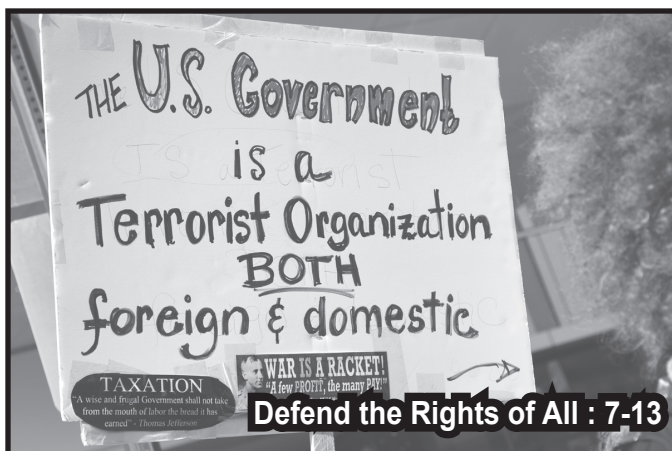




For a Democracy Where We Decide : 1-6



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A STATE OF CIVIL WAR AND
DYSFUNCTIONAL GOVERNMENT

Time for a Democracy Where We Decide!

President Donald Trump gave his State of the Union address and simply declared that the state of the union is strong. He attempted to rally all the vying factions among the rulers by emphasizing U.S. military might and appealing

to the U.S. chauvinism that imbues all the rulers — and was applauded by the large majority in the hall. Chants of USA, USA rang out several times during the course of the speech, in a desperate **Democracy Where We Decide • 3**

REMOVE ALL TROOPS AND DRONES
FROM THE BORDER

Our Security Lies in Our Fight for the Rights of All

The utter lawlessness by the government at the southern border is increasing. It includes the president using police powers to impose long-term detention of children in tent camps and extremely cold

and unfit facilities; targeting families of the children for deportation though they have committed no crime; continued separation of families, using branding of parents **Defend the Rights of All • 7**

STRIKE SECURES GAINS FOR THE PUBLIC

Los Angeles Teachers Defend Right to Education

About 34,000 Los Angeles teachers and staff, in more than 900 schools with more than 640,000 students in the country's second-largest school district went on strike January 14 and remained out until January 23. After filling the streets and picketing at schools every day and holding massive demonstrations of

more than 50,000 at City Hall, the teachers and staff secured important gains. They voted by 81 percent to accept their new contract and return to work. The LA unified school district agreed to hire more nurses, librarians, and counselors; reduce standardized testing and random police **LA Teachers Strike • 8**

January-February edition of ***Voice of Revolution***

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I • Time for a Democracy Where We Decide

effort to unite the vying factions. This included after Trump's statement that, "America was founded on liberty and independence, and not government coercion, domination and control. We are born free, and we will stay free." Congressmembers from the many factions chanted USA! USA!

No doubt they forget the government coercion and control taking place at the border, in the prisons, on the streets against dissent. The domination the U.S. is trying to impose on Venezuela. They are oblivious to the government control over the economic and political decisions made that effect the lives of the people like the shutdown, or factory closings, or decimated public schools or the huge debts of all kinds imposed on the backs of the people. The "we" that is "born free" is certainly not be questioned or opposed.

These various efforts could not hide the deep dysfunction of government, the brewing civil war and the increasing lack of confidence among the people that those in power are fit to govern. Trump refused to even speak to the government shutdown that impacted more than 800,000 government workers, tens of thousands more contractors and millions of people who needed the services shut down and are still being impacted. He did not speak to the dysfunction of Congress these shutdowns reflect, even though yet another one is expected just days away, on February 15. He did not address how U.S. military might will solve any problem, when long years of U.S. aggressive wars in Iraq and Afghanistan have solved nothing and more wars and crimes against Syria and Yemen have not. The U.S. wars abroad and war economy are only further intensifying the factional fights, as the various forces contend over how to maintain U.S. dictate. They are also serving destruction of the human productive forces of all the countries involved, including the U.S. as the war economy is harmful to all.

The reality of civil war was further evidenced in the threat



Trump made: "An economic miracle is taking place in the United States, and the only thing that can stop it are foolish wars, politics or ridiculous partisan investigations. If there is going to be peace and legislation, there cannot be war and investigation. It just doesn't work that way." While many consider the reference to war here is to those abroad, which is part of the content, he is also speaking to the civil war at home. Peace is linked to legislation, to governance and war to investigations. The factions Trump represents considers the current investigations as a danger to U.S. power, while those pushing them consider them the way to secure power. None are concerned about the interests of the people and all are concerned that an open bloody civil war could break out among them. So all are simultaneously striving to rally the people using chauvinism and cheerleading, while

also attempting to have people line up behind one faction or the other of the rulers. But certainly not to organize to unite the most numerous faction, that of the people, to defend their own interests and fight for their own democracy, a people's democracy where We Decide!

Political power today belongs in the hands of the people themselves. Organizing to achieve it requires looking at the world from our own vantage point, not that of the rulers. It is not a matter of debating this or that fact or exposing lies or better describing the situation. It is a matter of starting from a vantage point that favors the people, that is to our advantage. This cannot be done by starting with the thinking and outlook of the rich. It requires our own thinking, our own outlook, that addresses the various interests of the people, individual, collective and of all society and finds ways to harmonize them. Laying claim to this outlook is not a matter of the future, but of taking up the work required in the here and now to win change that favors the people.

Slavery, Smaller Government & Public Distrust

Charles Ellison, Publisher's Riff

A prolonged federal government shutdown creates subtle, but more devastating consequences.

Among the uglier, but still less reported or discussed aspects of the way-too-long federal government shutdown are how it rattles and threatens to completely crack a fundamental pillar of civil U.S. society. With such a shutdown being a uniquely U.S. experience (this does not happen in any other advanced democracy or developed country), there is worry the public — while anxious — will adjust to it as a normal condition when, no, it is not. When government ceases to function, and even when there is an organized front or movement instigating that dysfunction, that can be characterized as a form of coup, purging or, much worse, anarchy.

What is also troubling is that this particular shutdown suggests we are willing to consider acceptable paradigms: 1) slavery; 2) smaller government; and 3) very shaky public confidence in government. These three concepts are converging at this moment into a critical, sparky mass at a very fragile time for Americans.

Slavery By Any Other Name

The increasing number of federal government workers who are being called back to work while unpaid should be of great concern to everyone watching — and not just political junkies, insiders, policymakers and federal workers themselves. The casual treatment by mainstream media coverage is also troubling considering unpaid forced labor has traditionally been viewed as “slavery.” But no one is calling it that.

They should. It brings to question whether the public is fully aware of the definition of slavery and its history in the United States. Alarming, 41 percent of Americans, in a 2015 McClatchy-Marist poll are not aware that slavery was a main reason triggering the Civil War; 13 percent of voters, in a 2016 YouGov/Economist poll, disapproved of the freeing of slaves in 1863 — along with 19 percent of Republicans and conservatives. A Southern Poverty Law Center report in 2018 revealed only 8 percent of K-12 school students understood slavery as the cause of the Civil War and “fewer than half” could answer that it was legal in the colonies. There may be some general view that slavery is wrong — but, how deep is the understanding of it?

Unpaid full-time work on any level should draw an immediately visceral reaction from the larger public. But even as it is happening in plain view with furloughed workers being forced back into operation (or risk the loss of job), that reaction has not happened. A mix of flat growth in earnings for the bottom 90 percent, negative wage growth since the mid-90s, and declining union membership (from a high of nearly 34 percent in 1945 to now a low of just 11 percent in 2015) could be contributing to a perception that working more and earning less is not an unusual thing. This is all against the backdrop of a steady erosion of labor rights.

Keep in mind that tucked away, conveniently, from the official monthly unemployment numbers are the rising underemployment numbers.

That creates the slippery slope towards an is-what-it-is perception that it is acceptable for people to work and not earn anything. Allowing policymakers to create such a condition is just short of condoning neo-slavery; letting that condition fester can also give the private sector (which is eager for more labor market deregulation) the signal that it is acceptable behavior. Which means that, perhaps, it is time for Americans to re-assess what they know and understand collectively about the history and basics of slavery before we end up repeating it in some form.

The “Smaller Government” Movement

Pushing the shutdown beyond a month or even into months begins fulfilling a long-held modern conservative view that “smaller government” is better government. Let the public become accustomed to the absence of key federal agencies and programs and, soon enough, the public will adapt to a world with “less government.” This religion went mainstream during the Reagan years, accelerated during the Republican “Contract with America” years and it was hypocritically defied by Republicans during the Bush II years as he radically re-altered and ballooned government in response to 9/11. Still, the trope of “smaller government” has been happily pushed since. And it is, many suspect, quietly driving lack of Republican motivation to reopen the government in a bid to see how long the nation can do without certain functions. Simply put, it is what they want anyway.

One could make the argument that a soft, bloodless and sophisticated purging of civil servants is taking place. Unpaid federal government workers are, understandably, re-considering the legendary stability of “good government jobs.” Hard choices are being made: from the dusting off of old resumes to look for other, more likely private sector, work to the fear that too much public protest over their predicament could cost them their current, furloughed jobs once and for all.

Americans Do Not Trust the Government

Trust in the federal government, as shown by Pew, has dropped to historic and dangerous lows. A shutdown of this magnitude and length of time exacerbates that attitude. According to Gallup tracking, 48 percent and 54 percent of Americans, respectively, are described as having “not very much” trust and confidence or “none at all” in the federal government’s ability to respond to international and domestic crisis. [...]

Still, as an NBC/WSJ poll from a year ago showed: Americans want government doing more ... 58% favor doing more, 38% favor less.

Outsourced and Forgotten: No Relief for Federal Contract Workers

Anastasia Christman

As the government shutdown dragged on, 800,000 federal workers were furloughed or working without pay. Even if they receive back pay at the end of the shutdown, it will be a case of “too little, too late”: Delayed pay cannot redress lost housing, late payment fees on bills or credit cards, unpaid child care bills, or the daily struggles of living paycheck to paycheck when those checks are delayed indefinitely.

But large numbers of people who do the work of the federal government are not directly employed by the federal government; they do work that the government has outsourced to private companies. Many of these workers may end up receiving no back pay at all.

These are the women and men who staff customer service lines, process payments, maintain properties, serve meals and provide tech support through government contracts with private employers. The number of affected workers is literally impossible to pinpoint, even for the government agencies signing the contracts. For every direct federal worker, we hire almost two more to execute such contracts, for a total of more than 3.7 million contracted employees, according to 2015 research estimates. Untold thousands of these employees have been locked out of work for temporarily shuttered agencies like the Departments of Transportation (with its \$9.1 billion in contracts), Treasury (\$13.9 billion in contracts) and Agriculture (\$16.9 billion).

It is little surprise that President Trump and his allies on the political right have shown no real concern for these workers, who provide important public services and keep our systems running through private contracts. For nearly 60 years, big-name consulting and contracting firms like McKinsey, Booz Allen & Hamilton and United Technologies have profited from increased privatizing

of public work under both parties while lawmakers crow about limiting the scope of government.

By establishing a contract award system that prioritizes the lowest price over any other measure of value, this privatization agenda has shifted work from decently paid, direct federal employment to private jobs where the same tasks and duties can result in 34 percent lower wages for those without college degrees. It has also exacerbated an already wide racial wealth gap by wiping out a historic source of jobs for African Americans. [...]

Contractors have received stop-work orders, and many of the lowest-paid workers earn wages by the hour and so accrue no back pay during long shutdowns. Every day that the government is shut down is another drop into a financial hole for these workers and their families.

Some of these workers are employed by small contractors who may depend on a single contract with one agency to stay afloat. Businesses owned by women or people of color in particular tend to be “smaller and younger than other businesses” and have less ability to help employees when the government is closed. As one small contractor told reporters, she’s worried that her employees will find other jobs, “and now I’m going to be stuck with maybe no employees.” Outsourced workers are worried about being evicted, going through savings and even finding buyers for personal belongings as they struggle to stay afloat.

