

Prospects of Return to El Salvador Pose Difficult Choice

The Trump administration's decision to rescind Temporary Protected Status for people from El Salvador (as well as Nicaragua, Sudan and Haiti) is confronting migrants with a terrible choice, explained Ramon Cardona in an interview with Dennis J. Bernstein.

By Dennis J. Bernstein

On January 8, the Trump administration abruptly put an end to Temporary Protected Status (TPS) for Salvadorans now living and working in the US. Many have been in the country for 15 or 20 years, and have established jobs and families. Nearly 200,000 Salvadorans now living in the U.S. may be affected. According to the the U.S. Department of Homeland Security, Salvadorans, who account for about 60% of TPS recipients, will have until Sept. 9, 2019 to either adjust their status if eligible, make plans to return to El Salvador, or face deportation.

According to many immigrant and human rights groups, those being sent back will face harsh economic conditions and will probably end up unemployed. Some will be physically brutalized and possibly murdered in what has become one of the most violent countries in the world.

The following interview with Ramon Cardona, a former U.S.-based government official of the FMLN in El Salvador, and director of Centro Latino Cuzcatlan in Northern California, is part of a series for Consortiumnews.com on the multiple issues surrounding the battle for truly fair and humane immigration reform. "It's shocking," Cardona said. "It's news that we kind of expected, but now that it's official, it hurts."

I spoke to Cardona on January 9th, 2018.

Dennis Bernstein: I think it would be good for you to tell us a little bit about your history, and how TPS came to pass and the impact of its sudden spiking by President Trump.

Ramon Cardona: I am an immigrant from El Salvador. I was brought to the United States as a teenager. Currently I run Centro Latino Cuzcatlan, a community-based agency providing immigration services mainly to the Latino community.

I have been involved with the Salvadoran solidarity movement since my university years back in the 1970s. I witnessed the first fight in Congress for protective

status, which we eventually won in 1990 when Congress was made aware that Salvadoran deportees were being systematically labeled as subversives and murdered by the National Guard. Later, in 1997, the Nicaraguan and Central American Relief Act was passed which made these people legal permanent residents.

Today, the Salvadoran community receives shocking news when Homeland Security stated that TPS will no longer continue for Salvadorans, who are being given an 18-month reprieve to “put their things in order” and return home.

On average, these people have been living over twenty years in the United States. They have made their homes here, their children were born on U.S. territory. They contribute some \$4.5 billion in remittances, which is nearly equal to the national budget of El Salvador last year. What they basically need is for their temporary status to be made permanent.

DB: How many people are affected and could you tell us about some of the people you know who will be directly impacted?

RC: 188,000 Salvadorans are TPS recipients and another 192,000 are U.S.-born children. By September 2019, many thousands of families have to make a horrendous decision, whether to revert back to undocumented status, lose their work permits and be vulnerable to deportation or return to a country rife with violence of every form, rampant unemployment and a dire lack of public services. How will such a country be able to integrate tens of thousands of Salvadorans?

This decision by Homeland Security is based on the false claim that the conditions that prompted Temporary Protected Status back in 2001 have been overcome and the government is capable of integrating these people back into society. People are coming to us and asking us what they should do now, what is going to happen. Will they be able to obtain permanent legal residence? We are telling people to seek proper legal advice and find out what other immigration laws apply to their situation.

And we are advising them to join the struggle to pressure the U.S. Congress to once and for all recognize these people as productive members of society in the United States. A third of these people are paying on home mortgages. Many are business owners providing jobs in their communities. Every 18 months they have to pay a substantial amount of money to continue getting benefits and have to go through FBI background checks. Anyone who is found to have committed a crime loses all their benefits. It would be to everyone’s benefit for Congress to adopt a solution for permanent residency.

DB: Please take a moment to remind people of the conditions which forced this

massive migration to the United States from El Salvador and the role that the United States played.

RC: The first large migration from El Salvador took place in the late 1970's when the US-backed military government carried out a program of terror and repression in answer to a revolutionary pro-democracy movement. Military death squads went after union people, university students, teachers, organized public employees. Many people took to the mountains and joined the FMLN and many sought refuge outside El Salvador's borders. This was in the late seventies and throughout the 1980's.

