

GUATEMALA: THE FAILURE OF A COUNTER-REVOLUTIONARY STRATEGIC MODEL FOR LATIN AMERICA

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In January of this year, the so-called Kissinger Commission, which visited Guatemala as well as other Central American countries, presented the Reagan administration with a Report, in which it was stated that

“in terms of the interests of regional security and of United States interests, Guatemala with its strategic position on the frontier of Mexico and with the largest population in Central America and the most important economy, is without doubt a key country”.

Historically, Guatemala has played a special role in Central America: first as site of the ancient Maya Civilization. Later, during the Spanish colonial domination — from 1524 to 1821 — Guatemala was Capital of what is today Central America and Chiapas, the southern province of Mexico. The European ruling classes used to live in Guatemala City, the center of the colonial administration, while the rest of the country was regarded as provinces which provided Spain and Guatemala City with their products. After the Independence from Spain — and Mexico — these provinces, excluding Chiapas, became national States. During the 19th and 20th Centuries Guatemala received thousands of European immigrants, mostly Germans, Spaniards and Italians, but also North-Americans, Jews, Chinese and Arabs, who contributed to the capitalist development of the country. This did not occur to the same degree in the other Central American countries and as a result, Guatemala regained a dominant position economically as well as politically in the area. In fact, Guatemala is the linchpin in Central America because of its size and

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its strategic position close to Mexico. It is the only country in the area bordering four countries and two seas. At present, it is the center of the most explosive region in the continent.

Since 1954, Guatemala has been playing the role of a regional gendarme of the United States of America, and the model of a counter-revolutionary strategy for Latin America. Today this model happens to be in crisis, undermined by its own contradictions and by the incapacity of successive military governments to put an end to the gerilla movement, after more than 20 years of counter-insurgency struggle.

In order to understand what is happening in Guatemala today, let me mention some of the historical and political facts which have in large measure shaped the current situation.

In 1944, the dictatorship of the traditional liberal party in Guatemala — the party of the criollos and foreign landlords who ruled the country since the Spanish colonial domination — was overthrown by a popular upheaval. The progressive government that replaced it initiated a reformist period which stands out in the political and social history of the country. I shall not go into the characteristics and particularities of the two democratic governments which from 1945 to 1954 ruled Guatemala with a reformist development programme aimed at modernizing the country's old economic and social structures, but I would like to point out that the last of these governments, the one headed by Jacobo Arbenz, announced that agrarian reform was its fundamental concern and sought the support of the organized labor movement and of peasant groups.

According to the 1950 census, 70% of the arable land in the country was in the hands of 2.2% of landowners and a mere 51 landowners possessed 13% of all lands. The Agrarian Reform Law enacted by the Arbenz government in 1952 tried to change this situation. The declared aims of the laws were the elimination of serfdom; grants of land to low-income and landless workers; and concessions of credits and technical assistance to farmers with small holdings.

In the 17 months of the agrarian reform under Arbenz, 883,615 hectares were distributed, of which 280,000 came from national estates and 603,615 were expropriations of incultivated land. 175,000 hectares, which had never been used, were expropriated from the United Fruit Company. Estimations of the number of beneficiaries of the reform vary between 78,038 and 100,000 according to different sources. In any case, between 30 and 40% of the landless farmers received an average amount of 10.5 hectares under different schemes of redistribution.

The large landlords — national and foreign plantation owners — and the United Fruit Co. joined to oppose reformism in the agricultural sector. By March 11, 1952, the United States government had concluded that the progressive Arbenz administration and Guatemala's political situation adversely affected U.S. interests and was a potential threat to U.S. security. Based on this conclusion, the United States refused to give economic and military aid to Guatemala, while trying to align the other nations in the hemisphere against and alleged communist penetration in Guatemala, taking steps intended to bring down the Guatemalan regime. A new model of U.S. intervention and counter-revolutionary strategy was implemented in 1954, when mercenaries led by Colonel Castillo Armas and armed, supplied and organized by the C.I.A., overthrew the progressive Arbenz government. Over 9,000 people were arrested, and many of them were tortured and killed during and after the United States intervention.

Carlos Castillo Armas emerged from a military junta as Provisional President, and a plebiscite subsequently regularized his status. The Constitution of 1945 was abrogated and there was a call for a National Constituent Assembly to rewrite the Constitution, which was officially adopted on February 1956. The revised Constitution allowed no political opposition and the activities of the labor unions were greatly curtailed. Union leaders had to receive government clearance to organize the workers. The Agrarian Law was suspended. The so-called Estatuto Agrario (Decree-Law No. 559) replaced all other previous agrarian legislation. Most of the land distributed under the agrarian programmes of President Arbenz was returned to its former owners.

After Castillo Armas was killed by his own collaborators in 1957, due to contradictions within the ruling oligarchy itself; temporary governments; and an election nullified by Congress; General Manuel Ydigoras Fuentes was elected President. He was an old corrupt servant of the dictator Jorge Ubico, who was deposed in 1944, and took office in March 1958.

During this period social unrest has spread to various parts of the country, not only because of the proliferation of State corruption and the worsening of the material living conditions of the people, but also because Guatemalan territory was used by the C.I.A. for mercenary training bases to prepare for the invasion of Cuba. A rebellion failed, some of the rebel forces went on to create the first modern guerrilla movement in the country (there were conservative as well as liberal guerrilla movements in Guatemala during the 19th Century) against the military state of the oligarchy and against U.S. imperialism.

