

Buffalo Forum



**Local Publication of the
U.S. Marxist-Leninist Organization**

Workers of all countries, unite!

IN THIS ISSUE:

- **Bring U.S. Troops Home Now** I-5
- **Target Racist U.S. State** 6-7
- **Organize Anti-War Alternative in Schools** 8-12
- **Salute Venezuelan People and Their Constituent Assembly**..... I3-I6

August 25, 2017

Vol. 21 #8

Action Needed Now to Counter Lead Poisoning

Buffalo continues to have a lead poisoning crisis—hundreds of children were diagnosed with dangerous lead levels again last year. Yet the city and county and state are not taking the action necessary to defend the rights of children to safe homes and water. Despite legislation being passed by the Common Council in May of 2016, high levels of lead poisoning persist.

For example, in 2016, 257 children in Buffalo were diagnosed with high blood-lead levels that will likely cause serious and irreversible brain damage and other health problems. It is estimated that another 1,000 children tested positive for lower—but still very dangerous—lead levels that are not counted in state and county data. This is because the state and county refuse to use the standard demanded by the Center for Disease Control (CDC) of 5 micrograms per deciliter of blood. That is the equivalent of one grain of sugar dropped in 3.3 gallons of water—meaning minute amounts of lead in the blood cause severe damage. In fact, the CDC considers no levels of lead safe, meaning there are likely hundreds more children in need of immediate assistance. For parents and teachers concerned about lead poisoning, make use of the city's hotline by calling 311 and demanding action now!

Despite knowledge of the problem,

Action Needed on Lead Poisoning • I

END CRIMINAL WAR AGAINST AFGHANISTAN

To Win Peace, Bring All U.S. Troops Home Now!

On August 21, President Trump put forward what was called a “new strategy” for Afghanistan and South Asia. The plans include, once again, sending more troops to Afghanistan, though when and how many was not announced. It also included more threats against Pakistan, which has long been targeted by U.S. drones and black

ops by Special Forces. Trump said, “We can no longer be silent about Pakistan’s safe havens for terrorist organizations, the Taliban, and other groups that pose a threat to the region and beyond. Pakistan has much to gain from partnering with our effort in Afghanistan. It has much to

Troops Home Now • 3

STATE-ORGANIZED RACIST ATTACK IN CHARLOTTESVILLE

To Strengthen Resistance, Target Racist U.S. State

Charlottesville, Virginia witnessed a state organized racist attack, as Nazis and the KKK—both known to be funded and armed by state agencies like the FBI—rallied. The few hundred brought in from around the country were met by many hundreds of demonstrators opposing racism and fascism. That the state was directly involved was evident by police actions, with police withdrawing as

efforts by the Nazis to provoke fistfights and violence unfolded. The usual police barricades and police lines that are commonly present at anti-war and anti-KKK rallies were nowhere to be seen as a car roared into the anti-Nazi and anti-KKK demonstrators, killing one young woman and injuring many others.

The firm stand of the demonstrators
Target Racist U.S. State • 6

PROVIDE ANTI-WAR ALTERNATIVE IN OUR SCHOOLS

Organize to Counter War and Government Racism

The recent state organized racist attacks in Charlottesville have again brought the issue of opposing government racism to the fore. The fact that the police actually withdrew, and did nothing to block the car used to kill one demonstrator and injure many others standing against racism, indicates that what happened is not simply bad individuals. Further, what is often left out is the connection between war abroad and state organized racist attacks at home. Both aim to keep the people divided and fighting among themselves

— so as to keep the rulers in power and the people out.

The U.S. military and police agencies are instruments for enforcing U.S. racism and repression, abroad and at home. The military conducts its wars abroad using racism, dehumanizing whole peoples and striving to whip up hatred against them as “enemies.” It is also known for its racism within its ranks. There have been KKK gatherings on military grounds. Half of the troops sent to the Persian Gulf, for
Provide Anti-War Alternative • 8

***Support the
Building of the
Communist
Press!***

**Subscribe to
VOICE OF
REVOLUTION**

The national paper of the U.S. Marxist-Leninist Organization. VOR works to raise the level of political discussion in society by taking stands that provide a way forward, oppose the chauvinism and racism of the U.S. state, and advance the interests of the working class and people. VOR also reports on the organizing work to build the alternative by Creating Politics of Empowerment. Together It Can Be Done! Read, write and distribute VOR.

office@usmlo.org
www.usmlo.org

Buffalo Forum

The local edition. Send us your views, comments, letters, and reports on activities. *Buffalo Forum* will respond to all serious letters to further develop political discussion with its readers. We want to know what you think!

716-602-8077
buffaloforum@usmlo.org
www.usmlo.org/buffaloforum

***Join in this
Vital Work!
Help Build the
Discussion!***

Subscriptions:

One year: \$65
Sustainer levels start at \$100
(Monthly payment plans available from your distributor.)

**Send check or money
order payable to:
USMLO, P.O. Box 331
Buffalo, NY 14209**

**Join Buffalo State Students for Revolution
Organize Against War and for Equality and Rights**

What does it mean to be a revolutionary today? What role for political empowerment and decision making by and for the people?

The danger of more war is growing and we need to build our unity and strength. We need action with analysis to be effective.

Join in defending the rights of all and opposing state-organized racist attacks like occurred in Charlottesville, and that occur daily through mass incarceration, police killings, detention camps, raids against immigrants and Muslims.

Organize for an anti-war alternative, on campus and with high schools students

**Organize to be Politically Effective • Work on Solutions
Discuss Creating a Democracy Where We Decide!**

Meet Wednesday 12:00 in the Library Study Quad • For more info: 716-602-8077

I • ACTION NEED ON LEAD POISONING

only 93 homes have been visited by a contractor to conduct inspections and risk assessments for potential lead paint hazards. That is a fraction of the 85,000 homes in Buffalo at risk for lead paint hazards, 12,000 of which have documented lead problems where children under the age of six live.

In addition, not a single landlord has submitted a required compliance letter with the city to confirm that they and their tenant are aware that lead paint is presumed to be in homes built before 1978. Only 14 of 832 property managers have signed up to obtain mandatory certifications on how to safely paint and remodel apartments that contain lead paint.

This past year the Erie County Health Department completed fewer unannounced home inspections for chipping and peeling paint in the city's most at-risk neighborhoods than it did in 2014. Inspections are down despite the hiring of more inspectors last summer.

Neighborhoods on the city's West and East sides accounted for three of the four upstate ZIP codes reporting the most new cases of lead poisoning, according to the state's most-recent

comparable data for a three-year period ending in 2012. The Erie County Health Department considers chipping and peeling paint in homes built before 1978 to be the chief cause of lead poisoning in Buffalo.

Lead in water is another major problem. The two most-tested ZIP codes this year and last – 94 of 289 samples – were in Buffalo's East Side. From 2014 to 2016, the county reported 221 children with elevated blood-lead levels in these two overwhelmingly African American neighborhoods, and it is known there are many more. Most are not receiving the aid and assistance needed to eliminate the problem. It is the children who pay the price for such government inaction, a crime by any definition.

Teachers and their union, together with the environmental expertise from Buffalo State and UB, can play an important role in assisting with identification of children with ANY level of lead poisoning and with the testing of water needed. It is clear that organized action by the people themselves is required, as continued waiting for the government to act has not solved this problem.

I • TROOPS HOME NOW

lose by continuing to harbor terrorists.” This is an echo of Bush’s statement, you are either with us, or with the terrorists. That is, the U.S. decides who is or is not a terrorist, including labeling whole countries as such, as is being done here against Pakistan.

Trump said he will also “expand authority for American armed forces to target the terrorist and criminal networks that sow violence and chaos throughout Afghanistan. These killers need to know they have nowhere to hide – that no place is beyond the reach of American arms.” Meaning not only Afghanistan but all the countries of the region are subject to more aggression, more drone attacks, more black ops and assassinations, which have already meant deaths of millions of women, children and other citizens in Iraq, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Syria, Palestine and Yemen. Trump did not speak to the fact that U.S. aggression has solved no problem and has done far more to destroy the human productive powers in the region.

