

Far-right government elected in Guatemala

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On Sunday, Alejandro Giammattei, a doctor and recent founder of the far-right Vamos party, was elected president of Guatemala. He received 58 percent of the vote against 42 percent for his right-wing opponent, Sandra Torres of the National Unity for Hope (UNE) party.

As demonstrated by the voter turnout of only 38 percent, the election was marked by popular hatred toward both candidates, who are widely perceived as representatives of the same corrupt political elite subordinated to Washington that is now led by incumbent President Jimmy Morales.

The vote, moreover, was overshadowed by the popular outrage against the “safe third country” agreement imposed by the Trump administration on July 26, via threats of tariffs and economic sanctions. The deal forces migrants traveling through the country to the United States to remain and request asylum in Guatemala.

Last Tuesday, student and peasant organizations convoked a national strike, which was accompanied by widespread roadblocks and mass marches across Guatemala, in opposition to the agreement. Protests have also involved student occupations of universities and other demonstrations. A poll carried out by *Prensa Libre* found last week that 82 percent of Guatemalans oppose the agreement.

The idea that Guatemala could serve as “safe third country” is ludicrous. The simmering unrest against the intolerable social crisis in the country finds its clearest expression in the relentless migration of hundreds of thousands of Guatemalans, who constitute the majority of migrants reaching the US-Mexico border. This flow continues despite the life-threatening dangers posed by tens of thousands of troops and inhumane concentration camps in the US and Mexico, not to speak of the Mexican cartels and Washington’s effective repudiation of the right to asylum.

Giammattei based his platform on promises to strengthen the “iron-fist” strategy ostensibly against gangs, including the return of the “death penalty,” and to build “a wall of investment” along the northern border with Mexico to stop migration at the behest of the Trump administration. This US-backed build-up of the militarized police-state, now also aimed against immigrants from neighboring countries, will be used against all opposition by the working class and peasantry.

At the same time, fears of a mass movement against imperialism led the speaker of the US House of Representatives, Nancy Pelosi, to visit Guatemala Thursday, leading a delegation of a dozen other Democratic US legislators. The intervention, denounced by some media outlets as electoral “meddling,” sought to create the illusion that a faction of the US ruling elite opposes Trump’s anti-immigrant measures, as well as the right-wing policies carried out

by Morales.

Accordingly, the entourage refused to meet with Morales, and the Guatemalan-born California Congresswoman Norma Torres told the media that she opposes the “safe third country” designation. Pelosi herself, however, exposed this posturing by commenting cynically that the delegation would later visit migrant detention centers in Texas, where “we’ll observe what changes might have happened since we approved the last bill that sent several billion dollars to these centers.” That is, the Democrats have voted to finance Trump’s concentration camps.

This money also financed the mass sweep last week in Mississippi, where about 200 migrants from Guatemala, among 680 workers, were snatched from their workplaces by Trump’s immigration Gestapo.

The most significant process revealed by the elections, however, is the growing influence of the parties of the pseudo-left middle class, which are today leading the ongoing protests behind a totally rotten bourgeois political apparatus. The Winaq party, the ex-guerrilla Guatemalan National Revolutionary Unity, and the Movement for the Liberation of Peoples (MLP) increased their representation in the national legislature from two seats to eight.

Nearly three decades have passed since these petty-bourgeois nationalist and peasant-oriented layers of intellectuals and activists lost their mass support after abandoning guerrilla warfare and repudiating any form of class struggle. They became integrated into the bourgeois political establishment and pledged their service to imperialism and its local puppets.

Under extreme conditions, in which low commodity prices, droughts, state-backed land theft, mass deportations from the US and a deepening economic crisis are undermining the already strained means of subsistence in the rural and urban areas, the influence of the petty-bourgeois pseudo-left reflects a confused but significant shift to the left among workers, peasants and youth.

Thelma Cabrera, the presidential candidate of the MLP, which was recently created by her Peasant Development Committee (CODECA), received more than 10 percent of the vote in the first round, compared to the 15 percent received by Giammattei and 26 percent by Torres. Cabrera, a 49-year-old Mam Mayan Indian, was projected as a likely winner if she made the second round.

This compares to the maximum of 3 percent ever reached by Rigoberta Menchú, a Nobel Peace Prize winner and founder of Winaq, under a similar indigenous nationalist program.

