SPECIAL UPDATE

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LATIN AMERICA

Guatemala: The Roots of Revolution

On 17 May 1982, Guatemala's largest and most prestigious newspaper, the conservative daily El Gráfico, began a series of articles and editorials that marked a watershed in Guatemalan politics. For years the nation's editors had prudently looked the other way as their news pages filled with terse accounts of high noon assassinations and rural massacres. The Organization of American States, the United Nations Commission on Human Rights, Amnesty International, and the International Commission of Jurists had all issued detailed reports attributing the vast majority of these killings to the Guatemalan government. Yet the Guatemalan press let the violence go largely unremarked. Blame was laid at the feet of "unknown armed men" or unspecified "subversives."

By mid 1982, however, events in the countryside had become so appalling that the local press could no longer keep silent. During the administration of General Fernando Romeo Lucas García (June 1978 to March 1982), killings of unarmed civilians were a daily occurrence. In August 1981, a group of coroners and forensic doctors publicly complained that they needed more personnel (FDIS). The flow of corpses with bullet wounds and signs of torture was causing serious overcrowding in the morgues. Doctors and church personnel estimate that during the final months of the Lucas regime, killings occurred at the rate of 30 to 50 per day. On 23 March, Lucas was overthrown in a military coup and replaced by a three-man junta headed by General Efraín Ríos Montt. On 9 June, Ríos Montt assumed sole power and then adopted a new military strategy. Violence against urban professionals was drastically curtailed. But in the countryside, where 80% of the population lives, the number of killings rose to unprecedented heights, exceeding the record of the Lucas administration.

For the first time since Guatemala's epoch of military rule began in 1954, rural violence was openly condemned by the rightist press and, though cautiously, blamed on the Guatemalan Army.

"Massacres have become the order of the day," El Gráfico editorialized. "In the hamlet of Semejá II in Chichicastenango. . . eight members of a family were murdered by armed men. There was no respect or mercy shown for grandparents, children, or grandchildren, all were exterminated equally. . . . Shortly before the coup we published an editorial entitled 'At Least Spare Our Children.' The cases discussed in that article were very similar to the current one: excessive use of force, unrestrained sadism, psychotic mercilessness. It would be difficult for any person in his right mind to imagine this kind of extermination. How is it possible to behead an 8- or 9-year-old child? How is it possible for a human adult to murder in cold blood a baby of less than a year and a half? . . . In war. . . one cannot hope for mercy on the battlefield. That. . . is understandable, but not someone who kills defenseless noncombatants, children and old people who are not involved in anything. Nor is it acceptable to murder pregnant women, for these acts of bestiality only serve to sink the nation deeper into the most degenerate immorality."

In an interview with the Los Angeles Times, Ríos Montt conceded that the editorial had been directed against the Army. El Gráfico followed up with a list of 30 post-coup massacres with a death toll of 584. On 20 May, it published a second editorial which noted the systematic nature of the killing and made pointed reference to Guatemala's efforts to obtain U.S. military aid. "The elimination of these wretched inhabitants of the western zone of the country cannot be explained, has no reason to happen, has no logic. . . . To anyone who has any sympathy with his fellow man, the kind of genocidal annihilation that is taking place in the Indian zones of the country is truly horrifying. Anyone who has children or grandchildren or brothers or a mother has to be in disagreement, has to energetically condemn these merciless massacres. There has been much talk of improving our image abroad, but this image will continue to blacken itself more and more with this new resurgence of blind and absurd violence. . . . Now they respect nothing, not age nor sex nor social condition. . . . They destroy to destroy. . . . It does no good to appeal to the

humanitarian sentiments of the assassins for, unfortunately, they have none. This is why they continue their systematic murders. . . . This new resurgence of mass murders sends the message that Guatemala is very far from peace, or even a decrease in violence. In the outside world they will once again close their doors to us, because in fact we do not deserve any aid as long as this keeps occurring."

On 1 July, Ríos Montt imposed press censorship and placed the country under a state of siege. Newspapers were "obligated to avoid publications which can cause confusion or panic or aggravate the situation." The moment of candor was over but a segment of the Guatemalan elite had publicly acknowledged the systematic terror which had become the regime's principal tool of governance and had claimed at least 80,000 lives since 1954. And as incomprehensible as the individual acts of cruelty might seem, the pattern of killing had become a predictable product of the logic of Guatemala's economic and political system.

The Economics of Poverty

On 15 August 1962, the Catholic bishops of Guatemala issued a pastoral letter describing the economic lot of the rural campesino: "On the plantations, the peasant is. . . submerged in conditions of blatant inferiority receiving salaries that hardly permit him to avoid death by starvation. Also, these salaries are not paid with regularity but rather doled out weeks and months late, leaving him without the hope of decently clothing his children and unable to provide them with an education befitting free human beings and free citizens. Especially grave is the standard of living of thousands and thousands of workers on state and privately owned plantations. Besides the conditions of their work, they live collectively in wooden shacks, without light, without windows, without interior walls for privacy, generally without sufficient and adequate sanitary systems, without the possibility of intimate family life nor morality, in situations closely resembling concentration camps rather than the homes of free human beings, upon whom rests precisely the national wealth. It is here that the infant mortality triumphs, reaching astonishing ratios, as well as sickness and social disintegration" (Melville and Melville 1971: 148).

That was twenty years ago. Since then, according to studies by the World Bank and AID, campesino living standards have declined. Peasant misery in Third World countries is often attributed to a lack of economic development. The theory which underlies many foreign aid programs, including President Reagan's Caribbean Initiative, holds that rural povery will slowly diminish as a nation's economy grows. By this theory, the welfare of the people is linked to the growth rate of the Gross National Product (GNP). When the economy as a whole prospers, so do the people; when it stagnates, as has happened for the past two years throughout Central America, everyone suffers. It is in these times of what President Reagan's Caribbean Initiative speech called "temporary economic suffering" that Communists step forward "to seize power and then to institutionalize economic deprivation and suppress human rights." By this analysis, the way to ameliorate the economic problem and quench the embers of social unrest is to help countries over the rough spots of temporary fluctuations by offering aid which will enable them "to make use of the magic of the market of the Americas to earn their own way toward self-sustaining growth."

The experience of Guatemala belies this theory. From 1960 to 1980 the Guatemalan economy was one of the most successful in Latin America, if judged in terms of aggregate indicators. Real GNP grew at a rate of 5.7% to 8% per year, a pace more than double the population growth rate of 2.9% (IBRD 1980; Schoultz 1981). Until the mid 1970s, Guatemala's rate of inflation was less than that of the United States. Its foreign debt burden was one of the lowest in the world. According to local and multinational businessmen, investors routinely enjoyed an annual 30% to 35% return on their investments.

Most Guatemalans are poor. Sociologist Mario Monteforte Toledo (1959: 591-592) estimates that the oligarchy comprises 1% of the population, the middle sectors 17%, and the popular classes 82%; AID (1980) reports that "three out of every four Guatemalans are poor, according to accepted international definitions of poverty." The situation of the poor worsened in both relative and absolute terms during this period of "prosperity." In 1950 the top 5% of the population received 48% of the national earnings: by 1978 their share had grown to 59% (IDB). The share received by the poorest 50% had shrunk from 9% to 7%. In 1979 the national development plan conceded that Guatemala's pattern of growth has made national income distribution more and more unequal (World Council of Churches 1980).

The poor were not just losing ground relative to the flourishing oligarchy. They were also falling behind themselves. Each year, as their income, landholdings, and food consumption shrank, they survived on less and less. In 1970 an AID study team concluded that "Guatemala's economic and social development record has been poor. There is little doubt that the absolute standard of living of a large part of the population has declined" (Fletcher 1970: 25-26). A 1978 World Bank study (IBRD 1978) noted that large landholders had systematically been increasing their share of the arable lands, and that more than half the population lacked sufficient funds to buy adequate food and housing. In 1980, Guatemalan government figures indicated that in the period from 1964 to 1979 large landowners had increased their holdings from 5.5

million acres to 6.7 million, thirty percent of which were left uncultivated (Krauss 1981: 306). At the same time, according to the World Bank (IBRD 1980), the average size and soil quality of campesino landholdings had been steadily diminishing.

"Land distribution is highly skewed, with less than 3% of the farm units controlling two thirds of the agricultural area," the Bank concluded. "And the situation is even worse than these figures indicate, for most of the land held by the poor is not only so fragmented as to be below minimum economic size, making impossible modern techniques of cultivation; it is also some of the poorest land in Guatemala, located primarily in the Altiplano where the terrain is so broken that much of the land currently under cultivation in corn and beans should be returned to permanent cover." By 1980, according to an AID study of the Altiplano, "nine out of ten people [were] living on plots of land too small to provide income sufficient to meet their basic needs." As a result, some 600,000 campesinos per year were compelled to migrate to the Pacific coast for seasonal work on the cotton and sugar plantations for wages of fifty cents to $3.00 per day. AID puts real wages for women and children at $.50-1.00 per day; until 1980 the legal minimum daily wage was $1.19. After a strike by sugar workers paralyzed the industry, the legal minimum was raised to $3.20. Yet in April of 1982 an internal report prepared by the Army general staff for the Rios Montt junta conceded that "landlords neither respect nor comply with the minimum wage" (Guatemala, Junta 1982). The migrants live packed together in open galleries under conditions which the International Labor Organization has characterized as "totally unacceptable with regard to hygiene, health, education, and morality" (Pansini 1981).

