

Do “Peace Accords” Lead to Peace, Justice and Security for the People?

Lessons from El Salvador for the Columbian FARC

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In Memory of Manuel Marulanda, Farabundo Marti and Augusto Sandino

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Introduction

It is commonly assumed that “peace agreements” between pro-US rightwing regimes and leftwing insurgents lead to peace, justice and greater security. A number of peace agreements which were signed and implemented in the 1990’s in Central America , South Africa , Philippines and elsewhere provide us with ample data over two decades to confirm or reject this commonplace assumption.

We will examine the case of El Salvador where a powerful guerilla movement (FMLN) signed off on a peace accord in 1992.

Method of Evaluating the Peace Accord

In approaching the analysis of the Peace Accord it is important to begin by focusing on the evolution of the FMLN – the ideological, organizational and political changes that led to the negotiations, the eventual pact with the rightwing regime and the socio-economic and political results. The second part of the essay compares and contrasts the socio-economic and political results and policies which followed from the pact and how they affected the mass of the people. This allows us to see who benefited and who lost; what socio-economic class and political structures emerged; what foreign policies were followed.

The third section of the paper will focus on drawing lessons which can be learned from the El Salvador experience which are applicable to the current Colombian peace negotiations between the FARC and the Santos regime.

The FMLN: From Socialist Revolution to Capitalist Electoralism

In 1980 four major guerilla groups joined forces to form the Farabundo Marti National Liberation Front (FMLN). The leading component, the FPL, envisioned a prolonged struggle, uniting the guerilla and mass movements in a common anti-imperialist and social revolutionary struggle. The lesser allies, led by the Communist Party envisioned a two stage

“democratic to social revolution”.

In a little over two years, the three minority components, the ERP, the Communist Party, the RN shifted FMLN policies, eliminating the struggle for socialism based on workers and peasants in favor of a ‘democratic revolution’, which included the “progressive modern bourgeois”. As the struggle continued, the internal alignments of the FMLN favored a further turn to the ‘center’.. FMLN leaders emphasized political incorporation into the electoral system, legalization of the FMLN, the opening of negotiations without any prior agreements and a willingness to work within the capitalist-electoral framework. When negotiations began the FMLN dropped its demand for dismantling of the military, the expropriation of the leading financial, banking, commercial and mining interests and accepted a “truth commission” which would “examine” war crimes – the mass murder of over 75,000 civilians.

By 1992 when the peace agreement was signed, the ex-guerillas, the El Salvadorian regime and the US government hailed it as a “great historical turning point opening the country and people to a new era of peace and prosperity”. Most leftist academics and journalists joined the chorus hailing the “pragmatism” and “flexibility” of the leaders of the FMLN. European social democrats, especially the Spanish Socialist regime offered training courses to the ex-guerillas, on the ways and means of acting in government and municipal affairs.

Evaluating the Politics of the FMLN in Opposition and Government

Once the FMLN leaders turned from armed struggle and mass mobilization to electoral politics, they directly benefited: many were elected to public office and secured middle class living standards. As Congress people, political advisers, staff assistants and mayors, the FMLN elite received substantial salaries, bought homes in middle class neighborhoods, new automobiles and obtained security guards for protection.

Most FMLN politicians retained a social democratic ideology and mouthed radical rhetoric. Some, like the former head of the ERP, Joaquin Villalobos allied with the rightwing, denounced the popular movements, received a scholarship to Oxford and became a consultant for murderous death squad regimes in Colombia, Philippines, North Ireland and elsewhere.

The urban and rural mass movements were virtually abandoned by the FMLN turned electoral party. During the mass uprising between 1980 – 1990, the peasants secured a land reform, public employees’ salaries increased, and popular organizations proliferated as the government and US attempted to undercut the mass base of the insurgency. Once the FMLN leaders entered the parliament and prioritized electoral politics, the pressure on the ruling classes was relieved, mass struggle declined and land reform ended. The trade unions received scant support from the FMLN politicians. The FMLN led by Shafik Handal pursued an alliance with the “modern bourgeoisie” to “isolate” the “traditional” landowning oligarchy”, to stabilize democracy and ensure their position in Congress as a “loyal opposition”. In 2009 the FMLN won the presidency running a neo-liberal Christian Democrat Mauricio Funes and gained a plurality in Congress.

