Venezuelan police beat striking teachers as Washington's protectorate takes shape

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Riot police of the Bolivarian National Police (PNB) attacked thousands of teachers, health care workers, university employees and retirees on Tuesday, November 24, as they marched on the Miraflores Palace in Caracas to demand a wage increase and Christmas bonuses large enough to cover basic food costs. The march, the tenth this year, was boxed in on Baralt Avenue, a few blocks from the palace.

The human rights group Provea reported at least five demonstrators injured and two phones seized, one of them belonging to a journalist. Pablo Zambrano of the healthcare workers' federation FETRASALUD said at least ten workers suffered blows, bruises "and even bites."

Roymer Durán, a local leader of the Venezuelan Teachers Federation (FVM) in Caucagua, Miranda state, was grabbed by four officers while filming an elderly woman lying on the pavement. One pocketed his phone; another punched him three times in the face, opening a gash beside his eye. When an officer handed him a cloth to wipe off the blood, Durán refused. "I am not going to clean up the regime's face," he said.

Durán has called a new rally for Thursday in Caucagua, with teachers across Miranda entering "permanent assembly." The Caracas march followed a 12-hour national stoppage on November 16, when the FVM reported 80 percent of schools shut and workers blocked highways across the country.

The clubbing of teachers outside Miraflores is not an exception: workers protests, over wages and blackouts have been repeatedly repressed by police. It is a necessary feature of the new order.

Since US forces seized Nicolás Maduro on January 3, the acting government of Delcy Rodríguez has been turning Venezuela into a US protectorate whose value to Wall Street rests on cheap oil and cheap labor. Such a program cannot be imposed on a working class already moving into struggle without the repressive state apparatus maintained under Chavismo, which is now being placed directly at Washington's disposal.

The official minimum wage has been frozen at 130 bolívares since 2022, worth about 15 US cents a month. Public employees instead receive non-wage bonuses totaling $240 a month, which are excluded from the calculation of vacation pay, Christmas bonuses and severance. The unions are demanding a $960 year-end bonus, four times that amount. The government has offered $150 in two installments.

Adriana López, a preschool teacher in Charallave with 15 years of service, told *TalCual* that her Christmas bonus of 2,000 bolívares bought a small soda and a bag of chips. "The minister said we earn 500 dollars, but I don't even make half a dollar," she said.

"It can't be that only a select few reap the benefits of the US plundering our national resources," university union leader Eduardo Sánchez told *Venezuelanalysis*.

Behind the bonus fight lies a broader assault. The government, the business federation Fedecámaras and select union federations are negotiating a "Law of Labor Consensus" that would end the retroactive calculation of severance and benefits under the 2012 labor law. Rodríguez has also pledged to return companies nationalized under Chávez to their former owners and to privatize "non-strategic" state assets.

"Venezuela Renace": a prospectus for creditors

The direction was spelled out this week in "Venezuela Renace," a 97-page economic plan backed by Washington. It projects doubling the economy in five years and raising oil output from 1.2 million barrels a day this year to 2.9 million in 2036 through foreign investment. It puts public debt at $237.5 billion, 242 percent of GDP and 1,079 percent of government revenue. The National Assembly has already approved in first reading new borrowing of nearly $14 billion.

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Economist Francisco Rodríguez of the Center for Economic and Policy Research noted that the document opens with legal disclaimers of the kind found in sovereign bond prospectuses, a sign that its purpose is the coming debt restructuring. He showed that the headline figure is inflated by $57.6 billion the state owes to itself and suggested a motive: “A high debt burden may serve to signal to the population that inherited conditions require deep sacrifices.”

The plan is a contract with bondholders and oil companies, to be paid for by workers. Its talk of “recovering workers’ income” is answered by the police lines on Baralt Avenue.

On November 18, US War Secretary Pete Hegseth visited Caracas to seal a military agreement whose text has been neither published nor submitted to the National Assembly. Hegseth has spoken of joint actions against “foreign actors” and the “transformation” of the Venezuelan armed forces.

In talks sponsored by Secretary of State Marco Rubio, the government and the right-wing opposition agreed on November 23 to “reform” the Law on Political Parties, Public Meetings and Demonstrations. Opposition negotiator Dinorah Figuera thanked Rubio, and the State Department praised progress on its “three-phase plan.” Both factions of the ruling class are drawing up the rules of political life under US tutelage while workers face police batons.

A warning on the unions

Workers must also be clear about who leads these protests. The FVM is not an independent body. Its first president after it took its current name in 1936 was Luis Beltrán Prieto Figueroa, a founder of Acción Democrática (AD), the party whose union machine ran the Confederation of Workers of Venezuela (CTV). The CTV led the April 2002 strike that served as the pretext for the US-backed coup against Hugo Chávez and joined the business group Fedecámaras in the 2002–03 oil lockout.

The FVM leadership has lined up with the US-backed opposition. During the 2024 election it appealed to the OAS Democratic Charter. In January, it focused on demanding freedom for “political prisoners,” echoing the opposition Plataforma Unitaria. In April it called for electing officials who would contribute to “the full restoration of public powers,” the language of the US-managed “transition.” Durán himself blames “27 years of abandonment” and calls Rodríguez’s administration an “interim government,” echoing the opposition.

The Chavista Bolivarian Socialist Workers Central was given a staged march for its 15th anniversary, the healthcare union official Zambrano noted, while the government’s “consensus” talks proceed. Neither camp opposes the subordination of Venezuela to US capital.

Each seeks to channel growing opposition from below behind securing a seat at the table where workers’ conditions are being bargained away.

A regional upsurge

Workers at the state heavy industry conglomerate CVG won $1,100 bonuses after weeks of protests; miners at MINERVEN won $2,000 after a brief stoppage.

The Venezuelan protests, however, are part of a growing movement of workers across the hemisphere against the same program. Colombia saw a national strike on November 19 against the De la Espriella government as Hegseth visited the country. Costa Rican teachers have struck against the Fernández government’s cuts. In Mexico, IMSS health workers have revolted against their union and the government. In Paraguay, Santiago Peña resigned after the collapse of the Ueno bank led to mass protests

“Venezuela Renace” guarantees that these struggles will intensify. The demands of Venezuelan workers—living wages, the conversion of bonuses into wages, the defense of pensions and benefits—cannot be won through appeals to Rodríguez or the opposition. They require rank-and-file committees independent of every union bureaucracy, linked with workers across the Americas and internationally through the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees, and fighting for a socialist program to place the country’s oil wealth under the democratic control of the working class.

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