There are no facts to indicate that more troops and more aggression against the peoples of Afghanistan and Pakistan will end these criminal U.S. wars. There



is nothing on the ground to indicate that continued U.S. occupation of Afghanistan will bring anything other than more death and destruction. On the contrary, the same basic approach has been used for almost 17 years with the same result. The aim is clearly not a political resolution favoring the peoples of the region — it is more war for purposes of more destruction. What is evident is that the just resistance of the peoples to U.S. aggression in all the Middel East remains firm in demanding their right to be, their right to determine their own affairs.

Trump also attempts to define “victory,” saying, “Victory will have a clear definition: attacking our enemies, obliterating ISIS, crushing al Qaeda, preventing the Taliban from taking over Afghanistan, and stopping mass terror attacks against America before they emerge.” Victory is not peace and an end to armed conflict through a political resolution. The definition instead justifies broader war and more aggression, wherever ISIS and

al-Qaeda or any other “terrorist” may be, as the U.S. decides.

The solution required, and one that meets the interests of the peoples of the region and the U.S., is to *Bring All U.S. Troops Home Now*. It is to *Stop Funding War and Fund Rights, Abroad and at Home!* Removing U.S. troops from the equation opens the way for the peoples of the region to solve their own problems as they see fit, and for people in the U.S. to stand together with all those fighting for their rights. It provides the means for relations of mutual

respect and benefit which directly contribute to peace.

To accomplish such a direction, organizing for an anti-war government is needed. The work involves standing against all U.S. wars and all the crimes against the peoples. This involves not only continued demonstrations to strengthen the organized quality of resistance, but also opposing the military in our schools and providing an anti-war alternative for students and young workers. It requires a new direction for political affairs, so as to develop an electoral process that empowers the people to govern and decide. The current set-up blocks the people from power, prevents the anti-war will of the majority from being exercised. The fight for an anti-war government is also a fight for a democracy of our own making, we, the people decide. This issue of *Who Decides* cannot be left to chance, cannot be left to the existing institutions and constitution, which ensure the people are blocked from deciding these vital issues of war and peace. Raising the level of political discussion, bringing the issue of decision making by the people to the fore, organizing in our schools and communities for an anti-war alternative are needed.



Death and Destruction of U.S. War Against People of Afghanistan

Countless lives that have been destroyed by the criminal U.S. war in Afghanistan and other U.S. wars and occupations in the Middle East. As Trump's recent speech indicated, it is not a war for political purposes, but rather an occupation designed to destroy the peoples of the region, the ancient cultures and societies they have produced. This is in part why there is no talk of winning a war, with a resulting political resolution of the conflict, but rather more destruction, more troops, and continued occupation. Here are a few facts indicating the aggressive and destructive character of the wars and the necessity to *Bring All U.S. Troops Home Now!*

- About 104,000 people have been killed as a result of armed conflict in Afghanistan since 2001. More than 31,000 were civilians, according to the Costs of War project at Brown University.
- Since President Obama approved a troop surge in 2009, the war in Afghanistan has claimed at least 26,512 civilian lives and injured nearly 48,931 more, according to a July United Nations report. At least 5,243 civilians have been killed or injured in 2017 alone, including higher numbers of woman and children than in previous years.
- As of 2015, U.S. drone strikes in Northern Pakistan killed between 2,000 and 3,800 people, according to international estimates. About 22,100 Pakistani civilians have been killed and another 40,000 wounded since the U.S. ramped up support for counter-insurgency programs in the country. Violence in Pakistan has created about 1.4 million refugees.
- There are currently an estimated 8,400 U.S. troops stationed in Afghanistan,

according to reports. Trump did not say how many more troops he would send to fight in the war, but reports indicate that he approved sending 4,000 additional troops, bringing the total number to 12,400.

- The Department of Defense reports that there have been 2,394 U.S. military casualties as a result of the war in Afghanistan, including 44 casualties since military operations officially "ended" back in 2014.
- By 2014, the U.S. had incurred \$453 billion in interest on money borrowed to pay for the wars. Unless Congress changes the way the U.S. pays for war, interest costs will add \$7.9 trillion to the national debt by 2053, an amount that dwarfs the original costs of all the wars combined, according to the Brown University team.
- Congress has committed more than \$800 billion directly to the war in Afghanistan since it began in 2001, but when associate costs such as the price tag of medical services for wounded veterans are factored in, that number easily tops \$1 trillion.
- \$1 trillion is also the combined amount of money researchers estimate the U.S. government will need to spend on treating wounded veterans from military operations in Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria and Pakistan by 2053, according to a 2016 Brown University study.
- The study also found that, when the war budgets for the Department of Defense, the State Department and the Department of Homeland Security are combined with the estimated cost of caring for veterans, the total price tag for U.S. operations in Iraq, Afghanistan, Pakistan and Syria since 2001 comes out to nearly \$4.8 trillion.
- About \$110 billion has been allocated to



"humanitarian relief and reconstruction" in Afghanistan since 2001, including at least \$4.8 billion for "counter-narcotics" operations. As of 2015, 58 percent of the \$13.3 billion in USAID funds spent on "reconstruction" in Afghanistan went to only 10 contractors, and federal auditors have long complained of delays and cost overruns.

• Critics say these claims of improvements brought about by U.S. reconstruction efforts have been exposed as downright lies: For example, earlier this year the Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction found that the number of Afghan pupils studying in U.S.-funded schools is 70 percent lower than officials reported.

• The federal government currently spends about 54 percent of its discretionary budget on defense, which is more money than any other country spends on its military by a long shot. If Congress were to accept President Trump's budget proposal, that percentage would increase to 63 percent in 2017 and 68 percent in 2018.

Reporting on Trump's Afghan Escalation Omits Dead Afghan Civilians

Adam Johnson, Fairness and Accuracy In Reporting (FAIR), August 23, 2017

As President Donald Trump tries to make the case for staying indefinitely in Afghanistan, the stakes for those actually living there are rarely broached by U.S. corporate media.

In dozens of write-ups, recaps and

reports on Trump's "major" Afghan War speech, almost no outlets took time out to note the plight or condition of the people the US is nominally there to save. The *New York Times* (8/21/17, 8/22/17), *Washington Post* (8/21/17), *Chicago Tribune* (8/22/17), CNN

(8/21/17, 8/21/17), NBC News (8/21/17), ABC News (8/21/17) and CBS News (8/21/17), among others, did not mention the Afghan death toll at all in their summary of events in the region.

Thousands of Afghans Killed • 5

A WAR ON SYRIAN PEOPLE

U.S. Bombings in Syria Kill 170+ Civilians in One Week

Jessica Corbett, *Common Dreams*, August 22, 2017

Reports indicate that in the past week, at least 170 civilians — including dozens of women and children — have been killed by the U.S.-led airwar in Raqqa, a Syrian city said to be controlled by the Islamic State (ISIS).

As President Donald Trump expands the war in Afghanistan, which Secretary of State Rex Tillerson said August 22 is partly inspired by “successful” tactics used in the war against ISIS, Reuters reports that in the past week alone, more than 170 civilians were killed by U.S.-led airstrikes in Raqqa.

Following the Monday night speech in which Trump confirmed he will expand the war in Afghanistan, Tillerson said tactics being used in Syria and Iraq will now be brought to Afghanistan. “I think we’re taking a lot of lessons learned from our success there, and we’ll translate those to Afghanistan,” Tillerson said.

Considering estimates that civilian casualties will double under Trump in the U.S.-led war against Syria and Iraq, activists and commentators argue the president’s decision to “expand authority for American armed forces” in Afghanistan — which reportedly includes sending 4,000 more troops — “will only continue this upward trend of civilian

casualties.”

Shortly after the U.S.-led coalition launched its offensive to capture Raqqa, a United Nations investigator said that intensified airstrikes by the coalition were responsible for a “staggering loss of civilian life” in the city.

