

US-backed repression by Honduran military leaves four dead

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The repression by the Honduran regime of Juan Orlando Hernández against mass strikes and demonstrations that began on April 26 over efforts to facilitate the privatization of the education and health care sectors turned to the open use of deadly violence, as the military began firing volleys of live bullets into crowds on Wednesday.

Eblin Noel Corea, 17, was shot dead at a demonstration in the central department of La Paz, while Luis Antonio Maldonado, 29, was fatally shot in the head in Tegucigalpa. Hospital authorities reported at least 21 demonstrators were injured that day, most of them from gunfire. Reuters and local media reported that the deaths and injuries were the result of “repression by the military.”

On Thursday, local media reported that two youth—one identified as Eliud Orellana—were shot dead at a roadblock by unidentified attackers near the Caribbean town of Jutiapa, where teachers have been leading protest actions since late April.

The brutal repression has only fueled the mass demonstrations, while teachers and doctors continue to strike, and roadblocks are built and rebuilt. The anniversary of the June 28 military coup in 2009, which was backed by the Obama administration and installed the National Party regime, continued by Hernández, is expected to generate even more widespread demonstrations calling for an end of the US-backed regime.

Reports in the US corporate media this week have repeated that on May 29 and June 2, respectively, the gates of the US embassy and dozens of Dole fruit containers and trucks were burned down presumably by demonstrators. The response by US corporate circles in defense of their property and trade across the Central American isthmus has been ruthless. Dole temporarily

suspended the contracts of over 3,000 workers to demonstrate its willingness to cut the means of subsistence for entire impoverished towns.

Washington is openly backing the deadly repression as fears mount that demonstrators will target US investments. Privatizations, austerity and repression are being orchestrated from Washington to defend the interests of US capital and its local client elite.

The latest killings follow the activities of death squads snatching demonstrators in broad daylight earlier this month, and the finding on June 3 of the dead body of a young doctor who was participating in the protests in the western department of Copán.

Truckers struck and joined demonstrators Monday in blocking the key highway CA-5, which connects the city of San Pedro Sula with the capital, Tegucigalpa. The truckers, both owners and employees, were demanding higher rates for their services. On Thursday, when fuel shortages were becoming widespread, Tegucigalpa business organizations demanded an end to the strike. The truckers’ associations reached an undisclosed deal with the government to end the action.

Between Tuesday night and Thursday night, hundreds of anti-riot police went on strike, after using tear gas and firing their guns into the sky to kick out their superiors and occupy their main base in Tegucigalpa. While demanding improvements in their conditions and a halt to the repression, police were filmed chanting “Out JOH [Juan Orlando Hernández]!”. A spokesman chosen by strikers apologized for the repression and declared “We don’t want a government that is not worth it.”

In response, the Department of Disciplinary Affairs of the Police threatened strikers that they had all been identified and would be fired, while Hernández responded by deploying the military across the country.

By Friday morning, the police ended the strike, agreeing to a set of pitiful and empty promises by the regime to improve food and uniform quality, respect human rights, make no reprisals. The police agreed to pursue their grievances within the established “internal channels.”

In recent years, the police forces have repeatedly responded to the escalation of deadly repression against demonstrations by striking, which led the Hernández government, in partnership with USAID, the Inter-American Development Bank, several US think tanks and firms such as Giuliani Security & Safety (owned by Trump’s attorney and former New York City mayor, Rudy Giuliani) to initiate in 2016 a seemingly permanent Special Purge and Transformation Commission. This body has fired more than 5,200 officers, alleging corruption and human rights abuses, while its representatives travel frequently to Washington to report directly to the US State Department.

Criterio reported that the police strikers expressed fears, recalling the reprisals that followed when police struck across Honduras in late 2017 during the brutal crackdown that left more than 30 demonstrators dead during protests against the fraudulent election of Hernández. “Many were fired, others jailed, and others escaped the country,” the report notes.

The purge was framed as a response to the widely reported killing in March 2016 of environmental activist Berta Cáceres, which saw four Honduran military officers arrested, two trained by the US. However, it has been used as an axe to threaten police against striking. Most officers live in the impoverished neighborhoods that are subject to the social attacks and terror of the regime.

This aim was explicitly revealed by the statements of the Honduran National Council on Defense and Security led by Hernández and the US government. It passed a resolution Thursday backing “police transformation and consolidation” while expressing thanks for “the backing of international cooperation.” On Wednesday, the US embassy in Honduras tweeted about its “firm support for the reform of the Honduras Police.”

Most strikingly, however, the commander of the US Southern Command (SOUTHCOM), which oversees Pentagon operations across Central and South America,

Adm. Craig Faller, arrived in Honduras Friday morning to participate in the opening ceremony of the deployment in the country of a Marine-SOUTHCOM special purpose task force.

This followed reports Thursday night that gunfire was exchanged, without resulting in casualties, between police strikers and the military police sent to patrol the police base in Tegucigalpa.

After a century and a half of imperialist political control and economic plunder of Honduras, which was used as a platform for US counter-insurrectionary operations during the civil wars in the 1980s across Central America, the presence of the US commander during the deadly crackdown in Honduras should be taken as a warning that US imperialism is ready to renew its direct military interventions in its “backyard” against any challenge to its interests from below.

More broadly, Washington is turning Central America into an open-air labor prison. After blackmailing Mexico with threats of tariffs, the Trump administration has secured the mobilization of thousands of Mexican military and an expansion of checkpoints and detention camps across southern Mexico against immigrants. It has also begun joint deployments of the US border patrol and the Guatemalan police and military along Guatemala’s northern border.

While Trump threatens to begin mass roundups and the deportation of “millions” starting on Sunday across the US, it has become clear that the Mexican government of President Andrés Manuel López Obrador has agreed not only to deploy its troops as an extension of the US border patrol, but also to play the role of colonial administrator. It has reached “cooperation” agreements over the last week with the governments of the Northern Triangle—Guatemala, El Salvador and Honduras—to “join efforts in dealing with irregular migration.”



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