

Guatemala election rocked by prosecutor's “coup” attempt

Andrea Lobo
14 July 2023

On Wednesday, more than two weeks after the June 25 presidential elections, the Guatemalan electoral court (TSE) certified the results and declared that a second round will take place on August 20 between former first lady Sandra Torres of the UNE party and ex-diplomat Bernardo Arévalo of the Semilla Movement.

Simultaneously, a criminal court announced that it had suspended the legal status of Semilla in support of a fraudulent public prosecution alleging false signatures and illegal campaign financing. In a Solomonian ruling the following day, the Constitutional Court ordered both the second round to proceed as planned and the prosecution to go forward.

The ruling acknowledges that the attempt to suspend the legal status of Semilla amid ongoing elections was unconstitutional, but it allows the prosecution and the court to continue an investigation aimed at fabricating a pretext to repeal a popular election and consummate a coup.

The Constitutional Court was responsible for the initial delay, ordering on July 1 a review of ballot box reports in favor of a lawsuit filed by several right-wing parties, including Vamos of incumbent President Alejandro Giammattei, which placed third.

Ominously, heavily armed police, with their faces covered and dressed as civilians, raided TSE headquarters in Guatemala City on Thursday, allegedly to look for documents that can incriminate Semilla. Under the pretext of an innocuous excursion, military students were deployed to the National Palace, the former seat of power, where social protests have concentrated in recent years. This followed repeated mobilizations by fascist groups tied to the military denouncing an electoral fraud.

Only scattered demonstrations, mainly of Semilla supporters, took place on Wednesday and Thursday to protest the coup attempt. The criminal attempts by Semilla to sow complacency and the moves by the pseudo-left to align themselves behind Arévalo have only emboldened the coup plotters.

In media interviews and statements at rallies Arévalo

warned of an attempted “technical coup” and a “rupture of the constitutional order” by forces aligned with the current administration. However, he appealed for “calm” and for the unity of “all sectors of society, independently of their ethnic, political, religious or any background.” He also made reassurances that the TSE “will simply disregard this illegal injunction,” ignoring that it had already obeyed the initial illegal intervention by the Constitutional Court—only the Supreme Justice Court could challenge an election.

Moreover, the first round revealed, above all, overwhelming opposition to the entire political establishment, with more than half of the electorate abstaining or casting null or blank ballots. Torres and Arévalo combined won the support of only 1.5 million out of 9.36 million voters.

While the corrupt clique in power seeks to defend its privileges, Washington has repeatedly backed the electoral results, which favor their preferred candidate, Arévalo. Assistant Secretary of State for the Western Hemisphere Brian A. Nichols plainly declared in a tweet on Thursday: “We expect a free and just runoff in Guatemala on August 20 between Sandra Torres and Bernardo Arévalo.”

The Semilla Movement, whose constituency is limited to the universities, NGOs and other sections of the upper-middle class, has demonstrated that it will do the bidding for US imperialism.

This was most clearly demonstrated by its pressures on the Giammattei government to support sanctions against Russia and Russian companies in Guatemala over the US-NATO war in Ukraine. Arévalo even opposed the buying of Sputnik V vaccines, and has made clear that he does not plan to switch diplomatic relations from Taiwan to Beijing.

The party was created in 2015 by former ministers, diplomats and others belonging to the political elite in support of the International Commission against Impunity in Guatemala (CICIG). The commission was created by the UN with direct orders and financing from Washington to employ select criminal investigations to pressure local political and business leaders. At the time a lobbying group, Semilla took

the first steps toward becoming a party under marching orders from US officials, particularly after corruption charges brought by CICIG against then president Otto Pérez Molina and Vice-President Roxana Baldetti triggered mass protests and forced their resignations.

One of the party's main founders, Alberto Fuentes Knight, a finance minister under UNE later convicted for corruption, has openly acknowledged: "before making the jump from a social to political [organization], we traveled to America to consult with Democrat and Republican representatives on whether it was the right or wrong decision."

The open secret that Semilla operates as a US State Department puppet should be a warning to workers in Guatemala. It is mortally hostile to the working class and will work to suppress any mass mobilization of workers in defense of democratic rights, including its own popular election.

An Arévalo administration will not present any challenge to the super-exploitation of Guatemalan workers and natural resources by US corporations and finance houses and their local partners. Amid a global resurgence of the class struggle against social austerity and attacks on living standards, Arévalo would respond to any struggle by Guatemalan workers through repression and a shift to dictatorial forms of rule, just like every so-called "progressive" government currently in power across the region has done.

Semilla will only further drag the country and the region into a future global maelstrom, with the Pentagon already requesting Latin American governments to send military aid to Ukraine.

The recent history of Guatemala, including in the 1980s when Arévalo was climbing up the diplomatic ranks, has been marked by brutal dictatorships backed by US imperialism that crushed any opposition to social inequality and the unfettered operations of foreign capital.

In June 1954, the CIA orchestrated and launched a military attack from Honduras to overthrow the elected Jacobo Arbenz administration, which had carried out limited agrarian and social reforms. The US provided pilots, warplanes, napalm, Green Berets and organized paramilitary groups that would form death squads in the following decades. Their methods of disappearances of left-wing activists largely helped pioneer those used by the dictatorships in Brazil, Argentina, Uruguay, and Brazil.

Arbenz and his predecessor, Juan José Arévalo—Bernardo Arévalo's father—had been backed by the Stalinist Guatemalan Workers Party (PGT), which was chiefly responsible for betraying the struggle against imperialism and the defense of democratic rights. At the time, its advisers entered the government and openly advocated the development of capitalism, while promoting "Mayan

Marxism," seeking to present the predominantly indigenous peasantry as the revolutionary force in Guatemala and their naturalist beliefs as "Marxist." At the time, the rich Indians largely backed the CIA coup and consistently conspired against the poorest layers. In the 1960s, the PGT dissolved into Castroite guerrillas that were swiftly crushed by the fascistic military, which during the 1980s also waged a genocidal campaign against the Mayan population.

On December 5, 1982, US President Ronald Reagan visited Guatemala to meet General Efraín Ríos Montt, who had recently taken power in a military coup and used the courts—historians still don't know who the judges were—to sentence oppositionists to death. Reagan described him as "a man of great personal integrity" who was "totally dedicated to democracy." During the following three days, the country's elite platoon killed 162 people in the village of Las Dos Erres, including 67 children. The women were raped and buried alive, with placentas and umbilical cords found scattered on the ground. Such massacres by the troops trained and armed by the United States were widespread, when the military did not simply bombard the villages.

US imperialism depends more today than ever before on anti-democratic methods and its influence in the local militaries to guarantee its hegemony and compensate for loss of economic dominance relative to geopolitical rivals, mainly China. The only road to oppose imperialism and its venal client bourgeoisie in Guatemala is the independent political mobilization of the working class under a socialist and internationalist program.



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

[wsws.org/contact](https://www.wsws.org/contact)