

Mass strikes and protests force Ecuador's president to cancel austerity decree

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16 October 2019

A mass protest movement of 12 days—involving mass marches by workers, indigenous peasants and students, three days of national strike, widespread roadblocks and the occupation of key oilfields—forced the US-backed administration of Lenín Moreno late Sunday to annul the elimination of fuel subsidies dictated by the International Monetary Fund (IMF).

The decision does not mean IMF reforms are permanently off the table, only that the Ecuadorian ruling class, in league with US and European imperialism, is buying time to formulate a new strategy to enforce devastating austerity.

After Moreno's announcement from the coastal city of Guayaquil where his government had retreated, the streets of the capital Quito turned from a battlefield into a mass celebration, with chants, music, caravans and fireworks celebrating the rescission of the measures after heavy sacrifices on the part of workers and peasants. In total, the repression left 8 people dead, 1,340 injured and 1,192 arrested, according to Ecuador's Ombudsman Office.

On Tuesday, fuel prices, which had risen dramatically, were sliding back down. The agency in charge of transportation fees said it would meet to withdraw the recent hikes. Schools and the national congress re-opened after nearly two weeks closed, while the government said that all state-owned oilfields would resume operations this week.

Moreno's new decree, however, makes clear that the ruling class is only seeking a better footing to eliminate the subsidies, and that those organizations negotiating the retreat will play a key role in the next offensive, while they ram through a new labor reform and other social cuts also announced on October 2. These forces are exposed as loyal servants of the interests of foreign capital and the local financial oligarchy.

The workers and the toiling masses in Ecuador and internationally must use the breathing space to extract the

sober lessons of this experience. This month's events show that any struggle against social inequality and dictatorship must be based on the fight against imperialism and for the overthrow of the entire system of capitalist exploitation on an international scale. The genuine spontaneous anger of workers, peasants and youth may be sufficient to force the ruling class into a temporary retreat, but to transform society on the basis of socialist egalitarianism, a revolutionary Trotskyist leadership is necessary.

The repeal of "decree 883" eliminating fuel subsidies resulted after a round of talks between Moreno, his cabinet, and the indigenous leadership headed by the Confederation of Indigenous Nationalities (CONAIE), which was leading the protests in partnership with the trade unions and several opposition parties.

The breaking point for the government was the warning by these organizations that they were unable to keep a lid on social anger.

Initially, this fear led the trade unions to call off the national strike on October 4. The transportation union leader, Abel Gómez, declared: "Analyzing the situation in the country, the chaotic situation that the transportation system is in, and having expressed our disagreement with our government...the transportation workers responsibly announce to the Ecuadorian people the end of our strike."

Then, during the first televised hour of the talks Sunday—the UN mediators asked the media to step out during the final three hours—the president of CONAIE, Jaime Vargas, said, visibly shaken, "I'm being pressured by the rank-and-file. 'How much is the government paying you?' they ask."

Leonidas Iza, the head of the Cotopaxi indigenous movement, was even more explicit: "We are not seeing things objectively. Even we were surprised by the amount of people. I don't think [ex-president Rafael] Correa could mobilize that. ... Nobody wants war, but we need to

resolve the issues now and that depends on who is ruling Ecuador.”

The repeal demonstrates that the ruling class’s greatest fear is that workers and peasants will break free from the organizations that have for decades channeled opposition behind one or another faction of the bourgeoisie.

The ruling class is wasting no time in mobilizing layers of the pro-capitalist “opposition” to set up a new trap to better suppress the class struggle and facilitate its turn toward dictatorship. On Tuesday, CONAIE’s Jaime Vargas told *Sputnik*: “We are thinking of becoming a political option for the 2021 elections; that is what the people are asking for, it’s not me who is saying it. We would group together all sectors in the ideological center and left.”

Ahead of the talks Sunday, the US State Department released a statement condemning the protests as the “violent campaign underway, which erodes Ecuadorian people’s hard-earned prosperity and only benefits anti-democratic forces.” Then, on Monday, the US assistant secretary of state for the western hemisphere, Michael Kozak, tweeted that the recent agreement “will help bring stability back to the country.”

The mention of “anti-democratic forces” refers to Moreno’s claims that the mass protests were being backed by Rafael Correa and the Venezuelan government.

During the last two weeks, the US openly backed Moreno’s murderous state violence, a state of exception suspending democratic rights, the deployment of the army and curfews in the capital Quito and military control over “strategic” buildings, ports and bridges.

The extent to which ruling circles continue to move toward a fully fledged dictatorship was revealed on Monday by the arrest of the pro-Correa politician Paola Pabón and the police raid of the headquarters of Correa’s Citizens Revolution party. Over the weekend, three opposition politicians and their partners were granted asylum by the Mexican embassy in Quito. Last week, civil rights groups were reporting that groups of demonstrators were being taken to Quito’s police barracks, while several reports and pictures on social media denounced government torture.

Moreover, *Sputnik* cited opposition politicians Friday who indicated that 13 journalists had been imprisoned and that the state “intervened” to crack down on nine media outlets. This included a police raid against Pichincha Universal for “inciting divisions.” On Saturday, the Venezuelan-linked TV channel TeleSUR was taken off air. Journalists were assaulted so brazenly by state forces

that the government itself issued a condemnation.

These developments confirm the perspective of the *World Socialist Web Site* and its principled defense of WikiLeaks founder and editor, Julian Assange, who faces a 127-year prison term in the US for exposing US war crimes and anti-democratic intrigues internationally. The day after Ecuador’s government allowed British police to arrest him in Ecuador’s embassy in London on April 11, the WSWS wrote: “It is the fear of the emergence of the class struggle, combined with growing opposition to capitalism, that is compelling the ruling elites to destroy all democratic rights, including freedom of expression, of which Assange’s persecution is the most grotesque example.”

During the Correa administration, WikiLeaks released an October 2009 US diplomatic cable explaining, “While mixed signals make cooperation more challenging, the [US] Embassy has developed a strategy to remain engaged with the Ecuadorian military. Using the experience of our renewed cooperation with the Ecuadorian National Police, we will allow pressure to build from within the Ecuadorian military on the GOE political leadership for the broad, quality-based assistance only the USG [US government] provides.”

Since then, Moreno has re-invited the CIA, FBI and the US Office for Security Cooperation into the country, while handing the Pentagon a military base in the Galapagos Islands.

The defense of Julian Assange, whose persecution is aimed at silencing any exposure of new imperialist crimes and its role in backing the repression of social opposition, is crucial in the fight for social equality and against dictatorship. This is the case under Moreno, Correa or any faction of the national bourgeoisie, whose dependence on global finance and its imperialist institutions has been fully exposed.



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