
Mulino Takes Off His Mask

By: Arnaldo Musa / Cubasí

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Panama's President José Raúl Mulino has tried to portray himself as a man who is accommodating to the people, respectful of democracy, a centrist who deals with everyone, and a defender of the country's integrity and sovereignty in the face of Donald Trump's announced intention to regain control of the Canal.

But all of the above is far from the truth, because the president is actually a right-wing man subject to the whims of Washington, as Marco Rubio, of unfortunate Cuban origin, admitted in his debut as Trump's foreign minister, describing him, after meeting with him, as pro-American and a great friend of the United States.

Thus, he acceded to US wishes to block the entry of Chinese companies, broke the treaty with Beijing adhering to the Belt and Road Agreement, allowed the entry of US military personnel to several points in the country, and even lowered the toll fees for US ships, whose captains refused to fly the Panamanian flag when crossing the Canal.

In short, all this occurred amid constant denials that it had submitted to Trump's whims, while the nation demanded that the agreements signed between the two governments be made public.

Protests in defense of sovereignty have escalated with the government's anti-worker and pro-oligarchic measures, leading to successive massive demonstrations repressed by police forces.

While writing right now, the demonstrations continue with the support and participation of labor unions, banana company workers, and indigenous people who reject changes to the pension system, the security agreement signed with the US that allows for an expanded US military presence in the country, and the mining industry.

Protesters denounce that future generations are exposed to "starvation" pensions, given that, among other things, the reform eliminates the concept of intergenerational solidarity and establishes a system of individual accounts.

After more than three weeks of protests, right-wing leader Mulino warned that he will use even greater repressive measures to eliminate the blockades on hundreds of roads across the country.

THE SEED OF DISCONTENT

In March 2025, the Panamanian Congress approved the Social Security Fund (SCF) Reform through Organic Law 462. The new law changes several key aspects of the country's pension system.

The legislation contemplates a progressive increase in the employer's pension contribution, that is, the money that companies allocate each month so that their employees can retire in the future.

The contribution will gradually increase until it reaches 15.25% of salaries in 2029.

"It was imposed and the people were not consulted," complained Traslación Acosta, who participated in one of the blockades. "The reform will most affect young people, who will receive starvation pensions, very low," he added to the AP news agency.

"In the case of pension systems, intergenerational solidarity means that people who are actively working (the current generation) contribute their contributions to fund the pensions of those who have already retired (the previous generation)," explains Jorge Luis Prosperi Ramírez, a doctor and former WHO official, in a column.

The law does not establish changes to the retirement age, but it does provide for studies to evaluate the possibility of keeping or adjusting these ages in the near future. Furthermore, it establishes a minimum requirement of 240 pension contributions (equivalent to 20 years of contributions) to access the benefit.

REPRESSION

Telemetro reported that teachers who were continuing to protest in the Chitré Economic Center were cleared by National Police crowd control units, who then threw tear gas at them.

The general secretary of Suntracs, Saúl Méndez, reported that several leaders of his union have been arrested for their participation in the demonstrations, and the opposition and former candidate for Vice President Richard Morales assured that there has been disparity against civilians:

"Repressing children, shooting protesters in the face, and torturing teachers will not solve anything. Mulino's government is criminal by tradition. When he was minister, they repressed the young Jerónimo Tugri to the point of death. What he forgets is that they did not fear him, neither before nor now."

For their part, the leaders of the Ngöbe Buglé indigenous community reported having been heavily attacked by security forces amid the protests against Law 462.

"The heavily armed security forces have not only brutally attacked communities and leaders in Trinidad, El Piro, Ojo de Agua, Tolé, Viguí, El Prado, and other regions, but they have also gone door to door, intimidating the population with high-caliber weapons, throwing tear gas bombs, detaining leaders without considering the consequences, and harming the population," community members told the local press.

Chamusquina Mining

The protesters are also rejecting plans to reactivate a mining operation by the Canadian company First Quantum, which was declared unconstitutional by the Panamanian Supreme Court.

This copper mine is the largest open-pit mine in Central America, and although it produces nearly 5% of the country's GDP, the Supreme Court had declared it unconstitutional in 2017.

Even so, Minera Panamá exported the mineral after the ruling. Tempers flared when the previous government of Laurentino Cortizo and the National Assembly approved a new contract in just three days. Furthermore, the mine is in the middle of a biological corridor. So far, Mulino has done nothing to eliminate the operation.

France 24 compared the coordinates of the mine, granted by Law 406, with the most environmentally important sites in the province and confirmed that the copper mining is taking place in a biological sanctuary, as environmental activists claim.

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