

The defense of Venezuela and the struggle for socialism in Latin America

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On Saturday, May 4, the International Committee of the Fourth International held the 2019 International May Day Online Rally, the sixth annual online May Day Rally held by the ICFI, the world Trotskyist movement. The rally heard speeches on different aspects of the world crisis of capitalism, and the struggles of the international working class, from 12 leading members of the world party, and its sections and sympathizing organizations around the world.

On successive days, the World Socialist Web Site is publishing the texts of the speeches delivered at the rally. Below is the speech delivered by WSWs Latin American editor Bill Van Auken. On Monday, the WSWs published the opening report to the rally, given by David North, the chairman of the international editorial board of the WSWs and national chairman of the Socialist Equality Party (US).

As we mark May Day 2019, the resurgence of the class struggle and the growing support for socialism in the working class are developing the world over, in inseparable conflict with the turn by capitalist ruling elites toward war and fascist reaction.

Nowhere is this truer than in Latin America, where some 650 million people confront the deepest social inequality on the planet.

The region's governments, both the increasing number controlled by the extreme right and those still posturing as "left" nationalist—the dwindling remnants of the so-called "pink tide"—have placed the full burden of the continent's economic and social crises onto the backs of the working class.

The struggle against war and reaction is posed with the greatest urgency by the mounting threat of a direct US military intervention in Venezuela.

The Trump administration has sharply escalated its regime change operation with this week's abortive coup attempt by Juan Guaidó, the right-wing and US-financed political non-entity, who serves as the puppet of US intervention.

Guaidó's call for the military to rise up and overthrow the Maduro government proved an abject failure. It neither

provoked a split in the armed forces nor elicited any significant popular support. Nonetheless, the threats of new and even bloodier provocations, as well as a direct US military attack, only grow stronger by the day.

Yesterday, the head of the US Southern Command, Adm. Craig Faller, flew to Washington to brief top administration officials on US military options in Venezuela. There are reports that at least one aircraft carrier battle group is being sent to the waters off its shores.

A noose is being steadily tightened around the country, with the imposition of economic sanctions on a scale tantamount to war. According to one recent estimate, the blockade of Venezuela has caused as many as 40,000 excess deaths by cutting off supplies of food and medicine. To add insult to injury, in February, Washington attempted to use trucks, bearing a pittance of food, as a kind of modern day Trojan Horse, to provoke a military confrontation on the Venezuela-Colombia border.

In its brazenness and criminality, the assault on Venezuela recalls the darkest chapters of US imperialism's prolonged history of military aggression, exploitation and police state repression in Latin America.

Bolton and others in the Trump administration have bragged that they are "dusting off" the Monroe Doctrine. This nearly two-century-old canon of US foreign policy was issued originally to warn the reactionary imperialist powers of Europe not to attempt a re-colonization of the Americas. With the rise of US imperialism, however, it became an all-purpose justification for military interventions and occupations to defend the interests of US-based banks and corporations.

Under the filthy flag of the Monroe Doctrine, Washington has launched no less than 50 direct US military interventions in the hemisphere.

Today, this doctrine has been resurrected in an even more sinister form. It has been invoked by Washington to blame Russia, China and Cuba for stalling the Venezuela regime change operation by providing loans and aid. Top officials have demanded that these countries "get out of Venezuela,"

imposing harsh new sanctions against Cuba and even threatening military action against Russia. One Florida Republican congressman went so far as to suggest that Moscow had deployed nuclear weapons in Venezuela, comparing it to the Cuban Missile Crisis of 1962.

US officials have made no bones about the fact that their aim is to assert direct control by US energy conglomerates over Venezuela's oil reserves, the largest on the planet, and to roll back the substantial economic influence in the country, and the wider region, of Washington's so-called "great power" rivals, China and Russia. This threatens to turn Latin America into a battlefield in a nuclear third world war.

At the same time, the revival of the discredited doctrine, reviled throughout Latin America, is the response of a US imperialism in decline, confronting the fact that, even in its "own backyard," it has been replaced by China as the principal source of foreign investment.

The threadbare pretense advanced as a cover for this exercise in criminality and plunder is that Washington is supporting "democracy" in Venezuela, a claim that is echoed by a servile corporate media as well as by Trump's supposed Democratic opponents who, from Biden to Sanders, have all lined up behind the regime change operation.

There is nothing new in this. Fifty-five years ago, when Brazil's military overthrew the country's elected president João Goulart, the *New York Times* responded as follows:

"If a single motivation could be detected in the coup, which was engineered jointly by a group of civilian state governors—all of them, incidentally, elected officials in their own right—and of military commanders, it was their concern to maintain the democratic framework in Brazil."

The framework established in the 1964 coup was that of a military dictatorship, which ruled the country with an iron fist for the next two decades and helped spread fascist military regimes that murdered, tortured and imprisoned hundreds of thousands of workers and youth throughout the hemisphere.

Who can believe that the Trump administration is concerned about "democracy" and the "freedom" of workers in Latin America? It shows its attitude toward these workers every single day on the southern border, in the relentless hounding of refugees fleeing conditions created by US wars and Washington-backed dictatorships in Central America. These workers have been hunted down by fascist-minded border agents, thrown into concentration camps, and had their children ripped from their arms.

There is, of course, a domestic component to the waving of the sullied flag of the Monroe Doctrine. It is inseparably linked to the Trump administration's attempt to make the

centerpiece of its 2020 reelection drive a fascistic campaign against "socialism," which it attempts to blame for the social deprivation in Venezuela, created by the world capitalist crisis, punishing US sanctions and the pro-capitalist policies of the bourgeois government of Maduro.

The struggle against the attempts of the US ruling elite to promote a fascistic movement against the growth of socialist opposition within the working class, finds its most immediate ally in the battle of Latin American workers against their own right-wing governments, from the fascistic former army captain Jair Bolsonaro in Brazil to Lenín Moreno, who proved his allegiance to imperialism by throwing open the doors of Ecuador's embassy in London to a British police snatch squad, acting on Washington's demands for the rendition of WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange.

As the recent strike wave of tens of thousands of Mexican workers in the maquiladoras in Matamoros demonstrated so powerfully, the working class, objectively joined in a common process of production across national boundaries, can find a way forward only through the conscious unification of US and Latin American workers in struggle to defeat their common enemies, the transnational banks and corporations, US imperialism and the region's national ruling oligarchies.

Only such a unified struggle, based upon the program of socialist internationalism, can defeat the threat of war on Venezuela, with its catastrophic implications for the entire continent and, indeed, the whole world.

This struggle must be prepared and led.

We appeal to our comrades in Latin America, those participating in this online rally, those who read the *World Socialist Web Site* and all those workers and youth seeking a revolutionary path: take up a serious study of the program and perspective of the International Committee of the Fourth International and of the long history of struggle waged by Trotskyism against revisionism in Latin America, and, on this principled foundation, build sections of the ICFI in every country.



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