

Fascists stage pogromist march against Nicaraguan migrants in Costa Rica

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On Saturday, August 18, far-right and outright fascist groups carried out pogromist attacks against Nicaraguan migrants in downtown San José, Costa Rica.

Hundred of thugs in groups of dozens marched in several major parks and avenues armed with knives, bats and Molotov cocktails. The actual number of those participating at any one place was difficult to determine, given the hundreds of pedestrians and onlookers. Some of the participants were threatening to “kill” and “burn” Nicaraguans. The main target was Merced Park, known as a meeting place used by Nicaraguan immigrants.

The Ministry of Security reported that 44 people were arrested, 38 Costa Ricans and 6 Nicaraguans, while 16 knives, a baseball bat, and 8 Molotov cocktails were confiscated. The latter were found in a suitcase left behind at Merced Park.

Some of those present were wearing Nazi insignias, with the security minister describing the participants as “soccer hooligans, Nazis and anarchists.” The Costa Rican detainees were immediately freed after being booked at the police station, with a majority of them reportedly having criminal records, while the Nicaraguans were held longer to check their immigration status.

The police chief, Randall Picado, described the scene at Merced Park: “People arrived, sang the national anthem and waved a flag. But suddenly, a group of them began running around the park, chanting xenophobic slogans against Nicaraguans. ... Any Nicaraguan who would look at them was assaulted.” The police intervention, however, was fully planned and sought at most to mediate the violence against Nicaraguans, with some of the cops participating in it.

“Since I have lived here [for 19 years], I’ve never had to live through such a humiliation. ... They would tell us, ‘Nicas, sons of this. Leave, murderers, thieves,’ and would then attack us,” María Andrea García told *La Nación*. She added: “The police didn’t do anything. On the contrary, they would hit the Nicaraguans and tell us: ‘You are not in your country. Leave, dogs.’”

During the last few weeks, the police have joined

immigration officials in rounding up hundreds of undocumented immigrants in these same parks for deportation procedures.

The government’s spokesperson, Juan Carlos Mendoza, called the attacks “unprecedented in Costa Rican history.” President Carlos Alvarado gave a national address on Sunday warning against “provocations and calls of hatred.” However, he immediately boasted about new police-state capabilities to “expedite deportation of people with unwanted profiles,” claiming to “understand the worries of many Costa Ricans” about the threat to “national security” supposedly presented by migrants.

Far from seeking to counter the pogromist atmosphere, Alvarado has fomented “patriotic” chauvinism since the electoral campaign, exploiting it to justify the ongoing build-up of the police, immigration units and intelligence services, which in turn will be aimed against all forms of social opposition. The next morning, Alvarado announced the incorporation of 98 new officers to the migration police.

Thousands have shown interest online in participating in an “anti-xenophobia” march on Saturday organized by pro-refugee groups. The generalized opposition to anti-immigrant policies and attacks among workers and youth—a 2016 poll show that only 10.6 percent believed Nicaraguans “should not come; they generate problems”—needs to be mobilized to actively defend immigrants from attacks and deportations at workplaces and in communities.

On January 13, heavily armed police and immigration officials broke up a peaceful picket of more than 100 workers protesting the arbitrary firing of 60 co-workers at a pineapple plantation in Los Chiles. Several picketing Nicaraguan workers were arrested for deportation proceedings.

Constituting about 8 percent of the Costa Rican population, Nicaraguans are an integral part of the working class in Costa Rica, which is bound to Nicaragua by innumerable family, economic and cultural ties.

All attacks against Nicaraguan workers by the Costa Rican and Nicaraguan states—both at the behest of the main

investor in the region, US imperialism—will be ultimately used to undermine workers' struggles in both countries. This raises the urgent need to consciously unite workers entering into struggle across the national borders under a socialist and internationalist program, which calls for tearing down the dead weights of the nation-state system and capitalism.

The fascist attackers on Saturday frequently chanted “Free Costa Rica,” which corresponds, along with the social-media accounts promoting the march, with the Free Costa Rica Movement, a notorious fascist organization in Costa Rica. It formed as a paramilitary group that carried out violent attacks against an upsurge of worker and student demonstrations within Costa Rica throughout the 1970s and 1980s, along with xenophobic assaults against Nicaraguans within Costa Rica and military support for the US-backed terrorist Contra forces.

After more than three decades of anti-worker policies aimed at creating the most profitable conditions for foreign and domestic capital, social inequality in Costa Rica has reached new heights, with poverty levels above 20 percent and unemployment at 10.3 percent, according to the Central Bank.

Social anger is growing rapidly against the high unemployment; devastated state of public education, health care, housing, and other social infrastructure; rampant corruption; and record-levels of homicides and other indices of crime. In response, every sector of the Costa Rican ruling establishment is scapegoating the ongoing wave of immigrants seeking to escape the brutal repression and economic crisis in Nicaragua.

The government has already rejected more than 1,000 Nicaraguan refugee applications this year, citing “criminal records.” This is part of a pernicious tendency. Costa Rica deported 549 Nicaraguans in 2017—before the current wave of migration—compared to 262 in 2016. Last year, 14,330 Nicaraguans were turned back at the border, compared to 6,754 in 2016.

As part of the deadly crackdown carried out by the Daniel Ortega administration in Nicaragua against demonstrations that began in mid-April protesting pension cuts, more than 2,000 Nicaraguans have been arrested “arbitrarily,” 480 of whom remain detained, according to rights groups. The UN has denounced “collective detentions,” while estimates of those killed vary between 317 and 448.

Several Facebook accounts are calling for more anti-Nicaraguan “demonstrations” for the rest of August and September. The largest of these right-wing groups, “Costa Rica Unida,” which has more than 158,000 members, is managed by David Segura, a current legislator of the evangelical National Restoration Party (PRN). Another key figure of this far-right movement is Marvin Rojas Ramírez.

On Friday, he posted a video watched more than 100,000 times in which he describes receiving support and feedback from high officials in state institutions. “We are a large group and are getting organized,” he says, “we’ll be announcing dates and places to meet.”

La Nación reported that a “wave” of false stories were shared tens of thousands of times on social media to stir up anti-immigrant sentiment ahead of Saturday’s march. However, the efforts of *La Nación* and several media commentators to portray the attacks as a *result* of “fake news” are aimed at channeling the widespread revulsion felt by workers and youth against these xenophobic attacks behind an equally ominous and authoritarian agenda.

On August 10, Facebook suspended for 48 hours the page “For a new Costa Rican army,” which advocates for building a paramilitary force to be deployed against Nicaraguan citizens. It has more than 27,000 “likes” and expresses political support for the “Free Costa Rica” fascists. Facebook’s actions constitute an outright attack against freedom of expression and will be used by the government and the technology corporations as a precedent to expand censorship against socialist and left-wing outlets.

The growth in support for the far right is chiefly the political responsibility of pseudo-left parties like Frente Amplio and the trade unions, which have suppressed the class struggle for decades and have now largely aligned themselves behind the Alvarado administration. Consequently, in the February general elections, the evangelical far right led by the PRN, which is adopting an increasingly open anti-immigrant stance, became the main opposition in Congress and the only significant political force that claims to battle the austerity and fiscal packages being imposed.

Anti-immigrant sentiments are similarly being fueled across Latin America as social catastrophes worldwide continue to force millions to flee. For instance, about 1,200 Venezuelans were forced to evacuate the Brazilian town of Pacaraima after hundreds attacked them and burned their belongings and tents.



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