For one section of the progressive people it became clear that only an armed struggle would remove the criollo and foreign oligarchy of Guatemala from power. Representing personal and foreign interests, they are the sole beneficiaries of a system of domination that produces only misery for more than 80% of the population. Dr. Xabier Gorostiaga has said that the Central American countries are ruled by "tiny oligarchies" and I disagree with him on this point. In the case of Guatemala we can not speak of the existence of a "national bourgeoisie", as is the case of Costa Rica, and it is wrong to believe that the country is a "banana-republic" ruled by few persons. The existing ruling classes — including the bureaucratic bourgeoisie that administers the State apparatus — are composed of criollos and foreign groups (Spaniards, Jews, Anglo-Americans, Arabs, Germans, and others) who have close links with their countries of origin.

This reactionary and militaristic oligarchy is composed by several thousands of rich plantation owners, unscrupulous merchants, and corrupt civil servants, professionals, politicians and army officers. Since the 19th Century the national army has been their best instrument of political domination. This domination is today, as it was in 1954, in accordance with U.S. strategy of counter-insurgency in Guatemala. In 1963 this oligarchy perceived that the presidential elections scheduled for November of that year to be a direct threat to their personal security and interests, because the contradictions within the system of exploitation and class oppression existing in the country had materialized in the framework of a national liberation struggle of the people. So they ousted President Ydigoras in a typical coup d'état in March and cancelled the elections. Once again the strategy and tactics for the counter-revolution made a strong dictatorship in Guatemala necessary, as well as combining the counter-insurgency struggle with the drawing up of a new Constitution reflecting the new political situation. The Congress was dissolved. The

Constitution of 1956 was repealed, political activities were banned and the "state of siege" previously enforced by Ydígoras was maintained.

A new Fundamental Law was enacted by which Colonel Enrique Peralta Azurdia, former Defense Minister under Ydígoras' government, assumed the presidency of the country with legislative authority. An Electoral Decree was issued by the government announcing that elections would be held on March 1964 for a National Constituent Assembly which would draft a new Constitution and prepare the way for general elections.

On 15 September 1965, the new Constitution was promulgated to become effective on 5 May 1966. On 6 March Julio César Méndez Montenegro, a lawyer, was elected President. Two months later, an agreement was signed between the elected President and the military, by which the new government agreed to support the army in all necessary measures to eliminate opposition. Plantation owners were authorized to bear arms and they were considered to be law enforcements agents, military commissioners, within the jurisdictional limits of their properties.

The guerrilla movement and the army launched a campaign of terror in which many people were killed in the urban and rural areas between 1966 and 1968. Civilian paramilitary groups were organized as death squads by the oligarchy to combat suspected guerrillas, following the policy of the extermination of enemies used by the French in Algeria. The best known paramilitary group was Movimiento Anticomunista Nacionalista Organizado (MANO), later known as "Mano Blanca", and the "Escuadrón de la Muerte" (Death Squad). These paramilitary groups captured, tortured and killed an increasing number of people suspected of advocating revolutionary ideas.

On March 1970, elections took place and Colonel Carlos Arana Osorio, an army killer and candidate of the oligarchy and the C.I.A., became the new President of Guatemala. Upon taking office, Arana Osorio continued the counter-insurgency operations. He declared a "stage of siege" and suspended all constitutional guarantees. The number of murdered and missing persons reached alarming levels. It was reported by the Committee of Families of Missing People that the number of disappearances during 1970 and 1974, Arana's presidential term, reached a level of more than ten thousand persons. Most such disappearances bear the classic marks: the victims were taken from their homes or places of work, in front of witnesses, by large groups of heavily armed plainclothes-men with whom regular police forces did not interfere.

Ten years later, in 1984, the terror continues. Since 1974 Guatemala has been ruled by successive military regimes (Kjell Laugerud, 1974-1978; Romeo Lucas García, 1978-1982; Efraín Ríos Montt, 1982-1983; and Oscar Mejía Víctores, from August 1983 to date) who have used crime and terror in their attempts to stifle the revolutionary movement. Unsuccessful attempts that have been responsible for massive violations of human rights directed at people from all sectors of the Guatemalan working classes. At the same time, a model of economic development based on exports has led to an ever-greater concentration of wealth in the hands of the criollo-foreign oligarchy, while increasing the misery of most of the population. This oligarchy, in order to hold political power and to use the State apparatus to augment the power and wealth of its members, has had to move from political pressure to repression, from military dictatorship and electoral fraud to the physical elimination of revolutionaries, from sporadic crime to systematic murder, from selective repression to massacres and genocide. Today, Guatemala is one of the few

countries of the world, where State repression has reached the level of genocide. The entire structure of the Guatemalan State has been built upon and supported by its program of terror.

“I think the violence is fine, it is something folkloric in our country, as all countries in the world have their violence in one form or another. Sometimes there is a little; sometimes it decreases or increases”, said Mejía Vítores recently.

