

Protests continue against Ecuadorean President Correa's policies

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Protests against the government of Ecuadorean President Rafael Correa are continuing after a national strike on August 13 was repressed by the police with tear gas and batons.

Thousands of indigenous people, workers and students have joined in demonstrations daily, with tense and violent confrontations last Monday in the towns of Sucúa, in the Morona Santiago province, and Saraguro, in the Loja province, where protesters were met by 600 police and military personnel, and 30 were detained.

In Quito, Ecuador's capital, unrest has continued throughout the week—in particular, on Monday and Wednesday, thousands marched on the streets protesting against the government's policies and proposed constitutional amendments. In the Amazon city of Macas, police were confronted by hundreds of Shuar and Achuar indigenous people armed with rudimentary tools.

Protesters displayed banners and signs with slogans like “Derecho de huelga no se toca” (the right to strike cannot be touched), “La lucha sigue” (the struggle continues), “Retiro de enmiendas” (withdraw the amendments), “Migrantes indignados y abandonados” (indignant and abandoned migrants).

Indigenous people, who initially were supportive of Correa, protested against water rights policies, a revoked environmental license for the construction of the Macuma-Taisha road and expansion of mining and drilling projects.

The government declared a state of national emergency in conjunction with activity registered at Cotopaxi, a volcano within a 30-mile range of Quito, a move that bans Ecuadorean and social media from reporting on the volcano unless using “official” government sources.

There is widespread opposition to the policies of the

government. President Rafael Correa's PAIS Alliance (Alianza PAIS- AP) ruling party put forth a package of reactionary constitutional amendments which would expand the power of the executive branch, while dismantling workers' rights sanctioned in the Labor Code.

The proposed constitutional amendments also include an expansion of the role of the armed forces in domestic security, the creation of a Comprehensive Criminal Code that establishes a new model of national security law, an increase of government power in media oversight, and a provision which removes limitations on the number of terms that can be served by a president.

Last October, the Ecuadorian Constitutional Court ruled that the package was not to be subject to a popular vote, but rather left to a decision by the National Assembly. Last April, the legislative body already passed a labor reform which greatly reduces state funding for pensions and puts a cap on wages.

Three of the 16 constitutional amendments spearheaded by Correa have been the main target of the protests, namely, changes to articles 114, 229 and 326 of the Ecuadorian constitution.

While a great deal of attention has been given by the media to the proposed amendment of article 114, which would allow Correa to run in the next 2017 election, the implications of an amendment to articles 229 and 326 are substantial and would dismantle an entire era based on gains earned by workers through bitter struggles.

The proposed amendments establish a mechanism to end the right to self-organization, the right to strike and collective bargaining for all those workers linked to the public sector. The proposed amendments would in fact remove Labor Code rights, benefits and guarantees.

The opposition to Correa's policies is heterogeneous:

it includes indigenous farmers, workers, students, teachers, medical personnel, pensioners and business owners. Such diverse social layers undoubtedly express different class interests.

Correa, however, has a definite political program, consonant to Latin American Bolivarianism, which favors the interests of a local bourgeoisie and places him in a natural political alliance with nationalist regimes like Cuba, Venezuela and Bolivia. He has developed strong ties to Brazil and Argentina.

A week ago, the Ecuadorian government issued an official diplomatic statement to congratulate the United States and Cuba for their resumption of diplomatic relations, a move that seeks to reassert semi-colonial domination of Cuba by the US.

Correa is seeking to renegotiate his position in world geopolitics by taking a more pliant position toward the Obama administration. In 2010, he was supported by the military in suppressing a police revolt over a reduction in benefits. On that occasion, US Secretary of State Hilary Clinton declared “full support for President Rafael Correa, and the institutions of democratic government in that country.”

Once touted as an example of the Latin American “left,” Correa has lost much of his approval base in recent months against a backdrop of plummeting oil prices, growing debt and right-wing policies.

What is unfolding is the collapse of a nationalist-based program. After seven presidents (plus two interim) from 1996 to 2007 (the year he was elected), Ecuador catapulted the US-graduated economist Correa to power, as he was hailed by all stripes of fake leftists as a new example of “socialist” success. He was never a socialist, and his success was temporary at best.

His policies initially reduced poverty from 37 to 22 percent through the implementation of various bourgeois reforms which allowed limited concessions to workers, similar to those implemented by the late Venezuelan President Hugo Chávez. Like those in Venezuela, the concessions in Ecuador were made possible by the protracted rise in commodity prices, particularly in the energy sector. With the fall in these prices, Correa, like every other nationalist leader, is now faced with the same contradictions of the world capitalist system that are affecting other countries.

His solution is to shift to the right, toward draconian measures aimed at improving the odds for Ecuadorian

capital by way of privatization, increased exploitation of resources and police state repression, consequently lowering workers’ and farmers’ living standards.

Many of those who supported his election are now participating in the protests. These forces range from the trade unions to the Ecuadorian Socialist Party, the Communist Party (intimately connected with the Confederation of Ecuadorian Workers or Confederación de Trabajadores del Ecuador or CTE, part of the Workers’ United Front, or FUT) to the indigenous Pachakutik, which is backed by CONAIE, one of the main indigenous organizers of the current protests.

The trade unions in particular play a treacherous role, by proclaiming spineless and often fake one-day strikes to lift the lid and allow workers’ pent-up anger to dissipate, while they ensure no threat to their allies, President Correa and the Ecuadorian bourgeoisie.

Mesias Tatmuez, president of the National United Collective of Workers, Indigenous and Social Organizations (Cedocut), part of the FUT, revealed the unions’ defeatist position: “They have told us that this is not a strike, because we have not closed factories. So we are saying to them that we will continue preparing for this. That if you want this, we will continue preparing this strike.”



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