Just as concentration of land tenure in a few hands was making more and more campesinos unable to grow their own food, changes in cultivation patterns dictated by the landlords' desire for profitable exports also made it increasingly difficult for the poor to buy food. Guatemala's economic boom was based on the sale of coffee, sugar, cotton, bananas, and beef to North American and European markets. From the mid 1950s on, land was taken away from the production of corn and beans, the staples of the campesino's diet, and devoted to export commodities (Melville and Melville 1971). Basic foodstuffs became increasingly scarce and prices for them rose accordingly. In 1959, as this trend began to emerge, President General Miguel Ydígoras Fuentes declared that "it would be a national shame to have to import corn." From 1959 through 1961 the nation suffered a traumatic series of corn shortages. Ydígoras' pleas to the landlords to rent out their idle lands for campesinos who wanted to plant corn fell on deaf ears. Within the year, hundreds of thousands of tons of corn were being imported from the United States and Mexico. Guatemala next began to import rice, and in 1967 lost its self sufficiency in its last basic food and began feeding the campesinos with black beans shipped from overseas. Local bean production, already inadequate, fell precipitously: from 1976 to 1978 output nearly halved (IBRD 1980). The results became apparent in the shops and market-places. By 1981, the prices of beans, cooking oil and other basic foodstuffs, though ostensibly controlled by the Guatemalan government, had risen to levels comparable to those of the urban United States; this in a country where, according to AID (1980), three quarters of the population receives a per capita income of less than $300 per year.

For the landlords, who received the revenue from the export sales and spent an insignificant portion of their income on food, the rise in basic food prices was unimportant. But for the campesinos, it was often a matter of life and death. In 1964, a Guatemalan government study attributing 50,000 infant deaths per year to malnutrition was blocked from publication by President Ydígoras on the grounds that it was a "Communist" document (Melville and Melville 1971: 253). By the 1980s, the Institute for Nutrition of Central America and Panama was estimating that 82% of Guatemalan children under the age of 5 were malnourished, 30% of them severely so. Among adults, "the poorest half of the population suffers from a deficit of 40% of the minimum daily caloric requirements and a protein deficit of almost 50%."

Following up on its 1970 evaluation of living standards, AID concluded once again in 1980 that "the benefits of growth have not accrued equally to the general population. . . . causing a further deterioration in living standards."

The only sector of the poor majority which appears to have benefited economically from Guatemala's twenty-year boom is the class of campesinos who left the countryside and found work in the somewhat higher-wage modern industrial sector. They comprise, however, only a tiny percentage of the total population. Although 20% of the workforce is classified as employed in industry, the great majority of these jobs are in low-wage cottage industries employing a few workers per shop. Only 4% of the economically active population is employed in modern industries, many of them multinationals, where wages range from $2.50 to $4.50 per day.

From 1977 to 1981, the modern sector was the scene of a series of labor disputes centering around management efforts to prevent the organization of unions independent of company control. President Lucas, who declared in 1979 that "unions are Communist," embarked on a vigorous campaign of repression against union leaders and members. In 1980, at least 100 union members were kidnapped or assassinated by government death squads; some of the victims were seized or shot down while inside the factory gates. On two occasions the National Police raided leadership meetings of the National Workers Confederation and abducted a total of 48 individuals, none of whom were ever seen again. At least 27 of the assassinated and kidnapped union members were employees of U.S. corporations. The two companies with the highest incidence of anti-union violence, Coca Cola (12 killed) and PROKESA (6 killed), were both American firms (Interfaith Center).

In an April 1980 speech to corporate executives in New York, Thomas Mooney, President of the American Chamber of Commerce in Guatemala, explained the

possibilities for a symbiotic relationship between death squads and multinational business. "The [Carter] State Department opposes the use of violence as a weapon to subdue the leftist oriented groups which seek to depose Guatemala's government. It is, above all, opposed to non-official exercises of violence. Spokesmen for the Department of State feel that privately controlled and financed 'death squads' only serve to incite the people against the established order and motivate them to support the communists. There is another point of view that contends that the only feasible way to stop communism is to destroy it quickly. Argentina and Chile are demonstrated as nations which used this approach with considerable effectiveness and have gone on to become among Latin America's most stable and successful countries" (Mooney 1980).

Former American Chamber of Commerce President Fred Sherwood, the manager of PROKESA, was somewhat more blunt in a September 1980 interview:

Q: The State Department says that the government hasn't been doing enough to deal with the death squads. Do you think that's a reasonable criticism?

Sherwood: Hell no, why should we do anything about the death squads? They're bumping off the Commies, our enemies. I'd give 'em more power. Hell, I'd give 'em some cartridges if I could, and everyone else would too. They're bumping off our enemies, which are also the enemies of the United States. Why should we criticize them?

Q: Do all the U.S. businessmen feel the same way?

Sherwood: Of course they do. After all, they're trying to do business. The commies are trying to stop them from doing business. . . . Why the hell should we criticize the death squad or whatever you want to call it? Christ, I'm all for it.

Although some workers found employment in industry, they too were subject to the same inflation of food prices which plagued the rural campesinos. A University of San Carlos study found that during the 1970s consumer prices rose faster than industrial salaries, resulting in a decline in real wages (La Nación, 9 June 1980).

The industrial sector has not grown fast enough to absorb the agricultural labor surplus. Since 1979, official unemployment figures have ranged from 25% to 35%. AID (1980) estimated that fully 45% of the rural workforce could be classified as unemployed or underemployed. This study, however, was completed before the massive exodus of campesinos fleeing their home villages because of the rural repression of 1980-1982. The Catholic bishops reported in March of 1982 that more than a million campesinos (Guatemala has a population of 7 million) "have been obliged to flee their homes and their small parcels, losing their few assets." More than 200,000 had walked across the borders with Mexico and Honduras. The economic disruption was extensive. The bishops said that food shortages had been aggravated by large scale abandonment of previously cultivated fields. The campesinos were afraid to sow or harvest in areas decimated by repeated massacres. According to the bishops, the number of rural houses burned down in the course of such massacres exceeded the destruction caused by the earthquake of 1976.

As the majority was further impoverished by Guatemala's brand of economic growth, the public sector offered little relief. Two decades of rising landlessness, malnutrition, and displacement had created a growing but unfulfilled need for social services. The Guatemalan government captures through taxes one of the lowest percentages of GNP of any country in the world. It raises 80% of its revenue through highly regressive indirect taxes. Such tax revenues have not kept pace with the growth of the economy (AID 1980).

Guatemala's educational, medical, and public health infrastructure has been widely recognized as one of the worst in the world. Only one fourth of the population has as much as one to three years of schooling. Two thirds of rural children aged 7 to 14 do not attend school; in the country's most densely populated rural region, the Altiplano, the figure is 90%. Only 12% of the youths from 15 to 20 years old attend high school or vocational school (AID 1980). The government admits to a housing deficit of 1.3 million dwellings. Millions live in makeshift shacks with dirt floors and little protection from summer dust and rainy season downpours (El Imparcial, 31 August 1978).

In such conditions, worms, amoebic dysentery, enteric diarrhea, and respiratory diseases are prevalent. The AID study team concluded that fully half of all deaths from natural causes occurring in Guatemala were "preventible given adequate sanitation, potable water, and shelter" (AID 1980). Guatemala's overall mortality rate of 15 per thousand is one of the highest in Latin America. Life expectancy for an urban Guatemalan is 56 years; in rural areas, 41 years. On the Altiplano, the death rate is more than double that of Guatemala City. The young are particularly vulnerable. The infant mortality rate is reported officially as 79 per thousand. Officials of the Central American Nutrition Institute believe that the real rate may be higher than 100. The infant mortality rate for children of Indians, who are some 65% of Guatemala's total population and the overwhelming majority of rural campesinos, is 1.7 times higher than for non-Indians (AID 1980; IBRD 1980). Nationwide, 35% of all children die before the age of 5; in rural areas the rate often exceeds 60%. An additional 25% die before reaching the age of 15 (Instituto de Estudios Políticos). Only thirty percent of the Guatemalan population has access to some form of health care. For the rural poor, the figure is 15% (AID 1980). Even in these cases, the rural health centers are usually poorly stocked and often stay closed due to lack of doctors and medical aides. The national social security system, which offers limited insurance and workman's compensation benefits, covers only 7% of the working population (Instituto de Estudios Políticos).

Guatemala's social services rate poorly even in comparison with countries from the same region or with the same per capita income. World Bank figures (IBRD 1980) indicate that even economies with fewer resources than Guatemala do a far better job of providing for basic human needs:

Table 1

Comparative Indicators: Guatemala and Similar Countries

	Guatemala	Countries of Same Geographic Area	Countries of Same Income
Per capita calorie intake (% of minimum requirements)	91%	107%	105%
Protein intake (grams / day)	20.2	28.3	23.5
Life expectancy (years)	57	63.6	60.2
Infant mortality (per 000)	77	76.1	46.7
Access to safe water:			
% of total population	40%	63.4%	60.2%
% of rural population	14%	38.6%	40.0%
Access to excreta disposal	25%	58.8%	46.0%
Persons per physician	2500	1841.9	2262.4
Access to electricity			
% of total population	28.5%	54.3%	50.0%
% of rural population	5.4%	14.2%	17.3%
Adult literacy	46.0%	77.4%	64.0%

Source: IBRD 1980.