As the shutdown dragged on, bills piled up and workers sat home worrying about the next financial catastrophe. We need to ensure that President Trump’s federal government shutdown does not destroy the livelihoods and well-being of tens of thousands of families. [...]

Stopgap Measure to Reopen Government Will Strain Food Stamp Recipients

Dottie Rosenbaum, Center on Budget and Policy Priorities

Funding for food stamps for May and later months likely will be at risk if the government shuts down again in mid-February. Under the continuing resolution (CR) that provided the funding to reopen the government for three weeks, SNAP (food stamps) now is fully funded at least through March, even if the government shuts down again on February 15. Millions of families, however, face a longer-than-usual gap between their February and March benefits and that could further strain household budgets, the emergency food network, and other community resources.

The new CR, like the prior CR that expired in December, funds SNAP for the month that begins within 30 days of the CR’s expiration. Under the new CR that month is March.

Presumably, the Administration could use the authority it used to pay February SNAP benefits early to pay April benefits early — in this case, by March 17 — though it has not said it would. For many

households, the measures that the Administration and states took to protect SNAP in February have created a much longer period between SNAP benefits than the usual 28- to 31-day cycle. About 15 million households, which include about 30 million people, could face a gap between monthly SNAP payments of more than 40 days. More than 4 million low-income households, including 8 million people, could experience a gap of more than 50 days. Households with gaps of 50 days or longer are located in about half the states.

The unusually long gap between benefit receipt for February and March will cause some households with extremely tight budgets to face even more problems affording food as they await their March benefits. That, in turn, will place more strain on the emergency food network and other community resources, which already are stretched.

Shutdowns Harm the Health and Safety of the People Even After It Has Ended

Morten Wendelbo, The Conversation

With the latest U.S. federal government shutdown the longest in history, it is important to understand what a shutdown means for the health and safety of Americans. As a researcher who studies natural disaster planning, I believe that Americans should be worried about the federal government's long-term ability to ensure good public health and protect the public from disasters.

As any shutdown draws on, it increasingly weakens the government's ability to protect Americans down the road, long after federal workers are allowed to go back to work. Many of these effects are largely invisible and may feel intangible because they do not currently affect specific individuals.

However, the shutdown poses a very real threat to preparedness for future emergencies, such as natural disasters and disease outbreaks. It also damages the government's ability to recruit and retain the experts needed to work at the cutting edge of public health.

Disaster Preparedness and Response

Much funding for disaster recovery that is already underway is funded in appropriations separate from those that fund the shuttered parts of government.

On Dec. 26, however, the Federal Emergency Management Agency, which contracts private contractors for a large share of their work, ordered its contractors to cease working on several projects. Even for programs with funding, progress is made difficult by a shortage of several thousand staff members.

When President Trump signaled to the Senate that he would not sign into law the appropriations bills that had passed the House, leading to the shutdown, funding with bipartisan support for disaster recovery died too. This impedes disaster relief efforts in the states that experienced disaster in the past two years. Among others, it leaves victims of the forest fires in California and victims of Hurricane Florence in the Carolinas waiting for crucial help needed to recover.

The shutdown also weakens the government's ability to foresee, prevent and respond to upcoming natural disasters. For example, hurricane modelers with NOAA, the agency chiefly responsible for storm forecasts, are furloughed.

In California, dozens of people recently died in the worst forest fire in the state's history, while more than 10,000 homes were destroyed. These forest fires were so severe in part due to how forests have been managed. However, more than half of all of California's forests are managed by the federal government. During the shutdown, those forests are not being managed at all.

In general, first responders and emergency experts use the off season to prepare for the next disaster season, but reports show that the prolonged shutdown is preventing some of this preparation, such as training for essential staff and forecasters.

More scary still is the possibility of a widespread disease. The lapse in funding also means that Pandemic and All-Hazards Preparedness Act did not renew as expected. This act lets the federal

government fund the development of emergency medicine, as well as new medications in advance of future outbreaks, among many other disaster preparedness functions it funds. Even with a fully functioning federal government,

several critical supply chains broke down during last year's flu season, preventing delivery of basic medical goods like saline.

The shutdown severely weakens the ability of the federal government to respond to new threats, even after the shutdown has ended.

Losing Dedicated Public Servants in Public Health

After the shutdown is over, it will probably also prove difficult for the U.S. to retain some of the staff who are crucial to the success of public health — even more so than in most other sectors of the federal government which will also struggle to retain its public servants.

Roughly half of the staff at the Department of Health and Human Services are deemed essential and continue to work despite the shutdown. The other half has been sent home. But neither group is getting paid.

During brief shutdowns, many of which have historically lasted only one to three days, such a lapse in pay is frustrating, but typically a surmountable challenge for most federal workers. During a shutdown lasting weeks, with no end in sight, it means hundreds of thousands of families struggle to pay for rent, school fees, medical care and other expenses essential for their own safety and well-being.

For many personal contractors, who make up hundreds of thousands of the federal government workforce, the loss of pay may be permanent.

This will all make it substantially less attractive to be a federal worker in the future. That is especially true for workers in public health. Although federal jobs often pay as well or even better than the private sector, that is not true for the field of public health, where workers often take pay cuts to become public servants.

To make matters worse, the president has signaled that federal salaries will be cut for 2019. Together, the pay cut and the shutdown may push government employees to join the private sector, leaving the federal government less capable of taking on public health challenges and disasters in the future.



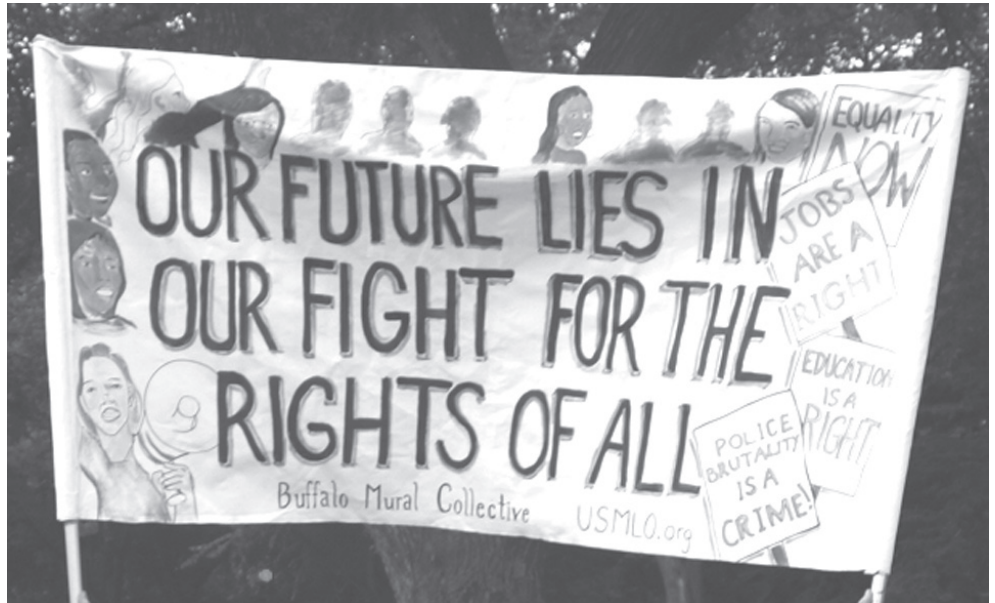
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as gang members; use of tear gas against unarmed families; refusing medical and legal support; and use of troops for immigration purposes. The lawlessness continues despite court orders, further showing that rule of law has been eliminated and police powers prevail. The same can be said of Congressional refusal to take action and instead support or conciliate with the broad attacks on human rights.

In his State of the Union Trump continued claiming an invasion is taking place and announced that he is sending another 3,750 troops to the border, putting the total at more than 10,000. New Mexico withdrew its National Guard troops in protest, saying "New Mexico will not take part in the president's charade of border fearmongering."

House leader Nancy Pelosi, Senator Chuck Schumer and others are planning a "smart" border wall, with yet more drones and spy towers and other means to target and repress people both sides of the border. It is estimated to cost as much or more than the \$5 billion Trump has been demanding. It is also just a racist, arbitrary and unjust as a physical wall. The issue here is that government cannot be relied on to solve any of the problems as it remains dysfunctional and deeply mired in the increasingly bitter factional fights among the rulers and their political representatives.

Trump also hinted that he may well target the Mexican gov-



ernment, saying in his speech that they are providing buses and trucks to bring migrant families to the border. Given his readiness to use force and intervene, the increased numbers of troops are a serious threat to people both sides of the border.

The U.S. has a long history of invading Mexico, particularly at times like the present, when the existing civil war is threatening to become open warfare. Trump is acting to ensure the agents from Custom and Border Protection (CBP) and Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) are prepared to do his bidding and carry out illegal and inhumane actions. The operation at the border is a live exercise in doing so. He is striving to do the same with the military, while also bringing all the state and local forces under military command.

In a situation of civil war, who controls the armed forces is a critical issue and the president is acting to ensure that control remains with the president. The objection of New Mexico within the situation, and possibly others in the weeks to come, indicates that the states may well refuse to participate and reserve their National Guard troops for their purposes.

Within this situation, rejecting the notion that troops and drones and spying can in any way provide security is critical. Experience readily shows that what is occurring at the border is greater insecurity, violence and chaos for all concerned. Joining with Pelosi and Schumer for their border wall, or expecting the new Congress to somehow escape its dysfunctional character will not solve problems.

The united actions both sides of the border and internationalist spirit developing show what is needed. It is by stepping up the fight to defend the rights of all, strengthening unity in action and organizing for a new direction for political affairs that security can be found.

*Remove All Troops and Drones from the Border Now
Our Security Lies in Our Fight for the Rights of All*



We Already Have a Border Wall and it is a Disaster

Debbie Weingarten, *TalkPoverty.org*

Ask anyone living along the U.S.-Mexico border, and they will tell you: We already have fences and walls, drones and helicopters, surveillance towers, checkpoints, and border patrol agents speeding their ATVs across the fragile biotic crust of the desert.

In fact, communities are suffering due to decades of militarization and border infrastructure. Today's walls and fences already cover 700 miles of the 2,000-mile U.S.-Mexico border, dividing towns and families, and causing damage to the environment and border communities, many of which are low-income, tribal, or on the Mexican side of the line.

In short, we do not need or want another wall.

In 1994, landing strips from the Vietnam War-era were welded together into a wall that separated Nogales, Arizona from its sister city of Nogales, Sonora, Mexico. Raised like a crude, rusty flag, the wall was part of Operation Gatekeeper, implemented by the Clinton administration alongside a new border strategy called "prevention through deterrence." The policy set out to deter border crossers by militarizing urban areas along the border.

But the sudden increase in walls, cameras, and border patrol agents did nothing to curb border crossers, and instead pushed them further into the inhospitable desert. Two decades later, the desert has become a graveyard, with more than 7,000 bodies found and thousands of additional border crossers missing.

In October 2006, President George W. Bush signed into law the *Secure Fence Act*, which approved the building of additional border fencing. A year earlier, the *REAL ID Act of 2005* included a provision that gives the secretary of homeland security power to waive any law deemed at odds with the "expeditious construction of physical barriers and roads" along the U.S. border.

"The result [of the REAL ID Act] has been that along a quarter of the 2000-mile border, we have a total of four dozen laws that have been waived off the books," says Dan Millis, the borderlands program manager of the Sierra Club's Grand Canyon chapter. A total of 48 federal laws have been waived, including the *Clear Air Act*, *Clean Water Act*, *Migratory Bird Treaty*, *Endangered Species Act*, and the *Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act*.

"That means that if you live in a border community where these laws have been waived, and the border patrol wants to set up a giant gravel pit to build Donald Trump's wall, they have the ability to do that, and not comply with any of the laws," says Millis. "They could dump toxic sludge into your drinking water and there's nothing you could do about it, because these laws don't apply. The body of laws that have been built up over decades to try to protect human rights and the environment have been thrown in the trash can."

The wall also cleaves in half the Tohono O'odham Nation, which has members on both sides of the U.S.-Mexico border. The tribe maintains that any barrier is at odds with the Tohono O'odham way of life. "We've inhabited this land for so long, since the beginning of time," says April Ignacio, a member of

the Tohono O'odham tribe and an organizer with Indivisible Tohono. "And so not allowing that migration to flow disrupts people's systems. We know the impacts [the border wall] has already had on our environment."