A settlement was reached with the INS [Immigration and Naturalization Service] to address the fact that Salvadoran and Guatemalan refugees were soliciting political asylum and seeing only one or two percent approval rates, while others coming from Poland or claiming to be fleeing the Sandinistas in Nicaragua were seeing upwards of 70% approval rates.

DB: This was at a time when priests were being killed, when Archbishop Oscar Romero was shot through the throat while saying mass. We saw nuns beaten, raped and killed. The U.S. government didn't want people coming to the US and telling this story.

RC: That time was a part of our collective history. Many, many families had members who were murdered or disappeared.

DB: While the U.S. government was perpetrating this violence, we saw the emergence of the sanctuary movement here. The number of people coming across the border was a direct barometer of the intensity of the wars that the U.S. was prosecuting in El Salvador and Guatemala. This is the dirty history that the United States is still trying to cover up.

RC: And then we have to ask how the high levels of generalized violence in El Salvador today got started. It began with mass deportations of youngsters who grew up in Los Angeles, went to jail there, joined gangs there, and then got deported to a hopeless existence in El Salvador. All they could do was join a gang.

Again, this last year, El Salvador was the most violent country in Central America and one of the most violent countries throughout the world. Anyone coming to El Salvador from the United States is an automatic target because it is assumed they have money.

DB: Are you getting any support from members of Congress or the administration who oppose what Homeland Security is doing?

RC: There are two legislative initiatives, one presented by New York Congresswoman Lydia Velazquez, which already has the support of nearly 100 representatives, most of them Democrats. There is also a bipartisan initiative that was started by Carlos Curbelo, a Republican representative from Florida.

But we know that both initiatives are up against very powerful anti-immigrant forces in Congress and we also have a president who ran for office calling Latin American immigrants rapists and criminals.

DB: As regards El Salvador, there is a lot of blood on the hands of U.S. politicians and they have a responsibility now to act. What do you think is the best way for people to get involved now? I imagine you want the support of as many people as possible.

RC: One of our challenges is to reach out to all TPS's and make sure they get proper legal counsel. When a U.S.-born child becomes 21 years of age, they can seek access to permanent residency. We have to speak directly to people to make sure they understand that there are legal options, even if they have already been charged with deportation orders.

There is also a national campaign that people can link to at www.savetps.com. We are going to Washington, D.C. between the 4th and the 6th of February, not just Salvadorans, but Nicaraguans and Haitians, who also benefit from TPS. And of course we continue to lobby Congress to take responsibility for this situation.

Dennis J. Bernstein is a host of "Flashpoints" on the Pacifica radio network and the author of [Special Ed: Voices from a Hidden Classroom](#). You can access the audio archives at www.flashpoints.net.

Tom Perez, the Democratic Party's Grim Metaphor

Tom Perez's lackluster first year as head of the Democratic National Committee provides a metaphoric glimpse into the waning influence of the Democratic Party as a whole, explains Norman Solomon.

By Norman Solomon

Sometimes a party's leader seems to symbolize an enduring malaise. For Democrats in 2018, that institutional leader is Tom Perez.

While serving as secretary of labor during President Obama's second term, Perez gained a reputation as an advocate for workers and civil rights. That image may have helped him win a narrow election among Democratic leaders to become chair of the Democratic National Committee, with the backing of Hillary Clinton loyalists eager to prevent the top DNC job from going to Bernie Sanders supporter Rep. Keith Ellison.

Perez's leadership of the DNC during the last 11 months has been mediocre at best. The problems go far beyond administrative failings, lack of inspirational impacts or shortcomings in fundraising. His mode of using progressive rhetoric while purging progressives from key DNC committees reflected a pattern.

At the top of the DNC, the Clinton wing's determination to keep the progressive base at arm's length has not abated – while, at the same time, the DNC proclaims its commitment to the progressive base. The contradiction exists because of Democratic Party priorities revolving around corporate power.

To align the DNC with a grassroots base that is notably more progressive and has enormous energy to challenge Wall Street and the oligarchy, it would be necessary to welcome that energy instead of trying to keep it at bay.

Rhetoric aside, the DNC leadership is hardly oriented to challenging the corporate domination that imposes so much economic injustice. Some disturbing indicators of the current chair's orientation can be found in his Obama-era record as an assistant attorney general as well as head of the Labor Department.

