

Hands Off Latin America! *Solidarity with Honduras*

Early in the morning on Sunday, June 28, a group of 200 soldiers surrounded the residence of the Honduran president Manuel Zelaya, and after a 20-minute gun battle with his 10-man personal guard he was arrested. He was then taken by plane to neighboring Costa Rica where he gave a press conference denouncing a military coup by “right-wing oligarchs”, calling on the people to mobilize in the streets and promising to come back to the country. The immediate origin of this reactionary military coup was the conflict over plans by Zelaya to call a referendum on the need for a Constituent Assembly, which was opposed by the right wing dominated Congress, the high command of the Army, and the tops of the judiciary. Zelaya, popularly known as Mel, won the presidential elections in 2005 as candidate for the Honduras Liberal Party, narrowly defeating his main opponent from the National Party. Despite being a wealthy landowner, the political polarization in this small and poor Central American country pushed him to take some measures in favor of the poor, the peasants and the workers, adopting “Bolivarianism” as his model.

Honduras is one of the poorest countries in Latin America, with over 50% of the population living below the poverty line and with a rate of illiteracy of over 20%. More than one million of its 7.8 million inhabitants have had to emigrate to the US in search of jobs. In these conditions, even the most moderate and reasonable measures in favour of the majority of the population are bound to be met with brutal opposition on the part of the ruling class, capitalists, landowners, the owners of the media, the local oligarchy. Among the measures taken by his government are a number of progressive reforms, including a national literacy campaign modeled on the examples of Cuba and Venezuela, an attempt to improve health care for the poorer sections of society, a cut in interest rates for small farmers and a significant increase of 60% of the minimum wage. In the international arena Zelaya sided with the Bolivarian Alternative of the Americas (ALBA), the regional alliance promoted by Venezuela which Honduras has now joined.

All these actions contributed to increase his popularity and social base amongst the poorest sections of the population and enraged the oligarchy which has ruled the country in close alliance with US interests for nearly 200 years. Honduras for most of the 20th century was a classic “banana republic”, dominated by United Fruit, which controlled the overwhelming majority of the country’s best agricultural land and ran it like a private fiefdom with no reference to the official government of the country.

A state of emergency and curfew has been declared, Congress has quickly appointed a new president, Roberto Micheletti, who until now was president of the Congress and a wave of arrests of left-wing, worker and peasant activists was unleashed. The Venezuelan, Cuban and Nicaraguan ambassadors were detained by masked military men while they were visiting foreign affairs minister Patricia Rodas. They were later released, not before having been beaten however. The whole script of the coup follows closely that of the April 2002 coup in Venezuela against Chavez, down to the role of the media, the taking off the air of government TV channel 8, and even details like the appearance of a forged letter from Zelaya resigning as a president! Obviously the same forces are involved in both countries.

Obama’s statement on the coup was certainly very mild. We have a situation in which the democratically elected president has been illegally arrested by military forces and taken abroad and Obama calls on “all political and social actors” to respect democratic norms and the rule of law. This clearly leaves the door open



to the arguments of the oligarchy that Zelaya was breaking the law by calling the consultation. A few hours later, after strongly worded statements by Chávez and a condemnation on the part of the Organization of American States, the US administration came out publicly to say that they still recognized Zelaya as the legitimate president of Honduras.

Venezuelan president Chávez, described the situation correctly when he denounced the military coup: “It is a brutal coup d’etat, one of many that have taken place over 10 years in Latin America. Behind these soldiers are the Honduran bourgeois, the rich who converted Honduras into a Banana Republic, into a political and military base for North American imperialism.” But, as in Venezuela in 2002, thousands of Zelaya supporters have come out onto the streets to fight against the coup and to demand the reinstatement of the president.

The trade union organizations, including the CGT national confederation, have called a general strike for today Monday. This is the way forward. Only through the mass mobilization of the workers and peasants can the coup be defeated. Such a mass movement must also make an appeal to the rank and file soldiers to refuse to follow orders from their officers.

We must give our full support to the workers and peasants of Honduras in their struggle for the reinstatement of the president. We call on the international labor movement and solidarity organizations to demonstrate their opposition to this reactionary coup. A particular role must be played by workers and peasant organizations in the neighboring countries of Central America and Mexico. Mass demonstrations and pickets of the embassies in these countries would serve as encouragement for the masses in Honduras.

The coup in Honduras highlights once again that even mild reforms within the capitalist system cannot be tolerated by the local oligarchies in Latin America and their imperialist masters. But Venezuela teaches that if the masses mobilize reaction can be stopped. Now is the time to mobilize the full force of the Honduran workers and poor.

*Excerpted from an article by Jorge Martin at
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