The so-called “Victory 82” and “Firmness 83” counter-insurgency campaigns involved the destruction of thousands of peasant homes in a country which has a housing shortage of one million units, the destruction of the cultivations and harvest of fruits, vegetables and basic grains, as well as the extermination of thousands of alleged guerrillas or guerrilla sympathizers. All these people, including women and children, have been arrested for being “suspicious and undocumented”, in mass search operations which include house searches, carried out by government security forces in the capital city and in different parts of the country. This repressive violence results basically from the way the ruling classes interpret the law, as well as being their method of maintaining their domination. This is the counter-revolutionary strategy based on gaining political hegemony in the country through repressive military actions.

These tactics of institutionalized terror and dirty war have also been utilized in other Latin American countries like, Argentina, Uruguay, Chile, Peru, El Salvador, and more recently in Colombia. Since the United States intervention in Guatemala, in 1954, an estimated 125,000 Guatemalans have been killed by regular security and military forces, as well as by paramilitary groups acting under government order or with official complicity. In the past two years alone, approximately 20 thousands sought refuge abroad and around one million were displaced from their communities, as a result of the escalation of government terror, mass murders and kidnappings.

The Secret Tribunals, which functioned during the Ríos Montt regime under the direction of the then Minister of Defense, Mejía Vítores, condemned 15 persons to death, while 100 more were given prison sentences of up to 30 years, in summary trials which did not comply with the minimal legal requirements. The Guatemalan Supreme Court does not want to fulfill its responsibilities in this situation of official violence. Therefore, on February 27 of this year, the Guatemalan Human Rights Commission (CDHG) initiated a world wide campaign for the life and liberty of those who disappeared involuntarily and by force, the missing who have been sentenced and those sentenced by the Secret Tribunals. According to the CDHG over two thousand people disappeared during the first three months of this year. That means that during this 9 hour symposium, approximately 9 persons have been kidnapped and murdered in my country.

Many relatives of missing union leaders and labor advisors, workers, employees, peasants, professionals, university professors and students, have submitted thousands of requests for Habeas Corpus in Guatemala in recent months; other relatives of the victims remain silent, specially in the countryside, for fear of

retaliation and because they have learned it does no good to denounce the perpetrators of this violence.

"Every day", said Monsignor Próspero Penados del Barrio, Archbishop of Guatemala and president of the Guatemalan Bishops Conference, on January 19, "10 or 15 relatives of disappeared or kidnapped persons arrive at my office to denounce acts of aggression against persons of whom it is not known whether they are alive or dead. These are people who have been kidnapped by unidentified individuals, who have been denounced as belonging to security forces by the victims' relatives".

Relief organizations usually report violent acts. In the majority of these cases the direct responsibility of security forces could be established. In the capital city, private houses are used as jails. Here members of the Department of Technical Research (DIT) and of the Special Operations Brigade (BROE), of the National Police, torture their prisoners. Torture is also carried out at the National Palace and military bases are being used as detention and torture centers. The army surrounds and attacks villages and kidnaps peasants, both men and women, who are taken away in trucks. They also burn down houses and harass the local population. The whereabouts of many of the inhabitants of rural areas in the western districts of Quetzaltenango, San Marcos, Huehuetenango, El Quiché and Sololá, as well as of the southern districts of Suchitepéquez and Escuintla, and of the northern districts of Baja Verapaz, Alta Verapaz and El Petén, are still unknown. Residents of many villages and coffee and sugar plantations have reported the discovery of numbers of tortured, beheaded and burned bodies on roads and hanging from trees. In many cases the bodies appear naked, bearing signs of torture and riddled with bullets, near military detachments and the headquarters of the Hacienda Guards, on whom local residents laid the blame for this violence. The Association of University Students (AEU) stated in a February 13 communiqué that

"violence, poverty and exploitation reign in the country. In the light of the kidnappings of many citizens in broad day-light, in the country side as well as in the capital city, it is impossible to believe that human rights are respected in Guatemala. The so-called security forces, after kidnapping an individual, also kidnap his relatives, as well as carrying out mass kidnappings and demanding ransoms."

Since 1980, more than 200 university professors have been murdered and more than 300 have gone into exile; more than 500 students have been murdered or kidnapped; and the San Carlos National University buildings in Guatemala city and in Quetzaltenango and Cobán have suffered many attacks. Dynamite charges explode during the nights in the buildings mentioned, in an effort to create panic among students, professors, employees, and the university authorities, as well as to neutralize the student and professional organizations. Dr. Eduardo Meyer, president of San Carlos University, said recently that Guatemala "is living in the stone age".

The ruling classes and the different military governments have used the laws regulating communications in Guatemala as an instrument to exercise pressure upon newsmen, many of whom have been also killed during all these years of institutionalized terror. Despite this, the Guatemalan Journalists Association (APG) concluded in a symposium held recently, that in Guatemala the law is not being followed, that the rule of Habeas Corpus and the right to defense are denied those on trial and that physical integrity is not respected. During the symposium, the APG stated that in the past three years about thousand people have been murdered, over 45 thousand have sought refuge in other countries and several thousand have disappeared.

"We can not believe any statement from the government as long as the human beings continue disappearing; we do not want to be deceived and humiliated any more; we need to breathe and be free, to live", commented one of the participants to the symposium.

