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European Languages

زبانهای اروپایی

Luis Bonilla-Molina

10.06.2025

## Panama: the epicenter of the struggle in Latin America



A small country of 4.2 million inhabitants shows Latin America and the world that it is possible to confront the interests of financial capital and vulture funds in the third decade of the 21st century.

Just a couple of days ago, the blood of a twelve-year-old indigenous boy, seriously injured by government repression, showed that the conflict was entering a new phase. Shortly before,

Saúl Méndez, the main leader of the powerful construction union, had to seek asylum in the Bolivian embassy to avoid being presented as a trophy and imprisoned. This has already happened to two of his other leaders, Genaro López and Jaime Caballero, who have been sent to the worst prison for common criminals in that country. The union had already had its membership dues confiscated by the previous government, a measure the new president continued to uphold, even with recent raids on its union headquarters and the closure of its cooperative. Thousands of striking teachers have been removed from payrolls, and many others have been illegally placed on permanent unpaid leave.

This is happening amidst an impressive global media blackout, corresponding to that existing within the country, which creates an information curtain that prevents the social movement and the people of the world from knowing what is happening in the small Central American country.

#### The origin

In 2023, after a period of growing struggles by the teachers' movement and workers as a whole in Panama, the most significant popular ecological rebellion in the world so far in the 21st century took place. After weeks of mobilization and paralysis across the country, led by teachers, construction workers, banana workers, indigenous communities, youth, women, environmentalists, communities, and a broad segment of the middle class, a decision was successfully obtained from the Supreme Court ordering the cessation of operations of the transnational company First Quantum and the closure of the mine that had sparked the popular uprising. This judicial decision overturned the spurious agreement forged in the Panamanian parliament, which sought to prolong the destruction of the environment.

This backlash by public authorities is driven by the Panamanian bourgeoisie's fear of the popular ecological rebellion that had shut down the country's most important transportation routes, affecting the profits of several sectors of capital. An unprecedented ecological victory has occurred.

The reaction of the Panamanian bourgeoisie and financial capital was to adopt the 2024 presidential candidacy of José Raúl Mulino, former interior minister of the corrupt Martinelli government and a favorite of Mr. Motta, the magnate of the Panamanian airline industry, media, and other business operations. Their agenda was to build a new political situation that would allow them to regain the dominance they had prior to the ecological rebellion, expand the profits of financial capital in that country, and fulfill the neocolonial agenda of an imminent new Trump administration in the White House.

What was new about President Mulino's election was the arrival in parliament of a large group of independent deputies, who had taken advantage of the wave of popular uprising to gain a foothold. This parliamentary renewal, which demonstrated the electorate's intention to create a new political situation, was quickly betrayed by half of this new parliamentary faction, who quickly reached an agreement with the reactionary Mulino government, which, elected with only 34% of the vote, lacked a parliamentary majority.

This new balance of power allows him to advance the approval of Law 462, which produces a new regression in the retirement and pension system for the Panamanian working class, which goes from retiring with approximately 60% of their salary to 30% or less. It also allows wealthy Panamanian families to manage pension funds and allow them to engage in financial market speculation. Furthermore, President Mulino announces his intention to reopen mining and reauthorize First Quantum, flouting the Supreme Court's decision. Outrage spread throughout Panama.

To top it all off, Trump's arrival to his second term comes with a clear intention to regain control of the Panama Canal, something that finds the approval of the Mulino administration, which signs an agreement to allow the reopening of three US military bases, despite the fact that Panama, by constitutional provision, does not have an army and that a treaty in force between the two countries had established the end of such foreign military presence since late 1999. This creates a situation of vassalage to the US government, a fact that ultimately initiates a new cycle of protests.

Five weeks of the national strike

The first to declare a strike on April 23rd were the teachers, who announced they would not return to the classrooms until Law 462 (pension and retirement system) was repealed, the closure of the mining industry was guaranteed, and the military memorandum of understanding with the United States was repealed. On this occasion, the progressive phenomenon of thousands of parents and families in schools and colleges deciding in assemblies to support the strike being waged by their children's teachers occurred. Since their school associations were suppressed by Noriega in the 1980s, high school student mobilizations have reappeared, while the University of Panama is the epicenter of meetings, declarations, gatherings, and a mega-march, despite the inexplicable stain of the expulsion by the authorities of a student for actions of struggle and the attempts to turn the institution into a "space for negotiation" rather than decisive action in favor of patriotic indignation.

