# El Salvador's government bows to Washington over threat to deport 262,000

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The Salvadoran foreign minister, Hugo Martínez, held a celebratory press conference Monday with the US ambassador, Jean E. Manes, after the US Department of Homeland Security (DHS) announced the elimination of the Temporary Protected Status (TPS) of 262,000 Salvadoran recipients, who will have until September 2019 to leave or be deported.

"We have attained 18 months more of TPS for our compatriots," Martínez boasted while smiling to Manes. The US Embassy then added insult to injury, giving out fliers advertising instructions online on how to move back to El Salvador.

For his part, the Salvadoran president, Salvador Sánchez Cerén, responded to the DHS announcement with a communiqué celebrating the 18-month "extension". Cerén was a commanding general of the ruling Farabundo Martí Front for National Liberation (FMLN), when it was a nationalist guerrilla movement fighting the US-backed military dictatorship and its anti-Communist death squads in a war that left about 80,000 killed, mostly civilians, and turned tens of thousands into refugees who fled mostly to the US.

"The Salvadoran Government expresses its gratefulness to the Government of the United States for this announcement, which reaffirms the strong bonds of friendship and cooperation that they keep as historic partners," the president said.

In the 17 years between 1999 and 2016, the US deported over 244,000 Salvadorans, with the rate of expulsions doubling after the 2006 Secure Fence Act was approved as a bipartisan measure, and increased even further under the Obama administration. El Salvador's former guerrilla leaders, having transformed themselves into bourgeois politicians now in power, are celebrating the 18 months that a similar number of Salvadorans who have lived in the US in many cases for decades, having raised their children there, will be given before being uprooted from their homes and forcibly ejected.

Such an impervious response expresses the FMLN leadership's position as representatives of a national client elite, whose wealth (Oxfam reported in 2015 that 160 millionaires controlled a wealth equivalent to 87 percent of GDP) comes predominantly from the administration of foreign capital to exploit the country as a cheap-labor platform.

Workers and youth in El Salvador have reacted with alarm to the announcement from Washington, recalling previous mass deportations, particularly when leaders of *maras*, or gangs formed in the United States, were sent and eventually took over entire areas of the war-torn Northern Triangle—El Salvador, Honduras, and Guatemala. At the same time, given that more than 80 percent of Salvadoran TPS holders send money to El Salvador, many families fear losing a major source of income, and many others fear that unemployment will increase.

While the FMLN government promises job-placement and entrepreneurship programs for the TPS recipients once they arrive, the Foreign Ministry indicates that "re-insertion programs" have only "reached" 5,000 of the 39,000 Salvadorans that the US deported between 2016 and 2017.

El Salvador has one of the highest rates of official unemployment in the region. According to the UN Economic Commission for Latin America, 56.6 percent of employed workers suffer underemployment and job instability, and 70 percent have no access to social security benefits.

Moreover, a majority of workers report suffering restrictions due to violence. The number of murders last year was 3,954, making it the most violent country in

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the region, but signifying a reduction of 25 percent compared to 2016. While officials point to these figures to suggest that their "iron-hand" strategy and US-backed militarization are "working," the monthly average of killings has returned since last September back to 2014-2015 levels, and the flashpoints have merely shifted, particularly toward the west of the country.

The murderous rampage of the state forces against *presumed* gang members was characterized in 2016 for having a dead-to-injured ratio of 3-to-1 in confrontations against the police. That year, the rate of state officials vs. "targets" killed was 1-to-59. "With figures like that," concluded the Inter-American Commission of Human Rights in September 2017, "we are dealing with a few confrontations and lots of cases of executions."

In August, *Factum* exposed a large network—consisting of police officers pertaining to the Special Forces of Reaction created by the FMLN government in 2016 and some civilian vigilantes—that organizes extrajudicial killings, offers services as hitmen, traffics weapons, carries out rapes in broad daylight and extorts gangs for bribes. As a whole, such reports and data show that the Salvadoran government constitutes a death-squad regime which uses brutal methods to suppress the country's impoverished youth and intimidate the working class as a whole.

An editorial in the Salvadoran daily *El Faro* on Tuesday warns sharply of a need to "catch a missile being launched" and of a possible "national emergency." However, like most of the Salvadoran and US press, it promotes illusions in the US politicians who have expressed some opposition to Trump's TPS decision and suggests that the "period of grace" of 18 months be used to try the "natural" path of appealing to the US Congress. The article claims that "the only one responsible for this measure is the xenophobic administration that controls the executive power in the United States."

In other words, Trump is portrayed as an anomaly in comparison to previous administrations and the rest of the US political establishment. On the contrary, the militarization of the US-Mexico border, the use of Mexico's armed forces as an extension of the US border patrol, the militarization of the Northern Triangle itself and the criminalization of immigrants, have been bipartisan policies for decades in the United States. Moreover, the Democratic Party has shown no inclination to oppose the mass deportations, working instead to divert opposition against Trump behind its campaigns to attack democratic principles like the presumption of innocence, due process and free speech on the Internet as part of its promotion of "sexual misconduct" and "fake news" scandals.

A day after Trump announced his plans to deport hundreds of thousands of Salvadorans, Democratic Party leaders were joking with the US president and declaring it an "honor" to hold talks with him on immigration. Democratic Senator Richard Durbin stated, "We want a safe border in America, period, both when it comes to the issues of illegal migration, but also when it comes to drugs and all these other areas." This bipartisan program will only make living conditions all the more desperate for TPS holders, the 88 percent of Salvadorans living in the US who are not part of this program, and those living in El Salvador.

Whether it is in the United States, Mexico or Central America—where it's only a question of time for the 57,000 Honduran TPS recipients to hear the same announcement—the anti-immigrant offensive is being advanced by all factions of the ruling class.

Only a united struggle of the working class across the Americas can defeat the drive by the US and its Central American client states to destroy the lives of hundreds of thousands of immigrant workers and their families.

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