

Rights Action

DAY 80, HONDURAS INDEPENDENCE DAY RESISTANCE MARCH: "A POPULAR COUP AGAINST THE MILITARY COUP"

(September 15, 2009, Alert # 64)

BELOW:

- photo-essay, by Francois Guindon: pro-democracy, anti-coup resistance march on September 15, 2009
- article by Jen Moore, "Honduras: De facto Regime Cannot Sustain Itself Until November. National Opposition to Coup Becomes a Social Force"

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RESISTANCE MARCH ON INDEPENDENCE DAY: "A POPULAR COUP AGAINST THE MILITARY COUP"

(By François Guindon, Rights Action, September 15, 2009)

At 8 o'clock in morning, one could see two marches getting ready to roll, on television. The pro-coup TV stations were promoting the "official" parade in the Stadium, sponsored by the elite private sector. I saw children marching to a military beat in front of empty seats on Channel 10.

On channel 36 (the one TV station that permits coverage of anti-coup events and perspectives), Dr. Juan Almandarez (a well know doctor and human rights activist) said: "Only pacific resistance can overthrow this coup".

On radio Globo, Mel Zelaya said over the phone: "This illegal military coup has taken Honduras 40 years back in history."

When I arrived on Morazán Blvd, I found a euphoric crowd chanting loudly and proudly.

Concepción Maradiaga reminded me of the violent repression of previous marches: "On July 12th, we were marching pacifically, but when we got to the central park, many militaries started shooting gas at us ... they dragged me, pulled my hair as if I were

garbage, hit me, kicked me in the genitals. I feel so much rage; militaries of my own country, hitting women, born themselves by women ... I want them to be punished for their crimes."

Costumes, slogans, dances, beats and rhythms animated the march. Passing by militaries, the crowd was chanting: "Study, learn, to be a soldier, never!" ["Estudiar, aprender, para chepo nunca ser"]

The march ended in the central park of Tegucigalpa.

According to Channel 36 and Radio Globo, near 3 million Honduran pacifically marched throughout the country.

Around 7:00 pm, rumours circulated that Micheletti was rushed to the military Hospital for serious health problems Were something to happen to Micheletti, who could assume control of this illegitimate "de facto" regime?

* * *

HONDURAS: DE FACTO REGIME CANNOT SUSTAIN ITSELF UNTIL NOVEMBER. NATIONAL OPPOSITION TO COUP BECOMES A SOCIAL FORCE

An interview with Leticia Salomon, director of Scientific Research for the UNAH, by Jennifer Moore (jenmoore0901@gmail.com), <http://alainet.org/active/32978>

A lead Honduran researcher believes coup backers will not be able to sustain their support for the de facto regime until elections in November.

Director of Scientific Research for the National Autonomous University of Honduras Leticia Salomón says no one ever anticipated such widespread opposition to the ouster of President Manuel Zelaya on June 28th 2009.

Now, more than two months later, the country is largely isolated from the international community and diverse sectors of Honduran society continue protesting daily in the streets. As a result, Salomón suggests, the costs for coup conspirators have become too burdensome.

Although the sociologist and economist hesitates to speculate about how the coup regime might fall and expresses concern about bolstered business and military involvement in political affairs, she says, "One thing is for sure, and that is that they cannot sustain this government until November and the day of the elections. For various reasons, not just as a result of the protest in the streets, but considering this in relationship to the interests of the business sector and politicians."

In her view, the Honduran business sector played a key role in the coup. "Those that thought the coup would be a matter of thousands of dollars, now have thousands and even millions of dollars invested in this. Not just money that they have put in, but money that they have lost as a result of the highway blockades, work stoppages, and strikes. The business sector recognizes that this has been terrible for them, and as a result, a strong business sector has begun to pressure for a solution to this because they have reached the upper limit of the economic cost of the coup."

But beyond confounding coup makers' plans, Salomón adds that broad-based national resistance to the coup is giving rise to a new "social force" in the country that any future government will have to contend with.

In an interview with ALAI on August 31st 2009, this researcher also with the Honduran Centre for Documentation lays out the interests behind Zelaya's ouster that she identifies among politicians, big business and the armed forces, toward which end she says there was no legal route.

She also speculates on additional tensions that might cause support for the de facto regime to fold.

THE POLITICAL TRIGGER

The same day that President Zelaya was ousted, a national opinion poll was to take place that would have asked Hondurans if they wanted a referendum during upcoming elections to consult the population on whether or not to install a National Constituent Assembly that would rewrite the country's political constitution. Following the poll, congress would still have had to approve the referendum and any national assembly would not be installed until a new government was in place.