“The United States is now one of the deadliest warring parties in Syria,” Laura Gottesdiener wrote for TomDispatch last month. Citing reports and photographs from Syrian journalists and activists, as well as first-person accounts from family members of Raqqa civilians, Gottesdiener observed that the American offensive “looks a lot less like a battle against the Islamic State and a lot more like a war on civilians.”

Summarizing coalition action as it prepared to launch its “much-anticipated offensive,” Gottesdiener wrote:

“Across Syria in recent months, the U.S.-led coalition and U.S. Marines have



bombed or shelled at least 12 schools, including primary schools and a girls’ high school; a health clinic and an obstetrics hospital; Raqqa’s Science College; residential neighborhoods; bakeries; post offices; a car wash; at least 15 mosques; a cultural center; a gas station; cars carrying civilians to the hospital; a funeral; water tanks; at least 15 bridges; a makeshift refugee camp; the ancient Rafiqah Wall that dates back to the eighth century; and an Internet café in Raqqa, where a Syrian media activist was killed as he was trying to smuggle news out of the besieged city.”

4 • THOUSANDS OF AFGHANS KILLED

Almost all, however, reserved airtime and column inches to mention the number of US soldiers and cost to the U.S. treasury — presumably the only moral metric that matters. One notable exception was Ali Velshi at MSNBC (8/21/17), who did mention live on air how many Afghans were killed in the first half of 2017— a scope curiously limited to the term of the current Republican president, but an improvement on silence nonetheless.

U.S. media also continued their rich tradition of not blaming the US or Trump for the war — instead laying responsibility at the feet of some unknown geopolitical dark matter that has forced the US to occupy Afghanistan permanently. The U.S. is not

waging ongoing war in the Central Asian country; it is simply “stuck,” according to the AP (8/21/17) and the *Washington Post*’s Karen Tumulty. Trump is not continuing the occupation; according to the *Sacramento Bee* (8/21/17); he “Keeps U.S. Stuck in Afghanistan Quagmire.” The U.S. does not seek further war and occupation, but to “break free from the quagmire,” the *Chicago Tribune* (8/22/17) spells out. Bush, Obama and Trump did not make a deliberate choice to bomb Afghanistan, according to PBS’s Judy Woodruff (8/21/17); attacking the country just became “the burden of three presidents.” War was consistently depicted as being thrust upon the U.S. government by forces outside of its control.

The number of Afghan civilians killed during the 16-year U.S. military occupation is well over 31,000, according to researchers at Brown University. The average American could not possibly know this fact, since it is almost never mentioned...

Just as the thousands killed in Yemen by U.S.-backed Saudi bombing do not inform coverage of the famine there, the causal effect of U.S. military action on poor, faceless brown people is never clearly laid out. The U.S. bombs and, on a totally separate note, people are dying. That the United States may be causing the suffering, and could choose to stop doing so, is never really considered, much less argued in any meaningful way.

I • TARGET RACIST U.S. STATE

despite such efforts was that *Racists and Fascist Have No Right to Speak or Organize*. This is the stand growing out of WWII and the resistance worldwide to defeat the Nazis and say never again to their aggressive wars, brutality and racism. It was evident throughout the 1960's and beyond, where the KKK was repeatedly confronted and shouted down. They were also always protected by the police, often escorted to their rally point in police vans. Then, when blocked from speaking by the hundreds and often thousands opposing them, escorted back out, with police then attacking the protesters. The stand taken by demonstrators was against the Nazis and KKK, and against the police, their consistent protectors.

Following the Nazi and KKK violence in Charlottesville, every effort has been made by government officials, then echoed by the monopoly media, that while Trump may not denounce racism sufficiently, the rest of the government and military does. Everyone was to focus on Trump's comments, as though he alone is the racist and the rest of the state machinery is not. Military officials publicly came forward to proclaim their opposition to racism (see p.7). Numerous politicians did the same, as did both Bush

the elder and younger former presidents. The Nazi and KKK forces that demonstrated are to be seen as bad individuals, certainly not as the state organized force that they are. And the state is to be seen as the innocent by-stander.

It is the U.S. government that brought Nazis to the U.S. after WWII, providing them with jobs and protecting them from the people who demanded they be treated as the criminals they were. It is the U.S. state that organized the KKK as a terrorist force to maintain the suppression of African Americans, striving to block black people from participating in the political life of the country. This was backed up by laws and lynchings and numerous other state-organized efforts. The FBI is notorious for "infiltrating" the KKK and being an integral part of its crimes. The military promotes racism and hatred so as to justify its brutality against the peoples, in Iraq, Afghanistan and elsewhere. They are instruments of the racist U.S. state and so imbued with its racism.

In the wake of Charlottesville, this role of the state in organizing such racist attacks and provocations is to be hidden. It is supposedly not the state that is the instigator and promoter of white supremacy — a concept initiated by the rulers to justify

slavery and divide the people. It is supposedly individuals that are responsible. Indeed the terminology, white supremacy, is designed to target individuals who are white, while keeping the role of the state hidden. All of the institutional racism, such as segregated housing, job discrimination, unequal schools, mass incarceration, broad social inequality — and police agencies to enforce this state racism — is to be ignored.

The many demonstrations where the Nazis and KKK are outnumbered, often 50 to 5,000, or a few hundred to a many hundreds, or 50 to 40,000 as occurred in Boston, all indicate that they would not exist without the backing of the state. *Buffalo Forum* salutes those taking their stand against the KKK and Nazis and shouting them down, refusing to allow them to speak. The more than 700 demonstrations that took place across the country in support of resistance in Charlottesville further indicate that the people do not accept these racist attacks and efforts to pit working people against each other. The resistance can be further strengthened by focusing on the state, its racist institutions and police agencies, alongside opposing the state's groups like the KKK and Nazis.



TRUMP UNABLE TO UNITE MILITARY BUREAUCRACY

Growing Conflicts Among Rulers Increases Civil War Danger

One of the jobs of the presidency is to preserve the union, which requires uniting the military bureaucracy. This bureaucracy, which has grown to massive proportions, is part of the state machinery that exists from one president to the next. It is the state and its monopoly on use of force that ensures continuity and rule by the rich, while government changes from one election to the next. In current conditions where the existing institutions for governance — Congress, political parties, elections, for example — are dysfunctional and no longer serving to resolve conflicts, this problem of preserving the union and uniting the bureaucracy becomes increasingly difficult.

This was evident during the 2016 presidential election, when various generals and military officials, mostly retired, campaigned for Trump or Clinton. This is contrary to military standards requiring military officials to remain neutral, so as to ensure their commitment to whoever becomes Commander-in-Chief. More recently, members of the Joint Chiefs of Staff — the top commanders of the Navy, Marine Corps, Army and Air Force — made public statements about racism, in response to those made by Trump about demonstrations and violence by Nazis and the KKK in Charlottesville. The statements by military commanders were seen as an open rebuke of Trump. News reports emphasized that the statements “indicated deep unease in the Pentagon,” and a “dramatic break with precedent,” of no public statements by the military that contradicted the president.

“The Army doesn’t tolerate racism, extremism, or hatred in our ranks,” General Mark Milley, chief of staff of the Army, tweeted August 16. “It’s against our values and everything we’ve stood for since 1775.” Marine Commandant General Robert B. Neller tweeted August 15 that there is “no place for racial hatred or extremism in the Marine Corps.”

Admiral John Richardson, the Chief of Naval Operations, on August 13 posted a statement on Twitter and Facebook that

called the events in Charlottesville “shameful” and “unacceptable.” He said, “The Navy will forever stand against intolerance and hatred.” General David L. Goldfein, chief of staff of the Air Force, tweeted August 16 that he stood “together with my fellow service chiefs in saying that we’re always stronger together.”

Military Racist to the Core

The military is notorious for its brutal racism, within its ranks and towards the peoples of the world. Soldiers are routinely trained to view peoples subjected to U.S. aggression as less than human, with various racist names used as part of this. And whipping up intolerance and hatred so as to convince soldiers to slaughter “the enemy” is also a necessary part of military training. So the aim of the comments is hardly to stand against the racism that has imbued the U.S. state and its military “since 1775,” and has been and remains integral to its genocide against Native peoples, enslaved Africans and now African Americans, and peoples targeted abroad, like those of Iraq and Afghanistan. Their comments against racism, like similar ones by Trump and numerous other politicians, are meant to hide this reality, to divert from the fact that the U.S. ruling class is imbued with racism and organizes racist attacks and funds and arms Nazis and the KKK so as to maintain their rule and preserve their union. The violence in Charlottesville was a state organized provocation, to set the people fighting amongst themselves while letting the state off the hook.