Growth and Misery

The crucial fact to keep in mind about the Guatemalan economy is that mass penury became more intense during an era of economic success, as defined by the standard indicators of growth. From 1970 to 1980, Guatemala's per capita GNP increased by 27%. During the same period, by contrast, El Salvador's per capita GNP stayed the same, Honduras' grew by only 4%, and Nicaragua's declined by 19% (El Gráfico, 16 February 1982). Since 1980, Guatemala's growth has slackened considerably due to softening demand in world commodity markets and the disruption of the Central American Common Market. But that is not the reason for the economic plight of the Guatemalan people. Their situation was bad—and getting worse every year—even when agriculture and industry were flourishing. The problem lies not in the performance of the Guatemalan economy, but rather in its structure. Under that structure the workforce does not benefit from growth. Instead, it occurs at their expense.

Two factors dominate the structure of the Guatemalan economy. The first is an extraordinary degree of concentration of wealth. Virtually all of the high quality land and manufacturing assets are owned by a few thousand individuals. Entire industries are controlled by single families. All cement production in Guatemala, for example, is owned by the Novella family (with the exception of a small Army-owned company). All beer is made by the Castillo family. The bulk of Guatemala's sugar production comes from five or six huge plantation-refinery complexes. This concentration means that most of the income from the activity and growth of the Guatemalan economy flows into the hands of a small group of people.

The disposition of that income is influenced by the second dominant factor: Guatemala's dependence on exports. The core of the economy is export agriculture—cash crops grown on the large plantations for export to the countries of the industrialized North. This is supplemented by an industrial sector which manufactures goods primarily for export to the middle and upper classes of the rest of Central America. Economists have noted that one of the disadvantages of an export-based economy is susceptibility to events —such as changes in world commodity prices or disruption in overseas markets—over which a country has no control. But in an export economy like Guatemala's there is a more profound problem, the lack of an internal market.

The consumers on whom Guatemala's economy depends are overseas. The mass of Guatemalans figure in the process only as workers. With this kind of structure, employers have an incentive to pay their workers as little as possible. In economies which have developed an internal market, it makes business sense for employers to strike a balance. The people who

work in their factories or in their fields are also their consumers. If they are paid too little, they will buy less, and the empoyers' income will fall. Prosperity depends on walking a line between controlling production costs and putting enough money into consumers' pockets to maintain a healthy demand for goods and services. Under the Guatemalan structure there is no incentive to put money in the hands of workers and, as a consequence, wages are forced down to starvation levels.

Table 2

Income Distribution in Guatemala, 1981

Percentage of the Population		Monthly Income (In U.S. Dollars)
35.90	("extremely poor")	Less than $100
15.45	("extremely poor")	$101 to $150
27.56	("poor")	$151 to $300
3.70		$301 to $350
4.70		$351 to $400
5.90		$401 to $600
3.50		$601 to $900
2.00		$901 to $1200
1.00		More than $1200

Source: Infopress 1982: 131.

AID (1980) has identified the "very low wage rates paid by commercial agriculture and an extremely low minimum wage established by the government" as principal causes of Guatemalan poverty. The U.S. State Department conceded as far back as 1963 that the prosperity of Guatemala's business class was based on "exploitive" wages (Christian Science Monitor, 5 May 1981). The World Bank concluded in 1980 that, if the country continued on its economic course, there was little prospect for the development of an internal market. In 1982, Guatemala's Economic Planning Secretariat issued figures (Infopress 1982) on income distribution which showed why the Guatemalan campesinos and workers were unable to participate substantially in consumption of the nation's product.

Thus, the Guatemalan economy is structured in such a way that even though exports may produce substantial and growing income, workers do not receive a large enough share of that income to maintain themselves except at the threshold of survival. Moreover, the World Bank found that this income is not invested in productive local projects either. Referring to foreign exchange earnings from exports, the Bank concluded: "A major share of such resources now accrues to a rather limited group of coffee, cotton, sugar, and beef producers. . . . A substantial portion of these funds leave the country to pay for the importation of consumption goods and for investment or other expenditures abroad. A significant share is also held domestically in relatively non-productive forms such as land held for speculation" (IBRD 1980). This speculation in land reduces the supply of fertile land available to campesinos for growing food crops. As export income increases and more land is bought up for speculation by the large landowners, the size of campesino plots diminishes, thus helping to produce the seemingly paradoxical effect of falling mass living standards in a time of rising GNP.

The Politics of Privilege

The economic logic of the Guatemalan system elicits a certain set of political values among the oligarchy. A 1971 staff report for the Senate Foreign Relations Committee characterized the Guatemalan right as "the most extreme and unyielding in the hemisphere" (U.S. Senate 1971). In a system where there is no rational economic reason to better the lot of the people, any efforts to do so are seen as political threats to the existence of the system. Guatemalan law and politics have thus traditionally given employers more than mere economic authority over the lives of their workers (Amnesty International 1976). A 1935 agrarian law formally gave landlords the right to kill campesinos who entered their property without permission. When rural properties are sold from one landlord to another, campesinos who live on the grounds are included in "the enumeration of the goods of a given plantation, . . . enhancing the selling price. They are thus 'sold' along with the rest of the farm." On many plantations which cover large expanses of territory, the finquero is formally appointed as the area's legally constituted "agent of authority." This gives him the right to bear arms and exercise police powers. For a monthly fee of less than $200, plantation and factory owners can hire armed troops of the Mobile Military Police (PMA) to patrol their premises. The 1965 law (Decreto Ley 332) which established the PMA obliges them to "lend assistance in cases of emergency to the owners and administrators of farms, haciendas, cultivated areas, forests and all other rural properties [and to] monitor all activity that tends to inflame the passions of the peasant masses or in the rural communities, and when necessary, repress through lawful means any disorder that should occur." At Guatemala's last constitutional convention in 1965, CACIF, the organization which represents the Chambers of Agriculture, Commerce, Industry, and Finance, insisted that all references to "social justice" be struck from the section of the Constitution on land policy. The Chamber explained: "We are not against social justice but rather against the demagogic way this term is used. Private enterprise might collapse if we augment the burden of the owners" (Melville and Melville 1971: 160). When President Méndez Montenegro proposed a progressive income tax, the chambers denounced the plan as "communistic" and the idea was dropped (Melville and Melville 1971: 160).

Guatemalan politicians and businessmen can be quite explicit about the way the system works. One development agency official explained in a 1981 interview that "the politicians believe that if the Indians do better they will not work on the plantations" (Krauss 1981: 306). A recent sociological study of 122 plantation owners quoted a "representative planter" as saying that "unemployment is good for Guatemala. It is good for any country if you think about it. That is why you can earn two or three hundred dollars a month in Guatemala and still have enough money for a maid or two. If people are hungry enough they will work at anything" (Pancini 1981).

The political party of the landholding and industrial elite is the National Liberation Movement (MLN). The MLN dominates Guatemalan politics. In the 1982 elections six of the eight presidential and vice presidential candidates were current or former MLN members. MLN leader Mario Sandoval Alarcón (who has been Vice President of Guatemala and President of the Senate) claims the party has a private standing army of 6000 and can put 100,000 armed men into the field on 24 hours notice. In a 31 October 1980 radio interview, the party's second in command, Leonel Sisniega Otero, described the MLN philosophy: "On more than one occasion we have been called the party of organized violence and I admit that the MLN is the party of organized violence. Organized violence is vigor, just like organized color is scenery and organized sound is harmony. There is nothing wrong with organized violence: it is vigor, and the MLN is a vigorous movement" (FBIS, 31 October 1980).

In such a political climate even modest economic demands are advanced at the worker's peril. In February of 1980 the Committee for Campesino Unity (CUC) organized a strike of 17,000 sugar and cotton workers. Their demand: wages of $6.00 per day. The owners denounced the demand as Communist economic sabotage. But production had been crippled and President Lucas was compelled to announce an increase from $1.19 to $3.20 per day. Many owners found this figure equally unacceptable and to this day do not comply. During the course of the strike, more than 100 workers were killed by Army and private death squads.

The government, far from moderating these inequalities with its tax, health, and welfare policies, has actually increased them. AID noted that government programs tend to serve as "redistributive mechanisms which favor the upper middle and upper classes at the expense of the rural poor." The keystone of the government's so-called land reform program, the opening up of new lands in the Northern Transversal Strip (Franja Transversal del Norte), has resulted, according to the World Bank, in "substantial distribution of large blocks of land to persons from the middle and upper income classes. . . . If the government expects to have the development of the Franja contribute to the welfare of the many rather than enrich the few, it will have to place a limit on farm size in the area" (IBRD 1980).

In 1978, the World Bank concluded that the economic problems of Guatemala's poor majority "almost certainly [have] to be attacked at least in part through the redistribution of existing properties" (IBRD 1978: 75). Two years later, it recommended the "redistribu-[tion of] large private landholdings in the fertile agricultural zones to smallholders, probably organized in production cooperatives" (IBRD 1980). It also noted that "a more dynamic public sector is essential if Guatemala is to overcome its economic and social dualism" and recommended "major public investment in water, health, and housing." The Bank concluded that since "the private sector is unwilling to undertake these investments voluntarily on behalf of the poor on the scale required, the government will have to play the leading role." The Bank went on to warn that "income distribution patterns are likely to deteriorate in the absence of well-funded well-run public sector programs and projects to reverse these trends. . . . Given the lack of an aggressive fiscal policy that would capture significantly larger amounts of domestic resources from the higher income classes for an expansion of economic and social services to increase productivity of the lower income classes, major improvements in their economic and social situation still seem to lie well into the future."

