

Coup in Honduras enters its third month

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It is now two months since Honduran soldiers abducted the country's elected president, Manuel Zelaya, forced him onto an airplane and flew him out of the country.

The June 28 coup installed a right-wing regime backed by the military, the country's native oligarchy and the multinational corporations that reap hefty profits from the exploitation of Honduran workers.

Despite mass popular resistance and formal condemnations of the coup by Washington, the Organization of American States and various Latin American governments, the coup regime headed by Roberto Micheletti remains in power and is preparing to stage rigged elections to choose Zelaya's successor.

The regime has maintained its rule, in the first place, through brutal and escalating repression. In recent weeks, reports issued by several human rights organizations have documented the state violence unleashed against Honduran working people, who in their overwhelming majority have opposed the dictatorship.

Amnesty International documented wholesale arrests and beatings of demonstrators, along with killings and "disappearances." The human rights group charged that the coup regime is "using excessive force and mass detentions as a policy to manage demonstrators and peaceful protestors," while "denying the right to freedom of expression and information, through the closure of media outlets, the confiscation of equipment and physical abuse of journalists and camera persons."

Similarly, a delegation from the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR), an arm of the OAS, found "a pattern of disproportionate use of public force, arbitrary detentions, and the control of information aimed at limiting political participation by a sector of the citizenry."

The agency said it had "confirmed the use of

repression against demonstrations through the placement of military roadblocks; the arbitrary enforcement of curfews; the detentions of thousands of people; cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment; and poor detention conditions." It estimated that up to 4,000 people have been subjected to arbitrary detention.

The commission cited the shooting deaths of at least four demonstrators, savage beatings of protesters, including elderly people and women, with "police truncheons and other blunt objects made of rubber, iron and wood," and police gang rapes of women detained at demonstrations.

In the face of this brutality, Honduran workers, peasants and students have continued to carry out strikes, mass demonstrations and other acts of resistance in a sustained mass movement without precedent in the country's history.

This heroic struggle has helped expose two great political fictions. The first is the pretense that the Obama administration has inaugurated a new era of non-intervention and mutual respect in US-Latin American relations. The second is that the region's bourgeois regimes of a nationalist or populist stripe—from Venezuela's Chavez to Zelaya himself—offer any way forward for the working class and oppressed masses.

Obama's formal statements opposing Zelaya's ouster notwithstanding, two months after the June 28 military overthrow, the US State Department has yet to rule on whether the events of that day constituted a coup. Such a finding would trigger requirements to cut off US aid to the Honduran regime.

Even more telling, neither Obama nor anyone else in his administration has uttered a word of criticism of the killings, disappearances, torture or mass detentions in Honduras. For its part, the US mass media has virtually blacked out these crimes.

The Pentagon, meanwhile, continues military operations at the US base in Soto Cano—its largest in

the region—where some 600 American troops and hundreds of US civilian contractors work closely with the Honduran military that carried out the coup.

The likelihood is nil that the Honduran military and the country's ruling oligarchy, US imperialism's most servile clients for over a century, would carry out such an action without a green light from Washington.

Far from ushering in a new era of peace and harmony, the Obama administration is embarked on a campaign to reassert US domination in Latin America, utilizing military means to offset growing economic challenges from China, Europe and emerging competitors within the region itself. The recent furor over Colombia's agreement to provide the Pentagon with bases capable of deploying US "rapid reaction forces" anywhere in the hemisphere and the continuation of plans for a revival of the US Fourth Fleet are indications of this strategy.

Washington's primary response to the coup has been its instigation of the mediation efforts by Costa Rican President Oscar Arias—a longtime Washington asset—and support for his so-called San José Accord.

This proposal would return Zelaya to the presidential palace as a powerless president, subordinated to a government of "national unity and reconciliation" dominated by the military and political elements that overthrew him. Those who carried out the coup and the vicious repression that followed would be granted a full amnesty. Any attempt to convene a constituent assembly for the purpose of amending the reactionary 1982 constitution imposed by the US and the Honduran military would be forbidden.

Such an agreement would secure the key aims of the June 28 overthrow and have the effect of legitimizing military coups throughout the hemisphere.

Zelaya's acceptance of this scheme is a measure of his own inability and unwillingness to challenge the framework of the bourgeois political setup and imperialist domination in Honduras. Indeed, his entire strategy for securing his return to office has been based on appeals to the Obama administration to impose stiffer sanctions on the regime headed by his old Liberal Party political ally, Roberto Micheletti.

The Latin American governments—including that of Chavez in Venezuela—have demonstrated similar impotence, providing only verbal condemnations of the coup, while also appealing to Obama to call the

Honduran oligarchs and generals to order.

With the events in Honduras, the class lines have emerged starkly. It is the Honduran workers, backed by students and peasants, who have fought intransigently against the coup regime, even as Zelaya has sought a US-brokered deal with its leaders.

Zelaya's willingness to participate in such a settlement confirms the bitter lessons of the past period of defeats in Latin America, from Brazil in 1964, to Chile in 1973, to Argentina in 1976. The working class cannot defend itself from military coups and dictatorship by subordinating its struggle to a supposedly "progressive" faction of the bourgeoisie.

Only the working class, mobilizing its independent political strength against the coup regime and the capitalist order that it defends, can prevent a counterrevolutionary settlement in Honduras. This struggle must be carried forward through the demand for a workers' and farmers' government, the expropriation of the oligarchy's "ten families" and the multi-national corporations that backed the coup, and the socialist transformation of Honduras and the entire region.

In this fight, Honduran workers will find support neither in sanctions from Obama nor in aid from Chavez and other Latin American regimes, but rather from working people in Latin America and the US itself, who are being driven into class battles by the historic crisis gripping world capitalism.

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