

Honduran military invades university and shoots down students

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About 40 soldiers invaded the campus of the National Autonomous University of Honduras (UNAH) firing live ammunition and tear gas into a crowd of hundreds of student protesters, leaving 20 injured. The five wounded by bullets are in “stable” condition, according to hospital authorities.

The operation follows the killing of four demonstrators and maiming of dozens with gunfire last week. Videos have shown armed squads snatching protesters, and the body of a young doctor was found after he participated in protests earlier this month.

Dozens more, including university students, have been killed by the Honduran police and military during recurring mass demonstrations since the US-backed military coup on June 28, 2009, that overthrew elected president Manuel Zelaya. UNAH, whose students have continuously been at the forefront of these demonstrations, had previously been invaded by riot police in 2009 and last year.

The most recent military repression, however, is unprecedented in the last decades and recalls nothing so much as the methods used against radicalized students and workers during the 1980s. While it did not experience the kind of full-fledged civil war seen in neighboring Central American countries, Honduras saw during this period the “disappearance” of 184 activists and the killing of dozens by US-trained death squads.

On Monday afternoon, students in UNAH’s University City in the capital of Tegucigalpa reported on social media that more than 300 armed officials of the National Police and the Military Police for Public Order (PMOP) had besieged the campus, firing tear gas and not allowing them to leave.

“Students reacted by throwing stones at the agents and, in response, the PMOP officials entered through the pedestrian walkway into the campus, pursuing students and firing with their rifles,” reported the AFP.

A chaotic scene followed, with videos showing the trapped students, who numbered more than 2,000, seeking to escape, carrying the injured with them.

The statement released by the armed forces, while making sweeping and unfounded claims of Molotov cocktails thrown and a hostage held by students, recognizes that their gunshots hit students’ legs as they sought to run away.

Students have been carrying out intermittent occupations of campuses across the country as part of the protests led by striking teachers and doctors that began nationally on April 26. While calling for the downfall of the regime headed by President Juan Orlando Hernández (JOH), the most recent demonstrations were triggered by two bills that would further facilitate defunding, mass layoffs and privatizations in the public health and education sectors.

These and other austerity measures were dictated by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) as part of credit talks in April aimed at meeting billions of dollars in interest payments to the local and international financial oligarchies and tax exemptions for the 24 Export Processing Zones in the country, as well as multinational exporters like Dole.

One IMF “structural” program after another, on top of the open sacking of millions of dollars from Social Security Institute (IHSS) by the PNH leadership, have resulted in thousands of unnecessary deaths and a massive fall in living standards. Moreover, unemployment and subemployment have together increased from 35.6 percent in 2008 to 63 percent today.

Despite the policies implemented by both the US and Mexican governments of militarized border policing, mass deportations and concentration camps deliberately aimed at making migrants suffer, the first eight months of this fiscal year saw about 210,000 Honduran migrants apprehended by US and Mexican authorities. This

represents about 2.3 percent of the population seeking to escape rampant poverty, murderous state repression and the world's highest homicide rates, which surpass 300 per 100,000 people in the northern departments (compared to 5 for the United States).

Meanwhile, the local ruling elite, composed of a handful of millionaire and even billionaire financiers and landowners who have partnered chiefly with US and European capital, sit in gated mansions in Honduras with their joint investments and property protected by the state forces trained and armed by their US patrons.

The rapid escalation of privatizations, social austerity, concessions of land and natural resources and attacks on jobs and wages that followed the 2009 coup was paired with the intensification of capitalist state repression. Decrees signed in November 2011 and March 2012 allowed the military's deployment in the country. In August 2012, the military special force "Tigres" was approved, followed one year later by the creation of the PMOP, both trained by the US military.

These forces have gradually grown to about 15,000 soldiers and serve as a reliable repressive force. It was the PMOP that was deployed across the country when riot police struck last week.

The US ruling class and its client elite in the region see the demonstrations in Honduras, along with the mass protests last year in Nicaragua against IMF pension cuts and this year's strike waves across Mexico, as harbingers of a mass social explosion that not only threatens the present regimes in Central America, but capitalist rule and imperialism itself with the triggering and confluence of revolutionary struggles across the entire hemisphere.

The private intelligence firm Stratfor wrote earlier this month: "The protests could continue to June 28, the 10th anniversary of the 2009 Honduran coup. They could even gain momentum and turn into a lengthy insurrection against the president. The security situation in Honduras will rapidly deteriorate if the protest wave continues to gain momentum, and could send more migrants north within months."

On Saturday, the US Southern Command chief, Adm. Craig S. Fuller, arrived at the US Soto Cano base in Honduras to inaugurate a US Marine "rapid intervention" deployment in the country. The following day, he released a statement virtually calling on the Venezuelan military to topple the Maduro government to "welcome you back into our hemisphere's professional brotherhood-of-arms...[and] to the family of democracies in this hemisphere."

The increasingly brutal response to the eruption of struggles against austerity and dictatorship in Honduras, as well as the abuses against migrants, are a warning to workers in Honduras itself, the Americas and beyond. US imperialism is prepared to employ the most ruthless militarist methods in defense of its economic and geopolitical interests, especially as it moves to counter the decline of its economic weight globally by relying on its "brotherhood-of-arms" to underpin its political hegemony.

The shelving of the bills in Honduras and the escalating repression—not to speak of the upper-middle-class march organized last weekend by the ruling National Party calling for "social peace"—have not deterred protesters.

However, the current leadership of the protests, including the University Student Movement (MEU) and the trade union organizations that formed the Platform for the Defense of Health Care and Education, are guiding workers and youth into the same dead end seen historically in all petty-bourgeois and bourgeois "left" nationalist movements: a rotten compromise with imperialism and its stooges.

A worker rightly commented on an announcement on social media of the "conditions for negotiations" outlined by the leader of the Medical Association, who has been promoted as the spokeswoman of the protests: "YOU, Mrs. Suyapa Figueroa and the others in the PLATFORM have been in charge of demobilizing the Honduran people when it was at a key moment to take down the dictatorship...we can't have a truce like you did wanting to go into a dialogue that was only meant to demobilize the people and legitimize [the regime]."

There is nothing to negotiate with the JOH regime or any of the bourgeois governments in Latin America dependent on foreign finance capital and committed to the continued impoverishment of the working class. The only feasible alternative for workers is to organize independently of the nationalist and pro-capitalist unions and any organization seeking to subordinate them to one or another sector of the bourgeoisie, as part of an internationalist political movement with workers across the Americas against imperialism and for socialism.



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