Coup backers allege, however, that Zelaya was seeking a constitutional amendment that would allow him to seek re-election and that this constituted an infraction. Salomón observes, however, that diverse groups were interested in constitutional reforms that, at first, even included the current presidential candidate for the National Party, one of the two traditional parties in Honduras.

The current constitution was written in 1982 in the context of the cold war, an influential military and the Central American crisis. Written with the intent to be "for life," says Salomón, it also "left gaps." Among those interested in reforms, according to the researcher, have been those hoping to advance decentralization in Honduras, those seeking the possibility of presidential re-election, and still others wishing to lay the groundwork for participatory democracy and broader recognition of collective rights.

Among those initially supporting this process, recalls Salomón, was the current National Party Presidential Candidate Pepe Lobo. She describes Lobo's support as having been "strong" and "decided." She explains, "Distinct politicians, and Pepe Lobo in particular, were aware of changes needing to be made to the constitution, and he, like many other ex-Presidents, were interested in the possibility of a re-election."

However, national party members quickly set Lobo straight given concerns about the likelihood of a future re-election for Zelaya whose social bases were expanding at the same time that bi-party politics in Honduras have been on the decline.

Salomón stresses that Zelaya was not considering re-election for 2010. However, she says, it was a consideration for future elections that worried his opponents. "Were a National Constituent Assembly to eliminate the prohibition [for re-election], would be able to run as candidate as part of a political movement that has already been gaining support and which in the coming year was going to present the idea of creating a new political party in the country that could break with the bi-party politics that exist."

Participatory democracy was a further proposal that led the political system to “shut down” to the idea of even a mere opinion poll. Salomón places early efforts toward greater direct participation of civil society in political life beginning around 1998.

From the start, she says, the idea was unacceptable to dominant political groups. “Any real effort to establish a true participatory democracy that would go beyond popular mobilizations and that would permit social sectors to make an impact in decision making in congress were seen as a threat to the political parties.”

Both broader input and greater social control over decision making that participatory democracy would imply put politicians on the defensive. “ is the fundamental point here because participation implies follow up and control on one hand, and the presence of organizations giving opinions and making proposals about big decisions on the other.”

But, for this researcher, the more decisive role in the coup belongs to the big business sector.

PRINCIPAL COUP BACKERS

“I would venture to say that a central figure in the coup were business leaders.” Not only is Salomón convinced that certain business leaders helped finance the coup, she believes they were even “pushing for the coup.”

“It is important to mention that currently there is a fusion of very powerful economic, political and media interests. Here, one cannot talk about business leaders on one side and politicians on the other because there are both nationalist business people and liberal business people. And if we consider the principal political figures in the country, they are also business owners such that we cannot separate one from the other. And at the moment that they become both politicians and business owners they have a greater capacity to negotiate and to impact upon decision making.”

Salomón considers Micheletti, whose business interests are in the transportation sector (according to the newspaper *El Libertador*,²) to be a weak player and a “circumstantial figure” in the coup, who lost the race for the liberal party presidential candidacy in 2008. She observes his interest to become the *de facto* leader and says he has certainly played his part. But, she qualifies, there are no Micheletti supporters and he would fall without support from stronger business leaders and the military.

On the other hand, she considers that past President Carlos Flores Facussé (1998-2002) is one of the masterminds of Zelaya's ouster. She describes Facussé, an important media owner, as a strong figure in the liberal party saying she is sure that “he participated in the meeting in which they decided to carry out the coup.”

Salomón comments that “President Flores is a person who does not appear in public, who makes his moves behind the scene, who meets with the right people, but who will never give public appearances or declarations.” As owner of the major daily newspaper *La Tribuna*, she says, it is his vehicle to “transmit his messages to the population.”

She describes its overall tone as “belligerent, war-mongering and provocative.”

Together with other business leaders who collectively own a large part of Honduras' mass media, and who have interests in banks, fast food, energy, pharmaceuticals and textiles as well as other sectors, she believes that beyond individual reforms that President Zelaya adopted, affecting their particular privileges, that the rise in the minimum wage is what led the business sector to collectively "shut down and say, we don't want a President like this any more."

Now, as a result of the coup, she says, the capacity of business to have influence over political life in Honduras has grown, having gained what she calls "veto power."

"From this moment on, the business sector will decide if the President is or is not fulfilling his role, to be able to do away with him if he dares to raise the minimum wage or to impinge upon the privileges that the distinct business groups have in this country."

