

Rights Action

DAY 86, HONDURAS COUP RESISTANCE

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BURGER KING VIOLATES LABOR RIGHTS, SUPPORTS THE COUP REGIME

By François Guindon, Rights Action, September 18, 2009

Below, a report on Burger King: 35 employees fired for not marching in favor of “de facto” regime, headed by Roberto Micheletti, and for trying to unionize

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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 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.

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- Francois Guindon (francois.guindon@gmail.com) in Quebec and eastern Canada
- Grahame Russell (info@rightsaction.org) in north-east USA

How to donate funds to the pro-democracy movement and what to do - See below

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BURGER KING VIOLATES LABOR RIGHTS, SUPPORTS THE COUP REGIME

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“To March or not to March: That is the Question”

The Honduran military coup was planned, organized, supported and executed by much of Honduras' wealthy elites, along with non-public support from conservative ideological sectors across the Americas, including some powerful transnational corporations. This is no news. Ousted President Mel Zelaya repeated this recently in a Radio-Canada interview: "6 families have planned and supported the coup" (http://www.radio-canada.ca/emissions/telejournal/2009-2010/Reportage.asp?idDoc=87752&autoPlay=http://www.radio-canada.ca/Medianet/2009/RDI2/TelejournalSurRDI21H200909142100_1.aspx)

The Siria Valley Environmental Defense Committee and Rights Action reported, in July, how Goldcorp Inc's Honduran subsidiary – Entremares – helped coordinate former mine workers and rural villagers to bus into Tegucigalpa and, receiving some \$20 per person, participate in "camisa blanca" (white shirt) marches in favor of the "de facto" regime.

"White shirt" marches are a regional phenomena. In Guatemala, middle and upper class people participated in "white shirt" marches" – some bodyguards held signs for their employers, like during the white shirt march concerning the Rosenberg killing case.

In San Miguel Ixtahuacán, Goldcorp Inc's Guatemalan subsidiary – Montana Exploradora – sent many of its 1,400 mine workers to march for "peace and the right to work", all dressed in white on June 14th.

White is supposedly the color of "purity". But behind the façade, we are told stories of manipulation and blackmailing. Employees, already exploited by corporations that are supporting the military coup in Honduras, have been obliged to march in favor of the coup regime, dressed in white shirts!

This is what happened to 35 men and women in Honduras, fired by Burger King in late August. None accepted to walk in the coup regime's "white shirt" marches; all of them had been working to get unionized.



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I meet Leonardo in the mall where he used to work in a Burger King. “I never agreed to walk in favor of the coup... This isn’t right as we are with the “pueblo”, with Mel Zelaya. We’re not coup supporters.”

Leonardo is father of 4 young children. After working three years and a half as an Assistant Manager at Burger King, he was fired on August 27th. Officially, he got fired for being late. Once. One hour late. He never received any warning ... just a termination notification. He never received unemployment benefits. As severance, they gave him 8000 Lempiras (\$US 445), less than the \$3,000 they legally should have paid him after his time with Burger King.

He told me to come back the next day to hear other stories: 35 of his colleagues were fired, 27 of whom were involved in a legal struggle to defend their rights and denounce the abuses they are victim of under Micheletti’s illegitimate and illegal regime.

