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Honduras

Coup by a dominant oligarchy

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At dawn on Sunday, June 28 the Honduran army invaded the Presidential Palace and, after an exchange of shooting with the presidential guard, arrested President Manuel Zelaya. Taken to the airport, he was deported to neighbouring Costa Rica. The putschists produced a false letter of resignation by President Zelaya and, using this falsification, Congress designated Roberto Micheletti, also a member of the Liberal Party and President of the Congress, to replace him. Micheletti has obtained the blessing the Honduran Catholic hierarchy.

[<https://internationalviewpoint.org/IMG/jpg/hondurascoup.jpg>]

The national Congress has declared a curfew from 10 pm to 5 am (on July 5 this curfew was advanced to 6:30 pm) throughout the country and has suspended the constitutional guarantees for citizens, which is equivalent to the establishment of a state of emergency. Andrés Pavón, president of the Civic Council of Organizations of Peoples and Indigenous Peoples of Honduras (CCOPIH) explains the reasons that led the putschists to do this: "A high-ranking member of the military told me that General Romeo Vásquez [the Chief of staff] told Micheletti that he didn't have "legal mechanisms" to deal with the demonstrations against him, and that was the reason for this decree".

Left activists and members of worker and peasant organisations have been arrested. Congress has ordered the arrest of many leaders of popular or social organizations including Juan Baraona and Carlos H. Reyes (Popular Bloc), Andrés Padrón (Human Rights Movement), the trade union leader Luther Castillos, Rafael Alegrón (Via Campesina), as well as CCOPIH activists: Caesar Han, Andrés Pavón. Marvin Ponce, Salvador Zúñiga and Berta Cáceres.

A front of popular resistance bringing together trade unions, non-governmental and left political organisations immediately started to mobilize the population against the "golpe", tens of thousands of people invaded the streets of the capital Tegucigalpa and across the country; they were brutally crushed by the police and army. On 2 July the unions called for a general strike. On July 5, with the diplomatic support of the United Nations and OAS (Organization of American States) which has suspended Honduras following the coup), President Manuel Zelaya attempted to return to Tegucigalpa; the army invaded the landing strip. preventing the aircraft from landing, and then opened fire on thousands of unarmed demonstrators, gathered to greet the legal President, causing deaths and injuries.

The Zelaya government

A magnate in the wood industry and the candidate for the Liberal Party (centre-right), Manuel Zelaya won the presidential election in 2005 ahead of the candidate of the National party (conservative right). At the head of one of the poorest countries in Latin America (50% of the population live below the poverty line and illiteracy is at 20%), long one of the "banana republics" dominated by the United Fruit Company, confronted with the policy of restriction of aid and foreign credits, Zelaya attempted to reduce social polarization through a more socially aware policy. Thus he quickly lost the support of his own political formation and the local oligarchy which caused him to turn to the progressive forces.

Interviewed shortly before the coup by the Spanish daily *El País*, he presented his evolution thus: "my government is centre-left, because I practice liberal ideas, but with a Socialist, social trend. wanting to guarantee the rights of citizens. I come rather from very conservative ranks. I thought I could make changes in the neo-liberal framework. But the rich do give not one cent. The rich do not give their money. They keep everything for themselves. Therefore, logically, to make changes you need to integrate the people. Chávez helped me in the crisis. I have sought this

support, it is not he who has sought me. Initially, there were countries who were opposed, I don't know why. Chávez is a democrat. He has elections every day. Now here my rapprochement with Fidel Castro, with Hugo Chávez is accepted". [1] To a question from journalist concerning his isolation within the state apparatus, Zelaya answered: "This is why we talk about a bourgeois state. And it is the economic elites that make up the bourgeois state. These are the leaders of the army, the parties, the courts, and this bourgeois state feels vulnerable when it is proposed that the people have a voice and vote. (...) If I emerge strengthened this Sunday [in the polls] [28 June]... Perhaps I should grow closer to these power groups and convince them. Tell them that this is not against them, that it is a historical process, they must cooperate... They must understand that poverty will only end when it is the poor that make the laws." [2].

The Zelaya government has initiated a literacy campaign inspired by the Cuban and Venezuelan examples, attempted to improve the access of the poor to care services by importing generic medicines and granting scholarships to study medicine in Cuba, it has reduced the interest rate for loans to small farmers and has increased the minimum wage by 60%. Thanks to the agreement with Petrocaribe, based in Venezuela, it has been able to import fuel at a price below the world price. These measures have undermined the monopoly of the oil and pharmaceuticals multinationals. Denouncing the oligarchy's monopoly on the media, President Zelaya has suppressed state subsidies to big media groups, provoking their hatred.

In the diplomatic area Honduras has joined the Bolivarian Alternative for the Americas (ALBA), with Venezuela, Cuba, Bolivia, Nicaragua and Dominica (joined since by Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, Antigua and Barbuda and Ecuador).

If all these measures have increased his popularity among the poor layers of the population, they have fuelled the hostility of the local oligarchy and the state apparatus, which has begun to paralyse government policy. This polarization led Zelaya to turn increasingly to the masses. He took the initiative of a referendum on the convening, at the general elections next November, of a constituent assembly, drawing on the examples of Venezuela, Bolivia and Ecuador, that was to take place on Sunday June 28, 2009. The Congress and the Supreme Court said the popular consultation, which was of an indicative character only, was illegal. The army high command refused to give logistical support to the organization of this consultation and the coup has prevented it.

International isolation

Contrary to their expectations, the putschists have quickly encountered international isolation. The UN General Assembly has condemned the coup, the OAS has suspended Honduras (which has never happened to a military dictatorship!), the majority of the imperialist powers recalled their ambassadors. Washington, with a large military base in Honduras, has suspended its military relations with the Micheletti regime, Venezuela has suspended its oil supplies, the Inter-American Development Bank has frozen its lending to Honduras, the World Bank has stopped a \$270 million loan and so on.

These reactions indicate that, mired in crisis and seeking legitimacy, the world bourgeoisie is concerned above all about polarization and the radicalisation of resistance. The Honduran oligarchy, which has carried out the coup, is from this viewpoint only a second-order client and it risks opening Pandora's box. If it cannot tolerate even modest progressive reforms big globalised capital is not ready to protect it all costs. It is again time for "stability" and the initiative of the Honduran military has been condemned. "The international community" repudiates the putschists and leaves them to find a way out.

It prefers Zelaya who called for the demonstrators against the coup to welcome him "unarmed", faced with... armed forces. Of course, since the aircraft was prevented from landing and went to El Salvador instead, he also called on the military to "lower their weapons", but this has not prevented the first deaths by shootings. Because if soldiers are

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to be won away from their officers, so that they "change sides" in a situation of confrontation, there needs to be another side, ready to fight on the ground chosen by the opponent. The demonstrations against the military regime, although numerous, have not yet taken this step. The putschists are internationally isolated, but hold their ground through the power of bayonets.

[1] 1. El Pais, June 28, 2009

[2] 2. Ibid.