

The Honduran coup: A warning to the working class

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Since the June 28 coup by the most right-wing sections of the ruling elite, backed by the US-trained military, Honduran workers have waged an implacable struggle against the imposition of an illegitimate and repressive regime.

Over 60,000 Honduran teachers have carried out an indefinite strike since June 29, the day after the elected president, Manuel Zelaya, was seized at gunpoint by the military and bundled onto a plane that flew him out of the country. Schools remain shut nationwide, with students and parents supporting the action. Other sections of the Honduran working class have joined in this struggle, threatening to escalate it through the erection of barricades on the nation's highways.

This heroic resistance has been carried out in the face of a de facto state of siege. Honduras remains under curfew, with the military controlling the streets. Basic democratic rights have been suspended, and nearly 1,000 opponents of the coup regime have been arrested. Sections of the media that voiced opposition to the takeover have been shut down, with broadcasting facilities taken over by armed troops and individual reporters threatened with death.

On Sunday, the coup claimed its first fatality, 19-year-old Isy Obed Murillo, shot down by Honduran troops at the Tegucigalpa airport, where thousands turned out to show support for Zelaya, whose plane was not allowed to land.

There is every reason to fear that this is only the beginning, and not just in Honduras. The country's ruling oligarchy is among the most backward and reactionary in the region, while its military command is trained by the Pentagon, which maintains a key military base at Soto Cano, where over 600 US troops are deployed.

The danger that workers in Honduras could face a

bloody tragedy like those inflicted upon working people in Brazil, Uruguay, Chile and Argentina more than 30 years ago is real and present.

In Honduras, as elsewhere in Latin America, there has been no real settling of accounts for the crimes carried out by the fascist-military regimes headed by thugs like Chile's Pinochet and Argentina's Videla. Those who led the US-backed Honduran military death squads that carried out massacres, assassinations, "disappearances" and torture 25 years ago continue to enjoy impunity, as do most of their counterparts in the region.

The deepening of the world economic crisis—which has driven the buying power of Hondurans down 30 percent compared to just a year ago—is ushering in a new period of intense class struggle, undermining the façade of democratization erected when Latin America's military rulers handed the reins of the state back to civilian politicians in the 1980s.

The lessons of the previous defeats must be learned to prevent new ones. Above all, as was demonstrated time and time again, from the Brazilian military coup of 1964, to Chile in 1973 and Argentina in 1976, the working class cannot defend itself against the threat of dictatorship by subordinating its struggles to supposedly "progressive" factions within the native ruling elite.

Nowhere is this truer than in the case of Honduran President Manuel Zelaya, who, like the coup leaders themselves, is seeking the intercession of the Obama administration in Washington to uphold his presidency's political legitimacy.

After his theatrical flight over Tegucigalpa Sunday—Zelaya announced that he would "jump" if he could find a parachute—the ousted president has abandoned his pledge to return to Honduras by "air,

land or sea,” instead flying to Washington Tuesday for a meeting with Secretary of State Hillary Clinton.

The outcome of that meeting was Zelaya’s agreement to “mediation” by Costa Rican President Oscar Arias between the elected president and those who overthrew him. Arias is a veteran of such dirty deals, having officiated in the late 1980s in the so-called Esquipulas process that brokered an end to the leftist guerrilla insurgency in El Salvador, consolidating power in the hands of US-backed factions within the ruling elite.

Significantly, Clinton refused to call for the restoration of the overthrown president, allowing only that the US administration favored “a peaceful resolution of this matter” and “the restoration of democracy.”

There is no question that the coup in Honduras was prepared with Washington’s foreknowledge and blessing. According to published reports, US diplomats were in discussion with Zelaya’s opponents about removing the president, and it impossible to believe that the Honduran military would be deployed without the approval of its US overseers.

Washington’s aim was to replace the Honduran president in order to effect changes in Honduran policy that would prove more favorable to US interests in the region, including the severing of the close economic and political ties established by Zelaya with the Venezuelan government of Hugo Chávez and Cuba’s Fidel Castro. It was hoped that Obama’s rhetoric about “mutual respect” in the hemisphere together with a few formal protests would create the conditions for a “velvet coup.”

Zelaya’s decision to turn to Washington and comply with its demands for mediation with the coup leaders expresses his own class position. The product of a wealthy landowning family with interests in the timber industry, he came to power as the candidate of the Liberal Party, which has alternated with the National Party and the military in holding power since the end of the 19th century, and with the support of some of the richest men in Honduras.

Zelaya turned to Venezuela for cheap oil as well as loans granted without any troubling questions about his government’s handling of public funds. This, together with his use of empty radical phrases, has been used to promote him as a “leftist” leader challenging the oligarchy.

The reality is that Zelaya secured support for joining ALBA (the Spanish acronym for Bolivarian Alternative for the Americas, the Venezuelan-sponsored regional trade group), by promising to support the presidential candidacy of Roberto Micheletti, the right-wing leader of parliament who has now been installed in that office by the coup.

However bitter the differences between Zelaya and the right-wing elements that overthrew him, both are staunch defenders of the interests of the country’s capitalist ruling class. A resolution of the current crisis on the basis of a mediated settlement between them would spell a political defeat for the workers of Honduras, while helping to legitimize military coups, making new ones more likely elsewhere in Central America and throughout the hemisphere.

Only the Honduran workers, who have been the main force resisting the coup, can defeat such a reactionary settlement of the current crisis. The critical task is the building of a revolutionary political movement of the working class, independent of all factions of the bourgeoisie and armed with a socialist program. Such a movement must be built to fight for a workers’ and farmers’ government and the socialist transformation of not only Honduras, but the entire region as part of a United Socialist States of the Americas.

Workers in Honduras and throughout Latin America will find support not in the imperialist maneuvers of the Obama administration, but in the working class of the United States, which is itself being driven by the economic crisis into struggle against capitalism.

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