Salvadorian Society After the Peace Pact

The FMLN signed the so-called peace pact without any democratic dialogue with

their members, without consulting the mass social movements; they discarded the major structural reforms which thousands of militants fought for and died. Instead they 'consulted' their own interests in a parliamentary career. They dictated their settlement to their middle level cadres, expelled critics and directed the masses to acquiesce offering them more phony and broken promises "to continue the struggle". They reneged on promises for jobs, income and land redistribution; the 'reform' of the military and judicial processes against officials involved in massive human rights violations never took place.

From 1992 to 2013, El Salvador continues as the country with the second worst inequalities in Latin America . Unemployment especially for young people continues to exceed over 50%. Over 60% of the "working population" does not have formal employment. They work without pensions, health plans, vacations or social security, mostly in low paid "services", i.e. street vendors, domestic servants etc. Over 2.5 million Salvadorians were forced to migrate to other countries for lack of opportunities. They young guerilla fighters were abandoned by their guerilla leaders. Some were offered land, but without training, credit, extension services, they turned to urban and rural drug gangs. Over 25,000 mostly young people are members of drug gangs. El Salvador has the second highest rate of violent homicide in the Americas . In fact more Salvadorians have been murdered in the aftermath of the "Peace Pact" (1992-2012) than were killed during the civil war (1980-91). From March 2012 when the two principle gangs signed a truce the killings have sharply declined.

The Peace Agreement set up a "Truth Commission" to uncover and prosecute war crimes and human rights violations. Instead the Generals and military elite were granted an amnesty. The Commission lacked financial and political support and no war criminals, even those identified with the most egregious crimes were ever tried let alone sent to jail.

The main beneficiaries of the Peace Pact were the 'modern bourgeois' - the banking, commercial, agro-business, maquiladora elite - who reaped high profits, paid little taxes, received state subsidies and exploited cheap labor in the maquiladoras. Private security companies prospered as the new rich ruling class - including the "new rich", FMLN elite-hired an army of private guards armed with automatic rifles and sub-machine guns, to protect their homes, businesses, private clubs and resorts.

El Salvador is a neo-liberal paradise' before and after the Presidential victory of the FMLN; free trade agreements, low wages, no-union, low paid maquiladora workers, in the free trade zones are the centerpiece of FMLN economic policy.

The so-called "Democratic Revolution" has been emptied of any socio-economic content. The social distance between the leaders of the FMLN and their business contractor allies on the one hand and the masses is abysmal. The FMLN leaders live in modern apartments and houses, protected by three meter walls covered with broken glass and barbed wire, with paved streets and flowered gardens. The majority of poor Salvadorians live in crowded hovels, on unpaved streets, controlled by armed drug gangs and corrupt police officials.

The FMLN regime has supported the US and EU free market agreement in Central America and US military bases. Their "free trade policies" undermine small and medium producers . Their military ties to the Pentagon strengthen the US military position against Venezuela and Ecuador .

Political Consequences of Peace Pact

During the civil war, the class struggle raised class consciousness, enhanced independent class organization and forced the ruling class and its US 'mentors' to make concessions including a land reform for peasants and wage increases for labor. In the aftermath of the peace pact, the mass organizations have diminished in size and militancy; leaders have been co-opted by the FMLN elite. Centralized political control over social movements ensures conformity to neo-liberal policies. FMLN attempts to legitimize its embrace of the current socio-economic order by citing its "glorious and heroic guerrilla past".

Corrupt FMLN politicians evoke their past role as "guerrilla commanders" to cover up their current corrupt links to the economic elite. Whenever, a trade union goes on strike for higher wages or better working conditions, such as the health, educational or municipal workers, the FMLN leaders accuse them of "politics" or "aiding" the bourgeois opposition.

The FMLN has become a bureaucratic political machine driven by elite factions fighting for positions of power and privilege within the neoliberal state bureaucracy.

