

# Honduras: The making of a death squad “democracy”

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With the restoration of diplomatic relations and the resumption of aid and credits from the world’s major governments and financial institutions, Honduras is being welcomed back into the fold of “democratic” nations, even as the organizers of last year’s coup remain at their posts and death squad murders continue.

The Obama administration is leading the way in affirming that an election held last November under state-of-siege rule and the inauguration of Porfirio “Pepe” Lobo as president late last month have washed away all the sins of the past. For Washington, the June 28 military overthrow of Honduran President Manuel Zelaya, along with the brutal repression that followed, is a dead letter.

Earlier this month, Honduran Minister of Security Oscar Álvarez met with US Ambassador Hugo Llorens to sign a bilateral agreement that will resume the direct flow of US military aid to the armed forces and police of the Central American country. In July 2009, the Obama administration withheld \$16.5 million in military aid to the coup regime headed by Roberto Micheletti as one of the few and inconsequential sanctions imposed in response to Zelaya’s overthrow.

This week, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton called Lobo to announce that civilian aid programs would also resume shortly and to praise him for working to strengthen the “unity of Honduran society.”

High-level Spanish delegations have also flown to Tegucigalpa, and French officials have indicated that relations with Paris will soon be resumed. The Organization of American States is preparing to consider readmitting Honduras, which was expelled from the OAS following the coup.

Finally, the World Bank announced on Wednesday that it is restoring loans that had been frozen in the aftermath of the coup, increasing the amount on offer from \$270 million to \$390 million, assuring the further

indebtedness of the impoverished country and a new round of austerity measures and attacks on the already miserable living standards of Honduran workers.

The supposedly democratic transformation that has made all of this possible took place on January 27, with the inauguration of right-wing National Party candidate Lobo, a product, like Zelaya, of the land-owning oligarchy. In an earlier stage of his career, Lobo was a supporter of Stalinism, active in the Honduran Communist Party and educated at Patrice Lumumba University in Moscow.

In his more recent political incarnation he is an advocate of the death penalty and economic development based on free trade and *maquila* sweatshops. He is also a loyal ally of Washington.

The assumption of power by Lobo in what amounts to the legitimization of the June 28 coup was prepared through protracted political maneuvers and negotiations involving the Obama administration, Zelaya, the coup regime, and sections of the Latin American bourgeoisie.

From the outset of this process, Zelaya counted on Barack Obama to restore him to the presidential palace. He, like Hugo Chávez in Venezuela, accepted Obama’s talk about a new era of “mutual respect” between the US and Latin America as good coin. In reality, this rhetoric was merely window dressing for a more aggressive policy of US imperialism in the region, which included the covert backing of the Pentagon and US intelligence agencies for the Honduran coup.

US aims were indicated recently in the testimony of Obama’s national intelligence director, Dennis Blair, before the Senate Intelligence Committee. Blair accused Venezuela’s Chávez of forging an “anti-US alliance” in Latin America and seeking to “undermine moderate, pro-US governments.” He noted with

satisfaction, however, that Chávez's influence "may have peaked," pointing out that "recently" Honduras had removed from that alliance.

Zelaya agreed to the parameters laid down by Washington in negotiations orchestrated by its principal agent in Central America, Costa Rican President Óscar Arias. These included his returning to office as a figurehead president in a government of "national reconciliation" dominated by the right-wing politicians and military officers who overthrew him.

In the end, the coup's organizers were not interested in such a resolution. With the support of US officials, they devised another "compromise" that conditioned Zelaya's reinstatement on a vote of the congress and the recommendation of the high court, both of which had backed the coup. Predictably, both institutions rubberstamped the decision of the Honduran oligarchy not to allow Zelaya back in office, even for a day.

A day before the inauguration, all accounts were settled, with the supreme court ruling that the military commanders who carried out the coup merely acted to preserve the peace and with Zelaya leaving the Brazilian embassy in Tegucigalpa, where he had been holed up for more than four months, for a second exile, this time in the Dominican Republic.

Just as Zelaya subordinated his attempt to return to office to decisions made in Washington, so the leaders of the mass movement that emerged to challenge the coup subordinated the struggle undertaken by Honduran workers, peasants and youth to Zelaya and the futile quest for "dialogue" with the leaders of the coup regime.

Despite the heroism of Honduran working people in the face of vicious repression, the bankrupt perspective of the leaders of the National Front of Resistance led this powerful movement into a political blind alley, leaving the masses unprepared to confront Zelaya's capitulation and the "democratic" charade through which the coup regime has consolidated its power under Lobo.

Now, César Ham, the leader of the "left" Democratic Unification Party, which was counted as Zelaya's closest political supporter, has agreed to join the Lobo government, allowing it to posture as a regime of "national unity and reconciliation."

While Washington and other governments are praising Lobo's democratic credentials, the repression

continues unabated, with workers, journalists and others who resisted the coup facing kidnappings, torture and assassinations.

In one recent case, Vanesa Yaneth Zepeda, a 29-year-old nurse and mother of three who was active in the anti-coup demonstrations, disappeared on February 2. Her lifeless body was thrown out of a car in Tegucigalpa two days later.

The "democratic" consolidation of the coup in Honduras represents a stark warning to working people across Latin America and internationally. Under conditions of the deepening global economic crisis, the ruling elites throughout the capitalist world are prepared to dispense with all democratic forms of rule in order to carry out lethal violence against any challenge to their interests.

The Honduran events have also once again demonstrated that workers in Latin America cannot advance their struggle by means of political subordination to supposedly "left" and nationalist representatives of the bourgeoisie, such as Zelaya and Chávez. Those calling themselves "socialists" who promote illusions in these figures are disarming the working class and preparing even greater defeats. The only way forward for Latin American workers is to forge their political independence from all sections of the ruling elites and unite in a common struggle for workers' governments and the socialist transformation of the entire hemisphere.

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