

The Paraguayan coup

Bill Van Auken
3 July 2012

The so-called constitutional coup that ousted Paraguay's elected President Fernando Lugo on June 22 is another indication of the mounting class tensions that are gripping Latin America and the world as a whole, making democratic forms of rule under capitalism ever more unsustainable.

There is every reason to believe that the hurried impeachment of Lugo—forced through both houses of the Paraguayan parliament in barely 30 hours after he was charged by the two traditional parties of the country's ruling oligarchy—was carried out with the indispensable complicity of US imperialism.

A former Catholic cleric and proponent of Liberation Theology, Lugo was elected in 2008, promising to combat corruption and promote “socially responsible capitalism.”

Without any party of his own, he came into office on the back of a coalition that joined a combination of left-nationalist groups, peasant and indigenous associations with the Liberal Party, a right-wing instrument of the Paraguayan oligarchy, which had been tolerated as a tame opposition under the 35-year dictatorship of Alfredo Stroessner. It was Lugo's vice president, Liberal Party leader Fernando Franco, who donned the presidential sash after supporting the impeachment of his former running mate.

Committed to the defense of private property and with all the real levers of power remaining in the hands of the Liberals and Stroessner's Colorados, who ruled the country for six decades before the 2008 election, Lugo was able to carry out little in the way of reforms, while he adapted himself continuously to Paraguayan reaction.

Nonetheless, the ruling oligarchy as well as the transnational agricultural interests found his presidency intolerable, fearing that it was generating false expectations among the masses of Paraguayan workers and oppressed. In particular there was concern that

masses of landless peasants, receiving nothing in the way of genuine agrarian reform from the government, would take matters into their own hands. In a country where 2 percent of the population controls more than 75 percent of the land, and where much of this land was expropriated from its owners and handed out to favored Colorado politicians under the Stroessner dictatorship, there is ample reason for such fear.

The principal pretext for the impeachment was a massacre unleashed by Paraguayan security forces as they attempted to evict some 100 peasant farmers occupying the land of a wealthy former Stroessner-era Colorado politician. Eleven peasants and six policemen were killed, while scores more were wounded and arrested. The right-wing parties in the Paraguayan Congress blamed Lugo not for gunning down peasants, but for failing to carry out more thorough repression.

The parallels between the June 2012 coup in Paraguay and the June 2009 coup that toppled the elected president of Honduras, Manuel Zelaya, are obvious. In both cases, the political representatives of oligarchical ruling classes threw out presidents who had postured as “lefts,” bitterly opposing even the paltriest reforms as intolerable infringements upon their wealth and power. And in both cases legal and constitutional statutes were twisted to serve wholly antidemocratic ends.

While in Zelaya's case, troops stormed the presidential palace and hustled the pajama-clad president onto an aircraft that flew him into exile, such methods proved unnecessary in the case of Lugo, who meekly and publicly accepted his impeachment, only joining protests after the fact. In Paraguay as in Honduras, however, the real violence will undoubtedly unfold in the aftermath of the coup, directed against the country's workers, peasants and students.

The social structures of the two countries also share much in common, with Paraguay the second poorest

country in South America and Honduras the second poorest country in Central America and with social inequality driven to unprecedented levels, in large measure due to the penetration of transnational capital.

And both countries have been the focus of attention of the US military and intelligence apparatus, which shares intimate connections with its local counterparts. Security forces in both countries have been trained and advised by the Pentagon and would not support the overthrow of an existing government without its approval.

In Honduras, Washington has installed its largest military base in Latin America. And, in the period leading up to Lugo's removal from office, US generals were reportedly involved in negotiations for securing a strategic base with the same right-wing politicians who organized Lugo's impeachment.

In August of last year, *ABC Color*, Paraguay's main right-wing daily, reported that Deputy Jose Lopez Chavez, the head of the Commission on Defense of the lower house of the Paraguayan Congress, reported meeting with a group of US generals visiting the country to discuss the installation of an American base in Paraguay's thinly populated Chaco region. Lopez Chavez is a leader of a dissident faction of the Colorado Party headed by former coup leader and retired general Lino Oviedo and one of the organizers of the parliamentary coup.

While Lugo had sought to placate Washington and allowed US special forces troops into the country to train Paraguayan troops in "counter-terrorism" tactics and "advanced military operations in urban terrain," he balked at a large-scale exercise proposed by the Pentagon for 2010. A secret US embassy cable released by WikiLeaks reports that embassy officials had sought to "vigorously engage" government ministers and Paraguayan military commanders to force acceptance of the operation, known as "New Horizon." The cable accused Lugo of getting "cold feet" and of seeking to curry favor with Venezuela's Hugo Chavez in order to get a better deal on oil imports.

Other secret cables dating back to 2009 released by WikiLeaks carry titles such as "Paraguayan pols plot parliamentary putsch" and "Lugo impeachment rumors are back." They indicate that the US embassy was intimately familiar with—and undoubtedly secretly involved in—the conspiracies being hatched by the

Paraguayan right.

The Paraguayan coup, following the coup in Honduras and the expanding US involvement in the "drug war" in Mexico and Central America, is another indication that with American capitalism confronting powerful economic rivals in China and Europe, the Obama administration is turning ever more openly to counterrevolutionary conspiracies and military force in the drive to reassert US hegemony in Latin America.

The events in both Paraguay and Honduras have proven once again that working people in Latin America cannot defeat imperialist intervention and the oppression by native ruling classes outside of the independent political mobilization of the working class in struggle for socialism. In both countries, counterrevolutionary operations were facilitated by the political subordination of the workers, peasants and oppressed to capitalist politicians—Lugo and Zelaya—who were in turn under the thumb of right-wing bourgeois parties.

The most decisive lesson of the so-called parliamentary coups in these two countries is the necessity of constructing new revolutionary parties of the working class, independent of all sections of the bourgeoisie and fighting for the United Socialist States of the Americas.

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