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Honduras Military Coup Engineered By 2 US Companies?

By John Perkins
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I recently visited Central America. Everyone I talked with there was convinced that the military coup that had overthrown the democratically-elected president of Honduras, Manuel Zelaya, had been engineered by two US companies, with CIA support. And that the US and its new president were not standing up for democracy.

Earlier in the year Chiquita Brands International Inc. (formerly United Fruit) and Dole Food Co had severely criticized Zelaya for advocating an increase of 60% in Honduras's minimum wage, claiming that the policy would cut into corporate profits. They were joined by a coalition of textile manufacturers and exporters, companies that rely on cheap labor to work in their sweatshops.

Memories are short in the US, but not in Central America. I kept hearing people who claimed that it was a matter of record that Chiquita (United Fruit) and the CIA had toppled Guatemala's democratically-elected president Jacobo Arbenz in 1954 and that International Telephone & Telegraph (ITT), Henry Kissinger, and the CIA had brought down Chile's Salvador Allende in 1973. These people were certain that Haiti's president Jean-Bertrand Aristide had been ousted by the CIA in 2004 because he proposed a minimum wage increase, like Zelaya's.

I was told by a Panamanian bank vice president, "Every multinational knows that if Honduras raises its hourly rate, the rest of Latin America and the Caribbean will have to follow. Haiti and Honduras have always set the bottom line for minimum wages. The big companies are determined to stop what they call a 'leftist revolt' in this hemisphere. In throwing out Zelaya they are sending frightening messages to all the other presidents who are trying to raise the living standards of their people."

It did not take much imagination to envision the turmoil sweeping through every Latin American capital. There had been a collective sign of relief at Barack Obama's election in the U.S., a sense of hope that the empire in the North would finally exhibit compassion toward its southern neighbors, that the unfair trade agreements, privatizations, draconian IMF Structural Adjustment Programs, and threats of military intervention would slow down and perhaps even fade away. Now, that optimism was turning sour.

The cozy relationship between Honduras's military coup leaders and the corporatocracy were confirmed a couple of days after my arrival in Panama.

England's The Guardian ran an article announcing that "two of the Honduran coup government's top advisers have close ties to the US secretary of state. One is Lanny Davis, an influential lobbyist who was a personal lawyer for President Bill Clinton and also campaigned for Hillary. . . The other hired gun for the coup government that has deep Clinton ties is (lobbyist) Bennett Ratcliff." (1)

DemocracyNow! broke the news that Chiquita was represented by a powerful Washington law firm, Covington & Burling LLP, and its consultant, McLarty Associates (2). President Obama's Attorney General Eric Holder had been a Covington partner and a defender of Chiquita when the company was accused of hiring "assassination squads" in Colombia (Chiquita was found guilty, admitting that it had paid organizations listed by the US government as terrorist groups "for protection" and agreeing in 2004 to a $25 million fine). (3) George W. Bush's UN Ambassador, John Bolton, a former Covington lawyer, had fiercely opposed Latin American leaders who fought for their peoples' rights to larger shares of the profits derived from their resources; after leaving the government in 2006, Bolton became involved with the Project for the New American Century, the Council for National Policy, and a number of other programs that promote corporate hegemony in Honduras and elsewhere.

McLarty Vice Chairman John Negroponte was U.S. Ambassador to Honduras from 1981-1985, former Deputy Secretary of State, Director of National Intelligence, and U.S. Representative to the United Nations; he played a major role in the U.S.-backed Contra's secret war against Nicaragua's Sandinista government and has consistently opposed the policies of the democratically-elected pro-reform Latin American presidents. (4) These three men symbolize the insidious power of the corporatocracy, its bipartisan composition, and the fact that the Obama Administration has been sucked in.

The Los Angeles Times went to the heart of this matter when it concluded:

What happened in Honduras is a classic Latin American coup in another sense: Gen. Romeo Vasquez, who led it, is an alumnus of the United States' School of the Americas (renamed the Western Hemisphere Institute for Security Cooperation). The school is best known for producing Latin American officers who have committed major human rights abuses, including military coups. (5)

All of this leads us once again to the inevitable conclusion: you and I must change the system. The president whether Democrat or Republican needs us to speak out.

Chiquita, Dole and all your representatives need to hear from you. Zelaya must be reinstated.

FOOTNOTES

(1)

"Who's in charge of US foreign policy? The coup in Honduras has exposed divisions between Barack Obama and his secretary of state, Hillary Clinton" by Mark Weisbrot http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/cifamerica/2009/jul/16/honduras-coup-obama-clinton (July 23, 2009)

(2) http://www.democracynow.org/2009/7

/21/from_arbenz_to_zelaya_chiquita_in (July 23, 2009)

(3) "Chiquita admits to paying Colombia terrorists: Banana company agrees to $25 million fine for paying AUC for protection" MSNBC March 15, 2007 http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/17615143/ (July 24, 2009)

(4) Fore more information: http://aconstantineblacklist.blogspot.com /2009/07/eric-holder-and-chaquita-covington.html (July 23, 2009)

(5) "The high-powered hidden support for Honduras' coup: The country's rightful president was ousted by a military leadership that takes many of its cues from Washington insiders." by Mark Weisbrot, Los Angeles Times, July 23, 2009

http://www.latimes.com/news/opinion/commentary/la-oe-weisbrot23-2009jul23,0,7566740.story (July 23, 2009)

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