

Colombian peace deal paves way for fiscal austerity

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Colombian President Juan Manuel Santos announced Friday that the government and the FARC guerrilla group would formally sign a peace treaty on September 26. The deal was agreed upon in principle at the end of August and will be the subject of a national plebiscite scheduled for October 2. If approved, the treaty will formally bring to a close a 52-year civil war that has left over 200,000 dead and millions displaced.

Polls show the treaty will likely be approved by voters, who are justifiably eager for an end to the conflict. However, if ever approved and implemented, the peace deal will solve none of the problems plaguing Colombian society. Under the deal, the FARC will transform itself into a new bourgeois political party, while it and the government agree to forgive one another for the crimes they have committed against impoverished Colombian workers and peasants. It has been heralded by international banks and corporations as necessary to pave the way for further attacks on the Colombian masses.

The armed resistance of the FARC began in the aftermath of the Colombian Civil War of 1948-54. In the decades that followed, broad sections of the Colombian countryside were transformed into war zones as pro-government death squads terrorized the impoverished peasants with impunity. The Colombian government, with the support of US imperialism, has continued to cover up its role in carrying out mass murder, despite the fact that up to 80 percent of those killed in the conflict are victims of the government and its paramilitaries.

By the 1980s, the FARC had developed into a criminal syndicate whose right-wing political character found expression in its involvement in the drug trade and in its killing and extorting of innocent workers and peasants.

According to the terms of the deal, both the government and the FARC will be granted near-blanket amnesty for decades of extortion, kidnapping, murder, and torture. The FARC will be guaranteed a minimum of ten seats in the legislature if it turns in its weapons at a series of UN-monitored drop-off sites. Child soldiers will also be allowed to return from rural areas held by the FARC, and the government has promised a subsidy program aimed at reducing cocaine production.

President Santos has declared that the peace agreement represents the opening of a “new era” for Colombia. The head of the FARC negotiating team described the talks that led to the deal as “the most beautiful of all the battles” fought by the guerrilla movement.

In reality, the purpose of the deal is to pave the way for renewed attacks on the Colombian working class by international finance capital. According to an August 26 press release by the Fitch Ratings agency, “the agreement highlights the importance of rebuilding Colombia’s revenue base in order to accommodate required investment without jeopardizing fiscal consolidation.”

Fitch explained that transnational corporations are hopeful because “investment and growth could increase over the medium term, as areas that were formerly in conflict zones attract investment in mining and agriculture.” But most importantly, international finance capital views the agreement as necessary to cut government spending and impose a new tax reform plan aimed at reducing the deficit.

In July, Fitch reduced Colombia’s rating outlook to negative, “reflecting a large current account deficit, rising external indebtedness and a high government debt burden relative to rating peers.” The rating cut followed a similar move by Standard & Poor’s in

February, which cited the drop in the price of oil as a major contributor to the government deficit.

Colombia's creditors view the finalization of the peace treaty as necessary to minimize social opposition to the fiscal reform program. The Fitch statement made it clear: "Gathering support for the peace process and tax reform, while complementary, present political challenges for the government, especially given the tight legislative schedule."

The most cynical role in this process has been played by the FARC. Founded in the aftermath of the Civil War of 1948-54 by a popular front of Stalinists and left-liberals, the FARC was idolized for decades by Maoists, Pabloites, Guevarists, and Chavistas as a "revolutionary" and "socialist" armed force.

"Today we bring to the Colombian people the transformative power that we have constructed in more than a half-century of rebellion," FARC chief negotiator Ivan Marquez told the press on August 24, after news of the deal was announced.

In reality, the FARC's right-wing character is exemplified in its signing a deal with the government that paves the way for renewed austerity in exchange for a government-guaranteed legislative presence.



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