As recently as the 1990s, the Tohono O'odham were able to move freely across the border, but Ignacio says all of that changed with Operation Gatekeeper. Tribal members were restricted to certain crossing points and had to carry a tribal ID. As the border wall was erected, the tribe saw increased migrant traffic on tribal lands and observed that certain animals were now unable to migrate. As militarization increased in the form of helicopters, checkpoints, and roving border patrol agents, traditional O'odham practices were greatly affected.

For instance, Ignacio says tribal members are stopped by border patrol while out gathering saguaro fruit or collecting basket-making materials. "One of my cousins was out hunting and had a gun pulled on him," says Ignacio. "There are areas where men will not hunt because of how border patrol are stationed, or where they've patrolled and chased out the game. That directly impacts ceremony."

Encounters with the border patrol are so disruptive, says Ignacio, that tribal members sometimes discontinue their traditions to avoid them. "They stop collecting. They stop going out." Or, she says, they become "overly prepared," carrying tribal ID cards and documents wherever they go and training their children to stay safe during border patrol interactions. She describes "psychological trauma that no one's talking about, a level of trauma our children are experiencing when they go through checkpoints to state their citizenship... They will probably not remember what it was like on O'odham land without the border patrol."

Walls in general cause structural and geological issues, including flood, erosion, and sedimentation, and the poorly-designed, ill-conceived border infrastructure has indeed malfunctioned in serious ways. For instance, in July 2008, a 5.2-mile section of border fence along southern Arizona's Organ Pipe Cactus National Monument helped cause a devastating flood.

During a storm that dumped 1-2 inches of rain in 90 minutes, the 15-foot-tall wire mesh fence became a towering net for piled-up debris. The built-in drains in the fence were blocked, preventing water from escaping. And the fence's foundation, buried six feet below the ground, prevented subsurface draining.

The result was surging water up to 7 feet high that funneled directly through the town of Lukeville, Arizona and the neighboring Mexican town of Sonoyta. The floodwaters caused severe damage to buildings, infrastructure, and natural resources.

Two hundred miles east during the same storm, a 5-foot-high concrete wall built across a storm drain by the U.S. Border Patrol caused severe flooding in sister city Nogales, Sonora. This resulted in \$8 million in damage, including damage to 578 homes, and the drowning of two people. Mexican officials declared the flood area a disaster zone.

In response to the flooding, Robin Silver, co-founder of the

Center for Biological Diversity, told the *Arizona Daily Star*, “What we are seeing graphically at Organ Pipe was predictable. ... When you build an impediment across a stream, it becomes a dam. And providing some holes in a fence is a joke.”

Not only are such walls structurally and logistically unsound, but some designs would violate a 48-year-old treaty between the U.S. and Mexico regarding the construction of border structures that may affect the flow of the Rio Grande or its floodwaters. The 1970 treaty mandates pre-building approval of both the U.S. and Mexican members of the International Boundary and Water Commission. In 2017, as Trump increased his rhetoric around building a wall, the IBWC’s chief Mexican engineer, Antonio Rascón, said that he would block any proposal that violated the binational treaty. “A concrete wall that blocks trans-border water movement is a total obstruction. If they plan that type of project, we will oppose it,” he said.

But blocking the flow of water is not the only damage the wall causes. The most biologically diverse desert in the United States, the Sonoran Desert spans 120,000 square miles of Arizona, California, and northern Mexico. It is home to thousands of plant and animal species uniquely adapted to the arid climate. Border militarization threatens the habitats, food and water supplies, breeding and migration patterns of these species.

A 2017 report by the Center for Biological Diversity found that “93 threatened, endangered and candidate species would potentially be affected by construction of a wall and related infrastructure spanning the entirety of the border, including jaguars, Mexican gray wolves and Quino checkerspot butterflies.”

“A wall will block movement of many wildlife species, precluding genetic exchange, population rescue and movement of species in response to climate change,” reads the report. “This may very well lead to the extinction of the jaguar, ocelot, cactus ferruginous pygmy owl and other species in the United States.”



Just before Christmas last month, Trump said of the wall on Twitter, “The fact is there is nothing else’s [sic] that will work, and that has been true for thousands of years. It’s like the wheel, there is nothing better. I know tech better than anyone, and technology ... on a Border is only effective in conjunction with a Wall.”

Trump does not know the borderlands. He does not know the smell of fry bread, or the way a cholla forest glows in the golden hours just before sunset, or the ferocity of a wash after a summer monsoon. He does not know the pain of a community sliced in half, the bodies in the desert, or the desperation of border crossers fleeing violence and economic destitution. This beautiful, rugged place has already been hijacked and turned into a weapon.

President Trump, we do not want your wall.

Leaving Food and Water for Migrants at the Border is Not a Crime

Judy Molland, No More Deaths, January 27, 2019

On January 19, a federal judge found four women guilty of misdemeanors after they entered the Cabeza Prieta National Wildlife Refuge along the U.S.-Mexico border without a permit. The group traveled there in August 2017 to leave food and water for migrants at a time when temperatures generally reach triple digits in the Arizona desert.

The four individuals are members of No More Deaths – a ministry of the Unitarian Universalist Church of Tucson, which has been providing life-saving aid to migrants in desperate conditions.

When the women were charged in December 2017, they at stated that they were motivated by religious convictions and a belief that all human beings should be provided with the means of survival. Now each of these four women — Natalie Hoffman, Oona Holcomb, Madeline Huse and Zaachila Orozco — face up

to six months in prison and a fine of \$500 after being convicted by federal magistrate Bernardo Velasco.

In his ruling, Valesco noted that the Refuge is “littered with unexploded military (ordnance), the detritus of illegal entry in the United States, and the on-road and off-road vehicular traffic of the U.S. Border Patrol.” Yet he then proceeded to claim that the water and cans of beans left by the volunteers “in addition to violating the law, erode the national decision to maintain the Refuge in its pristine nature.” Velasco added that the defendants did not “get an access permit, they did not remain on the designated roads and they left water, food, and crates on the Refuge.”

This U.S. magistrate is choosing to prosecute citizens who leave food and water to help their fellow human beings, but not to prosecute the Border Patrol for dumping dangerous objects such as unexploded military devices. What is up with that?

Hoffman was found guilty of driving a vehicle inside the Refuge, which is Arizona's largest wilderness area and spans an enormous 803,418 acres of formidably isolated Sonoran Desert. The other three women, passengers in Hoffman's truck, were charged with entering federally protected land illegally and leaving behind personal property.

It is an area where numerous migrants are known to have died. In 2001, Mexican and U.S. authorities launched an investigation when at least 14 migrants lost their lives after crossing the refuge's border. Authorities concluded that they had probably died because they had been abandoned by smugglers.

Assisting Our Fellow Human Beings

Why is it acceptable to leave plastic garbage in the ocean, but not plastic bottles of water for our fellow humans? Why is it OK for people to dump garbage in federal lands during the shutdown without penalty, but illegal to help our fellow human beings survive? Catherine Gaffen, a volunteer for No More Deaths, stated that the guilty verdicts challenge "all people of conscience throughout the country." "If giving water to some-

one dying of thirst is illegal, what humanity is left in the law of this country?" she asked. Orozco McCormick has said she considered her work almost "sacred," and described being on the Refuge as "like being in a graveyard," because of the number of migrant deaths that had taken place there.

Trump is certainly guilty of abandoning any humanity. A document released on January 17, 2019 by government inspectors revealed that the Trump administration probably separated thousands more children from their parents at the U.S.-Mexico border than was previously estimated.

The federal government reported that around 3,000 children were dragged away from their parents under Trump's 2018 "zero tolerance" policy when families sought to enter the U.S., most legally seeking asylum. The adults were prosecuted and their kids forced into shelters or foster care. But the numbers could be much bigger, according to the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU).

Why are Trump, his Department of Justice, Stephen Miller and the rest of the administration not being prosecuted for cruelty to children?

Lawsuit Filed on Behalf of 10,000 Children Detained by Trump

Southern Poverty Law Center

The Southern Poverty Law Center and Legal Aid Justice Center have filed a class action lawsuit on behalf of over 10,000 children currently being held by the Trump administration in over 100 detention centers across the country.

The lawsuit, originally filed last August in the federal district court in Alexandria, Virginia on behalf of a group of youth being held in Virginia, reveals that the alarming number of children that continue to be held for long periods of time is now at a crisis level. The lawsuit charges this situation is primarily the result of the ongoing cooperation between the Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR) and Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) which, hand-in-hand with family separation, is a deliberate strategy to deter vulnerable migrants from traveling to the U.S. A memo drafted in late 2017 and obtained January 17, 2019 reveals the Administration intended the very result this policy has caused: the prolonged detention of children.

The lawsuit is asking for the release of children who have sponsors available to take them into their homes and to reform this system that has resulted in prolonged detention for thousands of children around the nation.

"If the President is really interested in taking on a crisis in regard to the immigration situation, this is one he has the power to solve, since his Administration created it," said Mary Bauer, deputy legal director for the Southern Poverty Law Center's Immigrant Justice Project. "We have over 10,000 children in custody right now because this administration is using them as bait. This deplorable, deliberate policy means that these children are languishing in detention for months at a time."

In April 2018, ORR entered into a Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) with the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), whereby ORR agreed to share with ICE the information it gathered during the family reunification petition process about sponsors and others living in the household. This policy, an effort to facilitate DHS's efforts to arrest and remove possible sponsors who may be undocumented, has led to far fewer individuals coming forward on behalf of the children in detention.

This scheme is laid out in internal documents provided by a whistleblower that were made public. The documents demonstrate that this policy is a part of the same strategy as the infamous family separation policy, and that the government knew it would result in fewer sponsors coming forward and children remaining in custody for longer periods of time.

"Children belong in homes with families, not warehoused in government detention centers," said Simon Sandoval-Moshenberg, legal director of the Immigrant Advocacy Program and the Legal Aid Justice Center. "But the government is still using sponsors' information for ICE immigration arrests. They're still targeting the sponsors themselves, and as a result over 10,000 immigrant children are still stuck in detention for longer than ever before."

Despite the Administration announcing in mid-December the policy would be altered to only apply to sponsors and not family or household members, little has changed. The partnership between ORR and ICE remains in place and continues to have an enormously chilling effect on potential sponsors coming forward on behalf of these children.

The lawsuit also outlines the completely disorganized and arbitrary sponsorship process, which has created an impenetrable maze for potential sponsors. Together these unlawful and abhorrent policies are having an incredibly negative impact on these already vulnerable immigrant children including:

M.C.L., 14 years old, fled Mexico last fall. She was forced to leave her home after a series of events involving a group of violent men. They killed three of her uncles, broke into her family's home, and threatened her at gunpoint. The teen hoped to rejoin her mother in San Francisco. Instead, she was taken to a shelter in Florida, a 2,350-capacity facility not subject to state licensure and corresponding child welfare inspections.

A.Y.S.R. will turn 18 in three months at the Crittenton facility in Orange County. After a terrifying odyssey from El Salvador where she was routinely sexually abused by a relative, a high-ranking member of a Salvadoran gang, A.Y.S.R. and her 1-year-old son presented themselves at a port of entry in Arizona in September 2018. When immigration officials tried to separate them, she resisted and was sent to a Border Patrol holding facility commonly known as the "icebox" for its freezing temperatures and lack of adequate facilities to care for children.

The plaintiffs include a dozen immigrant children who are currently detained and their sponsors, as well as the Catholic Legal Immigration Network, Inc. (CLINIC) and the Northwest



Immigrant Rights Project (NWIRP), organizations that assist immigrant youth and their family members as well as nonprofits to navigate the immigration system, including the ORR sponsorship process.

"When a government agency takes custody of a child, it should always be looking out for the child's best interests. But the Trump Administration has instead seen children as a way to go after their parents or relatives," said Jorge Baron, Executive Director for NWIRP. "We hope this court case will lead to families being reunified as soon as possible."