To date, Salomón's research has focused on the role of domestic business interests in Honduras. However, she observes, "Indubitably, Honduran business owners are not strong in the sense that there is only national capital invested in their businesses. Their interests are directly related to Central American economic groups, as well as international groups... It would be necessary to carry out further investigations, but it is clear that these businessmen quickly activated their business networks in the area in order to gain solidarity for their position in favour of the coup."

In terms of whether or not the US, in particular, had a direct hand in the coup, she has her doubts. But, she is sure that the Ambassador knew and says their role is key toward a resolution. "President Obama is right when he says that it's ridiculous that we once told them "Gringos Go Home" and now we are asking them to intervene to solve a problem. But, there is an objective reality: that the two key figures in this coup are both very linked to US interests, particularly the business class and the military."

The military, like the business class, in her analysis, have also gained "veto power."¹

A MILITARY RESURGENCE

"This is the greatest danger that we face at the moment...that, at any time, the military can now engage in political decisions, discussion and debate, to opine over whether or not a president should continue. Once again, the military have become main characters or political actors which is a problem because they use force and what has just taken place could occur again."

In the perspective of this specialist on the Honduran military, the coup presented the military with a chance to recuperate what they had lost, particularly since 1995 under the leadership of the liberal party. Since this time, she says, the military have undergone a process of submission to civil institutions.

Under Liberal President Carlos Roberto Reina (1994-1998) obligatory military service was eliminated and the military lost control over key institutions such as the police, the state telecommunications company (Hondutel), the state port authority, as well as others.

But she also sees an ideological motivation with ties to the international right. "On the part of the military, their contribution to the generation of this political crisis was the Chávez threat. They began to get riled up about the spectre of Chávez, associating him

with the spectre of communism in the 1980s, in which discourse retired military officers were specialists. To hear them talk about this threat, one thought that a war was about to begin."

Initially, however, immediately following the coup, the involvement of the military appeared almost "circumstantial" and many people, says Salomón, even pitied the military saying, "What a mess the politicians have gotten them into."

"But then to see them in the streets containing the social protest against the coup, excelling at repression and with such cruelty, this is unforgivable and unjustifiable because never will one be able to believe that someone was obliged to participate in this situation and then come out shooting against a demonstration, or carrying out all manner of ."

Further evidence that the military had their own interests in getting involved in the coup became evident when a law was introduced before congress in mid-August seeking reinstatement of obligatory military service.

"This was an old aspiration of the military," says Salomón. The very controversial measure was unsuccessful. However, retired military officials are also known to have been repositioned in the public sector, in institutions such as the Migration Authority. "The fact that a retired military officer has been placed in migration is an attempt to recuperate spaces lost in the past, and migration is one of those."

Migration has both ideological and economic significance to the military. "Before, migration was under almost exclusive control of the military. Not just for ideological reasons, but for economic reasons as well. Through migration, the head of the armed forces received a sum of money periodically." Migration also allows them, according to Salomón, to monitor the entry and exit particularly of "those who challenge or question the system."

"It would not surprise me," she continues, "if their next step were to control the state telecommunications company (Hondutel) which is a very profitable company for the state and which they have longed to regain control over. This is also ideological allowing them impunity in the intervention of telephone calls of whatever person they would like to monitor without any sort of external oversight."

THE MILITARY ESCAPE ROUTE

Given the accumulation of interests to see Zelaya out of office, Salomón discards any notion that the decision to oust the President, in the way that he was, could have been made in isolation by the military. She also discards any suggestion that there was a legal route for his destitution.

"This decision was not made just by the military," she states, adding that in no case would the military have been the correct group to implement a court order should there have been one for Zelaya's arrest, this being the jurisdiction of the police. In the case of the court order that has been made evident, she says, "It is unclear if this order really existed, since the one that has been presented does not have an official number."

"In other words," she considers, "the order was written at the last minute, after the fact, because it did not follow normal procedure."

"I would dare to say," concludes Salomón, "that they were all complicit. That they arrived at an agreement to oust the President in the way that they did, although I would not exclude the possibility that it was the military that suggested how, since they are the experts in this kind of thing and have done it before."

"It is important that it be made clear that in the days and weeks before the coup, there were meetings between politicians, the military, the church and business leaders to decide what to do." She is sure that the US Ambassador participated too, giving his opinion and asking questions. "The US knew, just like the business leaders and the politicians did."

While some of those involved might have been in favour of a legal route, suggests Salomón, "They couldn't stop the president using the law ... According to the current constitution, there is no way to remove the president."

"Neither does the congress have the power to remove the president. But they arranged it in such a way, and so quickly, thinking that this won't last and in 24 hours everyone will forget the details and they will come out applauding us for having gotten rid of President Zelaya."