In dozens of capitalist countries programs of land reform, progressive taxation, and public works have been the policy of moderate, mainstream governments. But when such policies have been advocated in Guatemalan public life, their proponents have been denounced as Communist subversives and violently subdued. The International Commission of Jurists (ICJ) noted after a study of human rights violations in Guatemala that "it appears that a continuing source of repression is the narrowly perceived interests of the larger landowners" (Fox 1980). The ICJ added: "The government has embarked on a systematic campaign to suppress dissent which has, in fact, generated a widespread climate of fear, demoralization, and the growth of clandestine opposition."

"The root cause of the social strife," reported the Financial Times of London, "is the tremendous disparity of wealth, not 'outside intervention' " (Chislett 1981). That was not the first time that this point had been made. In February of 1970 a politician campaigning for the presidency offered the following analysis. "Subversive movements which attempt to alter democratric institutions are not dissolved only by bullets. Subversive movements such as we are facing are also a problem of hunger—a problem of injustice that has accumulated over a long period of time. It is the problem of desperation in the face of a life of misery and suffering, since our countrymen live in a world apart, which is sometimes primitive; civilization and progress have not yet come to them, nor has the constructive action of the government" (Melville and Melville 1971). The identity of the speaker was more remarkable than his words. He was Colonel Carlos Arana Osorio, who two years before had led a ruthless counterinsurgency in the eastern departments which claimed 10,000 lives and who was soon to become the most repressive president yet known in Guatemalan history.

The United States Thwarts Reform

The businessmen and Army officers who run Guatemala trace their political strength to the 1954 coup which overthrew the elected reformist government of Colonel Jacobo Arbenz. The role of the CIA in planning, directing, funding, and executing the coup has been well documented in two recent books: Bitter Fruit by Stephen Schlesinger and Stephen Kinzer (1982) and The CIA in Guatemala by Richard H. Immerman (1982). The motives for the coup—Arbenz' attempt to implement land reform, and supposed fear of Communist penetration—are themes which have resounded through the ensuing 28 years of Guatemalan politics.

Since the Spanish conquest of 1524, Guatemala's Indian masses had been kept in a position of economic subordination. The Spaniards used Indian slaves to support an export economy based on cacao and indigo. The campesinos remained subject to some form of forced labor, by means of debt bondage and vagrancy laws which compelled the landless to serve plantation owners, until the revolution of 1944. In the 1870s the modern pattern of highly concentrated landholding geared to coffee export had begun to take hold. In 1901, United States interests entered the scene, led by the United Fruit Company (UFCO). United Fruit developed a close relationship with General Jorge Ubico, the last of Guatemala's old-style dictators. In 1944, Ubico was forced out of office by a broad-based nearly bloodless revolt led by middle-class professionals, and the following year Dr. Juan José Arévalo was chosen president in a free election and embarked on an unprecedented program of democratic reforms including universal suffrage (except for illiterate women), repeal of vagrancy laws, and establishment of a minimum wage, collective bargaining, and the right to strike. In 1951, Arévalo was succeeded by Colonel Arbenz, who was elected with 63.2% of the vote. Arbenz expanded Arévalo's reforms into the areas of education, health, and social insurance. But his principal goal was to make Guatemala what he called "a modern capitalist country" through a program of land reform. Arbenz hoped to create a class of yeoman family farmers who would use their small farms to support an internal market and spur the growth of local industry. Arbenz proposed to do this by nationalizing—with compensation—idle lands not being cultivated by the large plantations. Landholdings were so concentrated that fully 40% of the land nationalized under Arbenz belonged to just 23 owners (Melville and Melville 1971). But fatefully for Arbenz and Guatemala, one of these landowners was United Fruit.

United Fruit was the largest landowner in Guatemala. It owned more acreage than half the Guatemalan population combined. It had an absolute monopoly on all Guatemalan railroads, international communications, and port facilities. The United Fruit railroad charged the highest rates in the world, according to the Inter-American Development Bank, and had not paid any taxes since its incorporation 50 years earlier. When confronted by a strike of its workers, United Fruit retaliated by curtailing all traffic into or out of Guatemalan ports. In 1951, the President of United Fruit went to Arbenz and demanded that the company be excused from any tax increases and be privately indemnified by the Guatemalan government against any fall in the exchange rate of Guatemala's currency (Melville and Melville 1971). United Fruit was accustomed to such treatment. UFCO public relations Vice President Thomas McCann observed in his memoirs: "Guatemala was chosen as the site for the company's earliest development activities. . . . because a good portion of the country contained prime banana land and also because at the time. . . Guatemala's government was the region's weakest most corrupt, and most pliable. In short, the country offered an 'ideal investment climate,' and United Fruit's profits there flourished for fifty years. Then something went wrong: a man named Jacob [sic] Arbenz became president" (McCann 1976: 45; see too Cook 1981: 226).

Eighty-five percent of United Fruit's 550,000 acres were idle and Arbenz sought to nationalize the bulk of them. United Fruit declared the compensation ($1.2 million) inadequate and Arbenz a Communist. Working through its many contacts at the highest level of the U.S. government—for example, John Foster Dulles, a UFCO stockholder and Director and the author of the Ubico-UFCO contract, was Secretary of State—United Fruit brought in the CIA. After an extensive destabilization campaign in which Arbenz was portrayed as a Soviet puppet, the CIA led in the invasion force which toppled Arbenz in 1954.

The new president chosen by the CIA, Colonel Carlos Castillo Armas, immediately repealed nearly all of the Arévalo-Arbenz economic and political reforms (including universal suffrage, the right to unionize, the anti-forced labor laws, and, of course, land reform) and declared a "Preventive Penal Law Against Communism." The law gave the police the right to imprison persons without charge and established a list of 70,000 "subversives" drawn from the rolls of campesino cooperatives and unions. Two hundred union leaders were shot, including seven from UFCO (Melville and Melville 1971).

The coup cast the die for the future of Guatemalan politics. Even the mildest economic reforms were abrogated and declared Communist and subversive. The democratic system that might have achieved the restitution of these reforms was effectively dismantled—72% of the electorate was declared ineligible, and the era of Army rule began.

U.S. Military Assistance

The internal situation of the Army remained unstable for several years: Castillo Armas was assassinated by one of his aides, and the Army's first attempt to hold an election was abandoned because of fraud. Nevertheless, the United States came in to help shape the security programs of the new military state. In 1957 the AID Office of Public Safety began a training program for the Guatemalan National Police. 24 Americans began patrolling with the National Police and the judiciales—the political police—on a daily basis. From 1957 until Congress abolished it in 1974, the program pumped $4.4 million into the Guatemalan police, trained 425 agents in the U.S., and provided extensive supplies of arms, anti-riot equipment, and communications and transportation technology. Among other services, AID set up the police training center; organized and equipped the PMA (the unit hired out to landlords and to suppress campesino unrest); developed a national communications network connecting 22 local departments with Guatemala City; trained the judiciales in bomb disposal, fingerprinting, photography and "criminalistics;" and supplied the force with pistols, ammunition, and grenades.

The U.S. also began a program of aid to the Army which would total $62.7 million by 1980. In 1959 the U.S. had 15 military advisors in Guatemala. By 1965, the contingent had grown to 34, perhaps the largest in Latin America (Miller et al. 1981).

There are two notable aspects of the U.S. military (and police) aid program. (In Guatemala, the police are under the authority of the military.) First, the program predates the existence of a guerrilla threat. There were no known armed "subversives" in Guatemala from 1954 to 1960. The first inkling of guerrilla activity did not appear until 13 November 1960, when a group of dissident officers took to the hills after a failed barracks uprising. By that time the United States had already established a secret CIA air base and training center in Guatemala in preparation for the Bay of Pigs invasion. U.S. and Cuban exile pilots took time off from their preparations to make bombing runs to help put down the revolt (Wise and Ross 1964: 33). Although the handful of renegade officers was at large in the countryside, they did not stage their first armed attack until 1962. Even then, their strength was still negligible. In a 1977 article in Armed Forces and Society, two defense analysts commented that "to Colonel Peralta [President from 1963 to 1966], the guerrillas represented only a minor problem and possibly were an asset" (Jenkins and Sereseres 1977). During the 1960s, guerrillas were never active in more than two of Guatemala's 22 departments and their number never exceeded a few hundred. Yet this ostensible Communist guerrilla threat was used as the pretense, by both Guatemala and the United States, for a military, police, and intelligence buildup. By 1965, for example, the Army and its U.S. advisors had saturated one department—which had no guerrilla activity—with one military deputy (Army informer, recruiter, or enforcer) for every fifty adult men. By 1967, the network of deputies had been expanded to the size of the regular Army in order to "exercise complete control and surveillance in towns and villages of each military zone" (Jenkins and Sereseres 1977).

The second notable point about U.S. military aid concerns the activities of the security forces trained and equipped by the U.S. In May 1962, the U.S. Embassy reported to the State Department that the police judiciales were "employed in the investigation and harassment of political opponents and in the carrying out of this or that unsavory assignment. This body is feared and despised by virtually everyone in Guatemala except those whom they serve." This was after five years of U.S. training and arming--a process that was to continue for another 12 years.

In 1966, President Julio César Méndez Montenegro publicly admitted (El Imparcial, 4 July 1966) that the judiciales had been engaging in torture. (He said he would stop the practice.) This admission came after an AID progress report had praised the judiciales for growing efficiency in "intelligence and control of the incipient Communist threat." In 1971 a staff report of the U.S. Senate Foreign Relations Committee noted that the Guatemalan public safety program had "an unusually high component of equipment" and that as a result of the program the police had been "completely supplied with radio patrol cars and a radio communications net"." The report went on to say that "the police are widely admitted to be corrupt and are commonly held to be brutal. . . . They receive their political direction from very hard line right wingers." The conclusion of the report was charitable: "After 14 years, on all the evidence, the teaching has not been absorbed. Furthermore, the U.S. is politically identified with police terrorism" (Gall 1971). At the very least, it can be said that the U.S. aid program did not seem structured to reward democratic behavior by the Guatemalan military.

