relies upon equipment provided by international suppliers such as General Electric. The sanctions prevented the Venezuelan government from paying these companies, thereby increasing reliance on hydroelectric power generation.

### **The Impact of Sanctions on Human Life and Health**

One result of the sanctions, as described above, is to deprive the Venezuelan economy of many billions of dollars of foreign exchange needed to pay for essential and life-saving imports. The sanctions implemented in 2019, including the recognition of a parallel government, accelerated this deprivation and also cut off Venezuela from most of the international payments system, thus ending much of the country’s access to these essential imports including medicine and food — even those that could normally be bought with available dollars. There is no doubt that all of these sanctions since August 2017 have had severe impacts on human life and health.

According to the National Survey on Living Conditions (EN-COVI by its acronym in Spanish), an annual survey of living conditions administered by three Venezuelan universities, there was a 31 percent increase in general mortality from 2017 to 2018. This would imply an increase of more than 40,000 deaths.

More than 300,000 people were estimated to be at risk because of lack of access to medicines or treatment. This includes an estimated 80,000 people with HIV who have not had antiretroviral treatment since 2017, 16,000 people who need dialysis, 16,000 people with cancer, and 4 million with diabetes and hypertension (many of whom cannot obtain insulin or cardiovascular medicine). These numbers by themselves virtually guarantee that the current sanctions, which are much more severe than those implemented before this year, are a death sentence for tens of thousands of Venezuelans. This is especially true if the projected 67 percent drop in oil revenue materializes in 2019.

The accelerating economic collapse that current sanctions have locked in assure further impacts on health, and premature deaths. For example, the increasing collapse of export revenue — and therefore imports — has also created massive public health problems in the areas of water and sanitation. The electricity crisis has also impacted hospitals and health care.

Food imports have dropped sharply along with overall imports; in 2018 they were estimated at just \$2.46 billion, as compared with \$11.2 billion in 2013. They can be expected to plummet further in 2019, along with imports generally, contributing to malnutrition and stunting in children.

The United Nations finds that the groups most vulnerable to the accelerating crisis include children and adolescents (including many who can no longer attend school); people who are in poverty or extreme poverty; pregnant and nursing women; older persons; indigenous peoples; people in need of protection; women and adolescent girls at risk; people with disabilities; and people who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, or intersex.

### **Illegality of the Sanctions**

The unilateral sanctions imposed by the Trump administration are illegal under the Charter of the Organization of American States (OAS), especially articles 19 and 20 of Chapter IV. They are also illegal under international human rights law, as well as treaties signed by the United States.

The sanctions also violate U.S. law. Each executive order since March 2015 declares that the United States is suffering from a “national emergency” because of the situation in Venezuela. This is required by U.S. law in order to impose such sanctions, and the national emergency is invoked under the 1976 *National Emergencies Act*. This is the same law that President Trump invoked in February 2019 when declaring a national emergency to circumvent Congressional appropriation for funds to build a wall along the border with Mexico.

The executive order also states, as required by law, that Venezuela presents “an unusual and extraordinary threat to the national security” of the United States. There is no foundation in fact for either of these declarations.

## I • Standing Up for Rights

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functions to the benefit of the people.

Contending with this growing resistance the Office of the President is acting to further attack rights and eliminate rule of law. In yet another presidential memorandum, Trump is acting to block asylum seekers from obtaining work permits. Since the processing of asylum claims commonly takes at least six months and sometimes years, given the current backlog, this is an effort to starve people out even though they have committed no crime and have the right to asylum. He is also demanding that a fee be charged simply to apply, something directly attempting to turn a right into a privilege of those with sufficient funds.

In addition Trump is demanding that all cases be adjudicated within 180 days. This is yet another attack on immigration judges, who are already under quotas. Judges have spoken out against these measures, saying it is robbing them of their discretion and authority as judges to decide cases. Forcing faster trials also undermines the ability of the migrants involved to secure lawyers and prepare their cases. Both these demands, and the earlier Migrant Protection Protocols (MPP), are undermining the judges and asylum officers trained in refugee law and acting to uphold it.

The memorandum directs Attorney General William P. Barr and acting Homeland Security Secretary Kevin McAleenan to propose regulations within 90 days that would enforce these demands. The memorandum states the goal is “to strengthen asylum procedures to safeguard our system against rampant abuse of our asylum process.” There is no evidence any such abuse exists. It is the case that large numbers of families are being forced to leave their homes as their countries have been engulfed in anarchy and violence as a result of U.S. interference of various kinds, especially in Honduras and El Salvador, where most migrants are currently coming from. Thus more than 103,000 migrants crossed the U.S.-Mexico border last month, the highest level in more than a decade. About 60 percent were Central American

parents traveling with children who, upon arrival on U.S. soil, wherever they crossed, have the right to asylum.