The Latin American Federation of Relatives of the Disappeared (FEDEFAM) stated recently in Paris that there are 90 thousand missing persons in Latin America, 35,000 of whom are Guatemalans, and said that records of these cases have been presented to the United Nations Commission on Human Rights. In Geneva, Switzerland, on February 20 of this year, this United Nations Commission initiated discussions on forced and involuntary disappearances, confirming that the majority of the cases remain unsolved. On March 1, during the 40th Session of the U.N. Human Rights Commission, representatives of Pax Christi, Pax Romana, the International Committee of Jurists and the Ecumenical Council of Churches stated that persecution of the Guatemalan people have increased to the point that "now it can be talked about in terms of authentic genocide". During this 40th Session in Geneva, The U.N. Human Rights Commission also expressed

"its deep concern for the acts of violence against non-combatants, the generalized repression, the mass displacement of rural and indigenous populations, and the disappearances and murders, which, according to reports, have recently increased in Guatemala, particularly in urban areas."

The increase in urban violence has a dramatic effect on daily life for residents of Guatemala City. The current situation is one of danger and suffering. The social and economic situation of thousands of persons has deteriorated. The Bank of Guatemala reported in March that the country's economically active population numbers 2,256,946 persons, of which only 511,000 have work. The estimated total population for 1984 is nearly 8 million inhabitants. this means that 78% of the economically active population are unemployed or under-employed, while the majority of employed persons suffer from the social injustice of low wages. The workers and the public and private employees refrain from claiming their rights because of fear of losing their jobs or their lives. In downtown Guatemala City the ambience is one of constant caution since police and plainclothes informers are stationed on virtually every corner. The army and the police carry out daily roundups of persons suspected of participating actively in the revolutionary war.

In February and March 1984 at least twenty union leaders have been kidnapped by government security forces. The military government punishes union organizers with death. For instance, on March 16, the government repealed a law which had been in effect for the past 30 years establishing teachers rights. The teachers had to form a secret committee to organize a strike, because the situation of official violence forces them to act with the greatest caution.

The workers can only participate in the union's struggle clandestinely because of victimization of the unions since 1980. The repressive measures against workers include the closing down of companies, death threats and murders, and denying recognition to collective pacts. Hundreds of workers have been systematically gunned down by plainclothes commandos paid and organized by businessmen.

On March 13, thirteen union denounced government repression, illegal acts by business owners and the violation of labor laws by employers, while several union leaders remain in hiding for fear of becoming victims of official violence. The same day, union leader Alvaro Sosa Ramos escaped from eight security force members who had kidnapped him and were taking him to an "undetermined" place. Sosa Ramos managed to take refuge in the Belgian Embassy, where he was wounded when his kidnappers shot at him from the Embassy gate. Two women who happened to be passing by the scene of the incident were kidnapped by the same group of men, who later released only one of them.

"Hunger, poverty and unstable employment are added to the high risk of losing one's life on any street corner".

stated a letter sent to Pope John Paul II by the Association of University Students (AEU) of San Carlos University on March 7, of this year.

Unfortunately, there are thousands of persons who are not as lucky as Alvaro Sosa Ramos, who left the country for Canada on March 21, under the protection of the Venezuelan and Belgian embassies. They are the hundred thousand or so refugees who have fled to seek refuge in Mexican territory to escape torture and death, to seek safety and the largesse of foreign relief agencies. As a leader of one of the Guatemalan insurgent forces stated, the thousands of Guatemalan peasants who have sought refuge in Mexico,

"constitute a living testimony of the level of military repression in Guatemala, a fact that the Guatemalan government and the army would like to hide. The refugees reflect the bestial extremes of torture and repression in Guatemala, the conditions of racial discrimination, the magnitude of the misery, poverty, illiteracy and malnutrition our people face, as well as the social dimensions of the regime's genocide."

Monsignor Próspero Penados del Barrio denounced on January 19, 1984, the existence of half a million refugees inside the country and another 150,000 in México, the majority of them women, children and elderly people. Monsignor Penados said that

"the Catholic Church asked the government to guarantee that the lives of the refugees will be respected so that they

can return to their villages, and they not be concentrated in camps, especially, concentration camps."

A week before Monsignor Penados made the statement quoted above, Gustavo Adolfo López Sandoval, Minister of the Interior of Guatemala, had said that the Guatemalan refugees in México were

"insurgents, who frequently invaded Guatemalan border towns to cause problems... The Guatemalan government believes that, as there is no reason for political persecution of the refugees, they should return to their villages, which now have been completely pacified."

The Committee of Peasant Unity (CUC) stated that the main desire of the Guatemalan peasants who have taken refuge abroad or in the mountains of Guatemala is to return to their homes, but not under the conditions of terror and control to which they have been subjected by the army. Alfredo Witschi Cestari and Pierre Michaelis, heads of the programs of the United Nations High Commission on Refugees in Mexico, said on February 28th, that for the refugees

"return to Guatemala means death."

