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EYE-WITNESS REPORT FROM VENEZUELA: Che Guevara Internationalist Youth Brigade & The International Peoples Assembly

By Azza Rojbi and Mike Larson

At a time when Venezuela is under increasing pressure and imperialist aggression, two young organizers from the Fire This Time Movement for Social Justice, Azza Rojbi and Michael Larson, were invited to participate as the Canadian delegation within the International Peoples Assembly in Solidarity with the Bolivarian Revolution and against Imperialism held in Caracas, Venezuela.

As part of the Assembly activities, we had the opportunity to participate in the Che Guevara Internationalist Youth Brigade. We saw first-hand how young people are actively building the Bolivarian revolution and maintaining the gains they fought for despite having to face brutal economic sanctions and an aggressive media campaign claiming there’s a so-called “humanitarian crisis” in Venezuela. The brigade was comprised of 150 youths from over 40 different countries from various political parties and social movements. The main goal of this brigade was to unite young people in defence of the Bolivarian revolution, to see the reality of Venezuela through the eyes of Venezuelans, and to use this experience to combat the lies and manipulation spread by the imperialist media.

Youth Are the Foundation of Revolutionary Progress

The mainstream media conveniently leaves out the role Venezuelan youth have played as a major force within the Bolivarian revolution. We saw first-hand at the UBV (Bolivarian University of Venezuela) how youth in Venezuela are taking the lead in defneding and expanding one of the main achievements of the revolution, which is education. One of these youth leaders was Diego Jesus Gonzalo, the National Coordinator of the Bolivarian Student Organization, which was created by the late president Chavez in 2005 to give students a sense of pride in their education. Not just at the high school level but throughout all levels of education in Venezuela you’ll see young people actively organizing and influencing educational policies and their curriculum.

Another movement at the forefront of the revolution is MEVEN (Ecology Movement of Venezuela). MEVEN was formed to teach youth the importance of understanding how the environment impacts us each day, why they need to raise productivity by growing more food and medicines for the communities, and the importance of combating climate change. When the brigade split into various groups to visit different parts of the country, the youth leaders of MEVEN had organized a program for us to see the importance of community and food sovereignty in Venezuela.

We saw in action the revolutionary commitment and work of these Venezuelan youth when we visited the agroecological school in Caricuao. The school is an initiative by the “Francisco de Miranda” Front (FFM), MEVEN and the Urban Agriculture Movement “Siembra Venezuela.” Led by the community, the government expropriated an idle plot of land being used as a garbage dump that belonged to a multinational corporation. The community now is transforming the space into a training and research centre to teach and promote the production of food and natural medicine using sustainable practices and organic farming methods. We experienced first-hand working alongside some of the community members at the school the immense spirit of dedication, dignity and pride they have in their Revolution. It was a concrete example of how the Venezuelan people are organizing themselves and fighting back against the economic war and sanctions.

We Are Venezuela

To better understand how Venezuelans are further fighting against this unjust war and aggression on their country, our Caricuao brigade team participated in the activities of Somos Venezuela (We are Venezuela). This grassroots movement is another community organization that has its finger on the pulse of the community; members of this movement will go door to door, house to house and check in with people living in their community to see how they are doing and if they require any basic goods. Then they work with the revolutionary Venezuelan government to provide it to them.

When we first arrived, we received a very warm welcome by the residents with beautiful songs performed by children from the community, before embarking with medical and household goods to deliver house by house. One woman upon seeing us arriving up the hill approached us enthusiastically. She didn’t just want us to drop off the mattress we were bringing but, also to see her home where she lives with six family members, two of them children with

special needs. She shared with us how much gratitude she has for the Bolivarian Revolution that gave her and her family a dignified life. As we continued going home to home, we directly witnessed some of the gains and achievements of the Venezuelan revolution in improving the life of people. We also felt the pride and strong commitment of the Venezuelan people in defending their revolution.

The International Peoples Assembly

Following the successful Che Guevara Internationalist Youth Brigade, social movements and organizations gathered in Caracas for the program of the International Peoples Assembly. The assembly took place February 24-27 and brought together 500 participants from 90 countries, representing 181 people’s movements and organizations.

During the assembly, representatives from various political parties and social movements spoke at a varity of plenaries about the importance of defending the Bolivarian revolution and the concrete tasks needed to confront imperialism when we return to each of our countries. On Tuesday, February 26, the Vice President of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, Delcy Rodriguez, gave a powerful speech on the hypocrisy of the imperialist war against Venezuela - as imperialist governments turn a blind eye towards human rights abuses in the region. She also spoke on the importance of the worldwide solidarity movement with Venezuela saying, “Today the independence, freedom, and dignity of the Great Homeland is playing in Venezuela, that is why it is so important to create such initiatives as the International Peoples Assembly.”