While there is no evidence the migrants are abusing the system, something confirmed by judges and asylum officers, there is abundant evidence that refugees are being unjustly criminalized and terrorized by the government — with families being separated, mothers and children detained for long periods, minors being kept in cages and medical care such that children are dying while in the care of CBP and ICE and people with just claims being sent back to Mexico.

Trump and the government clearly have no solutions to the problems the U.S. state has created, both at home and abroad. They refuse to defend rights while systematically eliminating rule of law. Whether dealing with immigrants and refugees, with police killings and brutality, or with issues of war and peace, such as plans to now militarily invade Venezuela, use of police powers, of which presidential memorandums are one example, are the actions taken. As further evidence of this, Trump is sending hundreds more troops to the border with Mexico and has extended their deployment indefinitely. Clearly there is a connection between imperialist war, potentially against Mexico as well as Venezuela, and the repression of ICE and armed police at home. A government with no solutions and refusing to modernize its institutions must rely on use of force.

As the growing resistance indicates, defending the rights of all is crucial at this time. A common aim for these struggles, both against U.S. wars and interference and for rights, is an anti-war government. An anti-war government upholds the rights of all at home and abroad, brings all U.S. troops home, and stands against war, interference and the genocide of police and military killings. An anti-war government recognizes that democracy today requires the people themselves to be empowered to decide these vital issues and ensure that positive relations are developed that serve the interests of the people at home and abroad.

SIT-IN DEFENDS RIGHTS

# Johns Hopkins Students Demand End to ICE Contracts, No Armed Police on Campus

Students at Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore, Maryland organized a month-long sit-in of their campus administration building, Garland Hall, to stand against the university's plans for an armed police force on campus and its contracts with Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE). They demanded the cancellation of ICE contracts, set to expire this year, and a pledge to donate all money generated by previous contracts to an immigration defense fund. Currently that is about \$1.7 million. Students firmly rejected detention of asylum seekers and criminalization of immigrants and demanded that their university play no part in such crimes.

Students also demanded voluntary recognition for all workers wishing to unionize, and a student and faculty representative on the university's board of trustees. But the main focus throughout the month-long action was that the voice of students be heard and that voice said loud and clear, *No Armed Police on Campus! No ICE Contracts!*

Prior to the decision by the University President Ron Daniels to impose a private armed police force on campus, students said no. As one organizer of the sit-in put it, "Very dangerous state legislation has just passed, granting this university, which is a repeat offender in terms of crimes against Baltimore city residents, with police power. Seventy-five percent of the students at Johns Hopkins said they did not want the police force. A bunch of community associations, primarily across Baltimore, also said that they did not want this armed force.

"There was a letter written by 100 faculty members to the administration who also said they wanted to disarm, de-escalate, de-fund this machine of force that was going to happen. They called for other solutions and investment and things like mediation and community-driven alternatives to policing. As a public health institution, Johns Hopkins University knows better and knows that more policing does not equate with less crime, but that more policing actually causes more anxiety and public health concerns around communities, causes the extraction of wealth from communities and also normalizes state-sanctioned violence and terror against black and brown bodies across the U.S.

"So a lot of the students are challenging and demonstrating against this investment in the mass incarceration system and the school-to-prison pipeline, and are demanding Johns Hopkins reinvest that money into community-driven alternatives that actually support the sustainability and wellness of people in Baltimore."

The sit-in was broadly supported by the faculty, who passed



a unanimous faculty assembly resolution. The surrounding community was also supportive and that support grew over the course of the sit-in. This included support from community organizations and church groups who visited students in the building and publicly expressed their support.

Students repeatedly demanded to meet with Daniels, but he refused, saying he would only speak with them if they left the administration building. Given they had been trying to meet with him for more than a year to present their demands and concerns, this response was recognized as yet more refusal. Instead of leaving students put leaflets and banners up and organized meetings and various events to inform their fellow students and all concerned about the need to block an armed police force on campus and to reject any relations with ICE. In doing so they made a clear connection between use of force at the border with Mexico and against immigrants and use of force against students, especially minorities, who are routinely brutalized and profiled. Students brought out that Baltimore police are already known for their killing of unarmed African Americans. They have no doubt a private armed police force on campus would be even worse, as they would not be accountable in any way to the public.

### **Armed Police Do Not Bring Safety**

Students also rejected the administration claims that armed police would make the campus more safe. Many women student for example said investigating sexual assault on campus would do a lot more to provide for the safety of students. One out of three undergrads face sexual assault. And recently, somehow, 18 documented cases of sexual assault were deleted from the

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## NO DETENTION, NO DEPORTATIONS, NO TROOPS ON THE BORDER

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computer records in what the administration claims was a “computer glitch.” Students are rightly concerned not only for the safety of women but also for all the minorities and LGBTQ students who will no doubt be profiled and harassed by such a private force.

