

افغانستان آزاد – آزاد افغانستان

AA-AA

چو کشور نپاشد تن من مباد بدین بوم ویر زنده یک تن مباد
همه سر به سر تن به کشتن دهیم از آن به که کشور به دشمن دهیم

www.afgazad.com

afgazad@gmail.com

European Languages

زبان های اروپایی

<http://www.counterpunch.org/2016/05/06/the-wall-street-journal-is-playing-dirty-in-el-salvador-again/print/>

The Wall Street Journal is Playing Dirty in El Salvador, Again

By Hilary Goodfriend
May 6, 2016

San Salvador, El Salvador.

As usual, *Wall Street Journal* columnist Mary Anastasia O’Grady has raked up such a scandalous mountain of defamation, fabrication and redbaiting in her most recent piece on the power struggles within El Salvador’s oligarchic private sector that it’s hard to know where to start. The task of refuting Ms. O’Grady is daunting to the point of exhaustion. That is, of course, a hallmark of this kind of Reaganite Cold War propaganda: overwhelm the public with so much misinformation that those seeking the truth are left far behind as they scramble to disprove, fact-by-fact, the long-cold trail of lies.

Yet Ms. O’Grady’s column raises a deeply perplexing question: Why on earth should the internal elections within a remote Salvadoran business association make headlines in one of the country’s most widely circulated periodicals? To explore this, we must not lose ourselves in each incendiary absurdity, and instead examine the narrative.

Ms. O’Grady’s principal argument appears to be that bloodthirsty Soviet-Chavista-Cuban totalitarians have high-jacked El Salvador, turning what was once a free-market paradise into a Venezuelan hellscape of public pensions and environmental regulations.

It is worth noting that El Salvador's government is not in fact trying to "nationalize the privatized pension system," but in fact has proposed a mixed public-private system to reform the dimly unsustainable and inequitable current system that only covers 25% of the working population and has generated over \$250 million in profits for private pension fund administrators while indebting the government to those same companies to the tune of millions.

To make her point, O'Grady has oddly fixated on the internal elections within the National Association of Private Enterprise (ANEP), which houses El Salvador's notoriously oligarchic economic elite—including the ownership of the country's three principal television channels, both major newspapers, and, of course, the private pension companies. While she deems ANEP "one of the new remaining independent bodies capable of challenging" the progressive government, the Association is by no means independent: it is the economic wing of the far-right Nationalist Republican Alliance (ARENA) party (former president Tony Saca, who governed El Salvador with ARENA from 2005-2009, was first president of ANEP from 2001-2003). ARENA ruled El Salvador for 20 consecutive years (1989-2009) with enthusiastic US backing, and oversaw the implementation of massive privatizations (including the pension system), market deregulations and devastating free-trade deals, while brazenly looting the treasury for personal enrichment. Naturally, the party has spent the last seven years trying to claw its way back into power, and O'Grady is here to help. In fact, O'Grady has always been here to help out ARENA in a pinch, regularly publishing electoral propaganda for the Right during Salvadoran election seasons. But I digress.

O'Grady claims that ANEP's "political independence" is at risk, and echoes the current leadership of ANEP's accusations that the Salvadoran government supports an alternative candidate, Carlos Guerrero, for election to the Association's presidency. In fact, thanks to the aggressive transnational campaign waged by O'Grady and her Salvadoran associates, Guerrero has already resigned from the race, leaving the vote uncontested. But O'Grady's argument to disqualify Guerrero is interesting.

She notes that he was Minister of the Environment when the last ARENA administration ceded to overwhelming public opposition to metallic mining by applying existing environmental protections more rigorously—a move that enraged companies like the Canadian Pacific Rim gold mining corporation, which proceeded to sue El Salvador for hundreds of millions for *potential* lost profits in a shadowy World Bank investor-state tribunal. The verdict in that case, which has already cost the Salvadoran State over \$12.7 million and become a worldwide symbol of the dangers of free trade investor protections, could be announced any day.

O'Grady then turns to Pacific Rim CEO Thomas Shrake himself, who she introduces as the victim of audacious public environmental protections. He joins O'Grady in lamenting the loss of his imagined transnational corporate profits. O'Grady doesn't mention Marcelo Rivera, Ramiro Rivera and Alicia Sorto, some of the anti-mining activists who were brutally murdered during their active struggle against Pacific Rim's proposed El Dorado mining project in the northern province of Cabañas. Nor does she mention the enormous environmental risks of the toxic gold extraction process that have driven the mass popular mobilizations against mining in El Salvador, a small, densely-populated nation where much of the dwindling watershed is already contaminated.

The intervention of Pacific Rim, which is now owned by the Australian mining company Oceana Gold, into the internal elections of El Salvador's most powerful business group is certainly unusual. Perhaps O'Grady is using her column as a platform to champion Pacific Rim's case as a verdict nears. Perhaps her intentions go further.

O'Grady's efforts to smear the progressive government of Central America's tiniest nation coincide with a broader regional right-wing campaign to turn back the pink tide in Latin America and re-instate the repressive neoliberal regimes of the past, with full US support. Argentina has already succumbed, where the newly-elected President Macri has already enacted sweeping economic reforms, including massive public-sector layoffs. Despite the enormous public backlash to these measures, the Obama administration's response has been open arms. In Brazil, corrupt opposition lawmakers are advancing in their efforts to illegally unseat democratically-elected President Dilma Rouseff of the progressive Worker's Party. El Salvador's right-wing opposition and its US allies have been salivating as these dramas unfold to the south.

O'Grady is not as savvy as her southern counterparts; while she remains stubbornly lodged in the Cold War, the Miami-based strategists have turned to more sophisticated public relations methods, adopting cynical discourses of anti-corruption. Their motives, however, remain the same.

El Salvador's economic weight and political influence is small-time even compared to its Central American neighbors, not to mention powerhouses like Brazil and Argentina. Yet O'Grady's clumsy fixation on the country further demonstrates a decades-old fact: El Salvador's outsized importance for US political and corporate interests.

We should not be surprised by these sort of flailing partisan distortions and attacks on El Salvador's modest resistance to corporate control. But we should reproach the *Wall Street Journal* for lending their pages to them.