In 1962, President Ydígoras Fuentes (elected in 1958) was facing a political crisis precipitated by a series of worker and student demonstrations and public outrage over his participation in the Bay of Pigs training. An election was coming up in 1963 and the Army feared that a free election would vote Juan José Arévalo (the reformist president of 1945-1950) back into power. Colonel Peralta Azurdia preempted the election with a coup in 1963. The United States responded by increasing military aid to Guatemala and, in 1964, by building a telecommunications facility behind the National Palace which Amnesty International would later identify in 1981 as the control center for the Army and police death squads.

The Terror Takes Root

In 1966, Julio César Méndez Montenegro, Guatemala's first civilian president since the coup, was inaugurated and the first major wave of terror began. Until this time, the annual toll in killings and disappearances had been in the dozens to low hundreds. But during the presidency of Méndez Montenegro—who took office after making a pact with the Army to leave all security matters in their hands—the Army and the MLN began a full-scale offensive against individuals they considered politically dangerous. Although the small guerrilla groups were operating in the countryside, the violence began in the city. People were snatched off the streets in broad daylight. A group called the White Hand (Mano Blanca) issued press releases claiming credit for the abductions and declaring that to oppose the Army is "treason to the fatherland." As Mario Sandoval Alarcón later admitted, the Mano was organized by the MLN in conjunction with the Army and the Police (Gall 1971: 13). On 4 August 1966, a MLN memo declared the need for "a paramilitary institution to combat the guerrillas with their own systems, their own tactics, and on their own ground" (Comité de Defensa 1968). As Sandoval said: "All we are doing is what the Bible suggests: taking an eye for an eye."

This was the beginning of the infamous "death squads" which were later centralized under direct Army control. In a 1981 interview, Raúl García Granados, one of Guatemala's wealthiest businessmen and the cousin and chief adviser of former president Lucas, recalled the birth of this important Guatemalan institution. "The death squads were organized under the patronage and the approval of the government and the Army, because it was the only way to fight guerrillas. They [the squads] have the sympathy of most of the Guatemalan people. . . . They have lists of people that are suspected to be Communists of whatever kind and they kill them. It's a war, you see, it's a war between the Communists and the anti-Communists."

The death squads were born in the city but they came of age in the eastern hills of Zacapa and Izabal, two departments where, in 1967, a guerrilla group called the Guerrilla Army of the Poor (EGP) had established the first major guerrilla presence, an enclave of several hundred armed troops that moved freely among the population. Under the direction of U.S. advisers, a massive detachment of Guatemalan troops went in to remove them. The operation was headed by Colonel Carlos Arana Osorio, who was recalled from his post at the Guatemalan Embassy in Washington for this assignment. Estimates of the final civilian death toll range from 3000 to 10,000. According to Time (26 January 1968), 85 of those killed were guerrillas and 500 were guerrilla sympathizers. Time also reported that Colonel John Webber, the U.S. military attache who dealt with the operation, had said that "armed local bands of 'civilian collaborators' licensed to kill peasants whom they considered guerrillas or 'potential guerrillas' " had been used. " 'That's the way the country is,' he said. 'The Communists are using everything they have, including terror. And it must be met.' "

The Guatemalan Army had been well prepared by the U.S. aid program. From 1954 to 1972, 2000 Guatemalans were trained in U.S. military schools. U.S. military aid averaged 12% of Guatemala's defense expenditures through the 1960s and early 1970s. United States "matériel funds provided equipment, vehicles, seacraft, and aircraft in order to improve the mobility, communication, and firepower of the Guatemalan armed forces. . . . The Méndez government received considerable military equipment for its campaign against the guerrillas." The U.S. aid was targeted for four infantry battalions, 2 airborne companies, one counterintelligence group, an engineers battalion, and the central maintenance facility (Jenkins and Sereseres 1977).

But the U.S. was far more than a passive source of hardware. "The furnishing of arms, communications, transportation, and other military equipment under the Military Assistance Program created the need to reorganize and train the Guatemalan military and provide the logistical support for a variety of newly created missions. Among the new missions was the creation of a 'rapid reaction force,' made up of airborne companies, which first implemented the tactics of airmobile counterinsurgency warfare in Guatemala." Moreover, "new communications and transportation equipment have added greatly to the mobility of the Guatemalan military. It has given them the capacity for sustained field operations which were of extreme importance to the counterinsurgency campaigns of the late sixties in the East. . ." (Jenkins and Sereseres 1977). From 1962 to 1969, U.S. military aid was nearly $2 million annually.

Another element of the U.S. program was crucial to the Zacapa-Izabal campaign. "A conspicuous part of the counterinsurgency in Guatemala was the civic action and public relations project that was heavily funded by the U.S. Military Assistance Program. These projects played a major role in bringing about changes in attitude toward the government and the armed forces. . . . While prevailing social and economic problems remained," it was conceded, "an increasingly large segment of the rural population, especially in the Northeast, came to view the government, and particularly the military, as a source of goods and services." This tactic fitted hand-in-glove with the use of the death squads. Arana organized a private irregular force of 2000 men. "Some of these vigilante soldiers were gunmen whose political preferences were unclear or nonexistent," others were members of the MLN. "While the comisionados [deputies] were formally under military control, many of them actually took orders from local landowners

and politicians." The MLN provided the Army with the use of its intelligence network and guides and helped in the recruitment of vigilantes. "Another element in the destruction of the guerrillas was the employment of terror. Military authorities in the early stages of their counterinsurgency operations permitted clandestine anticommunist groups to wage a campaign of violence as the 'counter-terror' to frighten possible guerrilla collaborators. Further, blacklists were compiled which included not only those suspected of working with the guerrillas, but those suspected of Communist leanings" (Jenkins and Sereseres 1977).

After Zacapa, by all accounts the guerrillas had been exterminated. Yet, according to both Armed Forces and Society and Amnesty International, the level of violence increased in both the countryside and the city. Army, police, and private death squads operated with impunity, claiming victims from all walks of life. In 1968, however, the death squad directors overplayed their hand when they kidnapped Mario Casariego, the Archbishop of Guatemala. The plan was coordinated among the MLN and the military and was carried out using gunmen hired by Roberto Alejos Arzú, a wealthy planter and industrialist who had lent one of his properties to the CIA for use as a Bay of Pigs training site. Their plan was to blame the kidnapping on the guerrillas and to use the act to justify increased death squad rampages and possible outright replacement of Méndez Montenegro with a military man. The plan backfired, the identity of the true sponsors leaked out, and Méndez Montenegro responded by sending Arana (who after Zacapa had become a leading political figure with close ties to the MLN) and a group of his supporters into exile at overseas diplomatic posts.

During the months when the Arana group was out of the country, there was an immediate—but temporary—lull in the killing. By 1970, Arana was back, after forging a political coalition from his post as attaché in Nicaragua. Arana became the MLN candidate for the presidency in the 1970 elections. On election day, MLN hit squads were very much in evidence. Arana won. On inauguration day, he said that "anyone who does not abide by the law will be broken in two" and declared a state of siege (Latin American Press, 19 March 1970). During the next four years, with the guerrilla movement essentially nonexistent, Arana launched the greatest campaign of systematic terror that Guatemala had yet seen. The Committee of Relatives of Disappeared Persons estimated that from 1970 to 1975 at least 15,000 Guatemalans disappeared. In 75% of these cases, there was evidence implicating the government.

There was more to Arana's strategy, however, than mere brute force. He reorganized the Army and the Police and implemented a centralized, more efficient plan of operation which made better use of intelligence files, surveillance, and communications equipment. He encouraged foreign business investment and established several development banks to spur new projects in the industrial and agro-export sectors. Most importantly, he began giving the senior officer corps a solid financial base. For years, the Army had been beholden to the oligarchy for financial support through bribes and payoffs. Arana helped the officers gain some financial independence by strengthening the Bank of the Army and the Army social security system, by establishing Army business enterprises, and by following a policy of buying up or expropriating campesino lands in potentially oil or mineral-rich areas for the benefit of senior officers.

Guatemalan military men have a gentlemen's agreement to serve only one term as president. This enables a new man--and a new group of associates--to enjoy the spoils of office every four years. The 1974 elections pitted Arana's chief of staff, General Kjell Laugerud, against the former Army chief of staff, General Efraín Ríos Montt. The Christian Democrats backed Ríos Montt. In Guatemala the economic policies of the Christian Democrats are hard to distinguish from those of the military and the MLN. But they affirm a strong belief in electoral honesty and civil liberties, views which lead many members of the Guatemalan elite to brand these eminently conservative politicians Communists. By all accounts, Ríos Montt won, but Arana and the Army fraudulently imposed Laugerud and Ríos Montt was packed off to Spain as military attaché.

Laugerud took a softer line than Arana. Assassinations, massacres, and kidnappings dropped off during his first two years in office to the surprisingly low rate of about 20 per month. Laugerud tolerated the formation of unions and permitted public demonstrations. He even encouraged the organization of cooperatives. This easing of political pressure set the stage for a flowering of political organization unseen since the period of 1944-1954. Unions, student groups, campesino organizations, professional service societies, and moderate political parties sprang up quickly and began to enjoy immense popularity and considerable political force.