The university also threatened students with disciplinary actions. And while they refused to put anything in writing in regard to the concerns raised, they did create a paper trail for “violations” by the students. As another organizer said,

“I think they’re creating a paper trail in order to pursue disciplinary actions against students as soon as the sit-in is over. So it’s quite alarming that there are these methods being used to intimidate protesters, intimidate students, as well as we’ve heard reports that the Dean’s Office has been calling faculty members, especially faculty members who are in more precarious positions, and threatening them, to discourage them from supporting the sit-in. Anyone who is stepping in the space is also being pursued and surveilled in these ways, which is extremely alarming and which actually gives credibility to our concerns about what Hopkins would do with its own private, armed police force on campus and beyond and in the community.”

At the same time they refused a student and faculty proposal for mediation to address concerns and resolve the problems. The Faculty Senate proposed a neutral, non-Hopkins-affiliated, mutually agreed-upon mediator. The administration said no. Students and faculty also called for more public meetings so that people in the community could voice their concerns about ICE and police profiling and killings and alternatives to use of force, and that too was rejected.

Students also spoke to an on-going struggle in Baltimore for justice for African American Tyrone West. He was killed by police from Morgan State University. Morgan State has a private armed force that Johns Hopkins is using as its model for its force. Tyrone’s sister, Tawanda Jones, has been holding weekly protests for more than 300 weeks now, demanding justice for her brother and accountability for all police killings. As she said, “These police killings are not isolated incidents by far. It’s systemically happening. It’s happening all over the world. . . . Accountability looks like those officers involved in my brother’s brutal execution be held accountable.” The state claims West killed himself, while a family autopsy indicates he was killed by police when they surrounded and restrained him. That this was a police killing is indicated by the city paying the family a \$1 million settlement.



No police were even charged and no high ranking officials charged either.

Students and the community are well aware that in the last several years, campus police officers have used racist profiling and force in handling incidents, including those with students with mental health issues. Students elsewhere who were suicidal or experiencing psychotic episodes have been shot dead by police. In April, an African American couple, unarmed and fully compliant during a traffic stop, was shot by police near Yale University (not fatally). One of the officers was from Yale’s police department, prompting protests that shut down two campus thoroughfares.

Concerned for their safety, their rights and the rights of all those on campus and in the community, on May 1, after weeks of demanding that the administration meet, students at Johns Hopkins shut down Garland Hall. They chained the doors shut and chained themselves to railings and staircases inside. They left open the door to the president’s office.

Students put up posters and leaflets on the windows and doors of the building, detailing their rejection of armed police on campus and ICE contracts. A large banner on the staircase reads, “No private police. No ICE contracts. Justice for Tyrone West.” They raised more than \$2700 to provide themselves with food and other necessities.

The students wrote on Facebook, “Rather than taking responsibility for the harm inflicted on our community, President Daniels and his administration have chosen to willfully ignore our concerns while directing the vast resources of the university to further entrench a climate of fear, intimidation and surveillance.”

On May 5, Daniels made an about-face and said he would meet with students, outside the building. But most saw this as a ploy. They called for a neutral, mutually agreed-upon mediator to conduct the negotiations and that students, professors and staff who participated in the protests would not be punished. They also wanted to be let back into the building and not be arrested if the talks went awry. Daniels refused. Far from acting to peacefully resolve the situation, the president called in the police to clear the building. A force of more than 80 police descended on the building. Seven students were arrested. As they were forced out students made clear they will continue to fight, chanting, “No Justice, No Peace, No Private Police,” and “No Justice, No Peace, No ICE in Our Streets.”

# Phoenix Organizes to House Migrant Families

Phoenix, Arizona is one of the main cities where Custom and Border Patrol (CBP) and Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) are releasing migrant families awaiting asylum claims, often with no food or water. Sometimes the families, many with young children, are just dumped at the bus station and left to fend for themselves. Many people in Phoenix active in defending the migrant families felt this was a way to further terrorize the families while overwhelming those organizing against detentions and deportations and for the right to asylum. But the Phoenix community responded by stepping up their efforts, organizing a wide network of 30 churches and other facilities to house and feed about 1,400 migrants a week, many of them families with young children. Generally, families released in Phoenix only stay about a week until transportation is available to reach their sponsors or other families members in other cities.

Recently, in what appears to be a direct effort by CBP and ICE to undermine the organizing efforts, many migrant families are now being released in nearby Yuma. Yuma is a city of about 100,000, with one migrant shelter housing 200 people. Officials there were told the shelter was only to serve as an “overflow” for migrants who could not be released at shelters in Phoenix.