At the same time, the statements by top ranking military officials and politicians



reveal the deep disunity and conflicts within the ruling circles, which are being openly displayed by the military. This also indicates the grave danger of civil war and potentially broader imperialist war.

Aggressive war is one means past presidents have used to unite the bureaucracy. The war against Iraq, for example, was launched in part for this purpose. But there is little evidence that open invasion of Syria, or the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea, or Iran, will solve the current problems the rulers face.

For the U.S. the issue of uniting the military bureaucracy is particularly important, as there is not a single, unified military. Rather, there are contending branches that both collude and compete for resources and power. There are also the many armed agencies within the country, like those at the border, FBI, DEA, and many others, as well as the highly militarized police forces. These all must be kept in check and united behind the presidency, something Trump is also not succeeding on.

Organize for a Democracy of Our Own Making

It is this issue of preserving the union and uniting the military that stands behind the various statements now being made about removing Trump and possibilities of civil

Civil War Danger • 8

I • PROVIDE ANTI-WAR ALTERNATIVE

example, were black. Part of opposing government racism then, is opposing the military and its role in our schools.

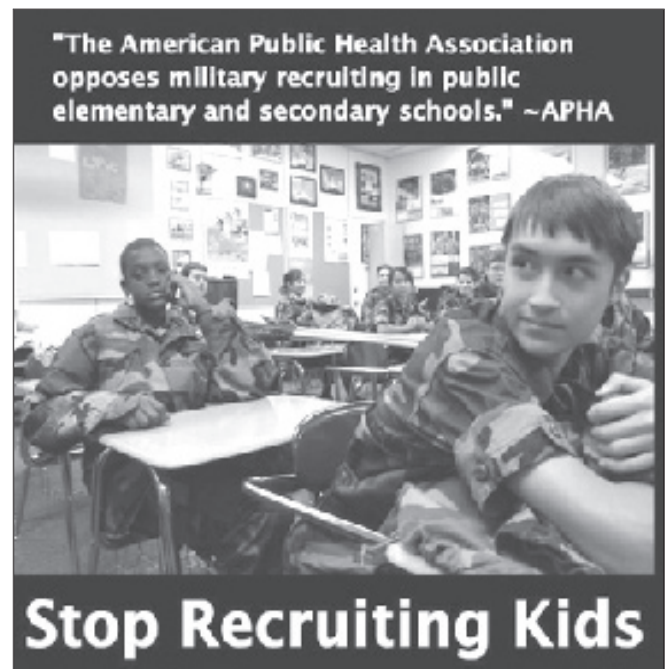
Currently there are Reserve Officer Training Corps (ROTC) at Buffalo State and UB and Junior ROTC at Hutch Tech, McKinley and South Park. As a result of many efforts to counter recruiters and provide an anti-war alternative for students, there have been court rulings requiring equal access for those opposing war. That is, if schools permit military recruiters, they are also required to permit those opposing the military and its wars. Buffalo Forum is initiating such work as part of efforts to strengthen the anti-war movement and organize for an anti-war government. We encourage all concerned to join in (call 716-602-8077).

It is also the case that in 2012, the American Public Health Association, (APHA), one of the country's foremost health organizations and publisher of the American Journal of Public Health, adopted a policy statement calling for the cessation of military recruiting in public elementary and secondary schools. APHA also demands the elimination of the legal requirement, based on federal law, that high schools both be open to military recruiters and turn over contact information on all students to recruiters and eliminating practices that encourage military recruiters to approach adolescents in US public high schools to enlist in the military services.

APHA identifies several compelling

public health reasons in calling for the cessation of military recruiting in the public schools. Most importantly, they argue that adolescents experience limitations in judging risk at this stage in life and they are unable to fully evaluate the consequences of making a choice to enter the military. The organization points to the greater likelihood that the youngest soldiers will experience increased mental health risks, including stress, substance abuse, anxiety syndromes, depression, post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), and suicide.

So the Hutch Tech JROTC and its recent visit to the Harriet Tubman (#31) Elementary School, are counter to the health of all the children involved. So too are the programs at McKinley and South Park. At the very least, students must have an anti-war alternative to consider as part of providing a more healthy environment and a means to join the resistance and efforts to create a bright future. Certainly, the military has not and cannot provide such a future.



Further, there are efforts underway to have JROTC classes used to replace curriculum in participation in government and history. How can the military teach conflict resolution, one of the units in their textbooks, when they are the ones directly responsible for violent conflicts the world over?! Or teach about democracy when they are the ones carrying out assassinations and illegal drone attacks and other undemocratic measures against the peoples? In addition to presenting an anti-war alternative to joining the military, there should be equal access to present an anti-war, pro-social curriculum.

7 • CIVIL WAR DANGER

war. Various politicians are talking about impeachment. One of the president's former top advisors warned that the result of Trump's removal would be an "armed" and violent "insurrection." Roger Stone, a Republican operative and top advisor during last year's presidential campaign, when asked about impeachment said "You will have a spasm of violence in this country, an insurrection like you've never seen." He also warned that anyone who voted for impeachment "would be endangering their own life."

The rulers are contending with con-

ditions where they cannot predict the outcome — the outcome of removing Trump through some means, the outcome of invading another country, the outcome of the growing and broad resistance, demanding a different direction for the country. Every effort is being made by the rulers to preserve the union and its constitutional form, while imposing a government of police powers, concentrated in the presidency. The façade of democracy and civilian rule is to remain, but the governing institutions for that are being eliminated, making the ability to

sustain the rule increasingly difficult and unpredictable.

For the people this poses the necessity to organize for the new, for a new direction for political affairs. The problem is not choosing sides among the rulers or defending an outdated Constitution that enshrines slavery and protects property rights, not human rights. It is organizing today for a democracy of our own making, where we decide! New institutions of government, a new constitution, can be developed in the course of struggle for political empowerment of the people.

Wars Start in Our High Schools and This is Where We Can End Them

Pat Elder, Director of the National Coalition to Protect Student Privacy

This year (fiscal year 2017) the Army's goal is to recruit 80,000 active duty and reserve soldiers. The Navy is trying to sign up 42,000; the Air Force is looking for 27,000, and the Marines hope to bring on 38,000. That comes to 187,000. The Army National Guard will also attempt to lure 40,000. These soldiers are needed to maintain the status quo for a year.

The Pentagon is thus attempting to recruit somewhere around 227,000 troops this year. But they are having one heck of a time finding them, even while they enjoy unprecedented physical access to kids in our high schools and equally unprecedented exposure to their minds through popular culture.

The military has been forced to relax several standards to bring in soldiers. They say today's kids are either too fat or too dumb or too misbehaved to make the grade. They claim youth are misinformed about life in the military, but we know most youth do not want to relinquish their freedom and risk their lives to serve in a military that is overly enthusiastic about going to war.

President Obama's parting addition of 6,000 soldiers makes it the largest in-year increase in the history of the all-recruited force that dates to the end of the draft in 1973. Adding 6,000 soldiers by the fall of 2017 will cost the Army \$200 million for bonuses to new recruits, \$100 million in advertising and at least \$10 million more to increase the pool of recruiters. That is almost \$52,000 per recruit, and most will leave after their first tour.

For his part, President Trump said he wants to add 60,000 troops to the overall size of the Army, (ten times Obama's 6,000) and increase the Marines by over one-third, or about 66,000 soldiers. He has also called for hundreds of new ships for the Navy and new fighters for the Air Force, requiring substantially larger forces, as many as 50,000 by some military/corporate estimates. Trump's largess would add 176,000 soldiers, which amounts to a substantial 13.6% increase over the current active-duty numbers, which stand at 1.3 million.