The MLP program proposes the nationalization of key natural resources, a “pluri-national” capitalist state, greater wealth and inheritance taxes, a limited growth in social spending, the recognition of collective peasant lands next to private lands and

some limits to estates.

While much more conservative than the agrarian reform implemented by the liberal bourgeois government of Jacobo Árbenz until his overthrow by the CIA in 1954, even the MLP's demands would require a direct challenge to and ultimately the abolition of landlordism and an infringement upon the property interests of major transnational corporations that control the mining sector and are directly backed by the American and European powers.

According to the UN, 2 percent of landowners in Guatemala control 47 percent of the land, while 92 percent of landowners control only 22 percent of the land.

Far from challenging capitalist property and landlordism, the Cabrera campaign focused on presenting her greatest attributes as being “a Mam woman,” while spotlighting vague bourgeois slogans such as “I choose dignity.”

The Guatemalan indigenous population has historically suffered the sharpest edge of the hundreds of years of colonial and imperialist looting. Today, more than 80 percent live under the official poverty line, compared to 60 percent of the general population. However, this history has also demonstrated that its economic and democratic rights, including the right to develop their culture while accessing modern agricultural technologies, health care and other services, cannot be fought for by supporting one or another sector of the national bourgeoisie or the indigenous elites, both of whose positions and privileges are rooted in their economic and political ties to imperialism and the landed oligarchy.

The MLP's function is to channel the growing opposition among the poor peasantry behind bourgeois politics, while using indigenous nationalism and gender-based identity politics to pit workers against each other and mask the party's right-wing character.

In a June interview with *Nómada*, Cabrera responded to “What is your ideology?” by indicating, “We don't want to say that we are left-wing, but we are anti-neoliberal, anti-colonial and anti-patriarchy.”

With these considerations in mind, the British bourgeois paper *Guardian* wrote a piece promoting her candidacy, titled “Thelma Cabrera, indigenous, female and shaking up Guatemala's election.”

Since the end of the civil war, Codeca—after participating in the formation of the URNG guerrillas—has worked with student organizations, the ex-guerrilla and pseudo-left parties and NGOs to contain each crisis of bourgeois rule, thereby defending the same ruling elite that presided over a US-backed counter-insurrectionary war involving the murder of thousands of radicalized youth and workers and a genocide that claimed the lives of hundreds of thousands of Mayan peasants.

More recently, when mass protests led to the resignation of President Otto Pérez Molina and Vice-President Roxana Baldetti in 2015, these forces channeled social tensions behind support for the International Commission against Impunity in Guatemala (CICIG), which had led the investigation of the corruption under Molina. Most significantly, they joined the National Platform for the Reform of the State, which also included student groups,

dozens of pseudo-left organizations, business chambers and bourgeois parties.

By driving the protest movement behind these dead-ends, the ruling class was able to control the demonstrations. This led the Obama administration “to slide from skepticism to sympathy for the movements in the plaza, particularly the Plataforma forum,” as described by a “Lectures on the 2015 crisis” pamphlet of the National Democratic Institute (NDI). This was followed by the almost seamless replacement of Molina with his far-right vice-president, Alejandro Baltazar Maldonado, and the elections of two other stooges of US imperialism, Jimmy Morales and now Giammattei.

The systematic orientation toward the CICIG, created by the US State Department to use selective cases of corruption to pressure the local ruling elite, exposes Codeca as servile to imperialism. Its founder, Mauro Vay Gonón, has acknowledged his receipt of funding from the Norwegian and Swiss governments.

In her trip to Guatemala last week, Democratic legislator Norma Torres shed actual tears while demanding that the CICIG, “which we have backed with funds and morally,” be allowed to resume its activities after Morales kicked it out of the country. Giammattei has also declared that “The CICIG is over.”

The plunder of Guatemala as a platform for cheap labor and natural resources by transnational corporations and the turning of the country into a militarized concentration camp by imperialism cannot be opposed through any nationalist organizations, all of which have turned into open servants of imperialism since the civil war ended in 1996.

This period, however, also witnessed the objective growth of the working class and of its ties to workers across the region and internationally. The urban population has grown from 5 million to 9 million, becoming a majority last year; nearly half of Guatemalans report having a family member living in the United States; and new industries like auto-parts and electronics fused into globalized production chains have expanded greatly. It's this powerful social force that must be mobilized and organized independently of all bourgeois and petty-bourgeois nationalists and on the basis of an internationalist and revolutionary socialist program.



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