Since October, the Border Patrol had been transferring migrant families detained in Yuma to ICE, which then transported them to Phoenix. But at the end of March, the arrangement suddenly changed and CBP began transferring fewer families to ICE custody and instead began releasing them in Yuma.

In April, Yuma Mayor Douglas Nicholls was forced to declare a state of emergency to deal with the flood of migrant families being released by CBP. Meanwhile, Phoenix saw a significant decrease in families and the hundreds of beds available were going empty. Organizers say the government is purposely creating chaos and striving to make conditions more difficult for migrants and communities alike.

Another example involves St. Vincent De Paul in Phoenix. In late March, the church agreed to let ICE release up to 100 migrants daily at one of its dining halls to provide a safe place for them to stay during the day until they could be driven to local churches to spend the night. The opening of the dining hall was intended to prevent ICE from dumping large groups of migrant families at the Greyhound bus station, or on the street, as the agency had done on several occasions before the network of churches had been developed.

But just two days after the St. Vincent De Paul dining hall opened to migrant families, the CBP announced it had started releasing migrant families in Yuma instead. CBP is also releasing families in Blythe, a city of only about 20,000 on the Arizona line. They are doing so even though many of the migrant families released in

Yuma and Blythe are headed to cities in Eastern states, and must pass through Phoenix anyway. Yet CBP and ICE are organizing to not bring them to Phoenix.

Data provided by Lutheran Social Services of the Southwest, one of the main defenders of migrant families in Phoenix, shows that during the 11-day period from April 14 to April 25, the number of migrants released by ICE in Phoenix fluctuated between 50 and 234 daily. On all but one day during that period, the number of migrants released by ICE fell far below capacity at the nearly 30 churches currently providing shelter on a rotating basis.

For example, on April 25, ICE released 70 migrants in Phoenix on a day when the capacity at local churches was 220. So far this fiscal year, the Border Patrol has seen a 374% increase in the number of migrant families arriving at the border compared to the same period last year, from 39,975 to 189,584, according to CBP data.

In the Border Patrol’s Yuma sector, apprehensions of migrant families have increased 273% so far this fiscal year, from 6,487 to 24,194, the data shows. ICE released 153,000 between December 21 and April 22, according to statistics provided by the agency. Of those, 26,700 were released by ICE in Arizona, 14,800 in San Diego area, 49,300 in El Paso area and 62,200 in the San Antonio area.

Immigrant rights organizers emphasize that migrant families are fleeing horrendous conditions in their home countries, often created by U.S. interference, and have a legal right to pursue their asylum case in the U.S. Many also feel ICE and CBP are acting in a manner to justify further attacks on migrant families and at the border more generally. “I think the broad goal in all of this is to create the impression that our country is under siege by refugees from Central America,” said an attorney who is executive director of Refugee Aid. The Phoenix-based non-profit collects food, clothing and other necessities to distribute to migrants released by ICE and some volunteers also host migrant families in their homes.

Loyal Rabat, a spokeswoman for the Phoenix Restoration Project, another community group helping migrant families, feels the Trump administration is intentionally creating chaos in border communities to provide ammunition to attack the Flores agreement, a court-settlement that prevents the federal government from holding migrant families who ask for asylum for more than 20 days. She also worries that the Trump administration is trying to justify plans to build large detention facilities to hold migrant families indefinitely by creating chaos in border communities.

In Phoenix, as in El Paso, San Antonio, San Diego and many other cities contending with government attacks on migrant families, people are rejecting these efforts to justify further criminalization and dehumanizing of people and instead stepping up efforts to defend the rights of all.

**Visit our website: [usmlo.org](http://usmlo.org)**

**“IT IS INHUMANE TO TREAT AN ASYLUM-SEEKER LIKE A CRIMINAL”**

## **Wisconsin Community Rejects Private Detention Center**

*Maria Perez, Milwaukee Journal Sentinel, May 5, 2019*

Plans to build the first privately run immigration detention center in Wisconsin are off the table — at least for now — part of a larger trend in which companies that build them are being encouraged by federal officials but resisted at the state and local level.

For at least a year, Virginia-based Immigration Centers of America wanted to build a 500-bed detention center in St. Croix County. The company said it would generate more than 200 full-time jobs and millions of dollars in state and local tax revenue.

However, earlier this month it withdrew its proposal to build in New Richmond. Public outcry over the plan was fierce, with residents opposing the detention of immigrants, and expressing concerns about use of tax dollars and property values. The city’s staff had issued a report recommending officials reject the application for rezoning and related ordinance changes, saying the project did not fit in the city’s development plan.

### **Knocking on doors**

After the St. Croix plans were made public in early April, a wave of public rejection spread through the area. St. Croix County Supervisor Daniel Hansen, who represents some New Richmond wards, was one of the first to organize opposition against the center. He said he believes it is immoral to incarcerate those who are fleeing their country and trying to seek refuge in the U.S.