MISCALCULATIONS

In other words, everyone was surprised by the opposition that arose the same day as the ouster. And no one calculated in the extra costs that internal and external pressure to revert the coup would have on economic, political and military interests in ousting Zelaya, suggests Salomón. Costs to coup backers, that she believes, have risen beyond what is tolerable. But not just financially.

In terms of the military, whose legitimacy in recent years, she says, has rivaled that of the church, Salomón sees the potential that their entire future could be in jeopardy, particularly as a result of their involvement in serious human rights violations since the coup.

On one hand, military sanctions from the US toy with the aspirations of newer or younger officials "whose dream is to go to the US or to participate in the activities of the Organization of American States or the United Nations." She suggests that it is mainly the leadership of the military that is holding out now "to protect their dignity more than anything."

But considering the grave human rights violations that the military and police have helped to perpetrate against the coup opposition, which she calls absolutely "unacceptable," she sees longer term efforts to seriously reduce their role. "If this is what they do publicly when there are people filming and the world is watching, we are obliged to seriously consider what is going on inside the police and the military."

It leads her to consider whether it will become necessary "to think about their reduction to the absolute minimum or even their complete elimination", like in Costa Rica.

On the political level, she comments, "The legitimacy of the political parties had already plummeted. But now the rejection of the two traditional parties has grown in an incredible way across the country. They can have their political campaigns, but they will be aimed more at an urban audience, since the rural areas won't accept any campaign ... They are experts at campaigning and know how to bring people in from other places to support them, but the military are there taking care of them and protecting them."

The opposition to the coup rejects elections without the return of President Zelaya, saying that these would "effectively legitimize military violence." Furthermore, now that the US has announced that it will not recognize the results of elections under current conditions, the pressure on these politicians continues to rise.

But, according to Salomón, the social pressure will not end with the elections. She attributes the strength of the current opposition to the coup to its ability to find common ground among diverse sectors through this opposition, rather than allegiance to a particular party or ideology and believes that it will transcend the current period.

With a sense of hopefulness, she says, "It doesn't matter who wins the elections in November, the next government will have to deal with this important social force if it hopes to even minimally govern the country."

NOTES: 1. See Leticia Salomón, <http://alainet.org/active/31692>. 2. See El Libertador, <http://ellibertador.hn/Nacional/3135.html>.

Jennifer Moore, an independent Canadian journalist, reported from Honduras for ALAI and FEDAEPS, <http://alainet.org/active/32978>, jenmoore0901@gmail.com

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WHAT TO DO

SPEAKING TOURS: "RESISTANCE TO MILITARY COUPS & GOLD MINING DEVASTATION IN HONDURAS & GUATEMALA"

In October, activists with Rights Action will be on speaking tours in Ontario, Quebec and eastern Canada, and parts of north-east USA, showing slides and short documentaries and speaking about the on-going pro-democracy, anti-coup movement in Honduras and about indigenous and community resistance to Goldcorp Inc.'s open-pit, cyanide leach mines in Guatemala and Honduras.

Karen Spring (spring.kj@gmail.com) will be travelling in Ontario;

Francois Guindon (francois.guindon@gmail.com) will be travelling in Quebec and eastern Canada;

Grahame Russell (info@rightsaction.org) will be in the north-east USA.

ALSO

AMERICANS & CANADIANS should contact our members of congress, senators & members of parliament every day, day after day, send copies of this information, and demand:

an immediate suspension of the release of all international funds and loans to the regime
unequivocal denunciation of the military coup and no recognition of this military coup
and the regime of Roberto Micheletti
no recognition of the November 2009 elections, that candidates from the traditional
Nationalist and Liberal parties are campaigning for, even as the country is militarized and
repression is widespread
unconditional return of the entire constitutional government of President Zelaya
concrete and targeted economic, military and diplomatic sanctions against the coup
plotters and perpetrators
application of international and national justice against the coup plotters and
perpetrators
reparations to the victims for the illegal actions and rights violations committed during this
illegal coup

TO DONATE TAX-DEDUCTIBLE FUNDS to the peaceful, people's pro-democracy
movement in Honduras, make check to "rights action" and mail to:

UNITED STATES: Box 50887, Washington DC, 20091-0887

CANADA: 552-351 Queen St. E, Toronto ON, M5A-1T8

CREDIT-CARD DONATIONS: <http://rightsaction.org/contributions.htm>

For foundations and institutional donors, Rights Action can (upon request) provide a full
proposal of which organizations and people we are channeling funds to and supporting.

Thank-you for your on-going support for our work and for this struggle.