The scorched earth counter-insurgency tactic displaced hundreds of thousands persons, who fled towards the cities, contributing to the growth of a mobile mass of under- and unemployed people, or who in the countryside must seek the charity of the army or risk the fury of the soldiers and starvation. They are the thousands of residents of resettlement camps undergoing "re-education" in the so-called "model-hamlets". With the "model-hamlets" policy the army seeks to isolate the guerrilla movement from its natural base of sustenance — "to draw the water away from the fish", as explained by former Secretary of State Alexander Haig —, and to better subject the population to military control. While Mejía Víctores called these "model-hamlets", "the fundamental base for the development of the country", humanitarian organizations have denounced these villages, which house nearly 2,500 people each, as being places where survivors of massacres carried out by the army, itself are concentrated.

Guatemala is becoming a nation of prisoners and of killers. The army exacerbate local squabbles, religious or ethnic differences and rivalries between peasant villages, and force villagers to join the so-called "civil defense patrols", which terrorize the surrounding neighbourhoods with abuse, threats and illegal extortion. The creation of civil patrols was begun by the army in 1981, by forcing men between the age of 18 and 55 to join them, as a support for its regular forces in counter-insurgency operations. Each civil patrol is headed by former soldiers and military commissioners, the army's traditional collaborators who are the real ringleaders, and receive arms and training. During the counter-insurgency campaign "Firmness 83" close to 700,000 peasants were forcibly enrolled in these patrols. As a result of this, massive extermination of the civilian population became more widespread. It has been exposed that the army allows civil patrols to take away the personal belongings, the lands, money, goods and even the women of the villages they plunder and destroy. Those who refuse to participate in the paramilitary squads are accused of being guerrillas and put on "black lists", which means death. Several

weeks ago, for instance, all the men of the village of Cantel, in the district of Quetzaltenango, led by local elderly people, refused to join the civil patrols which the army had ordered to be formed in the village. After some days four of these elderly people, the leaders of the community, were murdered in their homes. The murderers took the bodies to a nearby ravine and decapitated them. According to the Guatemalan Human Rights Commission, fears exist that the army could commit massacres and implement the scorched earth policy in the area at any moment.

In Guatemala, the military dictatorship of the criollos and foreign oligarchy is caught between an increase in repressive actions, like the extrajudicial executions mentioned above, and complete economic bankruptcy. According to socioeconomic data on Guatemala provided by the Inter-American Development Bank, the country's economy experienced a negative growth of 2.3% in 1983; a million people will be jobless this year; industrial production fell by 5%, private investment by 10%, export by 12%; and the foreign debt surpasses 1,300 million dollars. Nearly 80% of the population is illiterate; 75% of the Guatemalans are undernourished; and life expectancy is 43 years of age (28 years among the peasantry, under the conditions of violence presently prevailing in the countryside). Ironically, the State sets aside half of the national budget for the army, which can be compared to education 15.5% and public health 11%.

The Guatemalan economy is based on agricultural exports. But while the average yearly income of the rural population is 186 dollars, there are many landlords who receive millions of dollars for their export crops.

Guatemala's economy is in a depressed period caused by a number of factors. The country has lost foreign exchange, labor capital and capital reserves. Guatemala's trade deficit passed 100 million dollars in the past three years, and this, together with the flight of capital, has resulted in a scarcity of foreign exchange which has stowed down production, thus increasing unemployment.

The policy of economic reactivation, carried out by the military government over the past year, has failed. The Gross National Product fell considerably during 1983. Trade problems in the Central American region, the reduction in public spending, the rise of unemployment and the fall in private investment contributed to further aggravate the crisis. There has been no significant private investment or expansion over the past year due to perceived risk and tight credit. Political risk has also caused tourist revenues to fall off sharply (down over 50%). Revenues are declining as a result of the failure of the government's economic policy. The tax reform put into effect last August had negative results and the total fiscal income fell considerably. Of the 18 million dollar a 9.5 million have been brought in. The budget deficit will reach 600 million dollars during the current fiscal year, a figure which represents approximately 45% of the national budget. The International Monetary Fund's ironhanded control of the Guatemalan economy has caused fears that the government is covering up the truth about the national treasury. A marked fiscal deterioration is predicted in the coming months, which will affect the monetary situation and the balance of payments. In August, 1983, the IMF approved a 120 million dollar loan to the Guatemalan government, of which 60 million have already been paid. The rest of the loan will be frozen due to the use that has been made of funds from the loans for the purpose of counterinsurgency, and to the corruption which exists in the administration of state owned businesses.

The budgets for the 40 state owned businesses amounted 1.3 billion dollars in 1982 and 1.054 billion in 1984, and the majority of them have heavy deficits. In

February, in an analysis of the national budget plan for 1984, the National Center for Economic Research (CIEN), an organization of private enterprise associations, questioned the honesty of the military government.

"The national budget is a masterpiece of the art of concealing figures, and the Ministry of Finance has used all conceivable means to do this. 55% of the budget is destined towards corruption, debt, squandering and confidential expenses, which have been used to pay members of paramilitary groups and death squads sponsored by the government, to maintain clandestine jails and to buy off delegates, politicians, journalists, triumvirates and some business leaders", maintained CIEN in its publication "Carta Económica Mensual Informativa".

On February 20, the Asociación de Amigos del País, an organization of the oligarchy with ties to powerful North American industrial and financial associations, asked the military government for a detailed explanation of what occurred at the hydroelectric plants of Chixoy and Aguacapa, which were budgeted to cost 360 million dollars and 72 million, respectively, which actually cost 860 million and 320 million, and where structural and engineering deficiencies are costing the country 200,000 dollars a day.