“I feel it’s inhumane to treat an asylum-seeker like a criminal,” he said. He contacted a couple of advocacy groups, ordered some signs opposing the project and prepared a list of reasons why he thought the project would be bad for the city.

Hansen knocked on doors, called friends and reached out to others to build a campaign. He said both Democrats and Republicans were against the project. [...]

Groups around Wisconsin were also organizing against the project. The American Civil Liberties Union-Wisconsin supported the opposition efforts and immigrant advocacy group Voces de la Frontera was getting ready to send a delegation to New Richmond. “This is a for-profit business that is making money out of discrimination and breaking up families and our economy,” Christine Neumann-Ortiz, the group’s executive director, said before the proposal was withdrawn. “This has no place in Wisconsin.”

New Richmond Alderwoman Scottie Ard said she lost count of the number of calls she received opposing the project. “Most of the callers had not only a moral objection to a detention center, but they also have the objection that this is not what we want our community to be known for,” she said. [...]



Immigration Centers of America’s experience in St. Croix County echoes what is happening elsewhere in the country. The federal government is trying to open centers amid a crush of individuals from Central America seeking asylum, and an increase in arrests of immigrants living in the U.S. by U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE).

The number of detainees has rapidly increased since fiscal year 2016, when ICE held an average of 34,376 immigrants on any given day. The average for this fiscal year, as of March, was 45,155, said ICE spokeswoman Nicole Alberico.

And yet, even in counties like St. Croix that voted for Donald Trump...plans have not worked out. Immigration Centers of America, which owns a detention facility in Virginia, also has been trying to secure two multimillion-dollar federal contracts to open detention centers in Illinois and Michigan.

The company has run into opposition there, too.

Michigan Governor Gretchen Whitmer canceled earlier this year the sale of a shuttered state prison in Ionia that the company hoped to use as a detention center, saying the company could not guarantee it would not be holding adults separated from their children at the border. ICA spokesman John Truscott said the company is looking at other options near Detroit.

In Illinois, the Village of Dwight board voted in favor of the company’s request to annex a property where they plan to build a 1,200-bed immigration detention center in March despite the opposition of immigrant advocates. But the plan may yet be blocked, as state lawmakers are pushing for legislation banning private detention centers. The bill passed the Illinois House in early April.

Fred Tsao, with the Illinois Coalition for Immigrants and Refugee Rights, said immigrant detention is cruel and unnecessary. “One can make a detention facility as nice as you can, but it’s still a jail, it’s still a prison,” he said. [...]

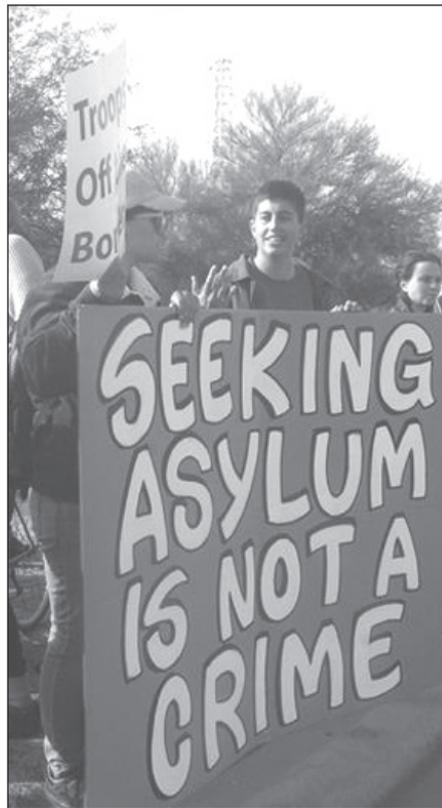
# Asylum Officers Speaking Out Against Trump Program that Attacks Refugees

The Trump administration launched what it terms its Migrant Protection Protocols (MPP) program in January and has expanded it ever since. MPP sends people seeking asylum back to Mexico to wait while their claim is processed through the immigration courts, something which commonly takes at least six months and often years. Previously, people would be released to family members already in the U.S. or sponsors like churches and community organizations. The program directly involves asylum officers, who are trained to determine if people seeking asylum have a reasonable fear of being persecuted, tortured or killed if they are returned to their own countries.

This corps of asylum officers is distinct from Customs and Border Patrol (CBP) and Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) and not an armed force. One of their main jobs is to ensure the U.S. is upholding international and U.S. law concerning refugees. An asylum officer has to make sure an asylum seeker would not be persecuted if they are turned away from the U.S.: to uphold a fundamental principle of refugee law called non-refoulement, that a government must not send a migrant back to a country where they would be persecuted or imperiled.

