Costa Rica: First murder of a journalist in 25 years, a government critic and DEA informant

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Camilo Rodríguez, a right-wing commentator who boasted of passing information to the US Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) and who had accused President Laura Fernández of ties to drug money, was shot dead on November 16. He is the first journalist murdered in Costa Rica in 25 years.

Two gunmen on a stolen motorcycle drew up beside his pickup in heavy traffic in Santo Domingo de Heredia. They fired through the driver's window, then circled the vehicle and fired again through the passenger side to make sure he was dead. Six days later, no one has been arrested. Rodríguez had reported repeated death threats but refused witness protection, which would have required him to stop publishing. The last such killing of a Costa Rican journalist was that of radio journalist Parmenio Medina, who was murdered nearby in 2001.

Rodríguez had political ambitions and belonged to the same far-right milieu as the administration of Fernandez and her predecessor Rodrigo Chaves. In a text read out in the Legislative Assembly after his death, he declared: "I don't attack without evidence. I have shared information with the DEA since December 2022." He sought the presidential nomination of the evangelical Renovación Costarricense in 2021 and headed the San José slate of Aquí Costa Rica Manda in this year's elections, a party that in 2023 took in nine deputies loyal to Chaves.

His explosive and often unsubstantiated accusations targeted drug bosses, the extradited former magistrate Celso Gamboa and, increasingly, figures in the government.

Fernández condemned what she called a "cowardly murder" and added: "Regardless of the content of his communications, what happened today in our country is a stain on freedom of expression." The qualification was a clear reference to the fact that the President was suing him.

Who benefits from the murder of Camilo Rodríguez? While at this point it is impossible to know who ordered the killing, the question must be asked. In August 2025, as a presidential pre-candidate, Fernández filed a defamation complaint after Rodríguez claimed that her house had been built with money from a drug-trafficking network in Cartago. The court admitted the case in February and set trial for March 2027. The case dies with him.

On September 30, asked about Rodríguez's claim that the US had revoked his visa, Chaves, now Fernández's minister of finance and the presidency, replied: "Who can believe a man who has done the things Camilo Rodríguez has done and said? That is dead to me. What's more, I'll put it this way: it was never alive." The presidency insists Chaves was referring to the visa rumor. Rodríguez's lawyer says the journalist filmed a state-owned car watching his apartment.

The government's conduct since the killing providing more damning evidence. Amid growing indications that it is obstructing the investigation, it is using the murder to press its offensive against the judiciary and the remaining checks on executive power and to deepen the subordination of the Costa Rican state to US imperialism. The DEA itself has offered to take part in the case.

This is a government whose president said in September that US ground operations on Costa Rican soil "would obviously do national security a lot of good."

All this unfolds as the working class enters into struggle, with a national teachers' strike on November 11 and a national protest called for December 1.

The day after the murder, the Assembly, controlled by the ruling Sovereign People's Party (PPSO), demanded the resignation of chief prosecutor Carlo Díaz, who is leading the investigation. On November 18, PPSO bench leader Nogui Acosta moved to summon Díaz and the heads of the Judicial Investigation Agency (OIJ) before the narcotics committee over their handling of Rodríguez's complaints.

Meanwhile, the 2027 budget cuts and freezes some ?40 billion ($88 million) of the judiciary's funds. Díaz warned: "Don't ask me for any results, because there will be no verifiable result if the budget is limited the way it is being limited." Chaves answered on X: "What nerve and irresponsibility." Whatever the intentions, the effect is to starve the investigation.

On November 19, Díaz confirmed in Washington that the DEA had offered to "support" the investigation. The murder of a self-described DEA informant is to be investigated with the help of the same agency. The US already holds Gamboa and other traffickers extradited from Costa Rica in March.

Costa Rica belongs to the "Shield of the Americas," the bloc of far-right governments that Washington assembled in March in the name of fighting "narco-terrorism." The record these regimes tells a different story. Fernando Cerimedo, the Argentine digital operative close to Javier Milei, has been jailed in Bolivia since August, while serving as chief adviser to President Rodrigo Paz,

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on charges including drug trafficking, illicit enrichment and ordering the shooting of his former partner, Nadia Beller. Beller, shot three times, warned: "They want to silence me."