ICE Detention Centers Deny Detainees Contact With Attorneys

ACLU Southern California

For immigrants facing deportation, assistance from attorneys can make a profound difference in the outcome of their cases — immigrants with lawyers have an overwhelmingly better chance of being able to stay in the U.S. For asylum seekers, it can be a matter of life or death.

But at Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) detention centers in Southern California, officials make it nearly impossible for many detainees to contact and consult with attorneys. That violates not only the Immigration and Nationality Act, but also the First and Fifth Amendments to the Constitution.

The American Civil Liberties Foundation of Southern California and the Immigrants' Rights Clinic at Stanford Law School have filed a class action lawsuit against ICE, the Orange County Sheriff's Department, and the private prison operator Geo Group, Inc. for creating unlawful barriers to attorney-client communications.

"The Constitution guarantees immigrants the right to meaningfully communicate with their attorneys, said Jennifer Stark, clinical supervising attorney with the Stanford Immigrants' Rights Clinic. The complaint was drafted and researched by clinic students, including Gracie Chang, Annie Shi, and Josh Walden.

The suit, filed in U.S. District Court in Riverside, was brought on behalf of individual detainees and two prominent, non-profit legal organizations — the American Immigration Lawyers Association

and the Immigrant Defenders Law Center — that provide legal services to detainees.

At the immigration centers named in the suit — the Theo Lacy and James A. Musick facilities in Orange County operated by the Orange County Sheriff, and the Adelanto ICE Processing Center in San Bernardino County operated by Geo — officials make it nearly impossible for many detainees to communicate with attorneys and collect documentation necessary to pursue their claims.

"Legal representation is fundamental to ensuring due process for immigrants facing removal, but when our detained clients can't effectively communicate with us, our abilities to be effective advocates are compromised," said Meeth Soni, co-legal director at the Immigrant Defenders Law Center.

Telephone access — often detainees' main conduit to the outside world — is severely restricted, non-confidential, and expensive to the point that many detainees have had no opportunity to contact organizations or private attorneys for legal help. To make matters worse, the phone systems won't allow detainees to leave recorded messages or navigate an automated menu to reach a live individual — it cuts them off if the call is not answered by a live person.

If a detainee succeeds in getting assistance from a lawyer, face-to-face meetings necessary to build a case are limited to the point of being nearly useless. The suit charges that the detainee facilities

have very few or no private consultation rooms. In many cases, detainees and lawyers are forced to meet where their conversations can be easily overheard.

“The U.S. government has placed arbitrary barriers between immigrant detainees and their lawyers which must be eliminated if justice is to be served,” said Ben Johnson, executive director of the American Immigration Lawyers Association.

The individual plaintiffs named in the suit include Desmond Tenghe, who is seeking asylum in the U.S. Tenghe earns \$1 a day working at the Adelanto facility — hardly enough for the paid phone calls he needs to make to not only seek legal representation but also get documents needed for his case. Tenghe has submitted several requests for free calls, but ICE and Geo has never provided them.

Another plaintiff, Jason Nsinano, has been detained for over three years, initially in Adelanto and currently in Theo Lacy.

Nsinano has been kept in his cell in protective custody where he has no access to a telephone for about 22 hours a day. His scarce access to telephones usually falls outside of business hours, leaving him unable to make legal calls. The phone system also prevents him from calling human rights organizations, impeding his efforts to obtain critical information relating to his asylum case.

“Every day, hundreds of immigrants like Mr. Tenghe and Mr. Nsinano are denied access to critically needed legal assistance, in violation of their constitutional rights,” said Michael Kaufman, the Sullivan & Cromwell Access to Justice senior staff attorney at the ACLU Foundation of Southern California.

The lawsuit asks that the court provide detainees the ability to make private, unmonitored legal phone calls; establish reasonable accommodations for detainees who cannot afford to make calls; and provide sufficient spaces for confidential legal visits.

A “Smart” Border Wall Is Just as Racist as a Physical Barrier

s.e. smith, Care2, February 2, 2019

The government shutdown is over as Democrats brokered a deal to keep Trump happy and get people back to work. That deal did not include even one penny for a physical wall along the border, as demanded by numerous constituents — but it did contain what is being billed as funding for a “smart wall.”

Democrats [plan to] match Trump’s \$5.7 billion figure with a funding bill that enhances “border security,” but does not contribute to building an actual physical wall.

If you are wondering what a “smart wall” is, you are not alone. Most people do not really understand what the term means — and that is by design. While a “smart wall” is not a physical barrier, it is every bit as racist, unproductive and horrific as a physical wall. The concept draws on the state apparatus to normalize the militarization of the border with 21st century technology.

We do not know what this “enhanced border” or “smart wall” might look like exactly, but plans will roll out in coming weeks as Democrats attempt to appease the president with a compromise they think will be more palatable to Americans. They say they care about border security too, so they are pitching a large spending package on more personnel at the border, infrastructure investment at ports and checkpoints, and a whole lot of technology — specifically, drones and sensors. [...]

Those proposing the “smart wall” are drawing on the same tech tools that have been criticized by civil rights activists for years, but especially in this moment. And even members of Congress are correctly identifying algorithms like those that would be used at the border as racist.

We have already seen how this equipment is used for surveillance and intimidation, even when migrants are going about perfectly legal business. Keep in mind that asking for asylum



Demonstration in El Paso, Texas January 27, 2019

is not illegal — and that in order to do so, people have to get to the border.

The border is not a military entity, but the “smart border” proposals would have a heavily militarizing effect — with equipment used to harass and intimidate people and the dispatch of ever-higher numbers of Border Patrol officers. This will be harmful for communities along both sides of the border, as well as those crossing it — legally and otherwise.

And it should be noted that being in the country without documentation is a civil — not criminal — violation, so sinking resources that are being used to criminalize black and brown communities into border security sends an unmistakable message.

The “smart wall” would rely on technology that is still fundamentally designed to intimidate and deter, not address the underlying problems with the immigration system in the U.S. Instead, [elected officials] should be fighting to address the immigration court backlog; ending the use of immigration detention for people of all ages; changing immigration law to make it more welcoming; honoring U.S. responsibility to accept refugees; and addressing the foreign policy that has contributed to violence and suffering all over the world, driving people to the U.S. for shelter.

Salvadoran Man has Evidence He is not a Gang Member but U.S. Still Separated Him from His Kids

Laura C. Morel, Reveal

In early November, 2018, U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) officers accused a Salvadoran father – known in court documents only as “Mr. A” – of being an MS-13 gang member. They did not show him any evidence to back up their claim. Mr. A denied he was ever part of the group and stripped off his clothes to prove he was not hiding any gang-related tattoos. Still, the officers did not believe him.

On November 5, officers hauled Mr. A out of a Texas immigration detention facility to court for a hearing. When he returned to his cell that day, his 11-year-old daughter and 9-year-old son were gone. He has not seen them in the nearly three months since, even though the government has not offered any proof of his gang membership.

Mr. A’s lawyers have compiled a stack of evidence to the contrary. They have submitted a document from El Salvador’s Ministry of Justice and Public Safety confirming that their client does not have a criminal record. A letter from his former employer, an art supply store in San Salvador where Mr. A worked for the past 13 years, describes him as an upstanding colleague and manager. They have also filed a photo that shows Mr. A at the beach with his daughter, to prove he does not have any MS-13 tattoos.

“We have asked for information, and we have not been given any,” said Laura Peña, a lawyer in Mr. A’s case who works with the Texas Civil Rights Project. “We don’t know what information the government has, so it’s hard for us to counter the allegation.”

More than six months after President Donald Trump announced the end of his administration’s family separation policy, Mr. A’s case highlights the government’s ongoing practice of breaking up families at the U.S.-Mexico border.

Nearly 120 migrant children were split up from families between the formal end of family separation and early November, according to a recent report by the Department of Health and Human Services’ inspector general’s office. In the majority of these new cases, the report notes, parents are accused of having criminal records or gang affiliations. Allegations in some cases are based on unsubstantiated claims or minor infractions, *ProPublica* reported in November.

It is an issue that has garnered the attention of Lee Gelernt, the lead ACLU attorney in the case that resulted in the reunification of some of the families split up during zero tolerance. “We have raised this issue with the court and plan to keep doing so,” he said. “We have received information about these types of separations only after pushing hard for information, and the information we have received is usually minimal and inadequate.”

The Department of Homeland Security declined to comment. Lawyers representing the government have not filed records in court supporting its claim against Mr. A. [...] Mr. A’s case was delayed due to the government shutdown, but is expected to

progress in the coming weeks.

According to the inspector general’s report, the Department of Homeland Security also shares few details about the basis for separations with other government agencies. The federal Office of Refugee Resettlement, for instance, must evaluate the criminal record of parents as part of its process for placing children in homes.

“From a child welfare perspective, not all criminal history rises to a level that would preclude a child from being placed with his or her parent,” the report states. But in some cases, the department provided little information about the nature of parents’ criminal records to the refugee agency. That could “impede ORR’s ability to determine the appropriate placement for a child,” the report says.

Mr. A maintains he’s never been involved with MS-13. “We believe him,” Peña said.

Court records provide a detailed account of his case. In April, gang members began threatening Mr. A and gave him a choice: Pay \$1,300 or his children would die. Mr. A moved his family to another city in El Salvador on Oct. 7. But the threats continued.

“They told me to think about my children,” Mr. A told an asylum officer, according to a transcript of the interview the government conducts to establish whether someone has a “credible fear” of returning to his or her home country. He reported the threats to the authorities in El Salvador, but a prosecutor told him officials couldn’t help without the names of the gang members.

After crossing into the U.S. on Nov. 2, the family was apprehended by border officers, who took them to a detention facility. Two days later, they were shuffled on a bus to another holding area called the “ice box,” where migrants are kept in a cold concrete room. On Nov. 5, when Mr. A returned from a court hearing, his children were gone.

“Mr. A was not informed of, and did not consent to, the impending separation and was given no opportunity to contest it,” court filings state. “In fact, the officers concealed the impending separation from Mr. A by promising that his children would still be at the detention facility when he returned from his court appearance.”

Since their separation, Mr. A “grew increasingly despondent and withdrawn,” his lawyers say. He’s lost more than 20 pounds and has frequent nightmares and depression. During his credible fear interview, he asked for his son and daughter. He failed the interview, records state, and is being held at the Webb County Detention Center in Laredo, Texas. His lawyers are appealing the asylum case.

His children remain at a Texas shelter, Peña said, and have spoken to their father only a few times since they were separated. “The emotional and mental trauma is severe for both kids,” Peña said. “The harm is being done every day.”

I • Los Angeles Teacher Strike

searches of students; create an immigrant defense fund; hand budget control of 30 schools over to local communities and reduce class sizes.

From day one of the strike, huge majorities of teachers showed up at their schools every morning to hold the picket lines, together with parents and students. Then strikers and their supporters headed downtown for rallies that topped 50,000 the first day and kept grow-

ing. The streets were full of joy. All week, everywhere there was singing, dancing, spoken word, brass bands, mariachis. Teachers did not let the drenching rain daunt them; they suited up in ponchos, and laminated their song sheets and picket signs. As one sign put it, “45 is the Speed Limit, Not a Class Size.” They also made certain that all across the city, people were talking about the strike and its demands — in coffee shops, on the bus, in stores.

The teachers took a stand of social responsibility, defending the interests of society for fully funded public schools, with the nurses, librarians and counselors required, as well as their collective interests for better working conditions, like smaller classes and wages commensurate with the difficult work they do. The United Teachers of Los Angeles (UTLA) organized the strike, which had broad support from parents, students and community organizations.

More counselors and nurses and smaller classes are directly related to efforts to block the school-to-prison pipeline. California ranks 47th in the nation when it comes to counselor access: there is an average of one counselor for every 682 students, far exceeding the recommended ratio of one to 250. At the same time, the district spends \$80 million a year on police. The lack of counselors, nurses, and social workers combined with large classes feeds the school-to-prison pipeline. Amir Whitaker, a staff attorney with the American Civil Liberties Union of Southern California put it this way: “It relates to the teachers’ having large classes: if you can’t manage forty students and call for help, and if there is no social-emotional support, only the police are on hand.” Los Angeles has large numbers of African American and Latino students who bear the brunt of police actions in the schools.