Rhetoric aside, Trump's proposed budget does not increase the Army's ranks for next year, although his budget is requesting 4,000 more airmen, 1,400 more sailors, and an additional 574 Marines. More robust increases may be coming in a year.

Exactly how will Trump's Defense Department aggressively recruit reluctant youth into the military to meet these new requirements? The answer is that they will continue to lie, cheat, forge, hide, and deal to feed the recruiting monster. They will also rely on pulling kids from just six states that regularly contribute 40 percent of all recruits.

Military recruitment is the Achilles heel of the American empire. Today's warmongers are particularly vulnerable because they need full access to our children in our schools while many communities are pushing back. The military's recruiter handbook calls for "ownership" of America's high schools, so it is incumbent on each of us to know the extent of recruiting in our schools and take steps to confront it. Few other forms of resistance are more threatening to the ruling cabal.

Some Avenues of Resistance:

1. Equal Access to Students

Federal law says military recruiters are to have the same access to kids as college recruiters – not greater access. Military recruiters often eat in the cafeteria while college recruiters meet with select kids in the guidance office. Many schools give military recruiters free reign to fraternize with kids. The access military recruiters enjoy to our children is mostly determined by high school principals, rather than school boards. Let your principal know how you feel.

Demand that military recruiters never be allowed to be alone with kids. ((google: military recruiter, rape)). Get counter-recruitment information from NNOMY (National Network Opposing the Militarization of Youth) and Project YANO (Project on Youth and Non-military Opportunities) into your schools. Make

CURRENT ACTIVE-DUTY MILITARY PERSONNEL *(for the end of FY2017 in October)*

Army 476,000

Navy 322,900

Marines 182,000

Air Force 317,000

Total 1,297,900

sure recruiters are not regularly occupying guidance offices.

Federal courts have ruled we have the right to counter the message of recruiters in the schools.

The revolution we engender must course through the schools. We can no longer afford to cede our neighborhood schools to the corporatists and the militarists. Wars start in our high schools, and this is where we can help to put an end to them.

2. Junior Reserve Officers' Training Corps (JROTC)

JROTC textbooks teach a reactionary brand of U.S. history and government, while classes are often taught by military retirees with no college education. For instance, the Army's junior-year text book contains this zinger, "The CIA took part in overthrowing the government of Salvador Allende. The United States government thought Allende was not favorable to our national interest." End of discussion. The unit on citizenship is entitled "You the People." This is poisonous stuff. We must demand curricular oversight! [Texts used in Buffalo at Hutch Tech and McKinley, for example, have a section on conflict resolution that states "Poverty, exposure to media violence or to family violence, the availability of weapons, drug abuse, and membership in gangs are all important risk factors for violence." It makes no mention of the role of the military and its

Resisting Military in Our Schools • 10

9 • RESISTING MILITARY IN OUR SCHOOLS

violence against the peoples worldwide as a source of conflict and “risk factor” for the worst violence. Instead it claims “violence rates are highest in poor urban communities where unemployment rates are high,” as though the problem rests with those unemployed, not with an government that cannot guarantee the right to a job. BF Ed. Note]

Make sure students are not being placed in JROTC classes without parental consent. Request the JROTC enrollment statistics for each school. If any units have fallen below a total of 100 students two years in a row, agitate to remove them as required by federal regulations. Make sure the schools do not allow JROTC courses to satisfy Physical Education or history credits. For instance, Florida allows JROTC to substitute for physical science, biology, practical arts, and life management skills, while these classes are often taught by non-degreed individuals. Buffalo JROTC is striving to have its courses satisfy government and history classes.

3. Marksmanship Programs in the High Schools

The Pentagon embraces the seductive power of the trigger as a recruiting device. Realizing the potential, the military exploits video games and weaponry to recruit and cultivate adolescent killers. 2,400 high schools now have marksmanship programs affiliated with JROTC and the congressionally-chartered Civilian Marksmanship Program, (CMP). Public school children regularly attend tournaments hosted by the NRA.

Schools allow shooting to occur during school hours in classrooms and gyms that are contaminated by lead fragments fired from the CO2 air rifles that become airborne and are deposited on the floor at the muzzle-end and the target backstop. Kids track the lead throughout the school. Loose enforcement of regulations creates a health hazard of lead poisoning for



students and custodial staff.

Verify which schools currently have firing ranges and demand their closure. At least demand they stop using lead projectiles in school buildings. Non-lead pellets are available, but the CMP and military do not like them.

If shooting ranges are present, determine if the school is adhering to the “Guide to Lead Management for Air Gun Shooting” published by the Congressionally chartered CMP. These regulations are extraordinarily stringent but barely enforced. The CMP has amassed nearly \$200 million in securities earned from peddling discarded Army weapons while spending a small fraction of that monitoring lead poisoning in our high schools.

4. Opt Out

Federal law requires schools to release the names, addresses, and numbers of all high school students to military recruiters. The law gives parents the right to “opt-out” in writing. That is, parents can inform the school that they do not want their child’s information released to military recruiters and the schools must honor their request. The problem is that the law is weak. A single notice by the school provided through a handout or a student handbook advising parents they may opt out is sufficient.

Most schools do a lousy job informing parents of the right to opt out. Unlike many other school forms, its completion is voluntary, except in Maryland where a law requires all parents to fill it out. Contact your schools, your school board and

your state board of education to demand that the schools do a better job in informing parents of their right to opt out. We must strike down this law and until then, we must make the opt-out form mandatory.

5. Armed Services Vocational Aptitude Battery (ASVAB)

About 700,000 students in 12,000 high schools take the ASVAB every year. The ASVAB is the military’s 3-hour enlistment exam. The military parades the test as a civilian career exploration

program, indispensable in determining career paths for high school seniors. Meanwhile, military regulations say the primary purpose of the ASVAB is to find leads for recruiters. ASVAB marketing is extraordinarily deceptive, and the link to the military is not always apparent.

Although the military collects volumes of information on our kids, they would not know how smart Johnny is without the ASVAB. The SAT-like exam includes the typical Math and English sections but also has sections on auto, shop, and mechanical comprehension. The ASVAB collects social security numbers and sensitive demographic information from minors, a practice prohibited by many state laws.

Often, the Pentagon sends a single civilian employee to oversee the administration of the test, while a cadre of teachers and administrators shepherd students. If the schools gave the test, results would be deemed to be “educational records” and thus, subject to federal law that calls for parental consent before information on children is released to third parties. Consequently, ASVAB results are the only student information leaving America’s classrooms without parental consent.

It should stop! And demand that results not be used to recruit kids. 2,000 schools and three states have already done this.

(Pat Elder is the Director of the National Coalition to Protect Student Privacy, an organization that opposes military recruitment in the high schools. Visit www.studentprivacy.org for more.)

ROTC AND ROTC STUDENTS:

When Considering Enlisting Think Seriously About Being Trained to Kill Fellow Human Beings

National Network Opposing the Militarization of Youth

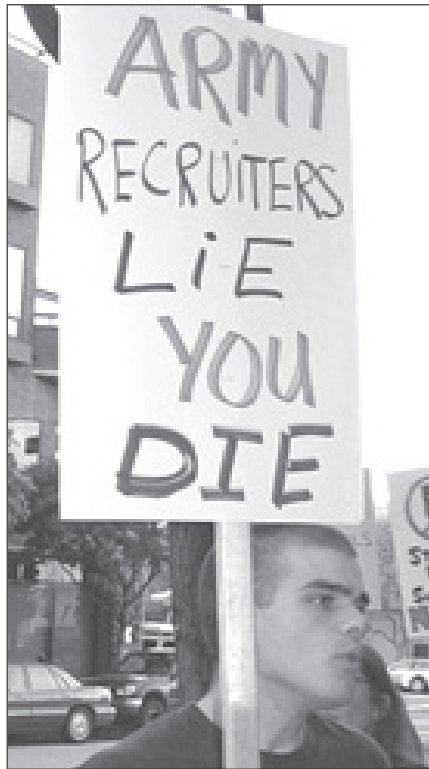
Enlistment in the Armed Forces is a very important decision. Before enlisting, think carefully about what it means to be a soldier for eight years. Every member of the military, from the medic to the mechanic, is trained to fight and to kill, and the conflicts in the Middle East proved that fighting and killing can begin very suddenly. You may enlist to get job training or money for college, but eventually you may be faced with war. You owe it to yourself to think seriously about when you believe it is justified to kill another person.