International Solidarity Forever

The commitment from social justice movements around the world to stand in solidarity with the Bolivarian revolution, as it is under increasing attack from the U.S. government and their allies, was very apparent throughout all the discussions and the plenaries. Beyond the Assembly’s program, participants also had the opportunity to connect and exchange with one another about their experiences in building Venezuela solidarity and planning together for future coordination and collaboration.

The Assembly program also included cultural components with performances from various international and local artists bringing together everyone involved with their diverse traditional songs and dances. Another important aspect of the Assembly was the focus on countering the right-wing and mainstream media narrative against Venezuela. This was emphasised as participants created different multimedia stories and live reports from the reality that we witnessed in Venezuela that could then be shared in different languages on social media platforms.

“The battle for Venezuela is not only for us, Venezuelans, but it is also a battle for the right to independence, to peace, to world diversity, we have to achieve an equal and free world for all.” Those were some of the words shared by the Constitutional President of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, Nicolás Maduro Moros. With a fiery intensity, President Maduro shared with participants that the attempted coup at the Columbian-Venezuela border by the United States and its lackeys was an utter failure and that the Venezuelan people will continue to stand strong in defending their sovereignty and self-determination.

Viva Venezuela! Viva Revolution!

The International Peoples Assembly closed with a final panel that included a representative from each continent who spoke on the importance of fighting to defend the Venezuelan revolution, a revolution that represents a beacon of hope for poor and oppressed people around the world. Participants agreed on final declarations from the Assembly that included a letter of solidarity with the people in struggle, a manifesto in solidarity with Venezuela and a political declaration from the Che Guevara Internationalist Youth Brigade that was read by two youth leaders: Azza Rojbi from the Fire This Time Movement for Social Justice and Kyle Haselsteiner from the Socialist Youth League of Zambia.

For all of us that participated, the Brigade and the Assembly were very educational, dynamic and inspiring experiences. As we each head back to our respective countries, we are committed to stand in solidarity with the revolutionary youth, working and oppressed people of Venezuela who are tirelessly resisting imperialist attacks on their country, by uniting our struggles we will win!

Venceremos!

Viva la Revolucion Bolivariana!

US/Canada Hands Off Venezuela!

Continued from page 1

Post interviewed the protesters and their reasons for protesting. Fumiko Shimabukuro, age 86, recounted “I come here almost every day unless I’m sick. I’m a survivor of the war, and I experienced all the hardships of war, and I never want to see this island turned into a sea of blood again.

The protest movement in Okinawa is not alone – people from around the world, including from the U.S., have travelled to Okinawa to join the protests. The website <http://standwithokinawa.net> invites others to join in supporting Okinawans against the bases and provides daily action reports and news.

Shannon: Civilian Airport or Military Airbase?

On another island on the other side of the world, the Irish people are also protesting continuously against the imposition of the U.S. military on their lands.

Ireland, specifically the Shannon Airport, has become a gateway for the U.S. military to disseminate their troops and weapons across the Atlantic Ocean and throughout the world. Despite repeated claims of neutrality by recent Irish Governments, nearly three million U.S. troops and their weapons have passed through Shannon Airport since 2002.

U.S. troop carriers started to appear at Shannon Airport in 2001 at the start of the U.S. war and occupation of Afghanistan, and from 2003 aircraft were landing en route to the U.S.-led war in Iraq. Although officially a civilian airport, Shannon Airport has been effectively operating as a U.S. airbase, complete with a U.S. military permanent staff officers assigned to the airport since 2002.

Another use of Shannon Airport by the U.S. is for CIA rendition planes. These planes transfer detainees from one country to another illegally, using means that bypass all judicial and administrative due process. When U.S. President Trump said in reference to the notorious Guantanamo prison that “we’re gonna load it up with some bad dudes, believe me, we’re gonna load it up” Shannon Airport is a pitstop on the way to take U.S. captured detainees to prisons like in Guantanamo, to be tortured and held without trial or due process.

Most of what has been documented about the use of Shannon Airport by the U.S. military is thanks to the monitoring and reporting by Shannonwatch (www.shannonwatch.org), a group of peace and human rights activists against U.S. military use of Shannon Airport. They also organize a monthly peace vigil outside the Shannon Airport.

