

Coup regime steps up repression in Honduras

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Demonstrations in Honduras against the government of de facto President Roberto Micheletti and the military forces that seized power on June 28 and expelled President José Manuel Zelaya have continued in the face of mounting repression. In an attempt to quash opposition to the coup, the government has brought back the brutal tactics of the dictatorship of the 1970s and early 1980s.

On Friday July 24, construction worker Pedro Magdiel Muñoz was dragged down the sidewalk by an army officer and detained. His body was found near a coffee processing plant early the next morning showing signs of beatings and torture. His right hand and arm where black and blue from being bound. He had been hacked to death. Magdiel Muñoz was part of a group of demonstrators who were marching on the Nicaraguan border to welcome Zelaya back into Honduras.

The Committee for the Defense of Human Rights in Honduras (CODEH) accused the police of handing Magdiel Muñoz over to a paramilitary death squad composed of ranchers from the town of El Paraíso.

On Saturday August 1, school teacher Roger Abraham Vallejo died from his wounds. He had been shot in the head two days earlier when the police attacked a protest march in Tegucigalpa. Vallejo, 38, an English teacher, had a reputation as a campaigner for equality and civil rights. He had opposed the military coup from the first day.

In addition to the demonstrators killed by the Honduran regime during street protests, CODEH has accused the new regime of executing 68 people since the coup. Among these killings are the recent assassinations of journalists and activists Fino Noriego, Roger Bados and Roger García, which were carried out by death squads. There are clear signs that the coup regime is reviving the infamous Battalion 3-16, a death squad notorious for its brutality and ruthlessness. The

3-16 was created by the CIA in the 1970s as an autonomous military squad modeled after the ones operating at the time in Argentina. It was designed to carry out with ruthless efficiency a genocidal extermination of political opponents of the regime.

It existed as part of a so-called preventive war in support of the most reactionary layers of the Honduran ruling class, in the context of the CIA war on the Nicaraguan bourgeois nationalist regime led by the Sandinistas. Involved in the day-to-day activities of the 3-16 squad was the United States embassy in Honduras under John Negroponte.

On Sunday, shortly after attending Vallejo's funeral, another school teacher, Martín Florencio Rivera, was assassinated outside his house in broad daylight, as he was getting out of a car. Like Magdiel Muñoz, Florencio Rivera was hacked to death.

CODEH further charges that the Micheletti regime is receiving advice from an Israeli private security company on what level of violence to use against the demonstrators. It is also evident that Micheletti is surrounding himself with people who were associated with the dictatorship including the infamous Billy Joya, who is now an advisor to the de facto regime. Joya, an architect of the death squads of the 1970s, was trained by the American CIA and the Chilean fascist dictatorship of Augusto Pinochet.

Another human rights group, the Committee of Relatives of the Detained and Disappeared in Honduras (COFADEH), has reported that the regime has assembled a death squad of 120 individuals, which trains on private ranches and includes elements associated with the Pinochet dictatorship. CODEH President Bertha Olivo reported that among these individuals is Robert Carmona, a Venezuelan widely believed to have planned Zelaya's kidnapping and expulsion from the presidency. Carmona was also involved in the failed coup to overthrow Venezuelan

President Hugo Chavez in April 2002.

Political and class tensions have transformed Honduran society into a powder keg. Zelaya has insisted that his National Resistance Front take a non-violent course of action. However, violence is being imposed on his supporters by the regime..

Despite the repression and the wave of state terror, popular resistance is escalating. Tens of thousands of teachers and health workers have declared themselves on strike against the regime. The teachers reaffirmed their decision to walk out at an August 3 public rally. One speaker declared, "We cannot teach while they are killing our members." On August 4, thousands of students battled police in Tegucigalpa. A day later, a national resistance march began in the Honduran interior. The demonstrators are expected to walk 15 to 20 kilometers daily, arriving in Tegucigalpa and San Pedro de Sula next Wednesday.

At a news conference Tuesday, State Department spokesman Phillip Crowley refused to call Zelaya's removal a military coup, a designation that would legally obligate the US government to cancel all but humanitarian aid to the regime.

The Obama administration insists on promoting the fantasy that both sides can come to an agreement on the basis of proposals by Costa Rican President Arias. Behind this public stance is Washington's attempt to consolidate the political aims pursued by the coup, while running out the clock on the remainder of Zelaya's presidency. The Obama White House and the State Department have made no criticism of the repression and death squad activity in Honduras.

For his part, Zelaya has continued to accept the Arias proposals, which would relegate him to a toothless presidency as part of a government of "national unity" controlled by those who overthrew him. He has oscillated between rhetorical threats to mobilize his followers in a struggle against the usurping government and vows that he will only pursue peaceful methods, employing the "weapons of reason."

On Wednesday, Zelaya returned to Nicaragua from meeting with Mexican President Calderón. While in Mexico, Zelaya accused the "government hawks" in the United States of backing the coup. At the same time, he refused to include President Obama in his denunciation. He also reaffirmed his support for the Arias plan, which decrees a complete amnesty for the

coup's organizers and demands that Zelaya abandon his plans for a popular plebiscite on a constituent assembly to revise the country's US-imposed constitution.

The Micheletti regime, meanwhile, has continued to make it clear that it will not accept that part of the Arias Plan that requires Zelaya's return to his position as president of Honduras. It insists that the ousted president would be allowed to return only for the purpose of being arrested and placed on trial for "treason."

The right-wing character of the coup regime was further spelled out Tuesday with an appearance by the five top generals in the Honduran military on national television. Speaking for an hour and a half, the uniformed generals justified their action in dragging Zelaya out of the presidential palace at gunpoint and forcing him on a plane bound for Costa Rica and exile.

General Miguel Angel García Padget, commander in chief of the Honduran army, harkened back to the repression unleashed 30 years ago, declaring that during that period Central America had "lived through the critical situation of subversion."

Denouncing Zelaya for establishing closer relations with Venezuela's President Hugo Chavez, García Padget echoed the heated rhetoric of the Reagan administration and the region's right-wing dictatorship during that period. "Central America was not the objective of this communism disguised as democracy," he said. "This socialism, communism, Chavismo, we could call it, was headed to the heart of the United States."

Meanwhile, the head of the armed forces, General Romeo Vásquez Velásquez, issued a direct threat to the leaders of the protests against the coup. He said: "They call us 'assassins'. It's an effort to demoralize the troops. When they do this, they are committing a crime, first and foremost, that of defamation. We're going to go after them. They are acting with impunity."



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