

Throwing door open for oppressed people: Bolshevik Revolution changed the world forever

written by Struggle - La Lucha
November 7, 2020



Vladimir Lenin giving a speech to the Red Army in Sverdlov Square, Moscow, May 5, 1920. On the right of the platform is Leon Trotsky, commander of the Red Army.

One-hundred-and-three years ago, on Nov. 7, 1917, workers and peasants overthrew the capitalist government in Russia. The world hasn't been the same since.

Two million soldiers in the Russian army had died in World War I. Russia was ruled by the cruel Czar Nicholas II.

Like the United States, the Russian Empire was a big prison of oppressed nationalities. Uzbeks, Kazakhs, Poles, Ukrainians, Georgians, Finns, Armenians and other peoples were denied independence.

Wars of conquest slaughtered Muslims. As with Native nations in the Americas, Siberia's Indigenous peoples were hunted down and killed.

Russian people were also oppressed. Many had been serfs, a sort of land slavery. But serf families couldn't be broken up and sold like cattle, as African slaves were in the U.S.

Thirty thousand serfs died building St. Petersburg, the former Russian capital.

Serfdom was abolished in 1861, two years after the raid at Harpers Ferry led by John Brown. The outbreak of the U.S. Civil War may have influenced the czar to get rid of serfdom before the serfs got rid of him.

Lenin and the Bolsheviks

By 1914, serfdom was gone, but 30,000 big landlords still ruled the countryside, where five out of six people lived. The vast majority of peasants couldn't read or write. Women had no rights.

Foreign capital poured into Russia, grabbing huge profits from long workdays in the factories. Striking workers were shot down.

Oppression breeds revolution. V.I. Lenin was the greatest leader of Russia's revolution. He organized a communist party known as the Bolsheviks.

Lenin was 17 when his older brother Alexander was hanged for trying to assassinate

the czar. When the Black revolutionary Jonathan Jackson was 17, he was killed trying to free his older brother George Jackson and other political prisoners.

Lenin studied the teachings of Karl Marx. Lenin taught that workers had to be saturated with Marx's revolutionary knowledge and determination to win.

Soviets vs. pogroms

The first Russian Revolution broke out in 1905. Workers went on strike, shutting down factories and railroads. Peasants burned the gentry's mansions. Czarism was on the ropes.

Workers formed councils called soviets. Today, we need peoples power assemblies to fight cutbacks, racism and war.

European banks poured in loans to save czarist tyranny. In 1960, David Rockefeller's Chase Manhattan bank — now the JPMorgan Chase & Co. bank — saved South Africa's tottering apartheid regime with loans following the Sharpeville massacre.

The 1905 Revolution was also defeated because the czar was able to pit peasant soldiers against workers and even other peasants. Billionaires divide poor and working people in the U.S. today with racism and anti-immigrant bigotry.

Mass lynchings called pogroms led by czarist flunkies killed Jewish people. Hundreds of African Americans were massacred in pogroms in East St. Louis, Ill., in 1917 and in Tulsa, Okla., in 1921.

The Bolsheviks fought pogroms with guns in hand. Lenin waged war on racism. He enriched Marxism by teaching that workers in the big capitalist countries had to support revolts in the colonies.

“What emotion, enthusiasm, clear-sightedness and confidence it instilled into me!”

was how Vietnamese leader Ho Chi Minh described Lenin's ["Theses on the National and Colonial Questions."](#)

The Black poet Claude McKay, who wrote "If We Must Die," spoke in Red Moscow.

Peace, land and bread

Sick of war and hunger, women textile workers in Petersburg went on strike on March 8, 1917 — International Women's Day. The holiday commemorates a strike of women garment workers in New York City.

Five days later, czarism was overthrown. Workers, peasants and soldiers made the revolution, but capitalists seized the reins.

For the next eight months, Lenin's Bolsheviks won millions of poor people to socialist revolution by demanding bread, peace and land. Despite Lenin being forced underground, Bolsheviks won majorities in the soviets that sprung up everywhere.

These soviets overthrew capitalist leader Alexander Kerensky on Nov. 7. It's called the Great October Socialist Revolution because under the old Russian calendar it occurred in October. It's also called the October Revolution because many peoples, not just Russians, rose up to break their chains.

