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Paraguay

A "Parliamentary" Coup d'état

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On 22 June, the Paraguayan Senate removed centre-left President Fernando Lugo, following a procedure of "political judgment of destitution": a parliamentary manoeuvre that is admittedly provided for by the Constitution, but whose expeditious nature (done within 24 hours!) has been widely denounced by Paraguayan social organizations and by several governments of neighbouring countries. Evo Morales (Bolivia) denounced what he considered to be a "parliamentary coup".

Lugo, known as "the bishop of the poor", who was elected in 2008 with the support of the popular classes against the candidate of the oligarchy, accepted the reality of this destitution, while denouncing an illegitimate act which "damages Paraguay and its democracy." The Right has thus sought - and been able - to use to its advantage a bloody confrontation in the North-East of the country, which recently led to the death of 17 people (11 peasants and 6 police officers), dramatic events which could, according to several sources, be the result of police provocation.

Three years after the coup in Honduras, the ruling classes are once again trying to keep the initiative and especially to stop social and peasant struggles: the key to this country remains the control of land, in a situation where 80 per cent of the land belongs to 2 per cent of the population, as well as to powerful transnational agribusinesses such as Cargill and Monsanto. The Paraguayan people is thus suffering the disastrous ecological, political and social consequences of a narrowly-based economy: exports of soya beans (often transgenic) represent 40 per cent of national exports and are worth more than \$ 2 billion.

The Lugo government was, from the beginning of its term of office, marked by weakness and beset by many difficulties. His election victory undoubtedly marked a political turning point and represented a broad aspiration for social and democratic transformation, ending 60 years of hegemony of the Colorado Party, the corrupt and reactionary pillar of the dictatorship of general Stroessner (1954-1989). However, without a powerful political party to support him, without an organized social base and very much in a minority in Parliament, Lugo chose to negotiate with the liberal elites and with defectors from the Right in order to govern. Today, following this destitution, it is precisely his former Vice-President, Federico Franco, member of the Authentic Radical Liberal Party (a conservative formation), who takes over the Executive, for the greater happiness of the traditional oligarchy and transnational capital.

In the end, Lugo opted more for the institutional set-up and for parliamentary negotiations, abandoning little by little an ambitious programme of reforms, rather than relying on a social movement, admittedly still very weak and fragmented, but with a huge potential of organization from below. This is a major lesson for the progressive governments of the region, at a moment when in Bolivia tensions are building up, with – very recently - police mutinies that some left activists feared could turn into a coup.

While strongly condemning the "legal" coup and any repression of social struggles, it is urgent to mobilize in a unitary way to denounce the situation in the Paraguay and the existence of a de facto government. We also call for support for the ongoing peasant mobilizations for a radical land reform, the only way to begin to really democratize Paraguayan society.