On October 1, the Shield's 15 governments, Costa Rica among them, publicly applauded the arrest of the Bolivian attorney general who was prosecuting Cerimedo.

The outlet *Derecha Diario* tied to Cerimedo campaigned for Fernández this year, and her campaign director is linked to his network. Cerimedo's business partner, the Spanish far-right journalist Javier Negre, hailed her as "the candidate of Trump and Rubio."

The "war on drugs" run from Washington is not aimed at insecurity and violence per se. It is the cover under which governments tied to drug money build the machinery of repression.

From Tinoco to Fernández

Costa Rica, the so-called "Switzerland of Central America," is closer to dictatorship than at any time since the dictatorship of the Tinoco brothers. On January 27, 1917, War Minister Federico Tinoco overthrew President Alfredo González Flores. González had responded to the collapse of coffee revenues during the First World War with an income tax and a tax on idle land, measures that turned the coffee and banking oligarchy against him. The coup was backed by that oligarchy, the press and the army. The regime imposed censorship and filled the jails, and in 1918 its troops killed opposition leader and journalist Rogelio Fernández Güell.

In mid-1919, women teachers and students led protests that ended with the burning of the official newspaper *La Información*. Tinoco fled to Paris in August 1919, days after his brother José Joaquín, the minister of war, was assassinated. At the time, the Wilson administration refused to recognize Tinoco. Today, Washington sponsors the drive to dictatorship.

The settlement that followed the 1948 civil war is now coming apart. When José Figueres abolished the army on December 1, 1948, he disarmed the defeated Calderonistas and their Stalinist allies, placed external defense under the Pentagon through the Rio Treaty and freed revenue for the social spending that bought two generations of relative class peace. The December 1 protest will take place on the anniversary of that abolition, as the President openly entertains US ground operations on Costa Rican soil.

Chaves and Fernandez have used an upsurge in investments as part of US near-shoring and a strong currency not to expand social programs, but to undercut the relative edge in public education and healthcare that the country had compared to the rest of the region and cater to local and foreign creditors and corporations with tax incentives and debt issuance.

Costa Rica is no exception to the collapse of the social basis of any so-called labor peace that is affecting the entire region and world. Unemployment rose to 6.5 percent in the third quarter, the first significant rise in five years, and jobs in the free trade zones fell in July for the first time in seven years.

Thousands of teachers struck on November 11 against education cuts. Fernández branded them "vagrants" and moved to have the strike declared illegal. Now 53 organizations have called a "sit-in for democracy" for December 1 over the state's debt to social security, university cuts and the Rodríguez murder.

These movements remain under the political control of the nominal opposition, National Liberation (PLN), the Broad Front and the union bureaucracies. They seek to channel the anger of workers and youth behind the defense of one faction of the state apparatus against another. When the Constitutional Chamber struck down the budget freeze, the opposition deputies and the universities celebrated alongside the OIJ and the judiciary.

Democracy is incompatible with capitalist exploitation and social inequality. Costa Rica has long been one of the most unequal countries in the world, for which the entire political and union establishment and the capitalist state they defend are responsible.

They oppose Fernández not over the class aims of her government, but over who will administer them. Their conflict is a dispute within the ruling class over who sets economic policy and who controls tax incentives, contracts and the exchange rate, with each faction courting its own patrons in the US ruling class and state apparatus. Tellingly, the chief prosecutor, the opposition's emblem of democratic institutions, took his investigation to Washington.

The defense of democratic rights, safety, jobs and living standards cannot be entrusted to these forces. A working class subordinated to them will see its strikes declared illegal by the courts it was told to defend, and its country integrated into Washington's war machine by whichever faction wins its patrons' favor. Teachers, health workers, free trade zone workers and students need rank-and-file committees, independent of the unions and of every party of the establishment, linked to the workers now striking across Latin America and to the international working class. Above all, they need to build a Costa Rican section of the International Committee of the Fourth International.

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