By 1977, Laugerud felt compelled to respond with a program of selective assassination aimed at eliminating the leaders of these burgeoning popular movements. The assassination of labor lawyer Mario López Larrave on 8 June 1977 initiated this campaign. But the increase in killing was not sufficient to stem the tide. Laugerud was confronted with a series of massive street demonstrations on economic issues; miners, campesinos, and slum-dwellers marched on the National Palace to state their grievances. The level of repression had achieved the worst of two worlds. The killings were not sufficient to stop the obviously growing opposition movement, but they were sufficient to merit a negative human rights report from the Carter administration. The Guatemalan Army responded with indignation. After using U.S. funds to build a new $7 million military academy in 1976, the Army and Laugerud told Carter in 1977 that if the U.S. was going to start conditioning its aid on human rights criteria, then Guatemala did not want any aid. Carter and Congress suspended new shipments, but the flow of funds and weapons "in the pipeline" continued through 1980 (Schoultz 1981: 113-115).

Lucas García: The New Hard Line

The Army decided on a change in strategy. In 1978, General Fernando Romeo Lucas García, a noted hardliner, was declared winner of the presidential elections in a maneuver that was, as the Washington Post said, "a fraud. . . so transparent that nobody could expect to get away with it." A hint of the new policy had come days before Lucas' inauguration when, in the northern village of Panzós, a delegation of campesinos coming to see the mayor were fired upon by the PMA. At least 100 were killed. The response was a 100,000-person protest demonstration in Guatemala City. The Army was not yet ready for a confrontation on that scale, and the demonstrators were allowed to go home peacefully. But the days of such open political expression were rapidly ending. In October 1978, the government announced a bus fare increase. Tens of thousands filled the streets in protest. This time, the Army and the Police, armed with U.S. riot control equipment, were ready. They attacked the crowd: 1500 were arrested, 400 wounded, and 40 killed. A new phase of repression had begun. The Army and the National Police moved to crush the popular movement with a series of urban assassinations and rural massacres. This was the most intensive wave of violence that Guatemala had yet experienced. Amnesty International testified in July of 1981 that "people who oppose or are imagined to oppose the government are systematically seized without warrant, tortured, and murdered. . . . The bodies of the victims have been found piled up in ravines, dumped at roadsides or buried in mass graves. Thousands bore the scars of torture. Most had been murdered by strangling with a garrotte, by being smothered in rubber hoods or by being shot in the head. Amnesty International holds the Government of Guatemala responsible for their fate" (Maurer 1981: 136). The New York Times reported in May 1981: "From the evidence, killing alone does not satisfy the revengeful motives of the security forces. The coroner in one of the capital's four morgues said that two out of every three bodies brought to his morgue bore signs of torture. Virtually all of the murder victims found in the countryside are manacled and indicate beatings, facial disfigurements or violence to the sexual organs" (Hoge 1981a).

Many of the victims were campesinos and workers whose "political activities were either insignificant or wholly imagined," in the words of Amnesty International (Maurer 1981). Mass killings were an integral part of the Lucas strategy. According to Latin America Weekly Reports, Lucas' military staff estimated in 1980 that 50,000 "subversives" would have to be eliminated. But the key to their plan was the assassination of popular leaders. "The main targets of the death squads," the Christian Science Monitor noted, "seem to be town mayors, teachers, health workers, and labor and cooperative leaders. It is almost as though any Indian who is educated or has anything to do with organizing people risks his or her life" (Southerland 1981).

No sector was safe. In June 1980, the Catholic bishops denounced a campaign of "violent persecution against the people and the Church" (World Council of Churches 1980). A landowners' association issued a statement declaring that "the Church in Guatemala is helping Marxists to destroy Christian civilization at its base and to erect in its place a dictatorship of the proletariat" (Hoge 1981b). When the Bishop of El Quiché survived an assassination attempt and went to Rome to report to the Pope, he was barred from reentering the country. In an 18-month period, 12 priests and more than 190 catechists were assassinated. In August 1980, after a spate of assassinations and kidnapping of Church personnel, the diocese of El Quiché was shut down. In February 1981, one of the four priests sent to reopen the diocese was assassinated as he rode to his parish. Not even Americans were safe. On 28 July 1981, Father Stanley Rother, an American priest who had been threatened by the death squads, was murdered in his rectory at Santiago Atitlán. James Miller, a Christian Brothers missionary from Minnesota, was killed on 14 February 1982.

In March of 1980, the Army began a series of attacks on the University of San Carlos, the national university located in Guatemala City. In a 6-month period, 27 professors and administrators and nearly 50 students were killed. University spokesmen declared in April that "everything points to a government policy totally to destroy the University of San Carlos as a center of democratic and scientific thought" (Maurer 1981). The Rector of the University and the Dean of the School of Architecture, as well as 50 other faculty members, fled into exile.

Those who tried to report on the killings were especially at peril. 49 journalists were assassinated in 1980 and 1981. The national press union declared that "journalists who say what they think or simply dare to tell the truth in Guatemala sign their death sentence" (Maurer 1981). This was the case for people active in a number of fields. An Amnesty International field mission concluded that "to be a union leader or active trade union member in Guatemala today means risking one's life" (Maurer 1981). 110 union members were assassinated in 1980.

Those who attempted to participate in Guatemala's formal electoral process did not fare much better. More than 150 members of the center-right Christian Democrats were murdered in 1980 and 1981. Guatemala's two centrist reformist parties, the Social Democrats (PSD) and the United Front of the Revolution (FUR), were crushed altogether. Hopes for a democratic opening were kindled briefly in 1978 when the Government said that it would permit the PSD and FUR to register to participate in the 1982 presidential elections. The leaders of the two parties, former Foreign Minister Alberto Fuentes Mohr (PSD) and former Guatemala City Mayor Manuel Colom Argueta (FUR), were considered to be the two most popular politicians in Guatemala. It was anticipated that a

FUR-PSD ticket would sweep to power in 1982 if honest elections were held. In January 1979, Fuentes Mohr filed the registration papers for the PSD. Within the week, he was machine-gunned down by a group of soldiers as he drove past an Army base at midday on Guatemala City's main street. Six weeks later, Colom Argueta died when he was ambushed in the city's wealthy residential district by a group of at least 20 men equipped with machine guns and automatic rifles as a helicopter hovered overhead. Shortly before, he had said in an interview with Latin America Political Report (6 April 1979): "The Government is attempting to give itself a democratic veneer, which is why they are recognising my party. But in exchange, they may want my head." The surviving PSD and FUR leaders have gone into exile to work with the opposition. A pro-government FUR splinter group, which has been disowned by the family and followers of Colom Argueta, participated in the 1982 municipal elections but received only a few thousand votes.

An Armed Resistance Arises

Lucas succeeded in crushing the popular movement. But in doing so, he helped to revive the guerrillas and turn them into a major political and military force. After being annihilated during the Zacapa campaign, the armed guerrillas reappeared in December of 1975. Their base of strength was the densely populated northwestern highlands. Campesinos were being displaced from their lands there by finqueros [large land owners], speculators, and military officers. The removals often involved murders and abductions of those who resisted. It was in these communities that the Guerrilla Army of the Poor (EGP), then comprised of Indian campesino leaders and survivors of the 1960 officers' revolt, began to make organizational headway. From 1975 through early 1980, the political scene was dominated by the popular organizations--the unions, coops, student groups, and campesino organizations like the Committee for Campesino Unity (CUC), which had led the successful sugar and cotton strike of 1980. But as the popular groups were suppressed and their leaders killed or forced underground, many of their activists and rank and file members joined the guerrillas or began to collaborate with them. Movement to the guerrrillas increased in 1981 as the Army began a series of systematic rural massacres.

By late 1981, the guerrillas had emerged as a powerful popular and military force. They were active in 21 of the country's 22 departments and were especially strong in the northwest, the west, and the cotton and sugar lowlands of the south coast. The two largest groups were the EGP and ORPA (Revolutionary Organization of the People in Arms), which appeared publicly in 1979 and grew rapidly among campesinos and intellectuals. The FAR (Rebel Armed Forces) was smaller but had a strong labor constituency. The PGT (Guatemalan Workers Party), the old Moscow-oriented Communist party created in the 1940s, was splitting into three small factions. A key to EGP and ORPA strength was their roots among the Indian population. The Indians were accustomed to economic exploitation and cultural scorn from the Ladino (or non-Indian) oligarchy, and to violent conscription and often slaughter at the hands of the Guatemalan Army. The guerrillas, many of them Indians themselves, spoke the Indian languages and organized from the ground up. They began their activities by "taking" villages: guerrillas would come in, speak to the people, distribute propaganda, and then leave. These actions were often accompanied by assassinations of local Army officers, military deputies, and landowners involved in labor repression. They have since moved on to ambushes of Army patrols and outposts, raids on Army forces occupying towns, and operations in which guerrilla columns guard groups of refugees fleeing into the mountains to escape Army attacks.

A 1980 compilation of newspaper reports found that about 10% of the victims of political violence were identified with the government, the oligarchy, and the right. The Organization of American States (Comisión Interamericana de Derechos Humanos) reported in October 1981 that "the great majority" of the deaths "can be attributed to the illegal executions and disappearances carried out by the security forces or paramilitary groups who are acting in close collaboration with government authorities." Many of the deaths which cannot be attributed to the government are accounted for by guerrilla military communiqués which list in detail the persons they claim to have assassinated and the motives for the actions. Other than Army and Police personnel, most of the targets of guerrilla violence are suspected Army spies, businessmen accused of mistreating workers, and members of wealthy families who are often kidnapped for the large ransoms which are one of the guerrillas' primary sources of funds. The London Sunday Times reported that an internal U.S. Embassy cable reporting on a rural massacre stated that "the guerrillas do not engage in mass executions" (Blundy 1981).