Many of the details about enlistment are not well explained to people considering joining the military. Recruits may not understand the specifics of the enlistment agreement, the possibility of recruiter fraud, the limitations of college funding available through the military, and the problems faced by veterans when they leave the armed forces. It is important to learn all you can before you join. Remember that if you enlist, and decide you don't like it, you cannot quit.

The Enlistment Agreement

The enlistment agreement is not a contract. It is a one-way agreement that is binding upon the recruit but not binding upon the military. The agreement states that the enlistee is "entitled to receive pay, allowance, and other benefits, as provided by law and regulation." However, the enlistment agreement also states, "Laws and regulations that govern military personnel may change without notice to me. Such changes may affect my status, pay, allowances, benefits, and responsibilities as a member of the Armed Forces REGARDLESS of the provisions of this enlistment/reenlistment document."

This language means that the military does not have to honor any promises made at the time of your enlistment. You, however, must give eight years of your life, obey all orders, and possibly kill or be killed. You may be subject to health



hazards, discrimination, and emotional or physical abuse. Your superiors may decide to cut your pay or benefits without even telling you. Even the job placement that the recruiter promised you may be changed at a moment's notice. If you refuse to obey orders, you may be disciplined, face a court martial, and perhaps receive a dishonorable discharge.

Recruiter Fraud

Any potential recruit should realize that his or her recruiter is not a teacher or a counselor but a salesperson. Recruiters are under great pressure to enlist a certain number of people each month; if they don't, they may lose privileges, bonuses, and may be transferred from the recruiting command. Recruiter fraud has become a serious problem in the military. Four hundred recruiters were relieved in a three year period for misconduct. Sometimes recruiters try to convince enlistees to lie on

the enlistment agreement - to provide false information so that you will be accepted into the service. They may also lie to you or to your family.

In the "Record of Military Processing," for instance, you will be asked questions concerning your character and social adjustment. These questions concern previous drug use, involvement with communism, whether or not you are a conscientious objector to war, and whether you have previously been in trouble with the military. All of these categories are considered character defects by the military, and anyone who fits these categories is considered unfit for the military. When filling out the enlistment form, recruiters frequently suggest that you lie - particularly in this section. Do not lie. When fraudulent information is uncovered, often the recruit is the only one punished.

Recruiters almost always say that the military is exciting and adventurous — that you will learn a skill, earn money for college, and gain leadership and discipline. Your recruiter is selling something. Many of the promises are simply not true.

Job Training?

The recruiter will probably emphasize the high-tech, state-of-the-art, sophisticated equipment that you will get to work with. True, some soldiers are trained for the highly skilled jobs. Generally, however, those jobs go to the soldier who was already trained, educated, and technically skilled before joining the military. Many of the high-skill jobs will go to soldiers who already have at least two years of college. And often the high-tech work is done by civilian contractors who have the necessary training and skills.

In reality, few military assignments could be described as high-tech, although many of the jobs sound high-tech. For instance, one U.S. Army brochure includes

Enlisting Means Training to Kill • 12

I • ENLISTING MEANS TRAINING TO KILL

assignments with titles such as, “combat engineering,” “general engineering,” “supply and service,” and “food service.” These assignments, and others offered by the military, would likely offer little more than low skill, manual labor. The armed forces simply do not have the time, the need, or the resources to train many recruits for highly skilled work.

Above all, the military exists for war. Most soldiers will be trained to fight and to kill, skills which aren’t marketable in the civilian world. During the time some young people spend in the military, others who are the same age are spending those years in college or trade school, or getting work experience. As a result, the unemployment rate for young veterans is twice as high as their peers who did not enlist. (Bureau of Labor Statistics, Biennial Employment Situation of Veterans Survey).

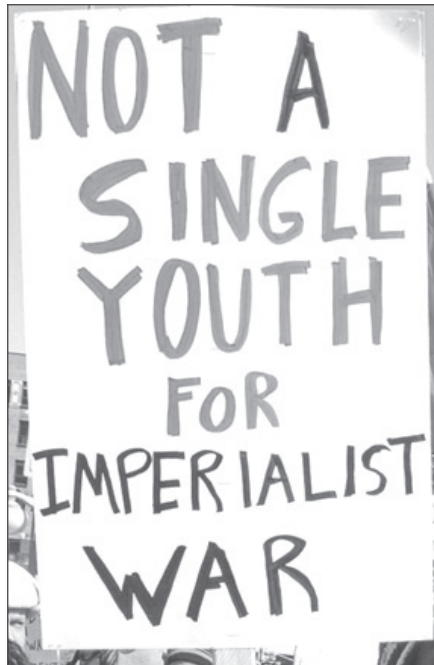
As former Vice President Dick Cheney once said, “The military is not a social welfare agency; it’s not a jobs program.”

College Benefits?

Many people join the military for college money. Recruiters might promise you that college will be “free,” but it’s not free – you must work for it! And the benefits will not be guaranteed, even under the new GI bill that went into effect in August 2009. Although there have been early promises of more money than under the old GI bill, more school options, and a chance for military members to transfer unused financial aid to other family members, vets counselors warn that there could be many problems. For example:

People will have to enlist for a total of 10 years to transfer unused college benefits to family members.

People who receive a less than fully honorable discharge (as about one in four people do) will lose all GI bill benefits—including those with “general discharges,” often given for minor prob-



lems with military duties.

Those who leave the military early (as one in three do) will get reduced benefits.

Veterans who wish to attend college outside the state where they live will only get part of their tuition covered until.

If you are worried about financing college, there are many other sources of aid to look at. Colleges can help you find aid, and it pays to investigate the many alternatives before signing away eight years of your life to the military. If you go straight to college, instead of the military, you can start earning the higher wages of a college graduate much sooner.

Racism in the Military

The military has policies to overcome racism in its ranks. Despite its authoritarian structure it has not succeeded.

During the Persian Gulf War, Arabs were labeled “towel-heads” or “sand-nig---s,” while there were reports of cross burnings and KKK gatherings on military grounds. Half of the troops sent to the

Persian Gulf were black.

The few opportunities that exist in the military benefit primarily educated, white soldiers. While one-third of the enlistees are people of color, only 11 percent of the officers are. Non-white enlistees tend to get low skill, combat-related jobs. Disproportionate numbers of African-Americans and Latinos face courts martial and receive bad discharges. One out of three black GI’s will get a bad discharge.

After You Leave the Armed Forces

Soldiers are often discharged with no money to continue in the civilian world and no transferable job skills. Unemployment lines are filled with veterans who are poorly qualified and lack the useful skills for civilian employment. Many veterans remain jobless for long periods and are a large part of the homeless and prison populations. Even those who are gainfully employed will remain behind their civilian counterparts in income and advancement for the rest of their careers. Once you have been in the military, you cannot catch up with the rest of the world.

The military stays with you in other ways as well. Much of the appeal is the idea of proving yourself, developing discipline, being “all you can be.” Perhaps you want to carry “army pride” with you all your life. Remember, however, that this is only part of the picture. No one can participate in violence and remain either unscarred or indifferent. You will always be part of the destruction you supported. And if the United States does fight a war, you may never be able to forget the people you killed. For some people the weight of these memories is too heavy to bear. The suicide rate among Vietnam veterans is many times the national average.

Enlisting in the military is a serious commitment. Before you join, know what is in the fine print. Learn all the details and choose what’s best for you. Think about it.

Visit our website: usmlo.org

NO SANCTIONS!