Peasants threw out the landlords. Bolsheviks exposed secret treaties that divided up colonies among the imperialist countries. This revolutionary energy helped overthrow Germany's kaiser and end World War I.

Capitalist governments, including the U.S., waged war against the soviets on a dozen fronts. But the Red Army, led by Leon Trotsky, was victorious.

The 73-year-long war

The Soviet Union remained the target of world capitalism. Hitler came to power over

the bones of the German working class.

Following Lenin's death, this political isolation led to backward steps, including abolishing abortion rights. Soviet leader Joseph Stalin framed Bolshevik opponents while increasing inequality.

At the same time, the Soviet Union launched the first and biggest affirmative action program in history. Every person had the right to an education in their own language. The Soviet five-year plans created the world's second biggest economy. Everyone had a job.

Under Stalin's leadership, the Soviet Union defeated Hitler. An estimated 27 million Soviet people died in World War II. The Red Army liberated Auschwitz, which the U.S. refused to bomb.

The Bolsheviks inspired the Chinese Revolution. The Soviet Union armed Korea and Vietnam against the U.S. war machine. Cuba was aided.

In 1988, it was Soviet weapons that allowed Angolan, Namibian, African National Congress and Cuban soldiers to defeat South Africa's apartheid army at Cuito Cuanavale. Two years later, Nelson Mandela walked out of jail.

The Pentagon spent \$5.5 trillion on nuclear weapons aimed at the Soviet Union. This unrelenting pressure finally led to the Soviet Union being overthrown in 1991.

Despite this tremendous defeat, the October Revolution will live forever.



Killer cop sues Breonna Taylor's boyfriend

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On Oct. 30, the attorney for one of the police officers who murdered Breonna Taylor announced that his client had [filed a lawsuit](#) against Taylor's boyfriend, Kenneth Walker.

Jonathan Mattingly was part of a squad of Louisville stormtroopers who raided Taylor and Walker's apartment in the middle of the night last March 13. The violent raid was a product of a "no knock warrant." This allowed the cops to enter Taylor's apartment without announcing themselves. What came next was a brutal scene, which included another officer spray-firing into the couple's apartment.

When the police gang initially entered the apartment, Kenneth Walker couldn't tell who was breaking into his apartment. There was no way for him to know anything except for the fact that several armed men were in his home firing weapons and deploying stun grenades.

In self-defense, Walker fired a warning shot with the intent of wounding the invaders. His shot struck Mattingly in the leg. When the exchange ended, the police had fired over 30 times and Breonna Taylor lay dying. Walker fired just once. Only one of these officers was charged with any crime, and that charge was not for Taylor's murder.

Walker had the presence of mind to do something that the terrorist shock troops would never think to do — fire to wound and not kill. Nevertheless, he was arrested and charged with attempted murder. It took two months for this [outrageous charge to be dropped](#).

In the aftermath of the raid and his girlfriend's death, Walker filed a \$10.5 million lawsuit against the state of Kentucky and the Louisville Police Department.

In response, Mattingly filed an entirely frivolous, insulting, disgraceful and racist lawsuit against Walker. The lawsuit alleges that Walker committed battery, assault and the infliction of emotional distress.

That's right: the cop accused a victim of racist terror of committing assault and battery. One would think it was Walker who raided Mattingly's home in the middle of the night!

Mattingly's suit alleges that Walker's conduct was "outrageous, intolerable and offends all accepted standards of decency or morality." This seems ironic in a state whose police officers are trained using [quotes from Hitler](#).

Recently, a high school newspaper uncovered the fact that the Kentucky State Police include the fascist dictator's quotes to ensure that officers have "a mindset void of emotion" when engaging in violence against the community.

While the officers who murdered Taylor were not Kentucky State Police, this report is indicative of a racist ideology at the core of policing, not only in Kentucky, but the

entire United States.

Jonathan Mattingly's absurd lawsuit should be thrown out of court immediately. Furthermore, all three of the cops involved in the March 13 raid and murder of Breonna Taylor should be arrested and jailed immediately.



Victory for Maher al-Akhras: Palestinian prisoner suspends hunger strike, to be released 26 November

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Samidoun Palestinian Prisoner Solidarity Network salutes [Maher al-Akhras](#) and the Palestinian people on the occasion of his victory after 103 days of hunger strike. His steadfastness and commitment to struggle, with his very life on the line, continue to inspire all those around the world who support the Palestinian people and their just cause of return and liberation.