Each of the groups except ORPA professes some strain of Marxist ideology. Their political programs are based on the redistribution of land. ORPA and the EGP emphasize the role of the Indians and the need to end discrimination against them. In January 1982, the EGP, ORPA, FAR, and one faction of the PGT formed

the Guatemalan National Revolutionary Unity (URNG), a coordinating group with a broad five-point program. The program calls for an end to repression and "the economic and political domination of the repressive wealthy, both national and foreign, who rule Guatemala" (Unidad Revolucionaria 1982). It pledges Indian-Ladino equality and a government which will include representatives of "all patriotic, popular, and democratic sectors." The program also calls for a foreign policy of "non-alignment and international cooperation." The program says that "the revolution will respect the people's right to elect their local, municipal, and national representatives. All those citizens who with their work, skills, or capital are willing and able to help Guatemala overcome its poverty, backwardness, and dependence will have a place in the new society. Patriotic businessmen who are willing to contribute to the achievement of this great objective will have full guarantees, without conditions, except that they respect the interests of the working people. The revolution will guarantee free political association, freedom of expression, and of religious belief."

In February 1982, a group of 26 well-known campesino organizers, labor leaders, academics, lawyers, religious leaders, and journalists, together with government figures from the 1944-1954 period, formed the Guatemalan Patriotic Unity Committee (CGUP). Among them they included exiled leaders from all sectors of the popular movement of 1975-1980. Many were drawn from two umbrella organizations, the Democratic Front Against Repression (FDCR) and the FP-31 (January 31 Popular Front, named in honor of the Indians massacred during a peaceful occupation of the Spanish Embassy in 1980). The membership of these two groups includes the FUR and PSD political parties and all of the country's major labor unions and campesino groups. CGUP endorsed the statement of the URNG and said that "the strategy of the Popular Revolutionary War which [the URNG] is promoting is the only route left to the people in order to build a country with respect for life and the right to peace with inalienable guarantees" (Guatemalan Patriotic Unity Committee 1982).

As the military and political strength of the guerrillas grew through 1981 and early 1982, the Army and the oligarchy became increasingly unhappy with the leadership of Lucas. After crushing the popular movement, Lucas maintained the pace of urban assassinations. His continued highly visible killings of politically unimportant individuals served no rational purpose but did increase Guatemala's international isolation. In the countryside, the massacres increased guerrilla popularity. They were not coordinated as part of a coherent military plan. Young officers were upset that they were sustaining casualties with nothing to show for it. The senior officers corps was disturbed by Lucas' diversion of the spoils of government corruption away from the Army general staff, which traditionally had received these benefits, into the hands of his small circle of business and political friends, most of whom, worst of all, were civilians associated with the Institutional Democratic Party (PID).

The 1982 elections were seen by business and military men as a chance to salvage Guatemala's political fortunes. International image, foreign investment, tourism, and U.S. military aid could perhaps all be revived by presenting to the world an apparently democratic election and a new civilian president. Throughout 1981, leading figures in the Army and business worked hard to arrange a deal under which a reliable but moderate-sounding civilian would be elected president in 1982. Two plausible candidates emerged, Gustavo Anzueto Vielman, a U.S.-educated architect and the right-hand man of former President Arana, and Alejandro Maldonado Aguirre, a 20-year veteran of the MLN who had recently formed his own party. But Lucas refused to cooperate. He insisted on picking his own military candidate and imposing him by electoral fraud. A month before the election, the government secretly added 250,000 phantom voters to the electoral rolls. Amid widely reported charges of fraud, Lucas' Defense Minister, General Angel Aníbal Guevara, was declared the new president.

By this time, two major coup plots were already under way. The first involved a group of young officers, mostly captains and lieutenants. They wanted to see a more sophisticated U.S.-style counterinsurgency strategy using civic action, psychological warfare, and more advanced U.S. weaponry. The young officers stressed repeatedly that they were an institutional, not a political movement. They had no particular ideology, but they said that they wanted to see the Army run like it should be. The second group was led by the old guard of the active and retired Army high command. Working with them was Leonel Sisniega Otero, second in command of the MLN. This group also had their own contingent of young officers, led by Sisniega's son. The old guard started plotting first—several months before the elections—but the young officers moved faster. They drew hundreds of officers from the rural counterinsurgency bases and the key city garrisons. On 23 March, the two groups moved in unison, taking command of the city and of rural Army bases; they met little resistance.

After a full day of negotiations, Lucas left the National Palace and turned power over to a three-man junta led by General Efraín Ríos Montt, former Army Chief of Staff under Arana. Ríos Montt was joined by General Horacio Maldonado Schaad and Colonel Francisco Gordillo Martínez.

Ríos Montt: More Massacres

The Ríos Montt junta adopted a new strategy. The politically unproductive urban assassinations were curtailed at once. Statements were made expressing respect for human rights and inviting the press and human rights organizations to come and see the new atmosphere in Guatemala for themselves. Hundreds of middle-level civilian officials were jailed for corruption. Guatemala's diplomats began a campaign to renew the flow of international financial assistance and U.S. military aid. Tension in Guatemala City eased considerably as the plainclothes police death squads seemed to disappear from the streets.

But even as these changes were eliciting positive comment from relieved urban professionals and observers around the world, Ríos Montt was planning a dramatic escalation of the Army's rural offensive. On 1 April 1982, the Junta adopted a secret political and military strategy entitled the "National Plan of Security and Development." The plan admitted bluntly that "the manpower, armaments, and equipment of the Guatemalan Army are not adequate to cover the different fronts presented by armed subversion." The plan began by assuming that "changes in the basic structure of the state will be minimal." It called for a public campaign of "psychological action at all levels," designed to win international and local support. Privately, the government would "increase the legal and functional capacity of antisubversive organisms" and create "at the highest political level, an organism for the direction of anti-subversive functions." The plan called for major increases in the size and power of military intelligence units and a new emphasis on tapping international sources of information on Guatemalan subversion. All aspects of government policy--economic, political, and "psycho-social"--were to be placed under military coordination in order to further the counter-insurgency campaign.

Within weeks, the pace of killing had surpassed that of the Lucas years. On 7 May, Latin America Weekly Report wrote that "the Army strategy is to clear the population out of the guerrilla support areas. Troops and militias move into the villages, shoot, burn, or behead the inhabitants they catch; the survivors are machine-gunned from helicopters as they flee. ... The new strategy, said in some quarters to have been planned by the deposed Army chief of staff General Benedicto Lucas García [President Lucas' brother] has the support of the landowners. One of their spokesmen, writing in the influential Prensa Libre recently, spelled out the establishment view: 'If the guerrilla areas have to be cleared of these people [the Indian population], then it must be done." On 27 May, the Catholic bishops issued a statement denouncing "the massacre of numerous peasants and Indian families." "With profound sorrow," the bishops said, "we have learned and verified the suffering of our people by these massacres.... Numerous families have perished, vilely murdered. Not even the lives of old people, pregnant women, or innocent children were respected." "Never in our national history," the bishops stated flatly, "has it come to such grave extremes."

In July 1982, Amnesty International issued a special report entitled "Massive Extrajudicial Executions in Rural Areas Under the Government of General Efraín Ríos Montt." The report included a "partial listing of massacres" from the time of the coup through the last week of June--more than 60 with an estimated death toll of 2,186.

- 26 March: Nine entire campesino families, totalling 54 people, were killed and three campesinos kidnapped by plainclothes soldiers who entered the village of Pacoj in the department of Chimaltenango.
- 31 March: 15 campesinos were shot dead and four burned to death in the village of Estancia de la Virgen, San Martín Jilotepeque municipality, Chimaltenango department, by heavily armed men who pulled them out of their homes. Most of the huts in the village were burned to the ground. Campesino groups blamed the Army for these killings.
- 2 April: Some 250 soldiers and paramilitary entered the village of El Adelanto, Concepción municipality, department of Sololá, kidnapping 10 women and killing them. They then set fire to their homes.
- 5 April: About 100 people were killed in the village of Nangal, and still others in Chel, Juá, and Amachel in northern El Quiché. In one of the villages the Army reportedly forced the entire population into the courthouse, raped the women, beheaded the men, and battered the children to death against rocks in a nearby river. 35 more people were killed on the same day on the Covadonga property, Chajul municipality, in the department of Chimaltenango. Campesino groups charge the Army with responsibility.
- 7 April: Soldiers killed at least three women after attacking the hamlet of Chirrenquiché, Cobán, Alta Verapaz. The following day soldiers returned to the hamlet and machine-gunned an entire family. (The Amnesty report included testimony from a survivor of this incident.)
- 15 April: Soldiers returned to the village of El Adelanto, Concepción, and machine-gunned or hacked to death with machetes 30 more people from the village, including 15 women, 5 men and 9 children between the ages of 6 months and one year.
- 26 April: 20 people were burned alive in their homes in the village of Chipiacul, Patzún, Chimaltenango. Survivors blamed the Army.
- 8 May: 15 campesinos were burned alive in the village of Chamaxú, Huehuetenango department. 6 men, 15 women, and 23 children killed in the village of Saquixa II, Chichicastenango, El Quiché.

