Hands off Venezuela!

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In the nearly two weeks since the sinister and farcical "self-swearing-in" of Juan Guaidó as the US State Department's anointed "interim president," US imperialism, with the aid of the major European powers, Canada and the right-wing governments of Latin America, has steadily tightened a noose around Venezuela.

On Monday, Germany, the UK, France, Spain and most of the other European powers followed Washington's lead in recognizing Guaidó, a political operative of the extreme right-wing Voluntad Popular (Popular Will) party, as Venezuela's president.

Virtually a political unknown in Venezuela before being installed as president of the National Assembly less than three weeks before the initiation of the US-backed coup attempt, he is well known in the halls of the State Department and CIA headquarters in Langley, Virginia, having been funded by the agency's offshoot, the National Endowment for Democracy, and trained in the methods of "color revolution" by US-financed NGOs.

The rush by the European powers to proclaim such an unelected figure the legitimate president of Venezuela is driven by European imperialism's fear of being left out of the scramble for Venezuela's oil—the largest proven reserves on the planet—as Washington prepares to either directly invade the country or provoke a military coup that could plunge Venezuela into a bloody civil war.

In supporting an act of outright criminality on the part of Washington, the European imperialists are counting on receiving carte blanche for their own crimes in Africa, the Middle East and beyond. At the same time, they are driven to play an active role in the carve-up of Venezuela out of concern for their own capital investments in Latin America, which outstrip those of both the US and China, under conditions in which Washington is once again attempting to assert its unfettered hegemony in its "own backyard."

The conspiracy against Venezuela is predatory in the literal sense of the word, an exercise in outright plunder. Washington has seized the assets of the Venezuelan government in the US, including its US-based refining and distribution company Citgo, ostensibly on behalf of the US puppet Guaidó. The puppet, for his part, has publicly announced an economic blueprint for a US-backed regime that would open up the country's strategic oil reserves to the direct control and exploitation by the American energy conglomerates.

US officials have made no bones about the fact that their aim is to assert control by US energy conglomerates over Venezuela's vast oil reserves, while at the same time rolling back the substantial influence in the country of both China and Russia, the "great power" rivals against which Washington is preparing for global war. This aim threatens to turn Latin America into a battlefield in a nuclear third world war.

The threadbare pretense advanced as a cover for this exercise in criminality and plunder is that Washington is supporting "democracy" in Venezuela and is interested in the "humanitarian" relief of its population. No one—least of all the Venezuelan people themselves—should believe such lies. The same US government has given its unconditional support to regimes like those of General Sisi in Egypt, which has killed thousands and jailed tens of thousands of its opponents, and the murderous monarchical dictatorship of Crown Prince Mohamed bin Salman in Saudi Arabia.

The consolidation of power under the likes of Guaidó and Voluntad Popular will signal not some flowering of democracy, but rather the imposition of a right-wing dictatorship of the Venezuelan corporate oligarchy and the IMF, whose first task will be to drown in blood the resistance of Venezuelan workers to austerity and oppression.

While claiming that it is driven by the urgent humanitarian imperative of providing food and medicine to Venezuelans, Washington continues to provide indispensable support for a near-genocidal war that has driven 16 million Yemenis to the brink of starvation.

This humanitarian ruse is now being shifted into high gear. Guaidó announced Monday that he would call for a

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"big mobilization" to demand that food and medical supplies organized by USAID and positioned on the borders with Colombia and Brazil, which are governed by Latin America's two most right-wing governments, be brought into the country.

There is not even an attempt to mask the fact that the aim of this "aid" is to provoke a split within the Venezuelan military or a confrontation on the country's borders that would provide the pretext for military intervention.

The working class, both in Venezuela and internationally, must reject this imperialist provocation with contempt and mobilize its full strength to defend Venezuela against a US imperialist intervention that is aimed at turning the Latin American country into a semi-colony.

Defending Venezuela, an oppressed country, against imperialist aggression in no way requires painting the government of Nicolas Maduro and the legacy of *chavismo* in bright colors.

The government of Venezuela under Maduro—as it was under his predecessor, Hugo Chávez—is a bourgeois government that defends private property and upholds the interests of international finance capital, even as the world capitalist crisis and the increasingly punishing sanctions imposed by Washington have decimated the living standards of the Venezuelan working class. Under both presidents, the government fostered the growth of a new layer of the Venezuelan capitalist ruling class, the so-called *boliburguesía*, which fattened itself off of government contracts, financial speculation and corruption.

While under Chávez, this government was able to divert a portion of the revenues from the oil and commodities boom to finance social assistance for Venezuela's impoverished masses, the deepening world capitalist crisis and the collapse of oil prices have largely eviscerated these programs. The full burden of the economic crisis has been imposed upon the backs of the Venezuelan working class, while increasingly the government has directed its repression not against its right-wing opponents, but rather against workers fighting for their social and democratic rights. With the Venezuelan bourgeoisie unable to chart its way out of the economic and social crisis, and Venezuelan workers as yet unable to pose a revolutionary challenge to the capitalist order, the Chávez and Maduro governments assumed an increasingly Bonapartist character, resting, in the final analysis, on the support of the military and security forces, for whose affections Washington is now vying.

It is the class character and the policies of these governments that have left Venezuela vulnerable to imperialist intervention and conquest. Maduro has directed his appeals to the right-wing opposition and to Trump for "dialogue," and most recently—insisting that he is serving "Christ's cause" in Venezuela—to the Pope.

This government is incapable of appealing to the working class. It fears arming the masses to counter an imperialist intervention. And it has no intention of expropriating the substantial foreign capitalist interests in Venezuela, including those of Chevron and Halliburton, in retaliation for the predatory actions of US imperialism.

The only progressive answer to the increasingly dangerous crisis unfolding in Venezuela lies with the independent political intervention of the working class, fighting for the arming of the masses, the seizure of bourgeois property and foreign capitalist holdings and the placing of the country's vast oil wealth under popular control.

Such a struggle can be waged successfully only through the international unity of the working class. Workers in the United States, Europe and Canada must oppose the reactionary and predatory imperialist intervention in Venezuela and fight to unite their struggles with those of the workers in Venezuela and throughout Latin America against the common enemy, the world capitalist system.

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