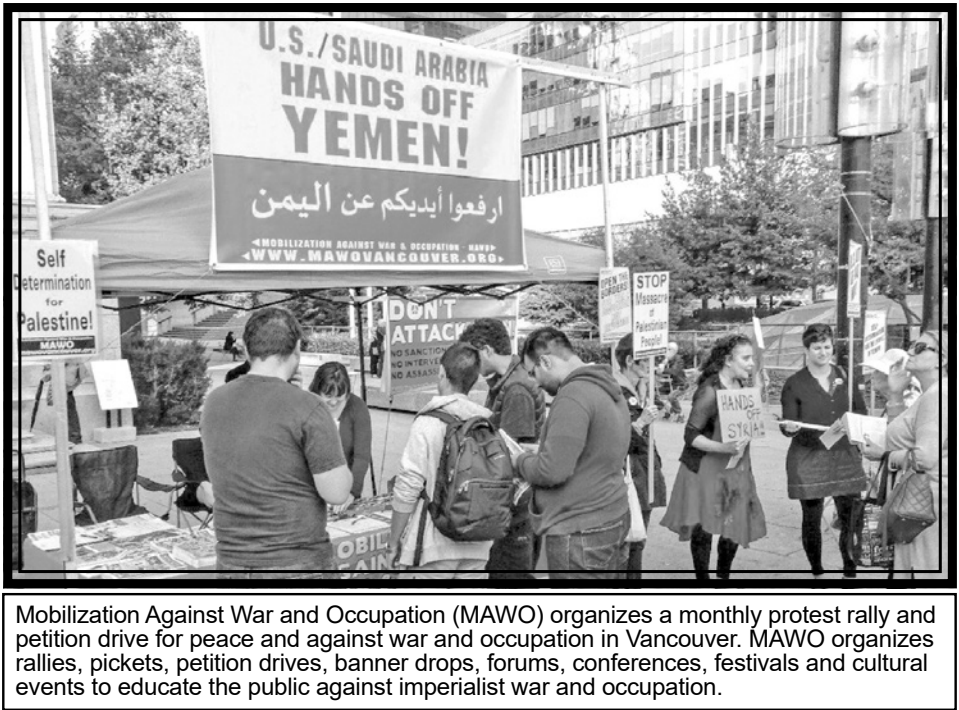
Protests at Shannon Airport began soon after the

U.S. military started landing there. On September 1, 2002, World Peace Day, the first Women’s Peace Camp was held at Shannon Airport. They held a 12 hour vigil and rally to protest that the Irish government refused a national referendum on allowing the U.S. to use Shannon Airport for military purposes. Subsequent polls indicate how a referendum would have ended up. In 2007, a poll commissioned by Peace & Neutrality Alliance (PANA) in Ireland and conducted by Lansdowne Market Research Ltd, found that 58% were opposed and only 19% in favour of the use of Shannon Airport by U.S. troops. A 2013 Red C poll also commissioned by PANA found that over three-quarters of Irish people believed Ireland should have a policy of neutrality, and 8 out of 10 that did not want Ireland to support the military intervention in Syria that was then being considered by the U.S. and UK.

Acts of civil disobedience have also taken place - In September 2002 an activist painted ‘No way’ on a warplane in the airport. In January 2003 another activist dis-armed a C-40 transport military plane with an axe. After it was repaired, other activists dis-armed it again. In recent years, activists have entered the Shannon Airport runway and been found guilty of having “interfered with the proper use” of Shannon Airport. In July 2014 two Irish legislators crossed a fence and proceeded towards two U.S. military aircraft with the intention of inspecting them, as Irish authorities have refused to do. As a result, they spent a short time imprisoned after they refused to pay fines against them. These are just some cases of resistance against the U.S. military at Shannon Airport.

The U.S. military use of Shannon Airport has gained international attention and helped to raise the issue of NATO and U.S. foreign military bases worldwide. On November 16-18, 2018, the First International Conference against U.S./NATO Military Bases was held in Dublin, Ireland. The conference was attended by close to 300 participants from over thirty-five countries from around the world. The conference culminated in a protest with international attendees at the Shannon Airport.

Both Okinawa and Shannon are striking examples to the world of how to resist U.S. military presence and occupation with consistent action. While these two examples are noteworthy spotlights, many other organizations are protesting NATO and U.S. foreign military bases around the world. As the U.S., and NATO are waging their new era of war and occupation at the expense of oppressed nations, it is of vital importance to bring these organizations together to build a strong and united movement against these foreign military bases. From Okinawa to Shannon, to those 1000 foreign bases around the world, let’s bring an end to the U.S. and NATO use of our world as a battleground, and fight against war and for a world of peace!



Mobilization Against War and Occupation (MAWO) organizes a monthly protest rally and petition drive for peace and against war and occupation in Vancouver. MAWO organizes rallies, pickets, petition drives, banner drops, forums, conferences, festivals and cultural events to educate the public against imperialist war and occupation.