

Colombia and FARC commit to peace deal in six months

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At a meeting in Havana Wednesday attended by Colombia's President Juan Manuel Santos, Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) commander Rodrigo Londoño, alias "Timochenko", and Cuban President Raul Castro, the right-wing Colombian government and the country's largest guerrilla movement announced an agreement to finalize a peace deal between them within six months. Afterwards, the FARC will have 60 days to complete the handing over of its weapons.

The evident breakthrough in the talks, which began in Cuba in 2012, came as a result of the FARC negotiators' dropping of their previous rejection of any deal that included criminal penalties for alleged crimes carried out by the guerrilla group's leaders or members, and the government's acceptance of the inclusion of crimes by the state and security forces in a system of "transitional justice."

In practice, this process of "transitional justice," with its own courts and judges, would effectively ensure that military commanders and capitalist politicians, those responsible for the great majority of the 260,000 deaths over the course of a half century of armed conflict, along with the forced displacement of upwards of 6 million Colombians, never face a day in jail.

For others, including the guerrillas, the process will restrict penalties for the most serious crimes—genocide, war crimes, torture, rape—to between five and eight years of "restricted liberty," i.e., not in prison, on the condition that they cooperate with the system and accept responsibility their crimes. Those who do not accept responsibility before being tried and convicted could be jailed for five to eight years. And those who refuse to cooperate altogether would face up to 20-year sentences in Colombian prisons if found guilty.

The system is supposed to also include "reparations"

for the victims of the conflict, which between those killed, wounded, displaced, tortured, raped and brutalized number well over 7 million.

This process, to be known as the Integral System of True Justice, Reparation and No Repetition, may also serve to shield the regime's worst criminals from the International Criminal Court, to which Colombia is a signatory. It also assures that those who accept responsibility for their crimes will be protected from extradition to the US on drug trafficking or "terrorism" charges.

A senior FARC commander, Simon Trinidad, was captured in 2004, extradited to the US and convicted on charges of terrorism for his alleged involvement in the capture of three US military contractors engaged in spy flights over FARC positions. After one mistrial because of a hung jury and a second trial in which the jury was unable to reach a verdict on four out of five charges against Trinidad, the FARC leader was sentenced to 60 years in solitary confinement at a federal "supermax" prison in Colorado.

While supposedly treating all equally, the Colombian government has not agreed to a deal that would place Santos himself under "restricted liberty" for the thousands massacred while he served as defense minister and then president, or mete out similar treatment to former president Alvaro Uribe, who is implicated in not only the crimes of his government and the military, but those of right-wing paramilitary organizations with which he had intimate connections. Uribe, now a senator, is a vehement critic of the so-called peace process.

Prior to the announcement of the deal on the transitional justice system Wednesday, government and FARC negotiators had already reached agreements on a toothless land reform, the entry of FARC into

bourgeois politics and the participation of demobilized FARC fighters in the government's drug eradication program.

Still to be worked out are the implementation of a bilateral cease-fire and the precise conditions under which the disarming of the FARC guerrillas is to take place.

While sections of the military and the supporters of Uribe are vicious opponents of the peace talks, the process has the support of decisive layers of the Colombian ruling class as well as that of foreign capital, which see an end to armed conflict opening up previously closed areas of the country to exploitation by oil firms, agribusiness and mining corporations.

Leading Colombian capitalists have publicly backed the negotiations, with one of the country's richest businessmen, Gonzalo Restrepo, joining government officials in the peace talks.

Also participating in the talks was US special envoy Bernard Aronson, reportedly playing an active role in negotiating the terms of the transitional justice deal. Aronson, who began his career as a political operative for the United Mine Workers of America in the 1970s, became undersecretary of state for inter-American affairs under the Republican administration of President George H.W. Bush. A Democrat, Aronson was tapped for the post after becoming a leading advocate for US funding of the CIA-backed *contras* in their terror war against Nicaragua.

The Castro government also played a prominent role as the lead mediator in the talks, insisting on its absolute neutrality between the FARC guerrillas and the Colombian regime and drawing even closer to Washington in the course of the negotiations.

The deal being struck between the FARC and the Colombian ruling class would end the longest running armed conflict in the hemisphere. It is by no means, however, the first such negotiations. Colombia's M-19 movement, then the country's second largest guerrilla group, reached a similar accord in the late 1980s, integrating itself into bourgeois politics. One of its former members, Gustavo Petro, is now mayor of Bogota.

In the early 1990s, the Farabundo Marti National Liberation Front (FMLN) negotiated an agreement with the US-backed government of El Salvador after more than a decade of bloody civil war. It transformed itself

into a bourgeois political party. The country's current president is former guerrilla commander Salvador Sánchez Cerén.

Last month, Deysi Cheyene, a former FMLN member who participated in the peace talks, gave an instructive interview (in Spanish) to the Colombian daily *El Espectador*, pointing out that today El Salvador is more unequal and more violent than during the period when the civil war began.

Asked how successful the process had been, she replied: "...as a party, the FMLN was absorbed into the political system and made elections its only purpose. This entire struggle of 20 years to transform the system was reduced to participation in elections."

Asked whether the FMLN "continued to fight against injustices," Cheyene said no: "The neo-liberal model was formally installed in the Legislative Assembly with the FMLN already a party. All of the structural adjustment programs that are the basis of this model were approved with the votes of the FMLN. All of the privatization of electrical energy, of telecommunications, the arrival of the extractive transnational corporations ... were approved by the FMLN. They never confronted the causes of the war, but rather exacerbated them."

She added that the entire process "favored the right-wing oligarchy that was our enemy, against which we had risen in the first place."

There is no doubt that a similar transformation of the FARC, which has been far more corrupted over the past period than the Salvadoran guerrillas, will produce similar results, creating a new layer of bourgeois politicians, while facilitating the exploitation and oppression of the masses of Colombian working people.



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