"Before Tom Perez was Labor Secretary granting waivers to indicted banks, he was at the Justice Department not prosecuting Steve Mnuchin for illegally foreclosing on active duty troops," financial specialist Matt Stoller pointed out in a recent tweet.

A former budget staffer on Capitol Hill, Stoller wrote an investigative report last February for *The Intercept* that laid out in detail how Perez refused to confront the criminal actions of large banks and their top executives during his eight years at the Justice and Labor departments. Stoller noted that "the reluctance to take on Wall Street has been a hallmark of the modern Democratic Party – and has served as an electoral headwind up and down the ticket."

And, Stoller wrote, Perez "represents the finance-friendly status quo that has relegated Democrats to minority status."

During the electoral tailspin of 2016, Perez was all in with Clinton's battle against Sanders. On Feb. 5, 2016 – just after Clinton had squeaked through the Iowa caucuses – Perez sent an email to Clinton campaign chairman John Podesta, looking ahead to the imminent primary in New Hampshire and caucuses in Nevada.

Reporting that “I was in NH on Sunday and Nevada on Monday and Tuesday for HRC,” Perez offered advice on how to counter the Sanders campaign, such as trying to promote a narrative that “Bernie does well only among young white liberals.”

Perez closed his email memo to Podesta with a reference to the next Clinton-Sanders debate: “Let me know how I can be of further assistance. I believe I am heading to Milwaukee next Thursday to help with debate spin.”

These days, two years later, Perez is publicly voicing strong support for the recommendations of the DNC’s Unity Reform Commission, which has called for some important steps toward a more democratic Democratic Party – including a 60 percent reduction in unelected superdelegates for the 2020 national convention. Yet we don’t know what Perez is privately saying to fellow Clinton loyalists on the Rules and Bylaws Committee that is now very slowly taking up those recommendations.

Perez had seen to it that this key committee would be bereft of Sanders supporters. There are signs that the committee is slow-walking the recommendations toward a watered-down morass – which progressives should demand must not happen.

While, in recent days, progressive outrage has been rightly focused on the cave-in of Democratic “leadership” in the Senate during the brief government shutdown, the stasis of the DNC sank further into the shadows when the Rules and Bylaws Committee adjourned a two-day meeting on Jan. 20. It appears that even the compromise reforms painstakingly hammered out by the party’s Unity Reform Commission for the better part of 2017 are in jeopardy.

In short, the corporate power structure of the Democratic Party, institutionalized in the DNC, has not given up on blocking efforts to reform the party and how it chooses a presidential nominee. One of the key battlegrounds will be over the compromise reform proposal to eliminate three-fifths of the superdelegates at the party’s national convention; these were entrenched Democrats who lined up behind Hillary Clinton by the hundreds for the 2016 nomination before a single vote was cast by the masses in a primary or caucus.

Meanwhile, under Perez’s uninspiring leadership, the DNC’s fundraising has been second-rate. At latest report, the DNC had only \$6.4 million in cash on hand, while the Republican National Committee had \$39.8 million cash on hand. Last week, a Vice article quoted a “Democratic official who has worked with Perez” as saying: “Tom is just really miserable in the job, which is part of why it’s not going well. He hates the fundraising and says no to so much of the fundraising even though they are obviously not in good shape financially.”

You'd think that with so much at stake and such a big hole to dig out of, Perez would be concentrating all his labors on being DNC chair. But last year, in late summer, Brown University announced that Perez would be spending the full 2017-18 academic year as a "senior fellow" at the Watson Institute for International and Public Affairs. "Throughout the year, Perez will engage with students, faculty, and visitors," the university said. He "will lead a study group in which students will engage in open-ended discussions and free-flow give and take with leading figures in American politics."

The university said that Perez would be meeting with the study group at Brown "for an hour and a half seven times this [fall] semester," and he "will hold informal lunches and office hours." A spokeswoman for Brown University confirmed to me this week that Perez is continuing this role through the spring.

That the Democratic National Committee tolerates its chair frequently shuttling to Rhode Island to teach a college course while the Democratic Party is supposed to be going all-out to defeat Republicans this year tells us a lot about the quality of the current DNC leadership.

