

US-backed candidate Bernardo Arévalo wins presidential vote in Guatemala

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22 August 2023

Bernardo Arévalo, a candidate promoted by the pseudo-left and US imperialism alike, won the presidential runoff elections in Guatemala on Sunday with 58 percent of the vote against Sandra Torres, a former first lady who was backed by most of the Guatemalan political establishment.

A figure largely unknown to the general population, the former diplomat and legislator Arévalo was seen as a default option to express popular anger against the traditional political forces that have ruled since the end of the civil war and supposed “transition to democracy” in 1996.

Arévalo’s votes came predominantly from the urban middle class and sections of the working class, including 75 percent of votes in the capital Guatemala City.

The election was marked by an open attempt by sections of the state and fascist groups backed by the incumbent Alejandro Giammattei administration to disqualify Arévalo’s Semilla party and overturn the elections, among other irregularities.

Three top candidates had been disqualified on spurious grounds, and the first round witnessed numerous reports of vote buying, the burning of ballots, police repression and violence against electoral officials. Subsequently, the courts allowed prosecutors and the police to pursue an unconstitutional criminal investigation against Semilla over signatures and financing, leading to several raids against the electoral court and the party’s offices.

Torres, who has refused to acknowledge her defeat, resorted to deranged anti-communist and bigoted propaganda previously employed by the far-right against her own two previous presidential campaigns. Her statements included calling Semilla members “Communists” who are “all effeminate and a bunch of sons of b*****.”

Despite the fascistic threats, Arévalo rallied only limited active support and responded by making assurances that his administration would not impinge on the interests of the business elites and by decrying gay marriage and abortion.

Protests against the coup threats were scattered and small. Moreover, 55 percent of the eligible voters abstained in the second round, similar to the percentage that abstained or cast

blank and null ballots during the first round.

Whatever popular illusions exist in Arévalo among young workers and professionals, they are the product of the efforts by the pseudo-left, the international corporate media and the US State Department to promote Semilla as “progressive.”

Several corporate outlets like the *Washington Post* and *El Pais* wrote that his election would bring about a new “democratic spring,” evoking the mass popular upsurge in 1944 that led to the first popularly elected president in the country, headed by Arévalo’s father Juan José.

There is absolutely no basis for describing Arévalo and Semilla as a left, democratic or progressive alternative to the clientelism of Guatemala’s ruling elite, whose subordination to foreign capital and US imperialism is the main cause of the rampant poverty, inequality, authoritarianism and corruption that characterize Guatemalan social life.

Even the so-called “democratic spring” under J.J. Arévalo and his successor Jacobo Arbenz, who unlike Bernardo came to power based upon a program of democratic, agrarian and social reforms, proved most fundamentally that there is no peaceful or reformist road for the masses in Guatemala and other semi-colonial countries to secure their democratic and social rights.

The CIA, which today backs Semilla, orchestrated the overthrow of Arbenz in 1954, which led to three decades of military dictatorships.

At the time, the main role in disarming the Guatemalan working class against US imperialism and the comprador bourgeoisie was played by the Stalinist Guatemalan Workers Party (PGT), which had been founded in 1944 according to the Moscow bureaucracy’s popular front politics, orienting openly to an alliance of “the working class, the peasants, the patriotic sector of the national bourgeoisie and the petty bourgeoisie.”

The PGT joined the Arbenz regime and advocated solely for capitalist reforms, rejecting any struggle for workers’ power and socialism. Arbenz then refused to arm the workers to resist the coup.

By 1958, the PGT was backing the military regime on the

basis of a “national conciliation” where “Guatemalans from the right and the left, conservative or Communist can live together.” Following the 1959 Cuban Revolution and the ruthless repression against left-wing workers, peasants and intellectuals in Guatemala, the PGT dissolved itself into suicidal guerrilla bands, which were swiftly crushed by the US-trained military and police death squads. The repression involved a genocidal campaign against Mayan Indians.

The remnants of the Stalinist and Maoist guerrillas and indigenous nationalist groups then transformed themselves into bourgeois parties and joined the state bureaucracy after the 1996 “peace” accords, which assured impunity for the military’s war criminals and left untouched the power of the traditional land-owning, banking and commercial oligarchy backed by imperialism.

The coalition of the ex-guerrilla URNG-Maiz and the indigenous nationalist Winaq party endorsed Arévalo, along with the Central American Socialist Party (PSOCA) and other pseudo-left organizations. The Morenoite International Workers League (LIT) and *La Izquierda Diario* stopped short of openly endorsing Semilla, but falsely presented the party as “center-left” and “reformist” and concealed the pro-imperialist record of Arévalo and his party.

In backing Arévalo, the pseudo-left organizations of the middle class are repeating the role played by the PGT of politically disarming the working class, even as the Guatemalan ruling class and US imperialism resort increasingly to the armed forces and dictatorial forms of rule to suppress the class struggle and intensify capitalist exploitation.

The main reason behind the opposition of sections of the ruling elite to Arévalo is the association of his party to the International Commission against Impunity (CICIG), a US-financed and UN-backed agency that pursued select corruption cases to whip the ruling elite into line behind Washington’s political diktats.

Despite the successful drive by the oligarchy to get rid of the CICIG in 2019, the Giammattei administration continued to follow US demands subserviently, including military deployments to attack migrants, the opening of a pilot office in Guatemala where migrants will be compelled to request asylum to the US, maintaining diplomatic relations with Taiwan, and maintaining its embassy in Jerusalem.

But nothing short of political pawns is enough for US imperialism in an international context of economic instability, the US-NATO war against Russia and war preparations against China. And Arévalo has given every indication that he plans to double down on enforcing US diktats. Semilla itself was founded only after consultations with Democrat and Republican officials, on the basis of supporting the CICIG. Moreover, Giammattei has opposed

ending relations with Taiwan and has demanded sanctions against the Russian government and firms.

Even an interviewer of France24 acknowledged that “Arévalo has been described as the most progressive candidate while Sandra Torres has dubbed herself a Liberal, but in practice both candidates are conservatives.” She then asked Eduardo Núñez Vargas, the Central American chief of the National Democratic Institute (NDI) “Was Arévalo’s victory really a punishment for the Guatemalan political establishment?”

After praising Arévalo’s anti-corruption rhetoric, Núñez Vargas insisted that what matters was that Arévalo channeled anti-establishment sentiments with success and, it could be added, with the complicit aid of the pseudo-left.

“From what we saw from his campaign, Arévalo is disposed to have a greater proximity” to Washington, he concluded. The NDI is part of the National Endowment for Democracy (NED), which was created to carry out overtly the political operations that the CIA previously directed covertly, including training and bankrolling US puppets across Latin America.

For his part, Stephen McFarland, US ambassador to Guatemala under Obama, openly backed Arévalo on social media and, in an interview with *Prensa Comunitaria*, said that he enjoys broad bipartisan support in the US Congress. “This means that the argument that Arévalo is supposedly a dangerous leftist has gained no traction or echoed among more-or-less conservative circles in Washington,” he explained.

“The United States has been less successful in using its influence or making its influence have an impact in the Central American countries, including Guatemala, in recent years,” he added, pointing to hopes that Arévalo will facilitate a change in favor of US imperialism.

Then, McFarland made clear that the US government strong-armed the Guatemalan ruling elite to allow for the election of Semilla warning that, “if a judicial coup does take place against the runoff candidates, I expect some sort of sanctions.”



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