Al-Akhras, 49, Palestinian prisoner jailed without charge or trial under Israeli administrative detention, announced the suspension of his hunger strike after 103 days on 6 November 2020. Specifically, he announced an agreement to release him on 26 November 2020, and he will remain hospitalized until the date of his release for treatment. The [agreement to end his hunger strike](#) reportedly came with a firm commitment to his release on 26 November, unlike previous proposals to end the strike.

Al-Akhras is one of approximately 350 Palestinians jailed without charge or trial

under Israeli administrative detention, a practice introduced to Palestine by the British colonial mandate and routinely used by Israel to jail Palestinian leaders and community organizers. There are approximately 4,400 Palestinian political prisoners in total at the present time. Administrative detention orders are indefinitely renewable, and Palestinians — including al-Akhras — have spent years at a time jailed under so-called “secret evidence,” never knowing when they will obtain their release. Al-Akhras launched his hunger strike on 27 July after he was seized by Israeli occupation forces and ordered to administrative detention.

Samidoun Palestinian Prisoner Solidarity Network sends its warmest congratulations to Maher al-Akhras, his family, the Palestinian people and all friends of Palestine and forces of justice in the world on this occasion. We salute all of those who have protested, marched, gone on hunger strike and organized to highlight his case and the struggles of the Palestinian people, in every corner of the world. Now, it is time to continue the movement to support all of his fellow prisoners – and all Palestinians – in the cause of freedom.

We also recognize that all of these victories accomplished by Palestinian prisoners engaged on hunger strikes will only be partial so long as Palestinians continue to be imprisoned by the colonial Israeli regime, and so long as the Palestinian people continue to face occupation, apartheid, siege and dispossession at the hands of Zionism. We urge all who were inspired by Maher’s commitment, bravery and self-sacrifice to continue the campaign to free Palestinian prisoners. All of those who love freedom and justice look forward to celebrating with Maher al-Akhras – and look forward to celebrating the day in which all Palestinians are free on their liberated land. The steadfastness, struggle and commitment of the Palestinian prisoners – the leadership of the Palestinian movement – point in the direction not only to individual freedom and victory, but toward the liberation of Palestine, from the river to the sea.

Source: [Samidoun](#)



Philippines: Mass mobilization for disaster response and recovery

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The Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP) has mobilized all its forces in the Bicol and Southern Tagalog provinces where super typhoon Rolly slammed today resulting in massive floods, landslides, destruction of property, displacement, injuries and a number of deaths. Houses, farms and sources of livelihood, both in the cities and countryside, are severely damaged.

The peasants and fisherfolk have suffered the worst effects of the disaster. These come on top of the rapid deterioration of socioeconomic conditions as a result of the economic crisis and government neglect. In many villages, the disaster wrought by the successive storms add to the grave effects of militarization of their communities by abusive AFP counterinsurgency troops.

The Party calls for mass mobilization to help victims of the disaster to collectively recover from the damage of the successive typhoons. We urge all humanitarian agencies and people's organizations to collect and help distribute food, water, clothing, construction supplies, as well as other farm implements, seeds and others. They can coordinate with local revolutionary forces to ensure that assistance will reach the intended recipients with dispatch.

While remaining alert, units of the New People's Army have been mobilized to coordinate with revolutionary mass organizations in the rural areas to help in rebuilding houses and structures damaged by the strong winds and heavy rains. Efforts are underway to ensure the facilitation of the entry of emergency supplies especially to the interior villages.

Plans to help the masses recover economically must be carried out the soonest. There can be mobilization from less affected areas to form production brigades and mobilize resources to help the masses repair their farms, damaged boats and other means of production.

While the Filipino people reel from the catastrophe, Rodrigo Duterte was nowhere to be found, not even appearing in a Malacañang briefing. They are utterly peeved by his display of gross disinterest for the welfare of millions of Filipinos who are suffering from the impact of the severe storm.

Indeed, he has no face to show to the people as disaster preparedness and response has never been a priority of his regime. Under his regime, calamity fund has been cut by 60% from P39 billion in 2016 to a measly P15.7 billion this year. Government agencies are grossly underfunded and incapable of tiding affected families over the crisis caused by the calamity amid a pandemic.