Salute Venezuelan People, Their Constituent Assembly and Their Bolivarian Revolution

Buffalo Forum salutes the determination and undaunted spirit of the Venezuelan people, who in their millions resisted U.S. interference and threats and voted for their Constituent Assembly. The Assembly is recognized as a necessary instrument for achieving peace, as the slogan put it: *All Out to Vote for Peace*. The Assembly has already begun meeting and will be taking up a number of issues, including that of peace, defending sovereignty, improving the economy and further strengthening democracy. People rallied and celebrated the victory of the Assembly and stood proudly, defying internal efforts — backed and fomented by the U.S. — and direct actions by the U.S. to achieve regime change.

Trump repeatedly threatened even more action if the Assembly was voted in, yet it is he now who has been silenced, not the people of Venezuela! Refusing to accept the will of the people to decide their own affairs and further strengthen their Bolivarian revolution, the U.S. is imposing yet more sanctions. Use of sanctions has a long history, including the continuing blockade against Cuba and those against the Democratic People's Republic of Korea. All three countries are determined to chart their own path forward and have persisted in doing so. The U.S. rulers still believe that by starving the peoples they can achieve regime change. The people of Venezuela decisively said No! as have the Cubans and Koreans.

Buffalo Forum extends its congratulations and firm support to the Venezuelan people and their government, as they march forward on their path. We wish them every success in strengthening their revolution and further advancing their constitution. We vigorously condemn all the U.S. interference and efforts to derail the Bolivarian Revolution. Venezuela continues to play an important role in opposing U.S. imperialism and in working for the unity and fraternal integration of Our Americas. This vote for the Constituent Assembly and continued defense of sovereignty are important contributions to peace and the strengthening of the fraternal relations of the peoples.

Red Salute to the Venezuelan People!

Results of Venezuelan Constituent Assembly Election

The Venezuelan National Electoral Council (CNE) announced around midnight on Sunday July 30 that 8,089,320 Venezuelans, representing 41.53 per cent of the country's registered voters, had participated in Sunday's National Constituent Assembly (ANC) election.

CNE President Tibisay Lucena reported that 537 of the Constituent Assembly's 545 members were elected on July 30 and that on Tuesday, August 1, Venezuela's Indigenous communities will choose the eight remaining representatives following their own traditional processes.

Upon receiving the first Electoral Bulletin containing the preliminary results, President of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela Nicolás Maduro congratulated the CNE for its work. He said its ability to guarantee, in the middle of a war, that the people were able to exercise their will and to go out and vote, in his opinion demonstrated the strength of the country's democratic institutions.

A group of 43 people made up of "political experts, parliamentarians, Indigenous people, peasants, workers and representatives of missions and electoral bodies" from Europe and South, Central and North America who were invited by the National

Electoral Council to witness the election issued their own communiqué. Among them were members of the Council of Latin American Electoral Experts (CEELA) who had been engaged to observe and make recommendations for different aspects of running the election starting July 17 through to the day of the vote.

The international group said they deemed the election to have been called in a legal and legitimate manner based on Article 348 of the country's Constitution and in accordance with the Charter of the United Nations. They further pointed out that the people's ability to exercise their right to vote was guaranteed through providing voting centers throughout the Venezuelan territory and their right to a secret ballot was guaranteed by the CNE's voting system, fully auditable at all stages and whose reliability for data processing and transmission has been verified in 20 national elections.

The international witnesses said Venezuelans had participated in a peaceful and civic manner in exercising their constitutional right to vote in free, universal and direct elections by means of a secret ballot. They commended the people for "speaking out for peace through their participation in voting despite the threats and interventionist actions

of both the Government of the United States of America and its partners and allies."

They condemned the "violent and terrorist acts unleashed by anti-democratic sectors" before and even during the electoral process, calling them an attempt to intimidate and terrorize the population and sabotage the electoral process. They also condemned what they described as a massive international media campaign against Venezuela's democracy aimed at creating the conditions to trigger a foreign intervention.

The group expressed their belief that the National Constituent Assembly would be a space to promote the coming together of all Venezuelans regardless of political affiliation in an inclusive dialogue to set Venezuela on a course towards collective well-being in an atmosphere of peace and the full exercise of the peoples' right to self-determination.

The communiqué concluded with a call to the peoples and governments of the world to respect the results of the National Constituent Assembly election as a manifestation of the self-determination of the Venezuelan people. CEELA has issued a more detailed technical report of its findings that is consistent with what was expressed in the communiqué.

Cuba Denounces the Implementation of an International Operation, Led by the United States, to Silence the Voice of the Venezuelan People

Cuban Ministry of Foreign Affairs

On July 30, 2017, during elections for the National Constituent Assembly in the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, the Venezuelan people demonstrated to the world that they are in full possession of their sovereign rights, and are firmly on the side of peace, in defense of citizen security, of independence and self-determination in their homeland, as they have been throughout the history of Latin America and the Caribbean, since Bolívar.

Venezuela poured out to the polls as never before in a constituent process. This people, that challenged barricades, blocked streets, economic sabotage, and international threats, defeated with their votes the strategy of imperialism, the oligarchies, and an opposition that has not hesitated to unleash the most brutal expressions of cruelty. The cynicism of those who attempt to blame the government, and the defenders of the people, for crimes committed is

offensive.

Cuba denounces the implementation of a well planned international operation, directed from Washington with the support of the Organization of American States (OAS) General Secretary, intended to silence the voice of the Venezuelan people, ignore their expressed will, and impose surrender with attacks and economic sanctions.

The government of the United States, for its part, has imposed sanctions directly on constitutional President Nicolás Maduro Moro, unprecedented, arbitrary sanctions that violate international law, which we condemn.

We are very familiar with these interventionist practices. They think that with



this, they will achieve the submission of a people to a puppet opposition, which they finance, and which now promises to burn the country down.

Once again, we reiterate what Army General Raúl Castro Ruz, President of the Councils of State and Ministers, said last July 14, in the National Assembly:

“The aggression and coup violence
Cuba Denounces Attacks on Venezuela • 15

Zulu Nation Backs Venezuela, Plans Solidarity Hip Hop Tour

Telesur, August 25, 2017

The Universal Zulu Nation (UZN), the “hip-hop awareness group” based in the United States, released a statement August 24 in support of the “Venezuelan Bolivarian Government” and the “sovereign right of the Venezuelan people to both struggle and determine their own destiny.” The Zulu Nation has built strong ties of solidarity with Venezuelans in the last decade, and are planning an “International Hip Hop 4 Humanity Tour.”

The group first built solidarity with Venezuelans in 2007.

That year, its members, through an event put on by the Malcolm X Grassroots Movement and the Afro-Venezuelan Network in New York, learned of the “concrete examples of international humanism and African ancestry exhibited by the then Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez.”

Since then, the group has planned a hip-hop tour inside the country, both to “build

solidarity and to provide material support for our Venezuelan Sisters and Brothers,” said UZN’s statement.

The planned tour is to take place in 2018.

“The Bolivarian Government has always recognized the significance of the Haitian Revolution, remained an ally and supporter the Cuban Revolution,” the group stressed. “They have never tried to hide from us the fact that racism, poverty and economic problems existed in Venezuela and have always asked for our solidarity and support in helping to build and resolve these problems.”

“The Venezuelan revolutionary government is also one of the few nations on this earth which acknowledges our U.S. government captured Black/New Afrikan and Puerto Rican Freedom Fighters,” the hip-hop group continued.

The group also has “always respected

the fact that a head of state (former Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez) not only visited Harlem and the Bronx, but that he would openly admit to being proud of both his kinky hair, thick lips and African-Indigenous heritage.”

They also lauded the Venezuelan government’s oil company, Petroleos de Venezuela SA, or PDVSA, and its U.S. subsidiary, Citgo, for using its surplus oil resources “to selflessly support numerous grassroots inner-city programs in the Bronx, New Orleans, Boston and Chicago when U.S. based oil companies have not.”

The group concluded that it respects Venezuelans and their right to “determine their own destiny without the historically racist and capitalist economic interference, right wing political influence, mainstream media propaganda and planned military intervention by President Donald Trump.”

Q & A: The National Constituent Assembly in Venezuela

Venezuela Solidarity Campaign

Elections for a National Constituent Assembly were held in Venezuela on July 30th. Here are some common questions — with the answers — that are being asked about the Assembly.