UTLA also called for a moratorium on new charter schools in the district. The charters are privately run and not accountable to the public, although they utilize public funds and are often



co-located in public school buildings. One in five students in Los Angeles now attends a charter school, and there are more than 200 such schools in the district — one of the largest proportions in the country. The charters are being utilized to undermine unions and eliminate public education and the social responsibility of government to provide it. However, in this case, charter school teachers supported the strike and

planned a strike of their own.

At a mass public rally outside City Hall January 22, UTLA President Alex Caputo-Pearl told the crowd, “We did not win because of a single leader.” He added, “We did not win because of a small group of leaders. We won because you — at more than 900 schools across the entire city, with parents, with students, with community organizations — you walked the line.” He emphasized later in an interview, “The creativity and innovation and passion and love and emotion of our members was out on the street, in the communities, in the parks, for everyone to see. And I’m so proud of our members — classroom teachers, counselors, nurses, librarians, psychologists, early educators, adult educators — who took it upon themselves, in record numbers on picket lines,” to defend public education and demand government accountability for providing it.

At the mass rally January 22, Secretary and Bargaining Chair Arlene Inouye reviewed the high points of the tentative agreement, which was published in full on-line:

- A full-time nurse in every school. Another 300 nurses will be hired over the next two years.
- A full-time librarian in every middle school and high school. The district will hire 82 more librarians.
- More counselors. The district will hire 17 more counselors to maintain one counselor for every 500 middle and high school students. While a case load of 500 this is far higher than the needed 1 for every 250 students, it will assist. As well additional funding was secured to lower the ratios for psychiatric social workers, psychologists and attendance counselors.
- An immigrant defense fund, with a dedicated hotline and attorney for immigrant families.
- Less testing. The district and union will establish a committee to cut the amount of standardized testing by half.
- Class size reductions. Gone is the hated Section 1.5 which allowed the district to ignore contractual limits on class size.

FULLY FUND PUBLIC EDUCATION NOW

Class size caps can now be enforced, and when a class goes over the cap a new class will need to be formed. Further, for grades 4-12 class limits will be decreased by four over the next three years.

- Progress on charters. The Board of Education will support a statewide moratorium on charter schools — which is a positive political step, though it does not mean a Los Angeles moratorium. The union also won increased notice and voice in the process where charter schools are co-located in neighborhood schools.

- A 6 percent raise, with 3 percent retroactive to the 2017-2018 school year and 3 percent for this year, retroactive to July 1, 2018. There will be salary re-openers in future years.

- Fewer random searches. The number of schools that do not do random searches of students will double from 14 to 28.

- Community schools. Thirty schools will get this designation and additional funding. A council of local people will run each school's budget, working with the community coordinator (a new union position).

- A joint push by the union, the district, and the mayor for more school funding from the county and state. Mayor Eric Garcetti agreed to endorse the *Schools and Communities First*

initiative on the 2020 ballot, which will close California's commercial property tax loophole and restore \$11 billion in funding to schools and other public services.

- Green space. A task force to develop more green space in schools.

After the rally teachers returned to their school sites to review and discuss the agreements with their co-workers, and vote on whether to accept it and return to work the next morning. Some teachers around the city were frustrated at a process they felt was rushed. The large majority voted yes on the agreement, and returned to their classrooms January 23.

Strike Blocks Efforts to Eliminate Public School District

Los Angeles is the largest U.S. school district governed by an elected school board. (The largest district, New York City, and third largest, Chicago, are both governed by mayoral appointees.)

Year after year, its school board elections have broken spending records. Monopoly forces striving to eliminate public education spent \$13 million in the last LA board election. Most of it came from the Walton family (the owners of Walmart) and Eli

Broad, two of the biggest funders nationally of charter schools, vouchers, and privatization. The anti-public schools forces won a majority of the seats on the school board. And after the previous superintendent resigned early last year for health reasons, that majority handpicked the current superintendent, Austin Beutner. Beutner has no education backing and is a multi-millionaire from Wall Street. His plan, backed by Broad, was to eliminate the unified Los Angeles school district and ensure at least half of the students went to privately run but publicly funded charter schools. Beutner was previously used to undermine public school districts in Detroit and New Orleans, which now has no public schools remaining and no central school district. The LA strike served to block this direction at this time.

As Arlene Inouye explained, "We are a union that four years ago set out on this path. This just didn't happen, you know, the last 21 months when we've been in negotiations. But four years ago, we set down a path to organize our schools, to bring in parents and communities and to have a social justice agenda, an educational justice agenda for all of our students."



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Parent To Los Angeles School Board: My Family Will Not Cross The Picket Line

Nora Murphy, LA Librarian and Teacher

(Nora Murphy was a teacher in the Los Angeles Unified School District when she realized she would rather be a teacher-librarian. In a 2011 op-ed in the Los Angeles Times she wrote: “When I taught seventh-grade English, I saw how critical it was that my students read. Those who loved books and read a lot found school easier and were more successful. I didn’t fully understand, though, until a school librarian taught me, that I could help the students who didn’t like reading become readers. By reading what my students read, I could learn what they liked and show them how to find other books they would like. I could create lovers of literature.

“I soon got into the habit of, whenever I felt in over my head, turning to the school librarian for help. I once taught a class of highly gifted students whose curiosity and abilities stretched my limits as an educator. Our school librarian suggested reading with them a memoir called “Finding Fish,” the story of a boy who overcomes insurmountable obstacles to create the life he wanted for himself. As we read this powerful book, we worked with the teacher-librarian to explore the social issues and ethics the story raised. Then students crafted their own memoirs.

That experience and others like it demonstrated to me that a school librarian performs the toughest, and most crucial, kind of teaching. Seeing it done well inspired me. Ultimately I returned to school to earn a library media services credential and a master’s degree.”

The Los Angeles school district, however, decided that librarians and library aides were expendable when it made budget cuts, and Murphy was one of them. Now, with a strike by teachers and staff, as a parent of a first-grader, she made clear, her family will stand with the strikers and all those defending the right to education. Below is her letter to the Los Angeles Board of Education.)

* * *

Dear members of the school board,

I taught in the Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD) for eleven rewarding, challenging, roller-coaster-ride years. I am the person and educator that I am today because of it. I am now a parent of an LAUSD student and I feel both elated to be part of public education again and conflicted over what I know about this district as an insider. I will tell you this, my family will be picketing with my child’s teachers because what they are asking for is the bare minimum any school district should provide for its schools, its families, its students... How do you plan to adequately care for the hundreds of thousands of children whose families do not have that option? How many qualified childcare professionals do you have ready to care for the lives that will be in your hands as your beleaguered, undervalued, underpaid, under-served teachers do the only thing left they can possibly do to get through to you? No teacher wants to strike, you know. Teachers work

through illness, through family hardship, through grief in order to care for their students. If they are going to strike, it is because the situation is dire.

The school district is a public trust. We decided long ago, as a nation, that our children would be educated. We decided, as a nation, that this is the bedrock of our democracy. The requests being made by United Teachers Los Angeles (UTLA) are neither excessive nor unreasonable. They are not out of reach for this school district. They are basic, fundamental, obvious needs. Will any of you really argue that teachers need not be paid what they are worth? Even what they are asking is far less than what they are worth, what they pour into their work, what they dedicate their lives to. Will you argue that my son does not need a medical professional on his campus at all times? Will you tell me that he does not need a librarian, that librarians are obsolete, that children intuitively use iPads and therefore no longer need curators of information? Will you tell me that my son will get the attention he needs from his teachers when there are thirty [or 40 or 50] students in the room? I do not think you will, and I do not think you could justify these things if you tried.

At a time when our national character is threatened, when our fundamental values are being challenged, where will you stand? I know how this school district functions and I can tell you where to find the money. Stop buying canned curriculum every 3-5 years and sending thousands of teachers to unnecessary training. Stop buying trendy gadgets and stop, please stop hopping onto flimsy bandwagons. Think about what you want for your children, your best friend’s children, your sibling’s children, your grandchildren when you are making decisions about my child. Give the money to the teachers, please! They are the ones who are actually, really, fundamentally, truly shaping the future of this nation. Give them the money so they do not go away and leave this task to...I cannot even imagine.

Fewer kids in the room, a living wage, nurses, libraries. That is the ask. It is unconscionable that you would refuse such a humble, modest, reasonable, ethical, moral request.

My family will not cross the picket line.



Teacher Strikes Are Spreading Across Country

Candice Bernd

Teachers in Colorado, Virginia and Oakland, California, were newly emboldened this week as they watched teachers in Los Angeles return to their classrooms after a successful six-day strike with an increase in pay and support staff. Now, they too are making their demands for fully funded schools known, with some moving closer to a strike of their own.

The LA strike has reverberated strongly in northern California, where educators face many of the same issues, including ballooning class sizes and meager support staff. The Oakland Education Association, whose members have been without a contract since July 2017, began a four-day strike authorization vote January 29. The last of the union's 3,000 members will vote February 1, and an authorization could lead to Oakland teachers' first strike since 2010. The authorization votes come on the heels of hundreds of Oakland teachers calling out sick January 18 in a wildcat "sickout" action to rally and march for school funding.

A Strike Brews in Denver

About 1,200 miles east, teachers in Denver have also reached their limit as negotiations with the school district have remained at an impasse over teacher compensation for more than 14 months. The Denver Classroom Teachers Association (DCTA) was gearing up to strike, but the school district thwarted the plan with a request for state intervention.

The 3,000-member union must now wait up to 10 more days for Colorado Governor Jared Polis to decide if he will intervene — which could delay the strike another 180 days as the negotiations enter into a fact-finding phase. Teachers, guidance counselors and nurses could face civil fines and even have their licenses revoked if they were to strike during this period.

However, DCTA President Henry Roman said that the union has crafted its proposals after years of information gathering and studies into the district's operations and budget.

Denver teachers' compensation is set up under a system called ProComp, which offers teachers incentives for working at a school that attains high test scores. While the district touts the system, the union argues it is overly complicated and creates frustration and uncertainty among educators about their pay.

The union is demanding increased base pay in a state that ranks 31st in the nation for teacher salaries, and is taking issue with the district's above average administrative spending



Teachers rally in Richmond, Virginia January 28, 2019

compared to the rest of the state. The district also has a scheme to incentivize teachers using bonuses, rather than give them a predictable salary schedule like other districts. Roman says, the district spends exorbitantly on bonuses for "people who are already well-paid" — its administrators.

In its legal response to the district's request for intervention, the union argued that the district "has resorted to shameful intimidation tactics against its own workers," including simultaneously threatening to report its immigrant teachers to immigration officials and school nurses with corrective action if they participate in any forthcoming strike. The union called these threats inexcusable.

Last April, Denver educators closed schools across the district for three days as thousands protested for fully funded schools at the state capitol building.

Virginia Teachers Plan Next Steps After Massive Protest

Another 1,660 miles east, thousands more public school teachers demonstrated in Richmond, Virginia, on January 28 to demand state lawmakers increase funding for public education, in what they say was the largest single demonstration of educators in the state's history.

As the rally unfolded, state legislators in the House of Delegates Finance Committee agreed to include Virginia Governor Ralph Northam's proposal for a 5 percent pay increase over two years for teachers and school staff in their next budget.

But Virginia Educators United (VEU), the grassroots group leading the #RedforEd movement there, says the raise does not meet the coalition's other major demands, and is an attempt to

silence the coalition's "demand for a comprehensive re-envisioning of our school funding models."

Deanna Fierro, a member of VEU's strategy team who also teaches math at a Henrico County middle school, said a group of VEU organizers plans to be at the state's General Assembly to ensure the increases actually make it into the budget. The organizers will also be strategizing around the coalition's next steps to pressure delegates to meet the group's other key demands: restoring state education funding; recruiting more diverse, high quality teachers; repairing school infrastructure; and providing adequate support staff. Actions like sickouts are not off the table, Fierro says.

Virginia has seen a dramatic decline in education funding over the last decade. The state ranks 34th nationally in terms of teacher pay, and its per-pupil spending was 9.1 percent lower during the 2018-2019 school year than 10 years ago, according to the Commonwealth Institute for Fiscal Analysis, a Richmond-based think tank.