Source: [PRWC Philippine Revolution Web Central](https://www.prwc.org/2020/11/page/5/)



Protest mass arrests of activists in Turkey

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In a new attack against socialists in Turkey, a large-scale police operation was launched where close to 100 people were arrested. These include Grup Yorum members, and also people part of its choirs which Grup Yorum has in different cities across Turkey. **6 Yorum members, and 7 choir members are currently being held in an Istanbul police station since the 28-29th October.**

We invite everyone to create/produce items calling on the Turkish state to release those arrested. For example, this can be you holding up a piece of paper saying #FreeGrupYorum, or a video saying this in your own language. **You can share these with the hashtags #FreeGrupYorum #GrupYorumCannotBeSilenced and can send it to our WhatsApp +49 163 4452918.**

Let's be the voice of Grup Yorum at all four corners of the world!

FREE
Grup YORUM!
Grup Yorum Solidarity Committee



Intimidation and repression against progressive, left socialist forces and organizations of the people in Turkey continue with full speed.

Since Oct. 28, the Justice and Development Party (AKP) government, headed by President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, has led another so-called anti-terror offensive towards the popular resistance movement, trying to project its own fear of the people.

By evening, 31 police detentions were registered in various cities and provinces of Turkey.

On Oct. 29, the People's Law Office reported news sources according to which 99 persons had been detained so far, while warrants were issued for 120 people.

The arrest terror by the police continues.

Resisters for terminated jobs, musicians of Grup Yorum, lawyers of the People's Law Office and names of several supporters of the resistance against injustice and state repression were listed among the detainees.

Two additional members of Grup Yorum, Ali Araci (released from prison a short time ago) and Seher Adigüzel, were arrested by the police in their house. It was also announced that group member Meral Hir was detained by police.

Dismissed teacher Selvi Polat, known from the Bakirköy Resistance, was taken into custody on Oct. 29.

Also, People's Law Office lawyer Seda Saraldi was among the detainees.

The list is growing; even some of their family members are targeted.

The repression is intensified by denial of legal assistance and the secrecy of the charges.

The authorities seem to be creating a new construct, as they did in several police operations before: Arresting hundreds of people with terrorism accusations and eventually looking for new “secret witnesses” to strengthen their accusations.

While access to lawyers and the investigation files is being denied, the press loyal to the regime printed the propaganda lies of the political police without delay and tried to associate the detainees with terror.

If there's anything for sure now, it is that these attacks on democratic protest, demands for justice and defense of the rule of law aim to consolidate a totalitarian regime and fascism in order to go on with exploitation of workers in the interest of large companies.

This course of the government will increase poverty of a major part of the people, who are left without jobs, future or proper health care, who are denied their basic rights and finally even criminalized for their legal struggle to gain their rights.

Therefore, only the consciousness and solidarity of the people all over the world can push back repression to progressive struggle and win freedom for those who are facing the repression of a power that fears the people's reaction to its policy, shaken by a deep crisis.



Minnesota: 646 arrested at ‘Don’t Let Trump Steal the Election’ march

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On the night of November 4, over 30 organizations and over 1000 people came together to march against Trump’s attempts to steal the election. As the community marched on to Interstate 94, the authorities moved in, without any warning, and refused to let the crowd leave the freeway. All participants were arrested, including children.

This is the first time in five years — since the murder of Jamar Clark — that the cops have harassed families and community members on such a mass scale. But, despite the intimidation by police, protesters stayed calm and organized, holding the space with speeches, chants and a marathon dance party.

Many livestreamed the incident and made calls to local politicians to question the

glaring First Amendment violations.

The original demands for the march were a call for a People's Mandate to address the triple pandemic of racism, COVID-19 and recession. Primarily, the march focused on protesting Trump's unconstitutional theft of the election, but also recognized that much work needed to be done to secure our rights even if Biden took the presidency.

Many participants in the protest were from the labor movement and had worked hard to defeat Trump and all he stands for. They are teachers, office workers, library staff, health care workers, cleaners and cooks.

In addition to stopping Trump from stealing the elections and the NAARPR demands, protest organizers now demand that all charges against demonstrators are dropped and that the cars impounded be released without fees.

According to a statement from the Twin Cities Coalition 4 Justice 4 Jamar, "We continue to fight for and demand community control of police so that police can no longer infringe on our First Amendment rights as they did today."

