



# GUATEMALA UPDATE

October 1983

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## TEN YEARS OF LIBERTY IN THE LAND OF ETERNAL DICTATORSHIP

On October 20, 1944, a civilian-military revolution overthrew the dictatorship of Federico Ponce--a General who, with the airs of an emperor, tried to perpetuate his power in imitation of his predecessor, the Fascist General Jorge Ubico. After 14 years of iron-fisted rule, Ubico was driven from the presidency in June of 1944 by a series of popular protests that demanded his resignation. Upon leaving office, Ubico left command in the hands of his personal friend, General Ponce, in an attempt to maintain "Ubiquismo" without the actual presence of Ubico himself.

The popular revolutionary movement of October 1944 frustrated the plans of the enemies of the people and brought instead, ten years of liberty in the land of eternal dictatorship. In the first open and free elections in the history of Guatemala, Dr. Juan José Arévalo won with an overwhelming majority of the votes. A man of great intellectual and humanist capacity, Dr. Arévalo wanted to convert Guatemala into a modern society within a Capitalist framework. He oversaw the design of a new Constitution--very advanced for the era, and decreed a Labor Code which would protect the rights of the working class. Ironically, it was this 1947 Labor Code that planted the seeds of demise for the progressive revolution, as it set Arévalo in conflict with the United Fruit Company which was brought to task to improve the wretched working conditions of its employees in order to comply with the Code. Arévalo also created a system of social security including ample hospitals to attend the workers, and began construction of modern schools. Workers and campesinos organized unions and defense leagues to protect their interests--so newly won and so often trampled upon in the past.

In accordance with the new Constitution, Dr. Arévalo remained in office for one six-year term and by popular will, power passed to Colonel Jacobo Arbenz who became the second president of the revolution. Given the feudal system of land ownership left over from the era of the Spanish Conquest, Arbenz knew that true social justice was not possible until the land reform envisioned by Arévalo became a reality. At the time, 80% of the land belonged to 2.5% of the population; the vast majority of campesinos did not have their own land for cultivating corn and beans. Necessity forced them to work on the plantations of the wealthy landowners earning miserable wages and living in sub-human conditions despite the 1947 Labor Code laws.

Arbenz' land reform brought him to open conflict with the United Fruit Company, and in a quintessential example of the common interests of government and corporate business, the U.S. ambassador to Guatemala, Richard W. Patterson, said in the June 30, 1950 edition of the New York Times: "I will do my utmost to see that you do not get a single pair of boots, a single cent from my government, unless you stop persecuting American companies."

Despite the Ambassador's threats, Arbenz went on with his plans and expropriated a portion of United Fruit's idle holdings to be distributed to Guatemalan families. The rest of the story is history. United Fruit Company called upon its friends within the Eisenhower Administration and the C.I.A. to come to its rescue. Arbenz was forced to flee the country following a mercenary invasion of troops augmented by Somoza of Nicaragua and Tiburcio Carías of Honduras, and C.I.A. hand-picked Colonel Carlos Castillo Armas to be president.

Thus ended ten years of liberty, social justice and progress for Guatemala, and thus began the era of institutionalized terror, misery and death brought by military rule.

Y LA VICTORIA NACE AUN EN LAS HORAS MAS AMARGAS DE LA HISTORIA.  
VICTORY IS BORN EVEN IN THE BITTEREST HOURS OF HISTORY.