

Protesters occupying Venezuela embassy in Washington DC speak out

Our reporters
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Following the abortive coup by self-proclaimed “interim president” Juan Guaidó, a tense standoff has unfolded at the Venezuelan embassy in Washington DC. For over a month, protesters hostile to the illegal US regime change operation in Venezuela have defended the embassy from being taken over by pro-Guaidó forces.

The protesters, who call themselves the Embassy Protection Collective, indicate that they were invited by the elected Venezuelan government of Nicolás Maduro. The demonstrators have worked to keep the building occupied around the clock, sleeping on couches or on the floor throughout the night. A rival encampment set up by pro-Guaidó demonstrators outside the embassy has taken control of most entrances and prevented food, water, and other supplies from reaching those inside.

At the height of the occupation, some 50 protesters lived inside the embassy. Now, only a handful remain as repressive measures against the occupants have intensified. Last Wednesday, the utility company Pepco shut off the building’s electricity, even though the bill had been paid until the end of the month. Water was also shut off inside the embassy last weekend.

A WSWs reporting team traveled to the embassy to speak to individuals occupying the building.

“When the water and electricity were cut off, the police department began turning away supporters trying to enter the embassy, including people seeking to bring food and water. Several people were arrested,” said one protester who wished to remain anonymous. “One woman was arrested for throwing a ‘missile,’ which was a loaf of bread through a window. Another person delivered food to the embassy doorstep and police came and threw it all in a dumpster.”

Speaking of the complicity of the US government, he said, “I was there about two weeks ago, when there

were about 30 people staying in the embassy. After several weeks of occupying the embassy, supporters of the Venezuelan opposition led by Guaidó arrived. They were hostile, aggressive, violent even. The US Secret Service set up barricades and opposition supporters were given prominent places to protest in front of the embassy where pro-Maduro supporters had been.”

Paki Wieland, who had been inside the embassy until a few days prior, told the WSWs, “The police were supporting the Guaidó people. Two Guaidó supporters broke into the embassy and when we called the police to remove them they were not arrested. We have camera footage of the Washington DC metro police fraternizing with the opposition supporters.”

On Monday, DC police posted an eviction notice at the embassy doors. While many feared that this was the first step toward a forcible removal, police eventually left the embassy after speaking to demonstrators inside. “[Guaidó-appointed] Ambassadors Vecchio and [Gustavo] Tarre have requested and directed anyone who is present on this property to depart from it immediately, and to not return without these ambassadors’ express authorization,” stated the eviction letter.

One protester told the WSWs, “the lawyer who is staying at the embassy in solidarity with the protesters said that the warrant, which could have been printed on anybody’s home computer, was laughable and could not be honored.”

On Saturday, Guaidó instructed Vecchio to open “direct communications” with the US aimed towards a possible military “coordination” in Venezuela. Vecchio is scheduled to hold a meeting with the US Southern Command (SOUTHCOM) this weekend to plan how to “restore democracy”—imperialist code for conducting a bloody operation to bring a far-right government to

power. On May 9, SOUTHCOM tweeted their willingness to provide “support” to members of the Venezuelan armed forces that “took the correct decision.”

The protesters occupying the Venezuelan embassy are aware that its capture would lead to a further ratcheting of tensions. One protester told the WSWS, “The people inside the DC embassy are also mindful of the fact that if representatives of the illegitimate Guaidó are allowed to take over the embassy, the Maduro government could very well do the same thing to the United States embassy in Caracas, which would potentially ramp up the threat of war.”

Paki said, “The saber-rattlers in Washington are so geared up for a war, they have sanctions in place, which are a form of economic war. Who benefits from this? Not the Venezuelan people. The oil corporations that want to take the oil do,” she said. “It’s like a parallel to the 2003 Iraq war: ‘bad dictator,’ build up to war, with the media promoting it. What I want to know is what leverage the US has used to convince the governments that have recognized Guaidó to do so. Also, what deals have the multi-national corporations struck with them?”

Several demonstrators spoke in defense of Julian Assange, who was himself trapped in an embassy for over seven years for opposing the wars of the US government.

Carlos told the WSWS, “I don’t agree with [Assange’s] extradition to the US. It is an attack not only on Assange but on a free press globally. It is the same principle as with Venezuela. You can’t defend US imperialism or Assange’s extradition to the United States.”

Prince said, “Assange is a journalist. Wikileaks is journalism. I am worried about him being steamrolled. I fundamentally agree that it is necessary to protect his rights. There is tremendous hypocrisy by the *New York Times*. They reported based on what he did, won awards from it, and then they turn around and condemn him.”

Paki thanked the WSWS for its opposition to the US-war drive in Venezuela, even though the WSWS does not characterize the current Venezuelan government as “socialist.” Paki said, “We need people like you to report this situation and tell the truth. This is imperialist hypocrisy. It is up to us [in the US] to see that there are limits to it and that this must be stopped.”



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