Source: [Fight Back! News](#)



After the election: ‘It’s time to occupy the streets’

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Talk given at “Demand a People’s Mandate” rally in New York on Nov. 4, organized by the N.Y. Alliance Against Racist and Political Repression.

As expected, Donald Trump declared himself the winner of the presidential election even before many votes have been counted.

If another country held elections under these conditions, especially a country on U.S. imperialism’s hit list, there would be immediate calls from Washington for military intervention, sanctions and to rerun the vote. But because both the Republican and Democratic parties are loyal to the imperialist system, we don’t hear a peep.

Jobs, housing and health care

Millions of workers are unemployed, hungry, facing eviction from their homes, in

danger of losing health care. Women's reproductive rights and queer rights are on the chopping block. The danger of war grows daily.

More than 233,000 people are dead in the U.S. from COVID-19, a disproportionate number of them Black and Brown people. Winter is looming and the virus is spreading uncontrolled throughout the U.S. How many more people — families, co-workers and community members, prisoners and migrant detainees — will die because of Trump's criminal negligence?

We can't rely on the "official" opposition, the Democrats. The people have tried playing by their rules. The Democratic leaders sabotaged the progressive Bernie Sanders campaign again. Here in New York and all over the country, they backtracked on promises to defund the police and make serious reforms to curb racist police violence. They told the people to hold their noses and vote for Joe Biden.

They couldn't meet the challenge of their own rigged electoral system, the months of voter suppression by Trump and his allies, the threats of the fascist gangs, the sabotage of the Postal Service.

Biden has no solutions

Even if Biden does end up in the White House, he has no solutions to offer poor and working people for the crisis we're facing.

The master's tools can't dismantle the master's house.

Now it's our turn. It's time for a different way — the way working people have used for more than a century to win their demands. It's time to occupy the streets. It's time for a people's strike to shut down the country. It's time to teach Trump, Wall Street, the cops and the white supremacists to fear the people.

It's time to organize, to go to every workplace, union, school, church and mosque, with this message. It's time to stop begging for crumbs and take the whole damn pie.

The Minneapolis uprising and nationwide protests against racist police killings showed the power that the people have when they are fed up and ready to fight back. Now we need to build on that experience to create an organized, united, national fightback to overturn the Trump regime, push back the fascist gangs and the police, defend Black lives and win a People's Mandate!

Occupy the streets! Shut it down! Only the people can overthrow Trump and the system that spawned him.



Lil Wayne's support of Trump: a Black communist responds

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On Oct. 29, New Orleans-born rap icon Lil Wayne announced his support for Donald

Trump's reelection campaign in a Twitter post that included a photo of himself grinning and making a thumbs-up for the camera alongside the president.

Wayne, now 38, has been a fixture in the hip-hop scene since signing to Cash Money Records at the age of 14 and joins the ranks of 50 Cent, Ice Cube and Kanye West as the latest in a string of high-profile Black (and interestingly, male) musicians to associate themselves with the oppressive regime.

The tweet was met with praise from Trump supporters and scorn from those disappointed in the rapper for selling out.

Among the Twitter backlash for Lil Wayne's support of Trump was a series of responses from notable Chicago-based communist and rapper Noname. [One reads:](#) "Until black celebs change their love of capital, they'll always stifle the revolutionary potential of the people. The system (capitalism) that kills working-class black folks is the same system that makes black celebs rich! They'll never denounce capitalism."



Jalil Muntaqim, recently paroled after 49 years, was arrested Friday and is facing re-imprisonment for completing a voter registration form

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Please sign the Petition . . . scroll down

Monroe County District Attorney Attempts to Reincarcerate

a Respected Elder
[recovering from COVID-19]

**Jalil Muntaqim
on Fabricated Charges**



PHOTO:
Jalil and mother Billie
upon his release

Jalil Muntaqim, former Black Panther and respected elder, was recently released after nearly 50 years in prison. The NYS Board of Parole, in his 14th hearing, interviewed him at length and determined that he met the criteria for discretionary release. **He had an exemplary prison record, expressed sincere remorse, and posed no threat to the community.** DOCCS' own risk assessment tool, COMPAS, scored Jalil as having the lowest risk for reoffending. In prison, he earned multiple college degrees and helped avert prison riots; his release on parole was endorsed by hundreds of people, including academics, faith leaders, and the Black, Puerto Rican, Hispanic & Asian Legislative Caucus (of NYS). **Jalil entered prison as a 19-year-old; today, he is a 69-year-old great-grandfather.**

On October 30th, Monroe County District Attorney Sandra Doorley's office issued a warrant against Jalil with charges for which no one in the state of New York has ever been arrested or indicted. This attempt to reincarcerate an elder recently recovering from COVID-19 does not work in the interest of justice, public health, or public safety.