Trump's MPP program is eliminating their discretion and also creating difficulties for the asylum seekers, as they are being sent back to Mexico, not their home countries. In January, under the MPP protocols, Trump started sending some Central American asylum seekers — first a handful a week, then dozens, now hundreds — back to Mexico after initial processing, with instructions to show up at a port of entry at a particular date for a hearing before an immigration judge on their asylum case. Lawyers and human rights advocates, say there is no way for immigrants to obtain U.S. lawyers while in Mexico; that they may not be able to return to the U.S. in time for their hearings; and, fundamentally, that northern Mexico is not necessarily a safe place for Central Americans fleeing persecution to be — that the U.S. would be violating the principle of non-refoulement.

The role that asylum officers are being forced to play in the MPP process is very different from the one they have typically played. Normally, a migrant has to pass a screening interview with an asylum officer in order to apply for asylum; if they fail, they are deported to their home country. Under MPP, though, migrants are automatically allowed to apply for asylum before a judge in the U.S. — the asylum officer now just determines



whether they are sent back to Mexico in the meantime.

Asylum officers are now speaking out against MPP and the current process where their discretion is being eliminated and people with legitimate fears about staying in Mexico are being sent back. They worry that they are being used to whitewash the program, and claim they do not actually have as much power to allow migrants to stay in the U.S. if they are in danger as the Trump administration has publicly stated.

In interviews with *Vox*, officers, who are also union members, spoke out. One officer explained that he had listened to a Central American's story of threats from drug cartels during his journey through Mexico en route to the U.S., and believed the man's life was in danger. "This was a guy truly afraid he was going to be murdered, and frankly, he might be," the officer said.

But the officer "wasn't even allowed to make an argument" that the asylum seeker should be allowed to stay in the U.S. to pursue his case. He signed — feeling he

had no choice — a form stating the migrant was not likely to be persecuted in Mexico, and therefore could be safely returned. "We were enlisted to give our blessing through these interviews," another officer said. "It's our names on the forms."

Many asylum officers think the integrity of their office is at stake — along with their names. For decades, officers made judgment calls on whether a person could stay in the U.S. to await an asylum hearing. Under the new rules, officers say they effectively have no power to do so. "I'm not adjudicating that case," said one. Another asylum officer described the interviews as "pro forma" — just for show.

## **A new legal standard that is all but impossible to meet**

Normally, after an asylum interview, the officer summarizes the facts of the case and reads them back to the applicant. Then the officer writes up a legal analysis that considers whether the interviewee is describing persecution (of a specific ethnicity, nationality, political opinion, religion, or "particular social group") or torture, and how likely it is that they would face such persecution or torture if returned to their home country.

For most screening interviews, the interviewee must show a "credible fear" — a deliberately generous standard designed to err on the side of non-refoulement. "If I want to go negative on someone" in a credible fear screening, says an asylum officer, "I

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## NO DETENTION, NO DEPORTATIONS, NO TROOPS ON THE BORDER

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have to turn over every rock” to demonstrate they lack a credible argument. The officer submits the legal analysis with their final ruling on whether the interviewee should be allowed to avoid deportation and seek legal status in the U.S.

MPP is completely different, “You are not adjudicating sh--,” one union member said. “You’re documenting a conversation.” Traditional screening standards do not apply. Instead, a migrant put into the MPP process has to show that they are “more likely than not” to face persecution in Mexico in order to be kept in the U.S. before their hearings. That is a higher standard than either “credible fear” or “reasonable fear.” And it is not a standard that asylum officers are familiar with. In practice, these union members say, it is all but impossible for applicants to meet.

“The legal standard requires such specific and persuasive testimony that it leaves virtually no doubt — not ‘could,’ ‘would,’ or ‘might,’ but ‘will be,’” one union member said. “No one can satisfy that burden.” Another officer said it felt like the standard was closer to requiring 90 or 95 percent to qualify as “more likely,” rather than 51.

As one officer put it, asylum seekers are “scared, unprepared, exhausted” — and do not understand they could be sent back to Mexico. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) agents, typically the first U.S. immigration authorities that these asylum seekers encounter when they cross into the U.S., do not ask asylum seekers whether they are afraid of being returned to Mexico, and will only refer them to an asylum officer if they *voluntarily* mention they are afraid of return. One asylum officer said that a CBP agent said they were “instructed not to ask” about fear of return to Mexico; another CBP agent told an asylum officer, “We don’t want to spoon-feed them” any supposed asylum magic words.

Asylum officers said interviewees did not understand why they were being asked about Mexico. They were afraid of being returned to their home country, and tried to stress that. If anything, asylum seekers appeared to know far less about Mexico, a country they had only spent a few days traveling through, than the officers interviewing them. That meant interviewees could not give detailed enough answers to make a persuasive case to stay in the U.S. [...]