Recent tax breaks for Amazon's new "HQ2," set to break ground in Virginia, were another instigating factor for the teachers. Education advocates argue the state should invest in its schools before investing so much in business development. "When things are bad in our economy, the first place [legislators] take money from is social services and things like education," Fierro says.

Virginia Educators United spent more than nine months planning the protest, according to Fierro, and worked in coalition with union and non-union members alike, as well as educators, parents, administrators and policymakers.

The grassroots group, she says, is meant to be more "inclusive of educators at all levels, so basically, anybody who works in the public school system, [or in] higher-education ... and anybody that is a parent, guardian or member of the community." Virginia's state statutes prohibiting collective bargaining and barring public-sector workers from striking, she says, have largely defanged the Virginia Education Association.

Arizona and West Virginia Strikers Face Retaliation

While California, Colorado and Virginia are joining the battles for public education, teachers in right-to-work states who have already walked out of their classrooms are now organizing to beat back new legislation designed to prevent any future strikes or walkouts.

Teachers in many of these states already face restrictions that make it harder for them to strike — one reason why some of these states have utilized the language of the "walkout," instead of explicitly calling their actions "strikes."

Arizona lawmakers introduced legislation this month that would make it illegal to close a school for any kind of labor action. The bill would also apply to charter schools, which have also seen strikes in both Chicago and Los Angeles recently.

Lawmakers have also introduced a bill that would gag teachers from discussing politics, including labor issues, in their classrooms. If the bill passes, teachers who engage in labor organizing could be fired. The legislation is so broad that it would also ban teachers from "endorsing" particular legislation, judicial action or political events — almost certainly imperiling teachers' freedom in civics classes. The bill also prevents them from taking on "controversial



issues," and citing one racial group as responsible for the "suffering or inequities" of another.

"Clearly, they didn't hear the voices of the teachers last spring," said Noah Karvelis, who teaches music at Tres Rios Service Academy in the Littleton Elementary School District in Tolleson and founded Arizona Educators United. "If you really care about students and schools, then you need to talk about solutions to Arizona's \$700 million education budget deficit. Not ways to discipline and silence teachers."

Meanwhile, Oklahoma lawmakers have also introduced legislation this month that would ban strikes and punish teachers for their labor organizing. Under House Bill 2214, any teacher who participates in a strike or walkout would see their wages withheld and their teaching license revoked.

"For us, [the April walkout] was such a positive event — we had community members and parents all coming together in support of their kids, our students, the future of Oklahoma — and it's sad that a legislator would take that positive event, where we worked together in a democratic way ... and then write up a retaliatory bill that would try to silence the voice of all those people," said Alicia Priest, president of the Oklahoma Education Association.

Priest remains confident, however, that the bill's author, Rep. Todd Russ, will not find enough support to move his bill forward. The union, she says, has worked to make substantial changes at the capitol since their walkout last year, tripling the legislature's educator caucus and "weeding out" those who voted against raises to education revenue last spring, while developing strong relationships with newly elected legislators.

"We've seen a decade of cuts to public education ... and that is, obviously, with these actions, not unique to Oklahoma. Not only has education faced cuts, but we've faced privatization and vouchers, and changes in our standards," Priest said. "We're using our collective voice and making sure that everybody knows that it's time to take care of our students' needs, and it's time to make sure that our workers can pay their bills."

Hands Off Venezuela!

No Sanctions, No Military Intervention!

On January 23 the U.S. attempted once again to force regime change on the people of Venezuela. This time the U.S. trained a particular individual, funded and backed him, and openly gave him the green light to simply declare himself president. Within minutes of illegally and unconstitutionally declaring himself “interim president” of Venezuela at a rally of opposition supporters, deputy Juan Guaidó was recognized by U.S. President Donald Trump as the “legitimate” president of the country, in direct opposition to the recently elected and recognized President Maduro. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo declared shortly after that the U.S. would continue to use the full weight of its economic and diplomatic power to impose regime change, or what he called “the restoration of Venezuelan democracy.”

The people of Venezuela immediately demonstrated in support of President Maduro and the Venezuelan military also pledged its full support. Tens of thousands filled the streets of

Caracas and heard Maduro affirm that Venezuela will not bow to U.S. threats. Protesters affirmed their support for their elected government and for continuing forward with their Bolivarian Revolution.

Voice of Revolution vigorously opposes this effort to impose U.S. totalitarian democracy and stands shoulder to shoulder with the people of Venezuela. Emergency actions all across the country took place January 24-26 including in Washington, DC, Boston, Chicago, Los Angeles and San Francisco, as well as Seattle, Washington; Boise, Idaho; Salt Lake City, Utah; Minneapolis, Minnesota; Springfield, Missouri; Indianapolis, Indiana; Dallas, Texas; Columbia, South Carolina; Miami, Pensacola, Sarasota and Tallahassee, Florida; Pittsburgh and Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. Additional demonstrations took place worldwide and more are planned for the one-month anniversary February 23 and in March as well. The broad and vigorous opposition to

U.S. sanctions, coups and potential military intervention are an important part of blocking the continuing U.S. efforts to dictate and dominate not only Venezuela but all the Americas. We urge all to join in!

Additional sanctions have also now been imposed by the U.S., especially against Venezuelan oil companies, in an effort to bring her to her knees. It is evident that the U.S. has learned nothing from its experience with Cuba, or Korea, or Iran, whose peoples all contend with U.S. sanctions while persisting in determining their own path forward. Sanctions serve only to harm the peoples and are purposely designed to do so. They too must be vigorously opposed. Relations of mutual respect and benefit are what the peoples here, in Venezuela and worldwide demand.

Trump has also threatened military intervention despite efforts by the peoples and countries of the region to resolve the problems through dialogue. No sooner did countries of the Caribbean organized in CARICOM and Mexico and Uruguay organize a summit for such dialogue — something immediately supported by President Maduro — than the U.S. and Guaidó refused. They are not interested in a political solution, as evidenced by Guido’s demands for the U.S. to intervene.

It is increasingly clear that the only democracy the U.S. upholds is totalitarian democracy, where it dictates and decides against the interests of the peoples. It is a U.S.-style democracy that is being widely rejected and denounced both in the U.S. and abroad and one that is fit only for the graveyard. Advancing the battle for a new democracy of our own making, one that stands as one with all humanity in the struggle for the new is what will best assist the people of Venezuela and the world.



Maduro Supports Negotiation Plan for Summit in Uruguay

ALBA, February 7, 2019

Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro affirmed on February 6 that he gives “absolute support” to the 4-phase Plan designed by countries of the Caribbean organized in CARICOM, Mexico and Uruguay for Peace and Dialogue in Venezuela. The summit began on February 7 in Montevideo, Uruguay. “We are ready for a process of dialogue and we are ready to participate,” said the president. “The first meeting to help and promote dialogue for peace in Venezuela has been a success and I reaffirm all the support for the plan of the four phases proposed by the Montevideo mechanism with the Governments of Mexico, Uruguay and Bolivia, plus the fourteen countries of the CARICOM,” he said.

Maduro emphasized that Venezuela is standing firm and the cohesion and loyalty of the popular forces and entire Bolivarian National Armed Forces (FANB) are fundamental to defending the revolution. He also affirmed that Venezuela is setting an example. “The battle we are doing in Venezuela is not only for us, it is not only against the colonialism that wants to enslave us, it is also the battle for humanity, it is a battle for dignity ...”

Four stages

The Foreign Ministers of Uruguay, Rodolfo Nin Novoa, and of Mexico, Marcelo Ebrard, explained on Wednesday that the “Montevideo Mechanism” will consist of four stages:

- The first is the “immediate dialogue” and the “generation of conditions for direct contact between the actors,” said Nin, referring to the Maduro government and the opposition.
- The second step would be the “negotiation and presentation of results of the dialogue, with points in common and a space for the flexibility of the positions” of each party.
- The third step would be “the commitment and the signing of agreements”.
- The last step of this “mechanism” would be “the implementation and materialization of the agreements, with international accompaniment,” Nin added.

Imperialist threats of the U.S. denounced

Maduro also indicated that Venezuela denounced the imperialist threats of the U.S. and said “a great wave of solidarity with Venezuela will rise and that the public opinion of the United States will annul the threats of Donald Trump.” The national leader called on the Bolivarian National Armed Forces (FANB) to defend territorial sovereignty in any scenario. “You are the shield of the western part of the country by water, by land,



by air and you have to guarantee together with the people the sovereignty, the territorial integrity and the full enjoyment of the rights of the people,” he said.

In a speech February 4, before the summit, Maduro said Venezuela will not allow foreign soldiers to invade and called for dialogue and diplomacy. Since the attempted coup on January 23 led by opposition lawmaker Juan Guaidó, the United States has aligned its forces with the self-proclaimed “interim president,” declaring his unconstitutional claim legitimate, triggering similar calls from its allies around the world and in South America.

Maduro said, “When our Comandante Chavez passed away, I became president, but my first act was to hold elections. I wasn’t going to govern without elections...”

Threats of militarized intervention have resurfaced as well as new rounds of suffocating sanctions against Venezuela, targeting the country’s oil companies in the United States. Although both the Lima Group and the European Union have rejected militarized force, they have recognized the Guaidó’s claim and are calling for Maduro to abdicate in favor of a new election.

Regarding the repeated requests for intervention made by the Venezuelan opposition, the president said it was foolish for those in the homeland to encourage war. “Those who march with the U.S. flag asking for military intervention in their own country have no idea what they’re asking for, they have no idea of the damage they will bring,” said Maduro.

“In Venezuela, a battle is being played out for the right of all countries to pursue their own paths... I want to ask the world for the highest level of solidarity to create a powerful movement against the threats of war from the US,” the Bolivarian president said.

Bolivarian National Armed Forces Ratify the Legitimacy of Nicolás Maduro as the Constitutional President of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela

Ministry of People's Power for Defence

On January 24, the Sectoral Vice President for Political Sovereignty, Security and Peace and People's Power Minister of Defence, General-in-Chief Vladimir Padrino López, accompanied by the expanded Superior General Staff of the Bolivarian National Armed Forces, took a firm and unwavering stand to reject the illegal actions that a parallel government intends to carry out in Venezuela and, at the same time, ratified the Bolivarian National Armed Forces' (FANB) full adherence to the Constitution and laws of the Republic.

Also, during the reading of the official statement from his office in Fuerte Tiuna, the head of the military reproached the interference by foreign governments, which he described as "disrespectful of international law and the principle of the self-determination of peoples."

On the other hand, the Minister of Defence guaranteed citizens peace as well as the proper functioning of State institutions, saying vandalism or terrorist acts will not be tolerated.

In the same vein, the Bolivarian National Armed Forces

recognized -- once again -- the legitimacy of Nicolás Maduro Moros, as Constitutional President of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela and Commander-in-Chief of the FANB, emphasizing that he was elected on May 20, 2018, through free, universal, direct and secret elections.

In the statement, Padrino López said that "for a long time a vulgar coup d'état has been in the making against the legitimately constituted government of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela by sectors of the extreme right, brazenly supported by imperial agents." In this regard, he denounced the claim of "establishing a de facto parallel government, lacking legality and popular support, for the shadowy purpose of generating chaos and anarchy in our society."

Finally, the General-in-Chief reiterated that the military will never accept a President who has been imposed, or self-proclaimed outside the law; nor will it ever be subordinated to a foreign power or to a government that is not democratically elected by the people of Venezuela.

International Statements and Resolutions in Support of Venezuela

Caribbean Community

The Chairman of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM), St Kitts-Nevis Prime Minister Dr. Timothy Harris, Trinidad and Tobago Prime Minister Dr. Keith Rowley, as well as Barbados Prime Minister Mia Mottley, met with United Nations Secretary-General Antonio Guterres on January 28 in New York to outline their position and discuss the ongoing socio-political situation in Venezuela.

A statement issued after the talks clearly outlined their fear over the fallout from an external military intervention in the Venezuelan crisis.

