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Honduras

US support for repression and fraud

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Right wing Honduran President Juan Orlando Hernandez (JOH) was inaugurated in a January 7, 2018 ceremony in a nearly empty National Stadium in the capital Tegucigalpa. Since the stolen election of November 26, 2017, the country had been totally militarized to protect his fraudulent victory with a death toll of more than 34 killed by military and police.

The anti-dictatorship movement and organizations declared a civic insurrection, vowing that Honduras would be ungovernable. Hernandez's authority will not be recognized by the citizenry.

Not surprisingly, the fraudulent election and subsequent repression were ignored by the U.S. government. The Trump Administration congratulated Hernandez for his "election victory," confirming Washington's support for the dictatorship. Hernandez is especially close to the Southern Command of the U.S. Military, to Donald Trump's White House Chief of Staff General John F. Kelly, and to far rightwing forces in the United States and Latin America.

Former State Department official Otto Reich, is a vocal supporter and advisor to JOH. He is part of the Cuban rightwing migration, and stands accused across the Americas of being a CIA operative because of involvement in coups and counter-insurgency operations including the 2002 coup in Venezuela and the 2009 coup in Honduras.

Just days before the election Reich was quoted on the front pages of the Honduran mainstream media warning about sinister Venezuelans trying to get into Honduras to destabilize the country during the elections.

Hernandez, who first came to power in a fraud-plagued post-coup election in 2013, started out as unpopular and became increasingly despised. He consolidated his power over all government entities and led changes in Honduran law aimed at criminalizing opponents and social justice movements. Meanwhile he continued to support impunity for cases of high-ranking corruption and human rights violations.

JOH ramped up neoliberal privatization and destruction of public services and benefits especially in public education and health. His National Party (PN) was involved in blatant corruption including theft of \$330 million from the national health system. He stands accused of having ties to narcotics cartels whose murderous recruitment tactics have forced thousands of young people to flee the country for their lives.

The Opposition Alliance (aka Alliance Against Dictatorship) including left, center-left and center-right (anti-corruption) forces ran Salvador Nasralla as their candidate. They challenged Hernandez's reelection, which, according to the Honduran Constitution, was illegal.

Illegal and Stolen Election

By election night, the deep and wide rejection of the JOH regime was apparent when the Alliance candidate took a five percent lead that one national election official admitted was "statistically irreversible."

This occurred despite the large number of PN activists paid by the party to intimidate, threaten and bribe voters, and in the face of the intimidating militarization of resistance neighborhoods on election day. Activists for the Alliance said that in order to officially win the election by 5%, their real margin must be at least 50% or even 60%.

There were reports of irregularities and "dead people voting for JOH" at polls all around the country, as well as

reports that more ballot boxes arrived at the Tegucigalpa counting center than were supposed to exist. But before any official announcement was made, the computer system suddenly "crashed" and vote counting stopped.

People reacted quickly to the screeching halt in reporting the results. Mass protests began at the military-controlled vote counting center on November 28 and spread out across the country. These first protests were met with ferocious repression, with teargas used as an offensive weapon. Large numbers of military as well as riot police and regular police mobilized, even bringing out armored vehicles (tanquetas).

People continued their defiance by expanding the protests: blocking streets with burning tires in the cities and small towns, while campesinos set up blockades on the Panamerican Highway. The strength of the movement against dictatorship at the polls was reaffirmed in the streets, as the effects of the years of organizing and discontent in the barrios and villages since the 2009 coup became obvious.

For its part, the government reacted with a declaration of a State of Emergency and a curfew for 10 days. In response protests became more localized, organized in each neighborhood in both cities and villages. People banged on pots and pans, set off firecrackers, and blocked streets in front of their houses at night in defiance of the curfew.

At that point the government deployed Hernandez's special military police (Military Police for the Public Order) in smaller mobile units. They fired live ammunition at mostly young protesters killing at least 14 from November 30 to December 5, according to the Honduran human rights organization Committee of the Families of the Disappeared Detainees (COFADEH).

There would be no official announcement for nearly two weeks, then Hernandez was declared the winner.

Washington Backs JOH

On November 30 the U.S. State Department published the certification of "human rights improvements" in Honduras. This is a requirement for the release of some U.S. aid.

To the Honduran people the timing seemed like a very bad joke. But it indicated that Washington was going to support the imposition of JOH, no matter how great the blatant fraud and murderous repression. This certification occurred despite the fact that the General Secretary of the Organization of American States Luis Almagro announced on December 17 that there should be new elections because the election process was too irregular and tainted to determine a winner.

Even as the death toll rose, Washington formally recognized JOH as president on December 23. By December 30 COFADEH had documented 30 executions of protesters and one disappearance; 1085 detentions; 47 house raids using tear gas and violence; and 12 attacks on journalists and independent media.

The Alliance leaders including former president Manuel Zelaya (overthrown in the 2009 coup) and presidential candidate Nasralla declared a national civic strike for the week of the inauguration. They were in the streets with protesters and were tear-gassed and threatened.

The strike was supported by all the important movement organizations such as the Lenca indigenous organization

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COPINH, the Fraternal Black Organization OFRANEH, the Platform of Social and Popular Movements in Honduras, the Convergence Against Dictatorship, and more. Along with mass protests, roadblocks and neighborhood actions they called for a boycott of banks, chain stores and fast food restaurants.

The repression and militarization increased, along with stepped-up death-squad-style activity (gunmen in civilian clothes, unmarked cars with no license plates killing or kidnapping people). In northern Honduras there were raids using 30-50 military police and regular police at the homes of regional leaders of the campesino organization, the National Center for Rural Workers (CNTC) and leaders of the Movement for Dignity and Justice (MADJ).

The Alliance also carried out an international push to isolate Hernandez and began talking about filing cases in the International Human Rights Court. Thirty-four elected Alliance congressmen and congresswomen protested inside the opening of the National Congress before inauguration day.

Resistance Continues

By the end of December COFADEH had documented 88 political prisoners and more have since been arrested. These include well-known resistance activist Edwin Espinal. There have also been further deaths at the hands of the security forces, with at least three people killed between January 27 and February 5.

The Honduran people, mass organizations, the LIBRE Party and Alliance members are continuing their protests. They have announced a campaign to free all the political prisoners.

While no one is surprised that there was election fraud, the surprise for some is the degree of repression and violence Hernandez unleashed to pull off the fraud. This shows the regime's tremendous weakness politically and has moved even more people to the side of the anti-dictator movement.

It also revealed the incredible military and police power that, largely thanks to the United States, a small country not in a declared war has at its disposal. Additionally, it showed how far the United States is still prepared to go to keep a social democratic or any independent government out of power in Latin America.

The Honduran people are debating their strategies; recent declarations from the Alianza groups call for the continuation of a civic insurrection and a rejection of any dialogue with Hernandez in control of the process. An alternative inauguration for Salvador Nasralla was called for February 11th.

People have not forgotten the role then Secretary of State Hilary Clinton played in welcoming the 2009 coup. They will not forget the role the Trump administration is playing today.

Within the United States and in countries that support the dictatorship in Honduras, the challenge is to step up our own movements and the solidarity movement to shake loose the grip of the United States on Honduras. [Honduras Solidarity Network](#) is campaigning to free Edwin Espinal and all political prisoners and for Washington to cut off all security aid to the dictatorship. You can get information on the political prisoner campaign and take action by going [here](#).

To demand support for a law introduced in Congress to cut off aid, go [here](#).

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