In addition, the value of the coffee harvest usually accounts for 25% of the total agricultural production, subjecting a large part of the economy to the vicissitudes of the world market. In 1984, 500,000 peasants have absolutely no land and of these, 400,000 did not have regular work throughout the year. Moreover, another 300,000 worked a total of 438,000 hectares, an average of 1.23 hectares per family. Guatemala, along with many other countries in Latin America, is characterized by striking inequalities in the distribution of land. The situation in Guatemala, nonetheless, is more serious than in all other countries in Central America, and in the majority of the countries in Latin America. The total area of Guatemala is 10,888,900 hectares of which 4,180,246 were used for agricultural and livestock production in 1983. The majority of the land under cultivation fall into the categories of "agricultural lands" and "pasture lands". There are 1,362 estates (0.25% of total holdings in the country) which have an area greater than 450 hectares and which make up only 10% of the land. These are the so-called "fincas de tamaño sub-familiar" (family holdings which do not provide subsistence) of which 288,083 have less than 1.4 hectares and 166,732, less than 0.7 hectares.

Another aspect of the distribution of the land which needs to be considered is quality. The best land is in the large estates. At the same time, the "fincas de tamaño sub-familiar" are basically found in the western, northwestern and eastern regions, where the land is generally barren and eroded. The emphasis on land settlements programmes during the last 15 years has been in the north, in the district of El Petén, where there is no infrastructure, the soil is shallow and of limestone, and there are great problems for agricultural exploitation of the land, since it is most suitable for forestry.

The situation outlined above implies that the living conditions for the 5 million Guatemalan who live off the land are appalling. The indigenous population, which makes up about 70% of the country's total population, is most affected. 81% of the

indigenous population lives in rural areas. Apart from being left out of any state assistance and welfare programmes, their holdings are, on the average, less than 2 hectares on barren land most suited to forestry. From this they produce the basic grains necessary for subsistence.

“The existence of small farms does not permit the subsistence of the Guatemalan peasants”,

stated a delegation from the World Labor Federation during a visit to the country in February, 1984. They added that in spite of the fact that the peasants work hard, there are no possibilities for social and economic development. As a matter of fact, only 21% of families in rural areas can meet their basic requirements. Of this sector the highest income bracket represents 0.8% of the total population, with an average income of 10,613 dollars per family yearly. Thus, of every five families, four live in a situation of almost absolute poverty, with an insufficient income to satisfy their basic requirements.

According to international organizations, there is no prospect for the landless peasantry to obtain land under the current legislation. The settlement of public lands in the frontier zone, the only method used by the Instituto de Transformación Agraria (INTA) can not solve the problem in either physical or financial terms, since the cost of the settlement of these lands is too high for the economy of the country to be able to support it. Considering the total area of the lands available for resettlement, there is enough land to distribute family size plots to all the landless peasants. Taking into consideration the relationship between land and population, the number of land less peasants who could have access to plots varies between 31% and 64%.

The imbalance which exists in the rural sector of Guatemala regarding land tenure, suggests a need to introduce land re-distribution programmes, especially for those areas where land is not fully utilized or where there are obviously social conflicts caused by the existence of small holdings and the presence of great numbers of landless peasants side-by-side with enormous underexploited estates. The current military government explicitly excludes any expropriation of land held as private property. This constitutes a serious difficulty in the formulation of alternatives, since the uncultivated land on the large estates reaches a total of 1,200,000 hectares.

Pressured by the nation's economic problems and right-wing opposition, bent on getting its share of power, the former self-appointed Guatemalan president, Ríos Montt, promised in the closing months of 1982 that he would reactivate rule by law and bring about a gradual return to constitutional rule. At the same time, The U.S. State Department pressured his government to carry out an agrarian reform as one of the top priorities in the country. The North Americans recommended the development of an active, commercial land market. This means, that the State would provide financing so that the landless peasants could buy land from the land owners. In the middle of February, 1983, Walter Widmann, one of the most powerful members of the oligarchy and an agro-industrialist of German descent, wrote to the Minister of Agriculture:

“We know that several specialists from the Agency for International Development (AID) and the State Department want to put forward an agrarian reform law, testing our patience and our resolve. If the failures of

Mexico, Cuba, Nicaragua and El Salvador repeat themselves, our minds will soon be put at rest. But we will always remain with this doubt: why is it that the United States doesn't try first themselves?"

Various groups of agricultural businessmen added their voices to Widmann's protest, demonstrating their deepseated opposition to any agrarian reform, regardless of its content. In this manner, the antagonism between Ríos Montt and the big economic interests who had made him head of government (Ríos Montt: "God has placed me in this post") led to the coup d'état that put an end to his regime. Meanwhile, domestic opposition to the next de facto regime, headed by Mejía Víctores, who replaced Ríos Montt on August 8, 1983, ranges from armed insurgence to growing criticism from popular and middle class sectors. The oligarchy and the military government are desperate and have called for elections to the National Constituent Assembly one more time, in order to put up a facade of democracy in the country. At the time of writing, in April, 1984, it is obvious that these elections are a screen to cover up the military dictatorship of the oligarchy. Poverty, unemployment, repression and genocide will continue as State policy and as the main strategy in the counter-insurgency struggle.