"The CARICOM delegation emphasized its commitment to the tenets of Article 2(4) of the UN Charter which calls on states to refrain from the threat or the use of force. CARICOM has been consistent in the critical importance it accords to the key principles of non-interference and non-intervention. CARICOM reaffirmed the view that there was an urgent need for meaningful dialogue leading to a peaceful internal solution for the Venezuelan people. The Caribbean Community is resolute in its belief that it is never too late for dialogue since

the consequences of no dialogue will be dire," a joint statement issued by the body said.

The statement also emphasized "the importance of the Caribbean remaining a Zone of Peace," an idea first coined by Maurice Bishop, who came to power in Grenada in a revolution that toppled the government of Eric Gairy in 1979 and was later killed in a bloody invasion of the country by the United States.

"We join with our sister Caribbean nations in re-emphasizing our determination to preserve the Caribbean as a zone of peace, free from military intimidation. We demand the right to build our own processes in our own way, free from outside interference, free from bullying and free from the use or threat of force," the statement said.

The Caribbean's long-held position of "non-intervention and non-interference" has often been reiterated by many of its leaders over the last few decades. If its governments intend to stand by those principles, avoiding the overtures of the world's declining superpower to support their position, it can play an important role in charting a way forward for the hemisphere. The continued destabilization of Venezuela would create chaos and economic, military and social problems many territories are ill-equipped

to manage, CARICOM leaders point out.

In related news, several Caribbean leaders decried the Trump administration's declarations of support for the person who proclaimed himself Venezuela's "interim president," with Saint Vincent's Prime Minister Ralph Gonsalves branding it a "coup d'état" while speaking to the Miami Herald and Antigua and Barbuda's Prime Minister Gaston Browne calling it "brazen regime change."

"The majority of countries that are in CARICOM do not accept Juan Guaidó as the interim president," Browne said. "In fact, we believe that it is an extremely dangerous precedent... which has absolutely no basis in law, it has no constitutional backing, it has no support of international law, and it's really an affront to democracy within the hemisphere."

Browne also warned the Caribbean should be careful not to be drawn into the ideological war unfolding in Venezuela with the goal of merely removing Maduro from office.

"These people are fighting an ideological war. They believe that socialism in Venezuela would plunge the people into poverty and so on. They want to get rid of these socialist regimes. Okay fine, they can fight their ideological wars, but we have

to deal with the practicality and the effects [on the region]," Browne said.

Trinidad and Tobago's Prime Minister Dr. Keith Rowley had strong words for U.S. officials, who have attempted to force CARICOM members into changing their position on the conflict. Rowley sent a clear message to the U.S. Ambassador to Trinidad and Tobago Joseph Mondello, who had said Trinidad and Tobago's continued recognition of the Maduro administration was "deeply concerning."

"We in Trinidad and Tobago under all of our governments, we have preserved the sovereign position of the people of Trinidad and Tobago," he added. "Until there is a change of government in Venezuela, as Mr. Patrick Manning said, when you pick up the phone, [whoever] answers the phone [is] in charge of Venezuela. What they are asking us to do is to take sides largely contrived by external forces. If you are going to have a change of regime in today's world post-World War Two and you want to do it properly, you're required to go through the UN and sanction it. Trinidad and Tobago will not be invited to take any interest that would damage our relations with neighbours."

(With files from TeleSUR, TML)

Message of Solidarity from the African Union

On February 1 Venezuela's Ministry of People's Power for Foreign Affairs informed on its website that the vice president of the African Union, Thomas Kwesi Quartey, sent a message of solidarity with the people of Venezuela and in support of the constitutional president of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, Nicolás Maduro Moros. The Ministry noted that the message from the African Union, a political bloc of 55 states, was

sent through the Venezuelan ambassador in Ethiopia, Modesto Ruíz.

The Ministry also reported that there were marches in support of the Venezuelan Government in Mali, Tunisia and Namibia on January 30 in which demonstrators denounced "the repeated, savage coup attempts U.S. imperialism has been plotting against Venezuela."

Aggression Against Venezuela Must Cease

Government of the Republic of Cuba

The Revolutionary Government of the Republic of Cuba condemns and energetically rejects the attempt to impose a coup d'état, a puppet government at the service of the United States, in the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, and expresses its unwavering solidarity with the government of Constitutional President Nicolás Maduro Moros.

The true objectives of actions against Venezuela are to control the vast resources of this sister nation and destroy the value of its example, as an emancipatory process defending the dignity and independence of Our America.

As President Miguel Díaz-Canel Bermúdez said: "The sovereignty of our peoples is expressed today in one's attitude toward Venezuela. To support the legitimate right of the sister nation to define its own destiny is to defend the dignity of all."

Other coup attempts should not be forgotten, such as the military coup of 2002 and the 2003 oil lockout; the aggressive U.S. Executive Order describing Venezuela as "an unusual and extraordinary threat to national security and foreign policy" of the superpower; unilateral coercive measures; the call for a military coup against the constitutional government of Venezuela; the President of the United States' threat to use "a possible military option" and the August 4 [2018] assassination attempt against President Maduro.

The acts of a group of countries and the shameful role of the OAS constitute a new, desperate attempt to implement an unsuccessful policy of regime change, which has not been imposed due to the unwavering resistance of the Venezuelan people and their determination to defend national sovereignty.

Havana, January 23, 2019

Statement of the Russian Foreign Ministry

The events in Venezuela have reached a dangerous point.

Failing to remove Nicolás Maduro, including physically, the extremist opponents of the legitimate government of Venezuela have opted for a highly confrontational scenario. The United States and several other countries in the region have recognised the opposition leader who has sworn himself in as Venezuela's interim president. This can only deepen the social divide in Venezuela, aggravate street protests, dramatically destabilise the Venezuelan political community and further escalate the conflict. The deliberate and obviously well orchestrated creation of dual power and an alternative decision-making centre in Venezuela is a direct path towards chaos and erosion of Venezuelan statehood. Several people have already died. We firmly condemn those who are pushing Venezuelan society into the abyss of violent civil discord.

We regard Washington's unceremonious actions as yet another demonstration of its total disregard for the norms and principles of international law and an attempt to pose as the self-imposed master of another nation's future. The United States is clearly trying to apply a tried and tested regime change scenario in Venezuela.

We are especially alarmed by the signals we have received

from some capitals on the possibility of foreign military interference. We warn that such opportunism can have catastrophic consequences.

We urge the sober-minded Venezuelan politicians standing in opposition to Nicolás Maduro's legitimate government not to become pawns in other players' chess game.

We believe that political activity is only acceptable if it is pursued within the constitutional framework and in strict compliance with the national legislation. Of course, the people must be able to freely express their opinions, including through rallies, but only if they do so peacefully in a manner that will not provoke violence or, worse still, endanger public safety.

Venezuelans alone have the right to determine their future. Any destructive foreign interference, especially amid the current tensions, is completely unacceptable. Incitement has nothing in common with a democratic process; it is a direct path towards lawlessness and violence.

It is a mission of the international community to help promote understanding between the political opposition forces in Venezuela that respect national interests. We are ready to cooperate with all countries that share these views.

(January 24, 2019)

World Peace Council

The forces of peace and democracy, constantly mobilized in support of the Venezuelan people's struggle in defence of their sovereignty, once again strongly repudiate the offensive against the legitimately elected government of President Nicolás Maduro. Showing its eagerness to take interference in Venezuela to its ultimate conclusion, Donald Trump's government on Wednesday, January 23, declared it recognizes the opposition leader, Juan Guaidó, who has no popular mandate, as the country's acting president, a position that was supported by allied governments.

Such an outrageous step is an attack on the most essential norms of international relations prized by all the truly democratic forces dedicated to building a world of peace and cooperation. It should be rejected widely, not only by popular entities, but also by institutions that cherish democracy and the principles embodied in the Charter of the United Nations.

The World Peace Council defends the sovereignty of nations and mutual respect as pillars of constructive relations between nations. Therefore, it repudiates, in the strongest terms, this outrageous announcement of the U.S. government, which is also the position taken by the countries that adhered to the arrogant statement issued on behalf of the Lima Group two weeks ago, saying it did not recognize the legitimacy of the Maduro government, whose mandate was renewed by popular vote. Most of the governments of this group, as we said then, suffer from a complete lack of competence to claim to be promoters

of democracy. This is the case, among others, for the governments of Colombia and Brazil, who also declared they recognize Guaidó as president.

The coup attempts in Venezuela are incessant and the resistance has been brave, an example for the peoples committed to the defence of their nations' sovereign course. Solving the crisis in the country and correcting course is entirely up to the Venezuelan people, in a dialogue already called for by the government among those who sincerely seek a democratic solution.

The governments of Hugo Chávez and, from the outset, that of President Maduro, backed by the Venezuelan people and patriotic forces, have bravely faced those attempts. Such resistance also sheds light on the continuity of U.S. imperialism's policy of interference, and its willingness to do anything to maintain its dominion over Latin America, trampling over international law and the democracy it claims to defend.

Therefore, we urge the strengthening of international mobilization in support of the Venezuelan people's struggle in defense of their sovereignty and democracy, and of the legitimacy, guaranteed only by the popular vote, of leading the country in a frank and sovereign dialogue with the democratic opposition, and dealing with the coup plotters who have been supported by U.S. imperialism and reactionary forces in the region.

End the imperialist offensive and the coup attempts! Sovereignty and peace in Venezuela!

Socorro Gomes, President World Peace Council

Canadian Network on Cuba

The Canadian Network on Cuba (CNC) denounces Washington's campaign of destabilization against the sovereign and legitimate government of Venezuela. The efforts to overthrow the government of President Nicolás Maduro is a flagrant, blatant and unconscionable violation of the right of self-determination of the people of Venezuela.

Ottawa has not been a disinterested party, an innocent bystander. Canada's shameful hand has also been revealed. Foreign Affairs Minister Chrystia Freeland has thrown the weight of the Canadian state behind the Trump scheme to re-impose U.S. imperial dominion. The shameful and naked alignment of the Canadian state with the criminal policy of the U.S. is deeply disturbing and alarming. By playing a leading role in orchestrating subversion, Ottawa has become an unapologetic extension of the U.S. State Department, engaged in open collusion and collaboration in the violation of fundamental principles of international law.

A core guiding principle of the CNC and the Canada-Cuba solidarity movement is the affirmation of the inalienable right of all peoples and countries to determine their future and their political, economic and social system without external interference. This right is enshrined in the United Nations Charter, the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the Declaration on Principles of International Law Concerning Friendly Relations and Co-Operation Among States in Accordance

with the Charter of the United Nations.

Washington's frenzied effort to organize a coup has nothing to do with genuine solidarity with the Venezuelan people or democracy, but all to do with negating Venezuela's right to self-determination. The Trump regime's objective is to turn back the wheel of history by reasserting U.S. control and tutelage over that proud South American nation.

Canada's relations with all countries, especially those of the Americas, should be based on mutual respect and equality, not on outmoded colonialist ideas and practices. It is the right and only the right of the people and country of Venezuela -- as for any other people and country -- to determine without foreign intervention or the threat of foreign intervention what political and economic system they wish to live under.

The Canadian Network on Cuba calls on Canadians to reject the policy of subversion and economic aggression that Ottawa is pursuing. Please write to your member of parliament to urge Canada to reject any interference in Venezuela and for an end to economic and political interference. We call for respect for the Maduro government, democratically elected in May 2018. The Canadian people must stand with those countries who resolutely defend their sovereignty and independence rather than submit to imperial diktat and return to imperial dominion.

On behalf of the Canadian Network on Cuba
Isaac Saney, CNC Co-Chair & National Spokesperson
(January 27, 2019)

Vancouver and District Labor Council

The Vancouver and District Labor Council (VDLC) condemns the attempted coup taking place in Venezuela, which aims to install unelected opposition figure Juan Guaidó as president of the country. The Trudeau government's legitimization of Guaidó's absurd self-appointment to the presidency should be a matter of great concern to Canadians who respect democracy and recognize the right of nations to determine their own path.

We call on the government of Canada to chart a foreign policy independent of that of the Trump government in Washington; one based upon diplomacy not interference, and which engages in dialogue rooted in respect for the sovereignty and the democratic will of the Venezuelan people. Doing so must include an immediate end to the recognition of Guaidó's presidency, an end to sanctions targeting the Venezuelan economy. The following is a motion adopted by the November 2018 regular meeting of the VDLC.