Daily mobilizations by teachers and professors, along with the entry into conflict between banana workers and the powerful construction union, have led to the incorporation of entire

populations in the country's interior provinces into the struggle. This increased the quality and number of protesters, leading Mr. Mulino's government to unleash unprecedented repression against the social movement in recent decades. Hundreds of injuries and arrests daily did not stop the protests; on the contrary, they increased them.

When the indigenous regions entered the conflict, the repression was merciless, especially against women and children of indigenous communities. The death toll of a 12-year-old boy and a university student seriously injured by the bullets of a government that has publicly stated it doesn't care if its popularity is at 50%, when polls were released that placed public approval of its mandate at less than 10%, reveals that we are facing a heavy-handed government seeking to inflict a defeat on the social movement that will allow it to get rid of its main organizations to advance its nefarious plans.

This week, the conflict enters a decisive phase, as the government attempts to stall and wear itself down, hoping the protests will subside in the coming days. However, all indications are that the protests will move from mobilizations to a complete shutdown, which will require a growing number of voices of international solidarity.

The correct method

The United People's Alliance for Life , the coalition of the social movement behind the protests, has built a broad social front to confront Mulino's neoconservative and neocolonialist offensive.

Teachers, trade unions, environmentalists, and community groups demonstrate that the right path is to go beyond sectoral struggles and build alliances among nationalist, patriotic, and working-class forces to generate broad participation among the population to advance the struggles and defeat financial capital, extractive policies, and North American neocolonialism.

The Panamanian bourgeoisie: between the voracity of financialization and the fear of an explosion

Social. The contradiction that the Panamanian bourgeoisie faces once again, as in 2023, is deciding between the voracity of financial capital, which is chasing pension funds and mining investments, or the stability of the bourgeois regime itself. Therefore, they have opted for crushing the revolt through police intervention, but if they fail to do so, they would have to decide between retreating or losing control.

Increasingly, the association of those at the top, the powerful and the wealthy, has less contact with the people and focuses on the propaganda of the media outlets they own. How long this situation will last is the key question.

## Presidential recall

An intermediate solution that is beginning to resonate in the streets is the possibility of revoking the presidential mandate and calling new elections, but this comes with the legal obstacle that this recall action has never been regulated. However, legislative initiatives to make this happen continue to advance and take shape, with growing support from citizens.

Mulino's removal has another legal course of action: the Assembly of Deputies will address the accusation filed by the United People's Alliance for violating the international personality of the State, for the subservient Memorandum allowing the reopening of US military bases. If the levels of community participation expected in 2023 are reached, this could create a new balance of power that would allow the current president to be brought to trial, under the very rules established in the Panamanian Constitution.

This would allow Law 462 to be reversed, repeal the reopening of mining operations, and annul the Memorandum that allowed the reopening of US military bases. But this can only happen within the framework of sustaining and expanding popular mobilizations. Therefore, the next few hours will be crucial for the course of events.

## The need to promote international solidarity

In the midst of this dramatic situation, broad and diverse international solidarity is required from democratic and progressive forces, as well as the social and educational movement at the international level. We cannot leave the Panamanian people alone at this time.

For this reason, the social movement has launched, among other important initiatives, a global campaign of protests and the delivery of statements of solidarity with the struggle of the Panamanian people, in front of Panamanian embassies and consulates in every country, on June 9, 2025. This would begin to break the media blockade created by the major news agencies and establish a significant network of alternative communication and solidarity. We look forward to seeing you on June 9, in front of the Panamanian embassy in your country.

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[1] 1 Director of the School of Sociology at the University of Panama. Director of the Association of Professors of the Republic of Panama (ASOPROF), member of the Alliance for the United People

2 Visiting professor at the Federal University of Sergipe (UFS) in Brazil, member of the secretariat of the World Congress against Educational Neoliberalism, researcher in the social and pedagogical sciences associated with CLACSO, CLADE, Kairos, and ALAS. Research Director of Other Voices in Education.

Date: [June 2, 2025](#) Author: [Luis Bonilla-Molina](#)<sup>3</sup> Comments

International Day of Solidarity with the Panamanian People on June 9

Panama: the epicenter of the struggle in Latin America

José Cambra [\[1\]](#) & Luis Bonilla-Molina [2](#)

Introduction