The DA's calls are outrageous, unprecedented, and come on the heels of a petition by Bill Napier, Chairman of the local Republican Party, to prosecute Jalil for voter fraud. **These charges are politically-motivated, senseless and a waste of taxpayers' money.** None of the people in Monroe County who oppose Jalil's release know him; they believe that anyone convicted of a serious crime should never leave prison. Whether or not one agrees with this sentiment, **Jalil was released from prison according to the lawful procedures of this state.** Jalil has **scrupulously followed the instructions given him by his parole officer.** In fact, hundreds of faith leaders, community members, elected officials, academics, legal experts, and civil rights organizations in Rochester and throughout the State of New York oppose this politically motivated effort by the District Attorney.

**Jalil is grateful to have strong community support,
is putting down roots, and reconnecting
with friends and family.**

###

**If you would like join the growing list
of community supporters,**

###

**please sign-on here
<https://urlat.co/8KOpt>**



Community sign on letter is here -
https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSdW2zfSqUm28Xk7BbUi2gicD-YwAcbwfvI3vG3ToOdyiYeXDw/viewform?usp=embed_facebook

Please sign the [Support for Jalil Muntaqim Petition](#) immediately:

STATEMENT OF COMMUNITY SUPPORT FOR JALIL MUNTAQIM

We the undersigned fully support the New York State Parole Board's decision to release Jalil Muntaqim. The parole process is meant to evaluate a person for release based on who they are today, not to extend one's sentence into perpetuity.

Mr. Muntaqim has been incarcerated since 1971, when he was 19 years old. During his 49 years in prison, Mr. Muntaqim has led education and mentorship programs for prisoners, earned several educational degrees and mentored many younger incarcerated men. He has been commended for preventing prisoner violence and promoting safety.

As a result, hundreds of organizations and individuals have stepped forward to support his release including community and faith leaders, family members, and the NY State Black, Puerto Rican, Hispanic and Asian Legislative Caucus. The Parole Board finally acted honorably in following the guidelines put forth by New York State Executive Law 259-(i). A 2011, bi-partisan amendment to the law passed by Republican and Democratic lawmakers makes it clear that an individual's readiness for successful re-entry should take priority in the decision to grant release.

Upon his release, Mr. Muntaqim was warmly welcomed by a large, diverse set of community leaders and residents of Rochester, New York. Now, the Rochester District Attorney is attempting to reincarcerate an elder recovering from COVID-19.

We are statewide and national organizations, community and faith leaders, elected officials, civil rights organizations, public defenders, and residents of the Rochester area. We pledge our continuing support for Mr. Muntaqim and our assistance in

facilitating his reintegration into society. We vehemently oppose any efforts to remove him from our community and/or place him back in prison.

Please click the [link](#) to sign.

This petition is sponsored by the Movement for Black Lives.

Source: [San Francisco Bay View](#)



How Venezuela has held back COVID-19 in spite of the U.S. sanctions stranglehold on its economy

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María Lourdes Urbaneja Durant tells Vijay Prashad that despite sabotage by the U.S., Venezuela has been able to curb the spread of COVID-19 through “participation of the people”

Not for one minute during this pandemic has the United States stopped trying to overthrow the government of Nicolás Maduro in Venezuela. A seam of cruelty runs through U.S. policy, which by its sanctions regime prevents Venezuela from open trade of its oil to import key medical equipment to help break the chain of the virus and heal those infected by it.

Billions of dollars of Venezuelan government money have been seized by banks in the North Atlantic world, money which President Maduro says is needed to fight COVID-19; even though Maduro's government says that the money held by the Bank of England can be turned over to the United Nations to buy goods for Venezuela, the government of the UK refuses to part with the funds.

