

Large demonstrations in Ecuador against Correa government

Our reporter
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Police used tear gas and batons to disperse demonstrators in Quito, Ecuador on Thursday as protests against a right-wing reform package proposed by the government of Rafael Correa took place nationwide.

Thursday's demonstrations were called by the National Indigenous Confederation of Ecuador (CONAIE) and the Workers' United Front (FUT)—Ecuador's main indigenous and trade union organizations—under conditions of growing popular opposition to the Correa government.

On Wednesday, thousands of indigenous people arrived at El Arbelito park in Quito after concluding an 800 kilometer, ten-day march that began in the rural southeastern village of El Pangui. According to CONAIE, over 20,000 peasants participated in the march.

Additionally, indigenous protesters set-up road barriers, blocking highway traffic in seven of the country's 24 provinces.

The demonstrations reflect a growing disaffection with the government of Rafael Correa, who was elected in 2007 after running for president as a self-described socialist on a populist program. Correa maintained close connections to the nationalist administrations of Hugo Chavez in Venezuela and Evo Morales in Bolivia and officially brought Ecuador into the *Chavista* Bolivarian Alliance in 2009.

Thursday's demonstrations were called in the wake of a series of recent proposals put forward by Correa that have met with popular hostility.

In April, the legislature—dominated by Correa's Proud and Sovereign Alliance Party (Alianza PAIS)—overwhelmingly passed a labor reform package which cuts 40 percent of state funding for pensions and which places an earnings ceiling on the wages of

workers. Representatives of the indigenous marchers have also called for land redistribution and the de-privatization of water and natural resources.

Correa has also proposed a constitutional change that would allow him to run for reelection in 2017 for an additional four-year term.

“Correa and Alianza PAIS came into government offering a revolution, but what they have constructed is a deceptive guise to cover up a new system of domination and oppression to favor big business,” explained a manifesto published by the indigenous organization, CONAIE. “The powerful economic groups have obtained in these eight years better profits than in the neo-liberal period; the wealth continues to concentrate in fewer hands...”

Correa responded to the demonstrations by mobilizing 5,000 police in the streets of Quito and by denouncing the demonstrators as right-wing coup-plotters.

The strike is “absolutely illegal,” said Correa, noting hypocritically that “in a democracy everyone has the right to demonstrate.”

For their part, the leadership of the trade unions have sought to limit the extent of the demonstrations. Production in most major industries continued without stoppage.

When announcing the August 13 strike in July, FUT acting president Pablo Serrano said that the purpose of the strike was not “to destabilize the government,” but rather to allow workers to manifest their discontent. In other words, the trade unions called the strike to allow the workers to blow off steam and thereby contain the opposition to the Correa government.

The Correa government's attacks on Ecuadorian workers and peasants reveals the bankrupt character of the so-called Bolivarian project of nationalist “left”

governments of South America. Beginning with the elevation of Hugo Chavez as president of Venezuela in 1999, Chavez and his supporters—most notably Evo Morales in Bolivia and Correa in Ecuador—were promoted tirelessly by the international pseudo-left as the pioneers of a new socialist movement.

In Ecuador, in particular, the bankruptcy of the nationalist orientation of Bolivarianism has been borne out.

As Colombia's *Semana* magazine explained last week, "the impact of the deceleration of the Chinese economy has been felt more in Ecuador than in other areas of the continent. Since the arrival of Correa at the Carondelet palace, Beijing has become the primary creditor of his government, and the end of the Asian giant's era of rapid growth has resulted in a reduction of the credit line. At the same time, the decline in Chinese consumption has affected the exports of different sectors of the mining, fishing and agriculture industries..."

Today, the nationalist programs of the Bolivarian "revolutionaries" are coming increasingly into conflict with the egalitarian interests of the workers and peasants of South America.



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