What is a National Constituent Assembly (ANC), under Venezuelan law?

A National Constituent Assembly is essentially a constitutional convention, a gathering for the purpose of writing a new constitution or revising an existing constitution. Apart from the famous examples from the 18th century U.S. and France, a range of other countries have employed this mechanism. In Venezuela, Article 347 of its constitution says:

“The original constituent power rests with the people of Venezuela. This power may be exercised by calling a National Constituent Assembly for the purpose of transforming the State, creating a new juridical order and drawing up a new Constitution.”

Venezuela’s constitution is itself the product of a constitutional convention held in 1999, convened at the initiative of President Chávez to draft a new constitution. The constitution was later endorsed by referendum in December 1999. New general elections were held under the new constitution in July 2000. This marked the transition from the Fourth Republic of Venezuela to the present-day Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela.

Is President Maduro allowed to call for the setting up of a Constituent Assembly?

Article 348 of the constitution provides for

how a National Constituent Assembly is to be instigated:

“The initiative for calling a National Constituent Assembly may emanate from the President of the Republic sitting with the Cabinet of Ministers; from the National Assembly by a two-thirds vote of its members; from the Municipal Councils in open session, by a two-thirds vote of their members; and from 15% of the voters registered with the Civil and Electoral Registry.”

It is also important to note what Article 349 of the constitution says, bearing in mind (as explained later) that the right-wing opposition coalition, which has a majority in the National Assembly, is opposed to the calling of a National Constituent Assembly:

Article 349: “The President of the Republic shall not have the power to object to the new Constitution. The existing constituted authorities shall not be permitted to obstruct the Constituent Assembly in any way. For purposes of the promulgation of the new Constitution, the same shall be published in the Official Gazette of the Republic of Venezuela or in the Gazette of the Constituent Assembly.”

Why has President Maduro called for a National Constituent Assembly?

In a formal document which he signed in front of the National Electoral Council (CNE), President Maduro stated that the call for the Constituent Assembly was made in the context of the current social, political and economic circumstances in which there are severe internal and external threats against democracy and the constitutional order.

This refers to the right-wing opposition-led violence aimed at bringing down the elected Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro. The violence began in early April, resulting so far in scores of deaths and over 1,200 people injured. A key tactic in the violent protests is the use of ‘guarimbas’ or street blockades created by masked protesters.

The current violence has involved attacks on state facilities and services such as maternity hospitals, electricity supplies, food depots and public transport, and also targeted assassinations of government supporters. A ramping up of the aggression occurred in late June when a police officer flying a stolen helicopter attacked the Ministry of Interior building and the Supreme Court, firing shots and dropping four grenades.

The purpose of the Constituent Assembly has been expounded on by former Education Minister Elias Jaua, who explained in an interview with Televen, a private Venezuela TV channel, that its aims were “to maintain political stability, to solve the economic issues, to broaden and to strengthen the system of social welfare [and] to heal the social wounds that have come up during the conflict.”

When and How Will the Constituent Assembly be Made Up?

Elections for Constituent Assembly took place on July 30 2017.

Anybody, regardless of political persuasion, could be nominated or nominate themselves to be a candidate for election to

Venezuela’s Constituent Assembly • 16

14 • CUBA DENOUNCES ATTACKS ON VENEZUELA

against Venezuela harms all of Our America and only benefits the interests of those set on dividing us in order to exercise their control over our peoples, unconcerned about causing conflicts of incalculable consequences in the region, like those we are seeing in different parts of the world.

“Today we warn that those attempting to overthrow the Bolivarian Chavista Revolution through unconstitutional, violent coup

methods, will shoulder a serious responsibility before history.”

Nothing can stop a people that take control of their destiny. Only Venezuelans can decide how to resolve their problems and chart their future. No more interventions, conspiracies, or betrayals of the Bolivarian spirit.

We reiterate our unwavering solidarity with the people and the Bolivarian Chavista

government, with the civic-military union led by constitutional President Nicolás Maduro. As Fidel said at the Central University of Caracas, during his 1959 visit, “The position of the Revolutionary Government of Cuba will be a firm position, without hesitations of any kind, because the hour has arrived for peoples who know how to defend themselves and how to assert their rights.”

— Venezuela's National Constituent Assembly —

from page 15

the Constituent Assembly.

Candidates were nominated in one of the following ways:

- by their own initiative.
- by the initiative of groups of voters and voters.
- by the initiative of the sectoral groups comprising 173 seats of the 545 seat Constituent Assembly

In order to run for office on their own initiative, 3% of voters and voters registered in the electoral registry of the municipalities are required to nominate the constituents. In the sector category, the candidates will be nominated by the corresponding sector, and should receive the backing of 3% of the sector to which they belong.

From these various ways of being nominated, there were over 6,000 candidates competing for Constituent Assembly seats.

In keeping with how previous elections have been organized, the National Electoral Council (CNE) organized a 'trial run' of voting arrangements for the Constituent Assembly, setting up nearly 2,000 voting booths in voting centers across the country, in order to be assured that on election day everything would run smoothly and efficiently.

How will a new constitution emerge?

Once elected, the National Constituent Assembly will be convened within 72 hours and will get to work.

The Assembly will set its agenda for discussion on the basis of what it sees as national priorities. As convener of the Assembly, however, the President has proposed nine topics for the Assembly to consider:

- the nation's right and need for peace
- improvements to the country's economy
- constitutional recognition of the various 'Missions' (government social programs)
- an extension of the justice system's scope, to end impunity for crimes
- constitutional recognition of new forms of popular and participatory democracy in Venezuela, such as communal councils and communes

• the defense of Venezuela's sovereignty and protection against foreign intervention

• reinvigorating the plural, multicultural character of Venezuela

• a guarantee for the future of Venezuela's youth through enshrining in the constitution their rights and the need to preserve life on the planet

What is the right-wing opposition's response to the National Constituent Assembly initiative?

Venezuela's right-wing opposition, the so-called 'Round-table of Democratic Unity' (MUD) coalition, originally announced in May that it would boycott the National Constituent Assembly and denounced it as an illegitimate effort to rewrite the nation's constitution.

This is seemingly in contrast to the position it held in 2013, when 55 opposition leaders signed a joint statement in support of setting up a constituent assembly.

Considering the opposition's claim about the depth of the government's unpopularity, echoed by most of the media, it is puzzling that opposition candidates will not be contesting all Constituent Assembly seats.

Instead of taking part in this legitimate constitutional process, the opposition held on July 16 their own unofficial plebiscite, asking whether voters recognized or rejected the Constituent Assembly process. Turnout levels for this exercise have been hotly disputed, since the process was not conducted under the auspices of the National Electoral Council and the voting was not independently audited.

How does this Constituent Assembly initiative fit with current peace and dialogue initiatives?

The convening of a Constituent Assembly is a key part of ongoing efforts by President Maduro to engage in constructive dialogue with the opposition.

The dialogue process was launched



last year between the government and opposition sectors, but the right-wing MUD coalition has refused to participate. Some opposition parties have accepted the offer of dialogue. Seventeen Venezuelan opposition parties met with the government to discuss the Constituent Assembly in May 2017. The parties who accepted the invitation included Citizenship Movement, Mopivene Movement, Republican Democracy, Republican Movement, Labor Power, Red Flag, Civilian Resistance, Renewable Democracy, Ecological Movement, Young Party and the Stone Party.

In an attempt to pursue dialogue, in early June, Maduro sent a letter to Pope Francis asking him to mediate the political conflict with opposition sectors that have encouraged violence in the streets. Pope Francis has repeatedly urged dialogue between sectors in Venezuela, criticizing part of the opposition for not being willing to sit down for talks, but without success. He has also called on Venezuelan bishops to denounce "any form of violence."

President Maduro has followed this by again renewing his call for the opposition to agree to dialogue and peace, in order that solutions can be arrived at to meet the needs and well-being of the Venezuelan people. He has emphasized that these solutions can only be arrived at through cooperation and peace.