- 17-18 May: Some 70 people (including pregnant women and children) were reportedly killed in San Juan Cotzal and Saquilá, El Quiché department.
- 18 May: A clandestine cemetery was found in the village of Chuatalún, San Martín Jilotepeque municipality, Chimaltenango. There were 84 bodies, including men, women, and children. Dogs and coyotes were devouring them.
- On or about 25 May: In the village of Los Cerritos, Chiché, El Quiché department, 5 campesinos, including a 5-year-old girl, were burned to death when armed men attacked them with machetes and set fire to their homes.
- 8 June: 9 people, including 3 children and 2 elderly people, were burned to death on a road leading to San Pedro Carchá, Alta Verapaz department. Some 30 armed men in small cargo vehicles forced the victims out of their homes, placed them together, threw gasoline over them, and set them on fire, according to an eye-witness report.
- 17 June: 20 campesinos were killed in the village of San Marcos, Alta Verapaz department.
- Last week of June: More than 80 campesinos were killed in the villages of Las Pacayas, El Rancho, and Najtilabaj, San Cristóbal Verapaz municipality, Alta Verapaz department, reportedly by the Army and members of the civil defense groups. The majority of the victims were women and children.
- Last week of June: In the village of Pampacché, Alta Verapaz department, all the men were dragged out of their homes by some 300 soldiers. A few days later, more than 70 corpses with signs of torture were found near the village of Tactic, Alta Verapaz department.

The Amnesty report concludes: "Following a pattern not significantly different from that implemented under previous governments, Guatemalan security services continue to attempt to control opposition, both violent and non-violent, through widespread killings including the extra-judicial executions of large numbers of rural non-combatants, including entire families, as well as persons suspected of sympathy with violent or non-violent opposition groups. . . . Information available to Amnesty International, including press reports, testimonies of witnesses and official government pronouncements, repeatedly identifies the regular Army and civilian Army auxiliaries organized as 'civil defense' units under the Ríos Montt government."

The report also notes that "in no case known to Amnesty International has a campesino who has succeeded in reaching relative safety abroad either in Honduras or Mexico supported claims that opposition forces have been responsible for massive extra-judicial executions of non-combatant civilians. On the contrary, many who have spoken to foreign journalists outside of Guatemalan territory have indicated their knowledge or belief that the atrocities which they have witnessed or survived have been perpetrated by government or government-supported groups."

The massacres have occurred in coordination with a program of "civic action"—limited handouts of goods by the Army to campesinos, designed to improve the Army's image. The New York Times reported on 18 July: "Military campaigns aimed at crushing the guerrillas and civic action programs designed to win popular allegiance are being waged in the mountains of Quiché. . . . An Army officer in Cunén said that the government's message to the Indians and peasants was simple: 'If you are with us, we'll feed you. If not, we'll kill you' " (Bonner 1982).

A major element of the program has been increased use of "civil patrols," groups of campesinos who ostensibly volunteer to help the Army fight the guerrillas. The Amnesty report stated that campesinos are forced to join the patrols and that "many of the massacres which the government has blamed on the guerrillas have actually been carried out by these new civilian groups, according to reports received by Amnesty International. . . . Civil defense patrol members from Baja Verapaz admitted that they had been involved in such atrocities. They stated that they acted under the orders of military commanders who instructed them to consider 'involved' anyone they found over the age of 12 in areas or houses considered suspicious by the commanders. They were told to seize such people and kill them. Even younger children, if they too were felt to be involved, were to be summarily executed. The testimony stated that until recently, the women had been left alone in the houses when the men were taken off, but that now women were being routinely raped, even those that were pregnant. One member of the squad told his interviewers that in one case a woman was raped five days after giving birth when she left her home to bathe the baby. He also reported having seen people drowned and mutilated, and he said he had seen several people's ears being cut off. His brother-in-law told him of witnessing garottings. The soldiers who directed these civilian squads were, according to the informant, also young Indians, obliged by their commanders to order the civilian defense squads to commit such atrocities. . . . The testimony also told of civilian defense patrol members being told that they should denounce their fathers, brothers, children, or other relatives that they suspected might be mixed up in opposition activities. The men giving the testimony also spoke of the same soldiers who had carrried out the atrocities in the villages returning to hand out toys to the local children as part of a 'civil action' program intended to win support for the new government. After giving out the toys, the soldiers then took all the men of the village who had appeared for the gathering to the village clinic. Later, only six bloody ears were found there. . . . Those that do not want to patrol, they said, were killed."

A Time for Decisions

Although the killings are often denounced as irrational, there is little that is accidental about them. They are an integral part of the Army's chosen strategy for defeating a guerrilla movement which has broad popular support. When General Ríos Montt was asked about Army killings of unarmed civilians, he replied: "It's a war, a permanent war. Look, the problem of the war is not just a question of who is shooting. For each one who is shooting there are ten working behind him. And you know that very well." His press secretary, Francisco Bianchi, explained the theory: "The guerrillas won over many Indian collaborators. Therefore, the Indians were subversives, right? And how do you fight subversion? Clearly you had to kill Indians because they were collaborating with subversion. And then they would say: 'You're massacring innocent people.' But they weren't innocent. They had sold out to subversion." One colonel explained: "The problem is not human rights. The problem is leftist humans." (Nairn 1982.)

When Ríos Montt declared a state of siege on 1 July, he was only bestowing formal legality on actions—summary executions, arrests without charge, forced entry into private homes—which the Army had already employed throughout the countryside for years. But politically this signalled the beginning of a period of still more intense repression. As Ríos Montt put it in his declaration of the state of siege: "Today we are going to begin a merciless struggle." Ríos Montt had already made efforts to consolidate his somewhat uncertain hold on government power. In the weeks following the coup, at least six major counter-coup plots were being organized by various factions of the Army and the oligarchy. On first coming to power, Ríos Montt had had broad support. Virtually the entire Army endorsed the overthrow of Lucas. The oligarchy was pleased when Ríos Montt asked CACIF (the Chambers of Commerce, Agriculture, Industry, and Finance) to choose the new ministers of Finance and Agriculture—thereby giving them control over the new government's economic policy. But Ríos Montt's erratic personal conduct soon caused problems, as when he hurt chances for U.S. military aid by telling a stunned international press corps that he did not need U.S. aid since he expected to receive one billion dollars from evangelical Protestants in the United States.

By late May, talk of the counter-coup plots was being openly reported in the local press. The junta admitted that it had foiled at least one such plot, but the conspirators were not jailed. Then, on 9 June, feeling that he finally had sufficient power to act, Ríos Montt dismissed the other two members of the junta and declared himself president. In August, he began arresting middle-level officers of civilian political parties accused of plotting against him. But rumors in political circles of impending counter-coups continued unabated. Ríos Montt indicated the political direction that his new one-man government would take when he named his new Minister of the Interior, General Ricardo Méndez-Ruiz. This ministry controls the national police: it had previously been run by junta member Maldonado Schaad. The new minister's penchant for civilian massacres was so well known that he had been criticized by other senior officers as being too extreme.

Signs of the old pattern of violence against popular leaders, professionals, and city dwellers began to reemerge. In July, three union leaders from Amatitlán were kidnapped by uniformed members of the national police SWAT team. Another was seized on 23 September. In August, a psychology student was taken from her home in the middle of the night by ten heavily armed plainclothes agents. The treasurer of the Economics School at the University of San Carlos was abducted from her home along with her three children. The next day, a group of armed men returned to cart away her furniture and personal belongings. In October, the Committee of Relatives of the Disappeared, a group with over 5000 members which has been forbidden to meet since the state of siege was imposed, estimated that urban disappearances were occurring at the rate of eight or ten per day.

By late October, Ríos Montt's early international image as an honest reformer interested in human rights had been seriously damaged by persistent reports of increasing Army violence. Amnesty International issued an updated report bringing to more than 2600 the estimated number of massacre victims. The Mexican government charged that the Guatemalan Army was invading Mexican soil in pursuit of Guatemalan refugees who had fled across the border. Using the testimony of refugees, the international press carried accounts of an Army massacre of more than 350 persons on the finca of San Francisco, Nentón, Huehuetenango. Even the Guatemalan political parties, all of which had initially supported the coup and Ríos Montt, withdrew their cooperation and criticized Ríos Montt for his reluctance to commit himself to future elections. The Christian Democrats, previously enthusiastic boosters of Ríos Montt, went so far as to call for a halt in U.S. economic aid to Guatemala until elections were called.

Whatever the political turns that Guatemala may take in the months to come, the basic facts underlying the current crisis are evident. The economic system which impoverishes the poor majority is accepted as a given by all of the military factions and civilian parties that are permitted to contest for power. The need to maintain that system by physically eliminating those who oppose it is likewise accepted as the current priority of a Guatemalan government, even though there is some disagreement over who should do it and how it should be done. Those who have traditionally sought economic and political reform through estab-

lished channels such as public debate, union bargaining, and electoral competition have seen those channels violently closed and have joined forces with an armed opposition that has its roots of support among the rural campesinos.

The struggle in Guatemala is not a passing agitation or a short-term response to temporary hard times. It is a revolution, a class confrontation. In 1944, Guatemala embarked on a fundamental change of political course, at that time from a colonialist dictatorship to reformist democracy. The United States disapproved, intervened, and set the nation in a different direction, a process which has culminated in the current situation. Now once again, basic social forces are converging. And once again, as the United States watches, it must ponder the kind of Guatemala that it will use its power to help create.

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