Various internal and external factors are making the efforts of the oligarchy to continue ruling the country as they have done in the past 30 years more and more difficult. In first place, high ranking officers of the National Army are not willing to renounce the highest positions in the State apparatus. The National Constituent Assembly, to be voted on in July, 1984, will not have the power to name a provisional president, but will only have the responsibility of drawing up the new Constitution, according to the electoral law passed by the military government on January 19th. Because Mejía Víctores will retain legislative and executive powers, traditional politicians have said that the law contains substantial defects, such as, the lack of autonomy of the future National Constituent Assembly and its dependence on the executive branch.

The country's political situation is confused. Mejía Víctores threatened to make himself a dictator if politicians did not accept the laws regulating the electoral process passed by the military government. The proliferation of new political parties gives the impression of political disorder. Traditional political corruption is reflected in the lack of work programs in the 42 committees for the formation of political parties which have provisionally registered for participation in the coming elections. So far, 15 of these committees have fulfilled the requirements for participation in the elections. Each party nominates 88 candidates and voters will choose 88 representatives from among the total 1,320 candidates, which will draw up the fourth Constitution that the Republic of Guatemala will have had in the past 30 years.

Apathy, lack of interest and fear are the prevailing feelings among voters, according to a poll taken by the television news program "Aquí el Mundo", on March 9th. The majority of the population does not want to have anything to do with politics or politicians. Only 3% of citizens have dared to join a political group, because of indifference and political leader's lack of credibility. People do not have a preference for any candidate, since they feel that politicians, who tend to change parties as easily as they change shirts, are charlatans and greedy for power. The apathy of the population and their indifference towards the electoral process is also due to the fact recent governments were tragic examples of gangsterism and

political opportunism. The elections will change nothing for the people, since popular interests are not represented by any of the participating political parties. Leaders are not concerned about the demands of the dispossessed classes, so these classes will continue living in the same or worse conditions.

The potential panorama is unpredictable and shows signs of turbulence and conflict. The military authorities do not permit the normal development of preelection activities which they, themselves, are promoting. At a political forum on February 15, several of the political groups participating, including the Christian Democrats, the Social Christian Party, the New Force, the Revolutionary Party and the National Renewal Party, stated their belief that the elections will be fraudulent. On February 20, eleven political groups announced the formation of the Guatemalan Democratic Coordinating Committee (CDG), with the purpose of fighting for the establishment of democratic norms in the country. The committee demanded that the government stop the violence, guarantee the security of political leaders, reform electoral laws and, particularly, that the National Constituent Assembly be autonomous and independent.

The politicians are afraid and have already expressed their pessimism and discouragement concerning the coming electoral process, because of the escalation of official violence. Several political leaders have received death threats. Security forces raid the political parties' headquarters and take away lists of party members and delegate candidates, as an act of intimidation. Recently, the Guatemalan Christian Democrats denounced a plot to assassinate its secretary general, Vinicio Cerezo Arévalo, and blamed the plot on people connected to security forces. In a statement issued in March, Cerezo said that members of his party in Quetzaltenango had been arrested and imprisoned, accused of crimes they had not committed, in order to prevent their participation in party activities. He added that the Guatemalan army destroys any type of political opposition.

Official violence has already been perpetrated against various political parties, bringing to 87 number of murders and kidnappings of political leaders and activists in six months. During the first two weeks of February alone, more than 25 members of the Christian Democratic Party have been kidnapped by troops, military commissioners or men in civilian clothing, who are probably civil patrol members, in El Quiché, Totonicapán and Quetzaltenango.

Traditional politicians pointed out the possibility that the army will pressurize members of the civil defense patrols to vote according to the army's interests. The Center for Political Studies (EDEP), an independent entity, stated on February 9th, that the government should halt the growth of violence, guarantee greater control of its security forces and respect electoral autonomy, if it wanted to improve the country's image abroad as well as the credibility of the elections. The EDEP also asked the government for the suspension of the civil patrols, at least during the electoral process, in order to guarantee that pressure will not be exercised over patrol members in order to manipulate the elections. Meanwhile, in several highland villages the coordinators of the civil defense patrol coerce patrol members to refrain from participating in political parties.

During the past weeks, various political groups have threatened to withdraw from the elections if the current situation of insecurity and terror created by the activity of the security forces continues. The Social Democrat Party (PSD) is not participating in the electoral process as it holds the opinion that adequate conditions for such a process do not exist, while political leaders such as Carlos Gehlert Mata,

of the Christian Social Party (PSC), said that under the current conditions, the development of the electoral process is impossible in Guatemala.

The prevailing conditions of violence are, in fact, affecting the electoral process. They are not the most appropriate for the so-called "democratic opening". The army is persecuting and harrasing political leaders and activists, and this is reflected in the Guatemalan people: in all areas of the country the people suffer feelings of fear and anxiety. Political sectors have censured the moral, pyshological and even material coercion of citizens by public officials. For instance, registration is a requirement for participating in the coming elections to the National Constituent Assembly. In the countryside, local authorities are threatening municipalities with jail if they fail to register to vote. In the cities, literate citizens who do not exercise their "right" to vote will be fined. Several people have been arrested in the past few weeks for failing to present a voter registration card to security forces during control operations. The failure to register to vote often results in loss of employment for public and private employees. Many workers have been fired and others have had their salaries withheld for the same reason. In March, the social democratic United Front of the Revolution party (FUR) called on the government to respect the life of individuals and to guarantee freedom of expression, after people had been arrested "on suspicion" by the National Police because they were not carrying voter registration cards.