Norman Solomon is the coordinator of the online activist group RootsAction.org and the executive director of the Institute for Public Accuracy. He is the author of a dozen books including "War Made Easy: How Presidents and Pundits Keep Spinning Us to Death." Solomon was a member of the independent task force that wrote the recent report "[Autopsy: The Democratic Party in Crisis.](#)"

Migration Reform from a Native American Perspective

Congress has agreed to a temporary funding measure to end the government shutdown, but there is still no guarantee for bipartisan immigration reform. Native American activist Bill Means discussed the issue of humane reform with Dennis J. Bernstein.

By Dennis J. Bernstein

Following a brief government shutdown over the weekend, House Democrats conceded to fund the government until February 8. The deal came after congressional Republicans agreed to fund the Children's Health Insurance Programs for six years and promised a discussion on DACA. But many viewed this concession as a betrayal by the Democrats, who have not been guaranteed any reasonable action on

immigration reform in return for re-opening the government.

In the following freewheeling discussion, I spoke with Bill Means about the quest for truly humane immigration reform in the context of the current Trump crackdown on so-called illegal aliens. Means also addressed the nature of immigration and forced migration as a result of highly destructive U.S. free trade policies.

We also discussed the recent decision by a federal court to dismiss charges against renegade ranchers in Nevada, while still holding under lock and key protesters who stood bravely against the pipeline at Standing Rock.

Bill Means is co-founder of the American Indian Movement and also sits on the board of the International Indian Treaty Council. I spoke to Means on January 23rd, 2018.

Dennis Bernstein: We have now seen the weak-kneed, spineless Democrats take a half-assed stand and capitulate to the Republicans, and we find ourselves again at the mercy of right-wing extremists in terms of so-called immigration reform.

Bill Means: Real immigration reform is being opposed by all these white males, all of whom were immigrants as little as two or three generations ago. They act as if they were indigenous peoples themselves!

It is disgraceful that we are treating in this manner people who are contributing greatly to the well-being of American society at all levels. It is pretty audacious for this Congress to make deals on behalf of the so-called immigrants.

We call them "migrants" because they have a right to be here as our friends and relatives to the south. Most of these people are Indian descendants. They probably have more Indian blood than a lot of Indians alive today in America.

It used to be that if you had one-quarter Indian blood you were an Indian, according to the U.S. government. A lot of these people should be allowed in based on their Indian heritage, if nothing else, or there should be some sort of path to citizenship for them. There has been some talk among tribal governments giving amnesty to these migrants on their reservations so that they wouldn't have to leave the country and could seek, in this way, a path to citizenship.

DB: Let's talk about this concept of "border security." We know that there are many tribes that live on both sides of the border who are being devastated by these border policies. We are hearing that we can't have a deal without there being a wall.

BM: There has been a wall for many years, a partial one. In some parts there are mountains and canyons that would make a wall almost impossible to erect. But a wall was something that was tried in Berlin, has been tried in Palestine. All it does is divide people from their relatives.

In the south of Arizona and New Mexico we have about twelve tribes living on or near the border. Their people travel back and forth every day, either for employment or for social services like medical care. Many of these people are already known by border control and the department of immigration. This wall has been going up for many years.

We had a conference in Arizona in 2004 and at that time the border was still open, at least in the Indian areas. Then came law enforcement of all kinds: border patrol, U.S. marshals, FBI, National Guard. They all moved in to predominantly Indian territory and began to set up their operations, disrupting the everyday life of our communities and desecrating many of our sacred sites.

We have seen a diminishment of many of the rights that people had prior to this wall going up. The human rights of these Indian people are being violated, whether they consider themselves Indian or not. They still have the right to migrate to other countries.

When the Europeans were coming, they had signs all over Europe which said, "Free land! Come to America! Be part of the Homesteading!" But they didn't mention that this was already Indian land. Now that they are here, they look on Hispanic people as aliens, as a detriment to American society.

They have built prisons to hold the children of immigrants once they have separated them from their parents. And all of these human rights violations are documented by sanctuary groups as well as the Indian tribes directly affected by this military occupation on the U.S./Mexico border.

