

Gunmen kill two FMLN campaigners in El Salvador

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After a rally last Sunday night in the campaign for this month's legislative and mayoral elections in El Salvador, gunmen attacked a Farabundo Marti National Liberation Front (FMLN) truck, killing two campaigners and injuring five.

As seen clearly in CCTV videos presented by the General Prosecutor's Office (FGR), the attackers drove past the truck decorated with FMLN flags and with an open cargo area full of supporters and children. The attackers cut across the truck's path, stepped out of their car, and riddled the back of the truck with bullets, walking around it. They then returned to their car and fled the scene.

The three suspected attackers were soon arrested and identified as a police officer of the Protection of Important People Division (PPI), a private security guard and a driver, all assigned to the Health Ministry.

The shooting has shocked the population due to its brazenness and openly political character. This type of assault has not been seen since the civil war. The attack was clearly planned, with the gunmen intercepting the truck near the FMLN's offices in downtown San Salvador after a scheduled rally.

While the political ties of the attackers have not been established, President Nayib Bukele, who formerly belonged to the FMLN, first characterized the killings as a staged self-attack, a claim used by the Latin American fascist dictatorships in the 1970s and 1980s to blame their bloody crimes on the victims of repression.

"It looks like the dying parties have launched their last plan," tweeted Bukele immediately after the attack. "What a desperate move to avoid losing their privileges and corruption. I thought they couldn't reach those depths, but they did."

He later changed his narrative to portray the attackers as the victims. He tweeted that the police had captured "two FMLN members suspected of shooting at the PPI," adding that the PPI officer was being treated for gunshot wounds. The FMLN members, who were unarmed, were released later without charges.

Bukele has consistently sought to exploit mass opposition against both the ex-guerrilla FMLN and far-right ARENA parties, which had shared power and controlled the Congress since the war ended in 1992, to advance his own turn toward dictatorship. This has frequently involved instigating violence against his political opponents, particularly by cultivating loyal and fascistic layers in the security forces.

On Wednesday, the National Police published a series of additional videos in defense of the attackers. While it is not clear in the videos, they claimed that an FMLN supporter being shot at pulled out a gun. The National Police then wrote in a statement that prosecutors are "misinforming the population and hiding that there were shots fired from both sides."

The General Prosecutor Raúl Melara responded by insisting that, based on an analysis of the videos and crime scene, no shots were fired from the truck. He then warned the National Police against "discrediting itself."

In response to the attack, the secretary general of the FMLN and former vice president, Oscar Ortiz, mildly criticized the president for turning the tables and blaming the victims. While indicating that it was not an "isolated" incident, Ortiz has vaguely attributed the attack to "a dynamic of sowing division."

At the same time, he praised General Prosecutor Melara for his management of the case and called on his supporters to "respect" whatever Melara says.

This was despite the refusal of Melara, who is particularly close to the US Embassy and a former director of the main Salvadoran business association, the ANEP, to investigate the attack as political violence, which would imply examining who hatched the plot.

On Wednesday, Melara presented the FGR case to a meeting of political party chiefs that Bukele's Party, New Ideas, refused to attend. There, without any objection from the attendants, Melara explained:

"We are categorizing this as an act of intolerance. We are obviously in times of political campaigns, but we want to see it as an act of intolerance that should go no further."

This is nothing but an operation to cover up the possible direct involvement, not to mention the moral and political culpability, of the Bukele administration.

Last week, Bukele called the UN-sponsored 1992 “peace accords” a “farce” and the beginning of a “stage of greater corruption, social exclusion and fraudulent enrichment by the same sectors signing the accords.” Such sentiments are widely shared among Salvadorans given the right-wing policies of Bukele’s predecessors. Polls show that over two-thirds of respondents plan to vote for New Ideas.

Under the cover of such “anti-establishment” rhetoric, however, Bukele seeks to rally his fascistic supporters to respond with armed violence to any opposition from below as he seeks to enforce policies that only further social inequality and defend the interests of the same ruling class represented by his predecessors.

The morning of the attack, as reported by *El Faro*, Vice President Félix Ulloa told a meeting of civil war veterans that “a new war, with new actors, has already begun. And we began winning it on February 3, 2019,” the day of Bukele’s election.

Throughout his term, Bukele has sought to rule by decree and criminalize opposition, constantly amalgamating other political parties with gangs and calling them “plagues.” On February 9, 2020, he led armed troops into the Congress to force it to approve at gunpoint a loan for military expenditures. Then he gave a blood-curdling speech outside Congress in front of thousands of supporters threatening to “press the button,” i.e., dissolving Congress and declaring a dictatorship.

The shift toward authoritarianism by the ruling classes is an international process that has been greatly accelerated as class tensions grow during the pandemic. At the heart of this process, Donald Trump and the Republican Party spearheaded a fascist coup attempt on January 6, while the Democratic Party, whose legislators were threatened with kidnappings and killings, has responded with appeals for “unity” with the coup plotters.

Similarly, the Salvadoran FMLN has responded to the killing of its members by denouncing the “divisiveness” of the president instigating such fascistic attacks.

In response to the pandemic, the Bukele administration concocted an anti-constitutional “state of emergency” with special powers to enforce a lockdown between March and May 2020, accompanied by a botched distribution of a meager \$300 stipend for impoverished households. By July, under pressure by transnational corporations and Wall Street, nonessential activities and social austerity were gradually resumed, including the textile maquiladora sweatshops.

Bukele provocatively decreed the reopening without

approval by Congress, but was forced to backpedal when the Supreme Court ruled the move unconstitutional. “Basically, they are taking away our power to reactivate the economy,” Bukele declared at the time, even though the opposition parties also backed the economic reopening.

Confirmed active cases and the weekly death toll have both doubled since late November. El Salvador has reported 55,623 cases and 1,646 deaths since the pandemic began. While the UN has selected El Salvador for the first round of the COVAX rollout of vaccines for poor nations, no date has been announced for the beginning of vaccinations.

Meanwhile, the FUSADES think-tank has estimated that another 100,000 households will fall below the poverty line, measured as the cost of a basic basket of goods and services. This will increase the poverty rate to over half of the population.

The FMLN, the trade unions and the entire Salvadoran ruling class are utterly subordinated to imperialism. In order to facilitate the imposition of social austerity and contain the class struggle at the behest of the transnational corporations and financial vultures, the FMLN administrations advanced a “hard fist” strategy—ostensibly against the gangs—that built up the armed forces and turned a blind eye on their pervasive extrajudicial executions.

While Bukele seeks to rekindle a counter-insurrectionary war, the former left-wing guerrilla FMLN and the far-right ARENA have been attempting to approve an amnesty bill for war crimes during the civil war.

The transformation of the FMLN, from a nationalist, petty-bourgeois left guerrilla movement into a right-wing capitalist party, demonstrates that the working class needs to intervene independently of all pro-capitalist and nationalist forces. Fighting the threat of fascism requires the building of a revolutionary party in the working class on the basis of a socialist and internationalist program.



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