In the face of the abject failure of the FMLN and its government to attend to the most elementary needs of the urban poor and peasants, several hundred NGOs, funded by US AID and EU regimes, and set up by middle class professionals have established local self-help projects, that enrich the NGO leaders, undermine local social movements and fail to reduce poverty.

Given the lack of peace, security, and social justice and the decline of social movements, is it any wonder that tens of thousands of Salvadorian flee their country every year? There are over 2.5 million Salvadoreans living abroad, over 90% in the USA .

Conclusion: Why the Peace Pact Failed

From any objective analysis, it is clear that the peace pact signed by the FMLN has failed to meet the most minimum socio-economic and political demands of its mass supporters. Despite great sacrifices and untold examples of personal heroism, the great mass of Salvadorians were defrauded of any positive outcome. The powerful movements were dismantled by decree of the guerrilla commanders. The top leaders who dictated policy either because collaborators with the US military (Villalobos) or allies of the so-called "progressive" bourgeoisie.

Various lessons can be drawn.

- (1) A militant military past is no guarantee of progressive socio-economic commitments after a negotiated settlement.
- (2) A peace agreement dictated by an elite is likely to sacrifice mass socio-economic interests in order to secure political respectability.
- (3) Foreign 'radical' allies, like Cuba , have their own political interests in securing regional stability and peace, which may not coincide with the socio-economic needs of a revolutionary mass movement.
- (4) Peace agreements must include the direct influence of the representatives of mass

popular movements and incorporate their demands.

(5) Peace agreements which disarm the insurgents and maintain the military, which sustain the economic ruling class and its control over all the strategic sectors of the economy, results in the continuation of neo-liberal policies, US military bases and the incorporation of former guerilla leaders into a corrupt, reactionary political system.

(6) A peace pact that does not lead to massive public investments in jobs, public works, agrarian reform and other productive activity will result in unemployed armed young people turning to violent crime and drug trafficking.

(7) Ex-guerilla leaders who promote their electoral careers and work within the system, adopt neo-liberal policies— as numerous examples demonstrate. In Colombia for example Antonio Navarro Wolff formerly of the M-19 became an ally of then President Alvaro Uribe's death squad regime when he was governor of Nariño. Teodoro Petkoff, the Venezuelan ex-guerilla, became the architect of the IMF austerity program of President Caldera. Joaquin Villalobos the former Salvadorian guerilla leader of the ERP became an adviser to the CIA and any murderous regime which paid his lucrative consultation fees. The people's movements must establish their socio-economic priorities and presence in any "peace process".

Incorporation of the guerillas into the electoral system should have the lowest priority.

The vast majority of the workers, peasants and students want peace that is accompanied by structural changes in the socio-economic system. This includes expropriation of fertile, irrigated land; the end of trade union repression and new labor laws protecting large scale unionization; doubling the minimum wage and the formation of workers' committees to oversee management.

Large scale public program to create employment require new progressive taxes on the rich to provide financing of infrastructures and productive enterprises. Environmental agencies composed of ecologists, Indian and peasant leaders need to be empowered to regulate mining operations and to enforce an equitable distribution of tax receipts and royalty payments.

Above all a peace agreement requires the democratization of the state: the dismantling of Special Forces, counter-insurgency programs, advisory missions and foreign military bases. The abject failure of the FMLN to change Salvadorian society and improve the socio-economic position of the masses was directly linked to their insertion in the capitalist state and subordination to the neo-liberal economy.

The "stage theory" of FMLN guru Shafik Handel argued that "capitalist modernization and democracy" in alliance with the modern bourgeoisie was the 'immediate goal' and socialism was for the "distant future". This "stage theory" overlooked the fact that the "modern bourgeoisie" was structurally tied to the traditional landowning, banking and imperial elites and was not in any way committed to any so-called "democratic revolution". The FMLN, discarded socialism, never achieved a "democratic revolution" and ended up presiding over a crime infested, impoverished country in which the political elite joined the same country clubs as their former class enemies.

It behooves the FARC to carefully study the negative lessons of the past, the disastrous

peace agreements of Central America , the MR-19 surrender to the narco-state, in order to pursue a peace agreement that consults and benefits the majority and not simply secures seats in Congress.

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