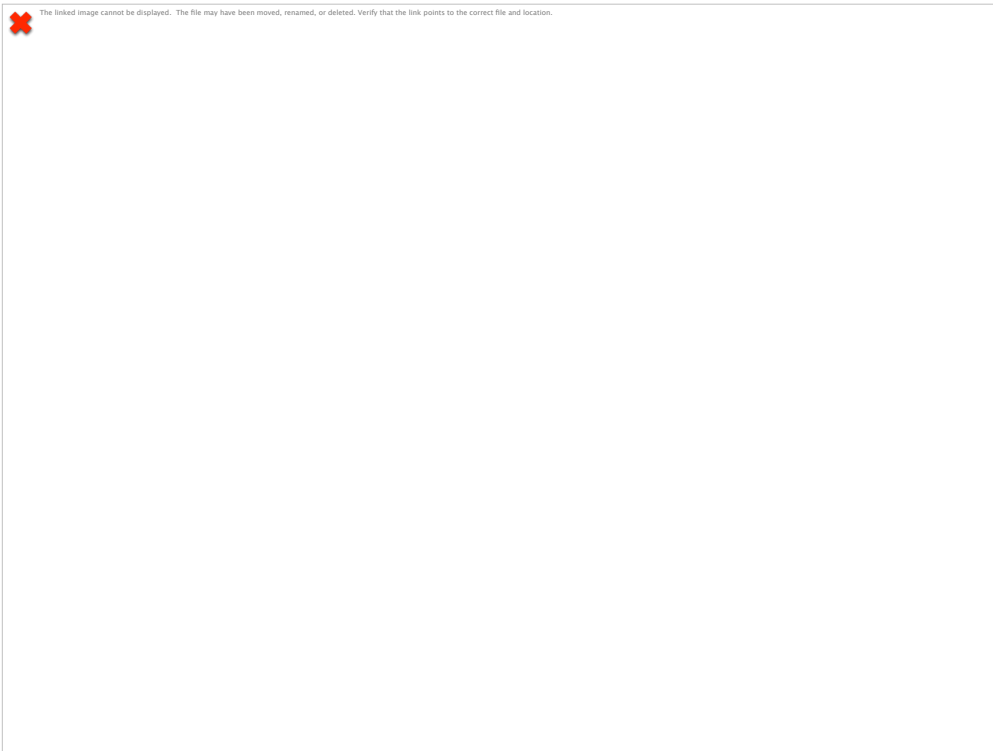
The next day, I showed up at the Honduran Ministry of Work and found 20 ex-Burger King workers waiting, all fired under false accusations. None of them were indemnified.

All were angry. They told me disturbing work stories: “look here, one told me, showing pictures from her cell phone, this bread was eaten by a rat living in the kitchen... These buns, that were urinated on by rats, were given to the clients. And when french-fries would fall on the floor, the manager would force me to put it back with the others, or they would charge me for it. We all have videos of this.”

MILITARIES EATING NEAR 300 BURGER KING COMBOS FOR FREE, DAILY

When I asked about the Coup and the “white shirt” marches, they told me they were obliged to walk with a white t-shirt to support Micheletti. People who wouldn’t go would face reprisals. They all got fired.

“Since June 28th , on a daily basis we were giving 140 combos in the morning and 140 combos in the afternoon to soldiers. Pablo Girad (Burger King’s Regional Director of Tegucigalpa) allows police officers to eat for free, without any bill... .”



After working 8 years in a Burger king, Martha is one of many single mothers who was illegally fired, not indemnified. The company “got a list of all of them who were trying to get unionized”, said their legal attorney.

SINGLE MOTHERS LOSING THEIR JOBS; PREGNANT WOMEN LOSING THEIR BABIES

During the 3 hours I spent with this group, what struck me most was how women are badly treated working in these Burger King.

“When one of us woman had our periods, we didn’t have the right to go to the bathroom. We had to keep working, with our legs really tight up and suffer... In fact, it was prohibited to sit down during a shift and we wouldn’t get paid the extra hours...”

“One is constantly humiliated: we are being yelled at in a vulgar way. For instance, when I fainted after a dispute with a manager, he left me on the floor and said to the mall guardians “leave her there; she’s not worth anything anyway...” The mall guardians got me up.”

I met 8 single mothers who say they were fired under false accusations and 2 other lost their babies while lifting 35 pounds cases.

“I was working while three months pregnant, and we are told that women need to work like men. One manager told me to carry heavy cases; I told him they were too heavy, but he ordered me to go and do it: “if you are working here, you have to do what men do”. All day I was carrying 36 pounds cases. By the third day I was bleeding; by the fifth day I lost my baby. The doctor told me I lost my baby for too much physical efforts.”



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"Pregnant women can't even sit down and relax" - Yarin Lainez

MINIMUM WAGE RAISE CAME TWO MONTHS LATE

When President Zelaya raised the minimum wage by 45% (from 3,800 Lempiras to 5,500 Lps) in January 2009, Burger King only began to pay it 2 months later and never paid its employees retroactively.

When Burger King raised the minimum wage, Burger King also started charging food, uniforms and caps to their employees. Employees were obliged to eat in the restaurant, and pay for it, not able to bring their own food to work.

According to the workers, Burger King also has a strategy of hiring, on a half-time basis, younger people in order to avoid paying the full 5,500 Lempiras a month.

HUNGRY FOR JUSTICE



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This group is battling for justice. They will need international support in order to get their rights respected. Theirs is part of the larger struggle in Honduras, to end the oligarchic-military regime, restore the entire government of President Zelaya, and then move towards the establishment of the National Constituent Assembly.

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WHAT TO DO

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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 all international funds and loans to the regime
- unequivocal denunciation of the military coup and no recognition of 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.