Under the circumstances mentioned above, voter registration cannot be regarded with optimism, since many people register because they fear becoming victims of retaliation and punitive measures, and not because they want to participate in the elections. One of the conclusions of a report presented on February 29 to the United Nations Human Rights Commission in Geneva is that the majority of the Guatemalan population has few possibilities of exercising civil and political rights unless the country's economic, social and cultural problems are greatly reduced.

Unfortunately, intervention by United States government is a factor which all Latin Americans must consider when planning the struggle for the national liberation of our people and the building of our force. Due to the United States' economic and geopolitical interests in Central America, the Sandinista Revolution and the Guatemalan and Salvadoran revolutionary movements are directly confronted with the political-military strategy of the U.S. government for the area. The general objective of the U.S. for Central America is the overall defeat of the revolutionary movement and thus continued political and economic control of the area. It is well known that Honduras has become a U.S. base for aggression against revolutionary movements in Central America, and the U.S. government is planning to invade Nicaragua and El Salvador, the objective of the two invasions being the same: to deprive the Central American people of the right to decide their own future.

The increase of official repression and intimidation of the peasantry and the legal political opposition in Guatemala, coincides with the Reagan administration's attempts to renew military aid to the military government, in spite of the position of the U.S. Congress and even of the Kissinger Commission Report, which recommended making such aid conditional on improvement of the human rights situation. Washington wants to buy with military aid the Guatemala's government full participation in the regional military plan, against both Nicaragua and the Salvadorean guerrillas. On March 1, the House Sub-Committee on the Western Hemisphere of the House Foreign Relations Committee rejected President Reagan's request for 10.3 million dollars in military aid for Guatemala and voted to

prohibit military sales to the country. Because the Mejía Víctores' position regarding U.S. intervention in Nicaragua has fluctuated according to the regime's internal conflicts and pressures from Washington, a consultant to the House Foreign Affairs Committee said on March 17, that the Committee would shortly approve 10.3 million dollars in "non-offensive" military aid ("model-hamlets") for Guatemala, in addition to the 30 million in "development aid" and the 5 million in "economic support" which the Committee has also offered Guatemalan government for 1985.

The Guatemalan and North American military experts are concerned over their inability to annihilate the guerrillas over the past 21 years, in spite of the social cost of more than 125,000 casualties, including deaths and disappearances. In 1984 the guerrilla movement has intensified its actions with greater force, reflecting the complete failure of a counter-revolutionary strategic model for Latin America. Although this year's military campaign has not yet been given an official name, the army conceives of it as the constant bombardment of the rural zones where they suppose the guerrilla forces are located and in the areas where insurgents have just carried out operations. In the cities, a steady increase of violence has affected all sectors of Guatemalan society. The local press has labeled this period as "one of the most violent in the history of the country." Statements made about this situation all point to the army and the government security forces as being responsible for the escalation of violence.

Guatemala today, after 30 years of counter-revolutionary struggle, is facing a serious crisis which could result in the definitive end to all possibilities of peacefully finding of a form of national coexistence and reconciliation. The deterioration of the Mejía Víctores regime has continued and has been manifested in the increase of violence and in the worsening of the conflicts with more and more social, political and religious sectors of the country. Many members of the military believe that discipline has broken down in the army as a result of the increasing contradictions within the military itself, thus weakening the armed forces, which need to be strong in order to halt the advance of the insurgent movement. The Mejía Víctores government has arrived at a state of fragility similar to that of its predecessor Ríos Montt, and the possibility of a new coup d'état cannot be eliminated. The proliferation of political groups trying to participate in the electoral process offered by the military government is not due to ideological questions, but to the personal interests of their leaders, all of whom represent different political motives within the oligarchy. The centralization of repressive actions doesn't exonerate this oligarchy from responsibility in the prevailing climate of terror, the increase of violence in the cities and the continuation of violence in the countryside. Sooner or later, this criollo-foreign oligarchy will be forced to give up the power, as a necessary condition for the peaceful development of the country.

Meanwhile, the killing continues. It is our hope that by calling attention to the gross abuses of human rights in Guatemala it will be possible to mitigate those abuses. That is the basis from which all efforts proceed to promote human rights internationally. Yet the Guatemalan case appears particularly intractable. We see only scant possibility that a government could come to power in Guatemala that would respect human rights. Yet remote as that possibility may be, we believe it is essential that the international community should strive to achieve it. We call upon the Swedish and the other Nordic nations to refuse to sell military equipment to the Guatemalan government. We believe that the present Guatemalan regime, and any successor that does not dramatically alter its policies to protect human

rights, should be denied all economic assistance — including multilateral loans — except assistance to meet urgent basic human needs. In addition, we call upon Sweden and the other Nordic countries, to publicly denounce the systematic abuse of human rights in Guatemala. None of the rationales for quiet diplomacy to promote human rights are applicable in the Guatemalan case. The military rulers of Guatemala should be held to shame before the entire world for their abuses.