Despite this, Venezuela's people have been able to hold down the rate of infection, and its medical workers have been able to heal large numbers of those who have been infected with COVID-19. Former Venezuelan Ambassador to Mexico María Lourdes Urbaneja Durant was the second health minister in the government of former President Hugo Chávez. She is trained in the fields of social medicine and public health, training which made her a natural leader in the Bolivarian Revolution's attempt to shift the foundation of medical care from the private to the public sector. In mid-October, I spoke to Ambassador Urbaneja, who left her embassy post in Mexico last year to return to Venezuela, where she has been weathering the storm of this pandemic.

Venezuela, she told me, has been able to face the challenge of the pandemic because

of the “participation of the people” in every aspect of the fight against COVID-19. Popular participation is, she said, “a pillar of the Bolivarian Revolution,” and it can be glimpsed in the way people’s organizations are helping with testing and contact tracing, as well as in maintaining the basic functions of daily life. The government has developed the patria.org digital platform, where 18 million Venezuelans (out of the population of 28 million) have participated in surveys on the impact of the virus and on their needs in these difficult times; this process has allowed the government to target its resources toward the most affected communities. Venezuela has benefited from material support from China, Cuba, Russia, and Turkey, as well as from the Pan American Health Organization and the World Health Organization.

Social medicine

Since 1999, when Chávez became president, the Bolivarian Revolution has struggled to create a robust public health sector. Ambassador Urbaneja joined the health ministry as director of international cooperation under Dr. Gilberto Rodríguez Ochoa. Venezuela’s medical sector had been assaulted by the structural adjustment policies of the International Monetary Fund, with the privatization of health delivery defining the industry. As Dr. Rodríguez Ochoa attempted to strengthen the public health institutions, the pro-privatization doctors’ unions in both public and private hospitals resisted the reforms; but the government was adamant that the country needed a robust public health system.

Ambassador Urbaneja followed Dr. Rodríguez Ochoa as the health minister. A veteran of the Revolutionary Left Movement in Venezuela, Ambassador Urbaneja had studied at the Institute of Neurosurgery and Brain Research in Chile with Professor Alfonso Asenjo Gómez from 1970 to 1973, during the tenure of the Popular Unity government of President Salvador Allende. During the coup against Allende, she was arrested, freed by a comrade as she was being taken to the Estadio Chile (now the Víctor Jara Stadium), and taken on a humanitarian aid plane back to

Venezuela. She then trained as an epidemiologist at the National School of Public Health ([FIOCRUZ](#)) in Brazil, where she had a front-row seat as Brazil created its Unified Health System (SUS).

Ambassador Urbaneja's commitment to social medicine led her into the Latin American Association of Social Medicine ([ALAMES](#)), which she headed, and whose insights about the need for health care delivery where people live defined her approach. The creation of Misión Barrio Adentro in 2003 led to the construction of thousands of medical clinics across Venezuela. This followed from the Venezuelan Constitution of 1999, which [enshrined](#) the ALAMES principles, such as to create a decentralized and participatory health care system with community control over the policies of the system. Privatization of the system was prohibited by the constitution. This was the system that was created by the process in which Ambassador Urbaneja participated. The structure developed then continues to play a vital role—despite the shortages—to reach people in the pandemic.

Resilience

After she left the Ministry of Health and Social Development in September 2003, Ambassador Urbaneja was deputed to be Venezuela's ambassador to Uruguay (2004-2006), Chile (2006-2012), Ecuador (2012-2015), Brazil (2015-2016), and then Mexico (2016-2019). Her tenure as ambassador began with the election of the Frente Amplio government in Uruguay and ended with the election of the Morena party in Mexico: a long wave through Latin America's pink tide. During this period, Ambassador Urbaneja participated in the construction of the Union of South American Nations (UNASUR), which was to promote the sovereignty of the region. In a crisis, such as the pandemic, this platform could have brought the countries of the region together; but UNASUR has been eroded by the rise to power of the governments of the oligarchy.

When Ambassador Urbaneja reminisces about her time as a student in

Chile—which just voted to rewrite its dictatorship-era constitution—she remembers a slogan—*I’m hungry and what about it! I’m still from the PU*. The PU is the Popular Unity government, which despite the challenges imposed on it by the United States still held the faith of the people. Much the same spirit governs Venezuela, she says; despite the pressure from the United States, and its allies, the people of Venezuela remain committed to the democratic project set in motion by the election victory of Hugo Chávez in 1998.

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