Hands Off Venezuela

BECAUSE the Federal government joined the Trump administration in the United States in inflicting sanctions on Venezuela in Fall of 2017; and

BECAUSE these sanctions are much broader than those previously imposed by the U.S. under the Obama administration, and are clearly aimed at undermining the Venezuelan economy as a whole; and

BECAUSE these sanctions are a form of economic warfare, aimed at toppling Venezuela's democratically elected United Socialist Party

government which has nationalized the country's oil industry and invested in housing, education, and social services for its people; and

BECAUSE the sanctions predominately hurt the working class and the poor, and act as a political support to the even harsher sanctions placed on Venezuela by the Trump administration, and for its ongoing support for opposition forces within Venezuela, some of which have resorted to acts of terrorism against government officials and public facilities;

BECAUSE claims that these sanctions are intended to support human rights fall flat when faced with the reality that these governments continue to support, and sell weapons to, human rights abusing regimes such as the one in Saudi Arabia;

BECAUSE Trump has also spoken on many occasions of the possibility of toppling the Venezuelan government by military force, or through support of a coup;

THE VANCOUVER AND DISTRICT LABOR COUNCIL WILL call upon the Federal government to end its sanctions against Venezuela, and promote dialogue and diplomacy instead of economic interference and threats; and

THE VANCOUVER AND DISTRICT LABOR COUNCIL WILL FURTHER acknowledge the right of all nations to self determination and respect for national sovereignty; and

THE VANCOUVER AND DISTRICT LABOR COUNCIL WILL FINALLY categorically oppose the use of military intervention, and the support of coups or other anti-democratic means of achieving "regime change" in Venezuela.

U.S. Fails to Get Organization of American States to Support Its Venezuelan Puppet

On January 24, a special meeting of the Organization of American States (OAS) was held at the request of the U.S. and a number of its close collaborators, including Canada. At the meeting, the U.S. Secretary of State browbeat all those he possibly could into recognizing the puppet “interim president,” in Venezuela, incredibly equating this to “aligning with democracy” and “respecting the rule of law.” He said the time for debate was done, that it was time for the OAS as a whole to act. Similarly, Vice President Pence, speaking in Florida January 25 said, “This is no time for dialogue. This is time for action. And the time has come to end the Maduro dictatorship once and for all.” The action includes military intervention in a situation where Venezuela has not attacked the U.S. or anyone else.

At the OAS meeting Pompeo also used the occasion to announce that the United States was ready to give its puppet in Venezuela the laughable sum of \$20 million for what he called “humanitarian assistance to the people of Venezuela” and was also going to help “rebuild” their country and economy. Peoples of Irawq and Afghanistan are well familiar with exactly what such “rebuilding”

entails!

Right after Pompeo concluded his imperial diatribe about “restoring democracy in Venezuela,” Medea Benjamin of the U.S. anti-war group Code Pink stood up holding a placard reading, “OAS: Don’t support a coup d’état” — an act which was met with loud applause. Before she was dragged away by security, she shouted appeals to delegates and repeated that a coup d’état is not a peaceful transition.

Venezuela was honorably and courageously represented by its representative Asbina Marín Sevilla, whose statement was a powerful indictment of the criminal plot unfolding against her nation and people. Among other things, she said some countries in the OAS are supporting a fascist coup that seeks a civil war, and a dictator who openly calls for conflict and foreign intervention to come and kill his people and defend his surrender of the country. That is how the U.S. likes its dictators.

Never before in Venezuela’s history has a foreign government dared to do so much as this mafia U.S. government, which is itself the biggest threat to peace in the region, Marín said. Never before

has a Venezuelan prostrated himself before a foreign power like the puppet who has declared himself “president,” as if he were a king. He does not recognize the Head of State, he does not recognize the Supreme Court of Justice or the National Electoral Council; he does not recognize the Attorney General or the Ombudsman or the Comptroller General, but he does recognize the power of the United States. One did not have to support Nicolás Maduro to reject such a puppet, she said, who gets his orders from the White House. She said all of them were traffickers in death who have been waging an economic, political and psychological war against Venezuela and now want to convert it to a shooting war.

Marín Sevilla dismissed the communiqué read out on behalf of a group of member states by Argentina, as nothing more than propaganda to justify a coup which applies only to those who signed it. She ended by declaring that Venezuela is not alone, that today’s generation will not fail its ancestors nor its children.

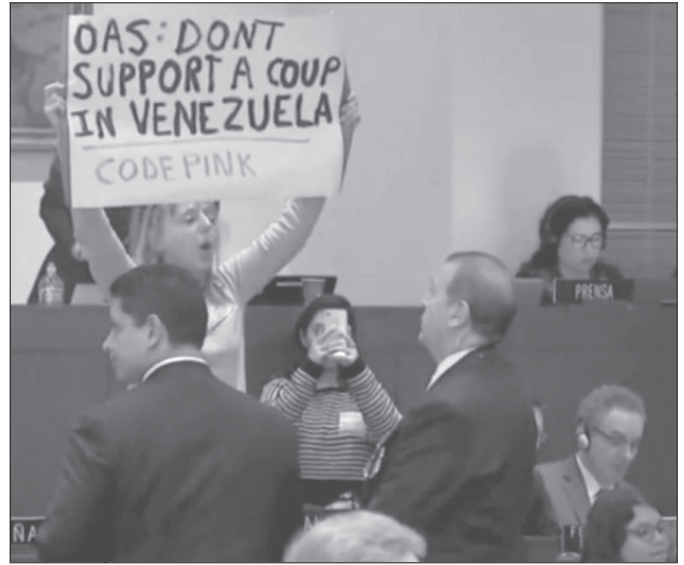
In the end, the lies, slander and threats Pompeo used to try and sway those present did not yield the results



he wanted. Eighteen of the 34 OAS member states refused to recognize the U.S. puppet and usurper Juan Guaidó. Along with others who took firm stands, members of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) played an important role in denying the coup forces the majority they sought by staunchly defending the principles of non-intervention and self-determination.

Later in the day, 10 heads of state and two foreign ministers of CARICOM released a statement in which they “reaffirmed their guiding principles of non-interference and non-intervention in the affairs of states, respect for sovereignty, adherence to the rule of law, and respect for human rights and democracy” and offered their good offices “to facilitate dialogue among all parties to resolve the deepening crisis.” They also called on external forces to refrain from doing anything to destabilize the situation in the country and called on all to “step back from the brink.”

While the U.S. did not succeed in getting its coup declaration adopted at the OAS, Pompeo issued threats on behalf of the U.S. that not only spurned international law and all norms of diplomacy but made it clear that the U.S. will continue to foment acts of violence. He warned “remnant elements of the Maduro regime” not to use violence to “repress” the “peaceful democratic transition,” as he called the coup d’état his government is organizing against



the Venezuelan people.

Peoples in the U.S. and worldwide continue to mount their broad opposition to the U.S. interference and sanctions and to defend Venezuela and her elected government.

The OAS Dangerously in Disarray

Sir Ronald Sanders, Antigua and Barbuda’s Ambassador to the U.S. and OAS

Over the last few days there has been a serious overreach by Luis Almagro of the authority he has as secretary-general of the Organization of American States (OAS).

If Mr Almagro continues to exceed his authority, plainly set out in the Charter of the OAS, the already fragmented organization will be headed for grave fracture.

The job of the secretary-general of any multi-national or international organization is to represent the positions of the collective membership of the organization either after direction by the appropriate governing bodies or after discussion with them that establishes a consensus. Almost from the day of his installation, Mr. Almagro has steadfastly ignored any such requirements.

In his latest overreach, Mr. Almagro has taken upon himself to unilaterally and publicly anoint an “Interim President” of Venezuela. Almagro’s selection is Juan Guaidó who was elected by the National Assembly — made up of only opposition party representatives — as its president “for a year.” He made this spontaneous statement at a meeting on January 15 at the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS), a U.S. think-tank based in Washington, DC.

No official organ of the OAS has made any such decision or even discussed it, and none has authorised Mr Almagro to make it.

This latest unauthorized statement on Venezuelan matters is the most recent in a series by Almagro, directed at the Venezuelan government that ruled-out both he, as secretary-general, and the OAS as honest brokers in trying to reach a settlement to the political divisions that have plagued Venezuela over the past five years.

The secretary-general has also taken to tweeting his personal views, which he incorrectly represents as speaking for the OAS, a

grouping of 34 countries. In a tweet on January 11, Luis Almagro stated: “We support the agreement in Venezuela’s national assembly declaring the usurpation by Nicolás Maduro and the need to apply constitutional article 233 on a transitional government and the call for an election.”

Exactly who is the “we” to whom Almagro referred is unknown, since he did not identify them. But what is known is that it is not any official organ of the OAS, including the Permanent Council, which is the highest decision-making body, representing all member states at ambassadorial level.

It may be that Mr. Almagro is working with a handful of countries which, from their own governments’ declarations, oppose the government of Nicolás Maduro to the point where they are using every means to topple it, but in doing so, he is not representing the OAS or the collective will of the member-states. Governments are free to pursue their own national policies on Venezuela, but they have no entitlement to impose those policies on the OAS.

The reality is that the membership of the OAS is deeply divided, not over the troubling humanitarian, political and financial crisis in Venezuela, but over the response to it.

There is no member state that condones the political impasse created by both ruling and opposition parties; the shortage of food and medicines; the hardship being endured by a large number of Venezuelans; and now the flow of refugees into neighboring countries. The disagreement arises from the manner in which 14 countries, calling themselves “The Lima Group” has held private meetings to fashion decisions which they then try to push through the Permanent Council of the OAS on a majority vote of 18.

The problem with this approach is that when a majority of 18

JOIN DEMONSTRATIONS IN SUPPORT OF VENEZUELA



Large demonstrations of tens of thousands in Caracas defend Venezuela's revolution and elected President Maduro

secures passage of a resolution or a declaration on which others have not been consulted and that is unpalatable to them, a trail of bitterness is left among the 15 others, particularly when it is known that governments have been cajoled and pressured to help attain the majority of 18.

It is sad that in the Americas, the governments of countries that benefited from the wisdom of the founding fathers of the United States, ignore the observation of Thomas Jefferson, one of the authors of the U.S. Constitution, that: "All, too, will bear in mind this sacred principle, that though the will of the majority is in all cases to prevail, that will to be rightful must be reasonable; that the minority possess their equal rights, which equal law must protect, and to violate would be oppression."

Tied-up with Secretary-General Almagro's disdain for the official organs of the OAS is his decision now to run for a second term, although he had previously indicated that he would not. His stance on Venezuela, particularly, would have endeared him to those member states whose governments might wish him to remain as an additional instrument for advancing their peculiar interests.

But, if Mr Almagro is not reined-in and his overreach not curtailed, many member-states will not tolerate it, and the organization will be damaged irreparably. Governments, except the timid and the frightened, will not sit by idly while their rights are eroded, and their voices disregarded.

Mr Almagro's latest dangerous pronouncement, made casually at the CSIS meeting on January 15, is that, if what he calls "the

interim president" of Venezuela being Juan Guaidó, one of the leaders of the opposition, designates representatives to the OAS, he will accept their credentials and seat them, presumably ousting the current delegates.

The secretary-general has no such authority. No instrument of the OAS gives him that power. And, if it is that Mr Almagro is setting-up this possibility for any vested-interest group in the OAS to force adoption of such a notion by a majority vote of 18, the OAS, in its present form, will not survive it.

To be clear, objection to any such action will not come because any country is blindly supporting the Maduro government in Venezuela; it will come because the precedent it would establish would be far-reaching and dangerous for any other country that is targeted for whatever reason.

The rules of international organizations and international law must be respected and upheld, or disarray will result.

Venezuela needs a negotiated and sustainable solution for the sake of its people and for the stability of the region. Promoting division within Venezuela and isolating its de facto government from diplomatic discourse simply protracts the hardships the people endure.

(Sir Ronald Sanders, in addition to being Antigua and Barbuda's Ambassador to the U.S. and OAS, is a Senior Fellow at the Institute of Commonwealth Studies, University of London and Massey College, University of Toronto.)

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