DB: Our vice president is right now in Jerusalem congratulating Netanyahu on plans to move the U.S. embassy there. For the Palestinians, it is like an endgame in the nature of ethnic cleansing. It seems to parallel the government policy toward indigenous communities in the United States.

BM: We have always been allies with the Palestinian people. The Palestinian is the Indian, and vice versa. We have a common history in terms of the human rights violations, the robbing of our lands when they are protected by various treaties and agreements and human rights standards. In Palestine, people can be uprooted at any time, even though they have lived there for generations! It is very close to the Indian struggle, which continues today.

DB: It was no surprise that one of Trump's first actions after taking office was

to try to remove the opposition at Standing Rock and open up the pipelines, endangering the sources of water.

BM: "Water is life" has become an international cry. You cannot drink oil. Now people figure that even if the water is polluted they can go to Walmart and pick up a case of bottled water. Well, soon it will all be polluted by petroleum and there is no filtering that out.

Oil pipelines are running rampant. In financial periodicals they are talking about investing in petroleum pipelines instead of investing in oil development. There are thousands of new permits being issued in every state.

And it is the oil executives who are making the decisions on behalf of the government. They are on a full-scale operation to exploit every mineral they can. They have even begun to open up protected lands and monuments. But when they start to endanger the water, it is time for all people to come together in opposition.

You have to understand that all pipelines leak eventually. It is unnatural to put a pipe in the ground and expect it to last. Mother Earth is moving all the time. When oil leaks, it doesn't go anywhere but into the earth and then into the water. You cannot do any recovery for water pollution by oil.

They say modern technology can provide warnings, but it never does. We just experienced a huge spill in northeast South Dakota that they claimed at first was 200,000 barrels but which turned out to be 800,000 barrels. And they spilled before anyone knew it, until a farmer discovered a lake of oil in his field.

These modern technologies are a myth. There is no way to protect the environment, especially when it comes to water.

DB: We just saw that the "vigilantes" who destroyed indigenous, so-called government property and took over buildings have now been set free by a federal judge, whereas there are still resisters at Standing Rock in jail facing time.

BM: There has always been a dual standard of justice in this country. When these armed cowboys took over a national park in the Northwest, [they were acquitted of the charges]. When we, on the other hand, act peacefully at Standing Rock, we had over 500 charged with various felonies. Some were charged with a felony for even traveling to Standing Rock!

This is an absolute violation of the Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples signed at the United Nations by President Obama in 2007. These standards have been set but no one is following them. American law treats

Indians and protesters one way and white people another way. The dual standard of justice is alive and well in the US courts.

DB: Speaking of justice, in Arizona we have the pardoned former sheriff Joe Arpaio now running for public office.

BM: That is about standard operating procedure in this country. Here is a guy who violated a federal judge's court order, told him to go to hell publicly. He would have been jailed because of his attitude, his violation of the law and his refusal to accept responsibility. The president pardons him and now he has the audacity to run for public office. And he may be elected, because Arizona has been a racist state for many years.

The reason Arpaio was able to get reelected time after time is that he represented a racist standard not only against migrants but also against American Indians. The state of Arizona has the largest Indian population in America. He went on violating the human rights of these populations and no one did anything about it. This is the standard of human rights in America.

DB: We are now seeing expanded raids and mayors in sanctuary cities under threat of arrest. Do you think they will be coming on to reservations to arrest people?

BM: I am sure that if the opportunity arises they won't hesitate to, although they may find themselves in their own courts, because we have a legal relationship with the United States that no one else has. We have a certain sovereignty whereby we can invite people in and allow them to live in our territory. It will involve complicated legal maneuvering for the immigration people to enter our reservations. No doubt they will try but we will fight them all the way in the courts and there will be public resistance.

DB: Would you like to give a shout out to Leonard Peltier, the longest serving political prisoner in the United States?

BM: Leonard has been in prison for over 41 years now. We are trying to get him moved closer to home where he can get more visitors. They have taken him as far as possible from his home in North Dakota to Florida, so that his relatives and supporters and advisers have to travel all that way and pay all the expenses just to provide him with the access to the legal system that every prisoner is entitled to.

Dennis J. Bernstein is a host of "Flashpoints" on the Pacifica radio network and the author of Special Ed: Voices from a Hidden Classroom. You can access the audio archives at www.flashpoints.net.