As one officer emphasized, exhausted and confused immigrants simply “don’t have the tools” to give that testimony and satisfy doubts about whether they would face persecution in Mexico. They certainly do not have the ability to articulate a “particular social group” they were being targeted as a member of.

In normal screenings, that would not be a problem. “All of our training for all these years teaches us how to identify particular social groups,” union head Michael Knowles says. “You may not be able to Google it, but if you’re talking to someone and they name the elements,” an asylum officer can make the determination. But with MPP, asylum officers are not being



asked to synthesize answers or provide any legal analysis; they are just checking boxes on a form and submitting it to their supervisors for review.

In other words, the training asylum officers are given to elicit testimony and translate it into legal language — to take the experiences and fears of traumatized immigrants and apply legal standards that the migrants themselves have never heard of — is cast aside.

Approvals are rare. The ones that are granted are scrutinized by higher-ups. Normally, if a supervisor disagrees with a final decision, they can ask the asylum officer to go back and redo it. Knowles himself, who has been an asylum officer since the creation of a dedicated asylum corps in the early 1990s, has had only three cases where a supervisor disagreed with his assessment, and “in none of those cases,” he says, “was I forced to do something I didn’t believe in.”

For MPP, “If you want to go positive, you will face Herculean efforts to get it through,” explained one officer. “If your supervisor says yes, headquarters will probably say no.” Officers said that decisions to let an asylum seeker stay are often reviewed and blocked or overturned by asylum headquarters.

Multiple asylum officers also reported that a supervisor was told not to issue any positive MPP decisions without checking with the other officers on their team, and with headquarters. One reported that the supervisor was told that “the front office” — upper-level management — “has eyes on these cases,” and that “they’ve already been complaining about you granting people.”

In two other cases, union members said, both the asylum officer conducting the interview and the supervisor agreed that

an interviewee who had been kidnapped by cartels while traveling through Mexico should not be sent back, but headquarters overruled them.

In both cases, part of the explanation for the denial was that the cartels had not explicitly named the “particular social group” identified by the asylum officer as the reason they were targeting the migrant — something that, again, officers say they are usually trusted to identify themselves.

Typically, one union member said, asylum officers are taught to use a “reasonable man” standard — if a reasonable person could conclude, based on the facts available, that someone was being targeted based on group membership, that is sufficient to allow them to stay. (In one of the cases overruled by headquarters, for example, the asylum seeker was treated differently from his fellow captives — something that under a “reasonable man” standard could have been used to demonstrate he was being targeted whether the cartels explicitly said so or not.) But in this case, they said, “I wasn’t allowed to go positive” on those grounds.

The asylum corps already considered that their authority as a trained force was being eliminated while asylum law was being violated. They have had to implement other Trump administration decisions, for example those eliminating domestic and gang violence as a basis for claims.

To many, MPP feels like a bright line has been crossed: They are no longer being trusted to do their jobs, no longer allowed to use the discretion they are supposed to have as adjudicators to protect the integrity of the asylum system while upholding the principle of non-refoulement. Even if the courts eventually put MPP on hold, the experience of the officers on the ground indicates there will just be some other attempt to override their discretion and force them to push people back when they have a legitimate asylum claim. Their concern is that the just rights



of those claiming asylum, and their role in upholding them, will be eliminated. So many are speaking out and rejecting these attacks on the right to asylum.

### **Asylum Officers May Be Replaced By CBP**

Asylum officers, who have specialized training and are not organized as an enforcement force, like ICE and CBP, are also concerned that they will be replaced. The White House is pressuring the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) to raise the standards for traditional screening interviews. Trump also recently issued orders for yet more restrictions and higher requirements. The president and DHS are

also reportedly laying the groundwork for CBP agents — who are assumed to be “tougher” on migrants and have no training concerning refugees — to conduct those interviews instead.

The asylum officers say they have already seen a situation where the U.S. asylum system has turned its back on people fleeing persecution in their home countries. And even if the specific “return to Mexico” policy is held up in court, they worry a fundamental norm has been broken that cannot be repaired. [A federal court temporarily blocked the new MPP policy of forcing asylum seekers to return to Mexico and remain there while their cases are considered. However, an appeals court issued a stay, so the program is still in force. As the officers indicate, on the ground the policy is being implemented and they are being forced to whitewash it — *VOR* Ed. Note]. The asylum corps knows well that CBP is not in a position to uphold refugee law, and that removing them is part of the whole process now underway to undermine international law. Many want no part of it and certainly do not want their names used to justify these attacks. More and more are speaking out and demanding that refugee law and their authority to determine eligibility for asylum be respected.

