

World:

Protests in Panama against Inflation and Inequality

Throughout the month of July, and in the month of August protests spread throughout Panama. Price increases along with growing inequality over past several years has triggered one of the largest mobilisations the country has seen in several decades.

Panama is a neo-liberal country that was invaded by the United States in 1989. Its economy has significantly grown due to the revenues from the Panama Canal and the country's service industry. But this growth has only benefited the population's wealthiest people, while the working-class, indigenous people and Panama's peasants have become poor.

The Panama government at the behest of IMF carried out major attacks on workers, with huge increases in layoffs and a drastic reduction in living standards.

Protesting against steep price rises and growing inequality, demanding for a reduction and freezing of fuel prices and energy, price roll-backs of food staples by up to 30 percent without adversely affecting producers, lower prices for medicines, an allocation of 6 percent of the country's GDP to education, creation of an inter-sectoral monitoring committee to resolve the problems of corruption.

Many organisations have joined in the protests throughout the country. People United for Life Alliance, the National Alliance for Rights of the Organised People (ANADEPO), and the indigenous peoples are the main organisers of the ongoing national strike and nationwide demonstrations. The powerful single union of construction workers, social organisations, organisations of the other working-class and poor sectors and even some in the middle-class joined in the protests. Many roads have been blocked including the Pan-American highway, a crucial part of Central America's infrastructure on which huge volumes of goods travel every day. The blockades have also led to significant shortages, particularly in Panama City, the capital.

The government has deployed a host of repressive forces across the country to confront the situation. The right-wing oligarchy and business class have been running a defamation campaign against the protesting people of different sectors, in main-stream and social media.

However the government entered into negotiations and signed agreements: to reduce and freeze the price of fuel at USD 3.25 per gallon and to reduce the cost of 72 essential commodities by 30%, increase the public education budget to 6% of GDP and to establish price caps on around 150 medicines.

Remaining demanding like reducing and freezing the price of electricity, measures to combat corruption etc were not resolved till Aug 4. The government did not agree to create a special entity to regulate the profit margin in the chain of purchase and distribution of private pharmacy drugs.

Hundreds of citizens continue to remain in the streets in defence of the right to a dignified life. They have declared that they will continue their protest agitation until all demands are achieved. On the other hand the people's organisations have been actively responding against the false claims of defamation campaign launched in the mainstream and social media.

(Based on the reports of left voice and people's dispatch.)