

Washington and Honduras seek to crush opposition to fraudulent re-election

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On Sunday, both the Honduran electoral tribunal (TSE) and the Organization of American States (OAS) effectively put an end to the twisted electoral process that has followed the November 26 polls. The first made the official declaration of victory for the incumbent president, Juan Orlando Hernández, over the Opposition Alliance against Dictatorship's candidate Salvador Nasralla by a margin of 1.5 percent. He is now to be sworn in for another four-year term in January.

For its part, the OAS chief, Luis Almagro, issued the following statement: "Facing the impossibility of determining a winner, the only way for the people of Honduras to be the victors is to call for new general elections."

After three weeks of scrambling for a path of least resistance, these announcements mark the beginning of a new stage in the imposition by Washington and its Honduran client state of their preferred rulers with virtually the same methods that they used in the aftermath of the 2009 military coup.

As then, they have relied on the compliance and bankruptcy of the right-wing and pseudo-left "opposition" forces to suppress the widespread social indignation among Honduran workers, peasants and youth.

Throughout the three weeks, including under a curfew during the first week, the armed forces have been strictly ordered to clear and violently intimidate the demonstrators, who have set up "paros" or road-blocks across the entire country, with at least 83 actions on Sunday in response to the TSE announcement. At least 20 civilians have been killed, 70 injured, 800 arrested and others reported missing.

The large toll suffered by protesters against the fraud is the result of two main factors: the law-and-order measures of the government and the orders by the opposition to its sympathizers to hold isolated demonstrations like road-

blocks vulnerable to the attacks by the police, and to dissuade the formation of any defense committees in the targeted working class neighborhoods.

On Friday, the ex-president deposed in 2009 and leader of the alliance, Manuel Zelaya—a big landowner and at one point manager of the Council of Private Enterprise (COHEP)—carried out a sinister media stunt by appearing at some of the roadblocks, while constantly looking over his shoulder, and proclaiming, "The people have the right to sacrifice themselves for their sons, just like Jesus Christ died for the people and the sins of others, we are willing to sacrifice ourselves so that this generation gets respected at the polls."

Honduran workers and youth need only look at recent history to know that blood should not be wasted in bringing to power any faction of a bourgeoisie willing to betray them and turn the repressive apparatus against them to defend the interests of imperialism.

Just as in the 1980s, when Honduras was a base for US counterinsurgency operations throughout Central America, and after the 2009 coup, the state forces, armed and financed by Washington, are kidnapping and murdering those leading the ongoing protests, with reports and videos of uniformed but masked officials carrying out extrajudicial murders of demonstrators and entering homes even during the daytime. Violent clashes with the police continued into late hours of Monday.

The Alliance has directed all of its appeals for a solution to the deepest political crisis in the country since the 1980s to the US State Department and the OAS, Washington's diplomatic arm for the Americas since its foundation after World War II. When the TSE made its announcement on Sunday, the opposition candidate, the former Pepsi Honduras CEO and economic-liberal hardliner, Salvador Nasralla, was on his way to negotiate and present his evidence of fraud to the State Department and the OAS.

After the 2009 coup backed by the Obama administration resulted in mass protests in Honduras and international condemnation, the OAS came to the conclusion that it was necessary to suspend Honduras. However, the Honduran coup regime, Washington, the OAS and the National Resistance Popular Front (FNRP) signed the Pact of Cartagena in May 2011. The FNRP and its leader, Manuel Zelaya served as a reliable left flank for bourgeois politics in the country. Almost immediately, on June 1, 2011, the Honduran representatives to the OAS were welcomed back with a standing ovation.

Last Sunday, the OAS-commissioned analyst, Irfan Nooruddin, published a report on the electoral results. Among several “unusual” findings, he points out that, after two-thirds of the votes were computed, there was a “strikingly large deviation from the earlier trend” in the subsequent results in favor of the PN, a trend present “in all departments” that “is hard to explain as pure chance.” His diplomatic conclusion: “I would reject the proposition that the National Party won the election legitimately.”

Later that day, hoping to keep the social opposition against the Honduran coup regime and the appeals by the Alliance linked to the OAS, Almagro made his proposal for new elections. Just as in 2009, the body will seek to mediate and eventually reach a new deal between the government and the Zelaya-Nasralla faction of the bourgeoisie, while Washington and Tegucigalpa carry out a bloody suppression of the social upheavals.

The Honduran bourgeoisie, notwithstanding, backed the declaration of Hernandez’s re-election on Monday, with declarations by the COHEP and the CONAFEPH, the main employers’ organizations offering their endorsements.

The Trump administration has made clear that, in spite of the Alliance’s promises to defend US business interests, it considers it vital to maintain the current and fast-tracked imposition of austerity, militarization, and dictatorial forms of rule in response to the deepening social crisis in the country. This crisis has been deepened by the deportation of tens of thousands of Hondurans from the US and Mexico, the continued stagnation in productive investments internationally and the preparations for global military conflicts.

While Washington is employing the Obama-era Alliance for Prosperity in the Northern Triangle (Guatemala, El Salvador, and Honduras) to strengthen its stranglehold over the region and protect its interests from foreign powers, namely Russia and China, and, particularly, against the working class, the weak-link in

the chain appears to be Honduras.

The country’s poverty rate has increased 10 percent since the 2009 coup, making it a generalized condition for three-fourths of the population, while the number of millionaires has increased significantly. Retired and current Honduran officials refer constantly to the threat of an “insurrection” and “civil war”. In response to temporary strikes by the police forces, the government resorted to expanding its protracted purge of more than 4,000 officials since 2016 to those showing any reluctance to carry out repressive orders. On Monday morning, at least 17 police officers “resigned” to the Special Commission for Depuration.

At the same time, there have been reports of attacks against the main news outlets that favor the Alliance and denounce the electoral fraud, UNE TV and Radio Progreso, including threats and the destruction of their transmission antennas and optical fiber cable networks. Several reporters of Radio Progreso had already been given special protection by the Inter-American Commission for Human Rights given threats after the 2009 coup and the murder of one of the station’s managers in 2014.

The pseudo-left organizations that work within or in the orbit of the FNRP, including the Morenoite Socialist Workers’ Party (PST), Socialism or Barbarism, and the Central American Socialist Party (PSOCA), have all closed ranks behind Nasralla, calling for a “national civic strike” to defend the coming to power of the Alliance. Their politics reflect the interests of layers of the upper middle class of academics, trade union officials and state bureaucrats, whose main fear is that their privileges will be threatened by a working class movement independent of the bourgeois political establishment.

Resistance to the current offensive by the ruling class requires the development of an independent movement of the working class, forming workers’ and defense committees in their neighborhoods and workplaces to formulate their demands and tasks based on an international socialist program.



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