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workers, long an integral part of the single U.S. working class, are among those organizing the actions and contributing their experience in opposing the racism and brutality of the U.S. state, here and in their home countries. Teachers too, especially in states like West Virginia, North and South Carolina, are among those in the forefront of demonstrations, standing for the equal right to education. This includes organizing for the working conditions necessary to provide the learning conditions students require. Their battles are posing the need to modernize education and provide a greater role for teachers and students alike in deciding how best to do this. There were also many signs opposing war against Venezuela and demanding an end to all U. S. wars. Everywhere, there was a strong sense of unity and the urgency to contend with the many attacks on the peoples abroad and workers, women, youth and minorities here at home. The many actions embodied the striving of the working class and people to defend the rights of all and the need to further step up this work.

There is also great concern with the dysfunction of government and the divisive and polarizing politics of the rich. Everyone has to contend with the constant disinformation of the rich that the role of workers is to line up behind one or the other of the ruling factions and remain stuck with the old institutions of U.S.-style democracy. Such disinformation is increasing as the 2020 presidential elections begin. It is designed to block organizing for what people feel is needed — a new direction for the country, one that is to the advantage of the peoples here and abroad, not the rich. A new direction for the economy and political affairs is needed to solve the pressing problems of the day, like war and peace, impoverishment, inequality and protecting the environment.

May Day is a time for serious political discussion on this new direction and the role of the working class in leading this struggle and averting the dangers posed by the rulers. It is a time to *look* at the situation from our own independent vantage point, armed with our own thinking and politics. Reacting to and limiting ourselves to the old, to an electoral set up designed to keep us out of power and an economy that cannot guarantee the rights of the people simply will not do. Such limitations are not on a par with the strength, experience and vitality of the U.S. working class.

USMLO calls on workers, women and youth to engage in discussion on the aim of an *Anti-War Government, Peace Economy and a Democracy Where We Decide!* We consider that this embodies the new direction required and provides a means to look at conditions from our vantage point, from the needs of the new. This is especially important today, when conditions of civil war are evident, with the rulers vying for power and clashes among the vying authorities at the local, state and federal level, including the armed agencies, are intensifying. The pressure to line up behind one or the other faction, or to succumb to pressure that the situation is hopeless and the people helpless is also intensifying.

The rulers have no solutions and are desperate to keep the workers divided and stuck with their old, dysfunctional system. Why accept such a rotten state of affairs?

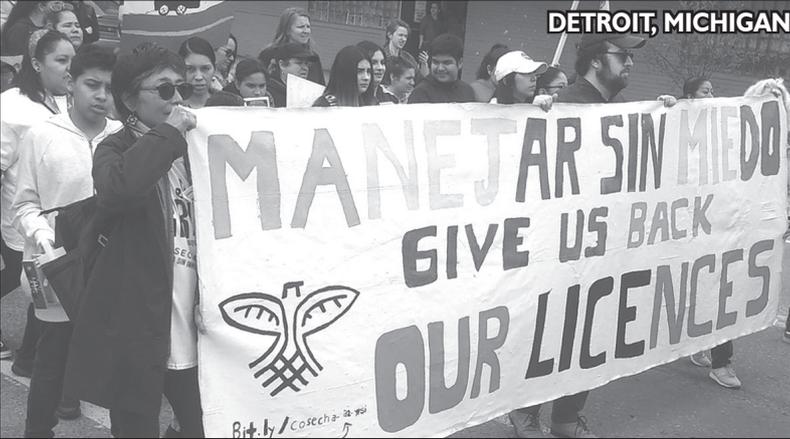
Now is the time to debate solutions of our own, whether for the workplace, our cities, states and country. Let such debate start with an aim that unites the many struggles and advances a new direction: *Unite and Fight for an Anti-War Government, Peace Economy and a Democracy Where We Decide!*

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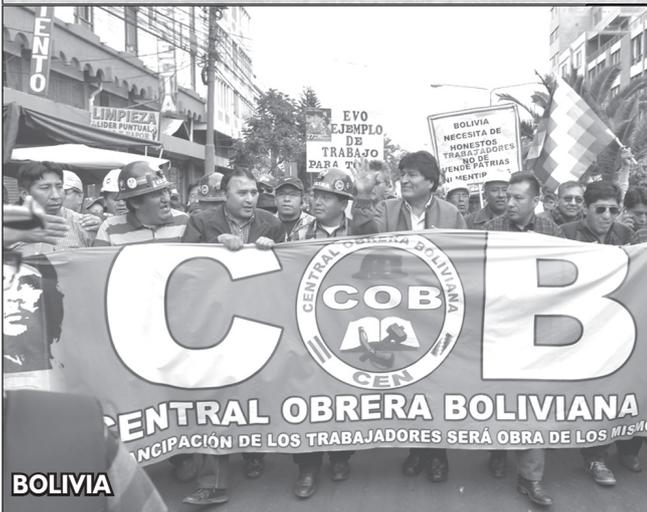
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