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Kenneth Anderson

Jean-Marie Simon

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Ken Anderson and Jean-Marie Simon

I

On the evening of August 12, 1987, in the grand ballroom of the poshest hotel in Guatemala City, the High Command of the Guatemalan Army took the unprecedented step of conducting a public forum to explain the strategy behind the past 27 years of counterinsurgency and how success in that war had led, step by step, to the present "democracy" in Guatemala. Although the forum was nominally open to the public, the audience consisted of high-level business leaders and top government functionaries. The exclusivity of the audience was no surprise, since the forum was sponsored by the Chamber of Commerce.¹

The evening was meant to be a public discussion between the oligarchy and the Army. It turned out to be less of a dialogue, however, than an opportunity for the military to deliver three specific messages to the assembled oligarchs. First, as Defense Minister Gen. Héctor Gramajo emphasized, the Army supported civilian President Vinicio Cerezo's attempts to find a peaceful regional solution to the Nicaraguan and Salvadoran conflicts — the Arias Plan — and did not favor Reagan's contra policy. Second, although the Army regarded itself as having unqualifiedly won the war against guerrilla insurgents, it considered

1. The material in this article has been gathered largely from interviews conducted in Guatemala over the last several years.

the prevention of further insurgency a function of long term security programs in the best tradition of counterinsurgency consolidation. Such programs cost money, however, and the military expected the oligarchy to shoulder a greater share of that burden. On the one hand, the High Command identified a "social debt" which, according to Defense Minister Gramajo, "the wealthy owe to the family of Guatemala."² On the other hand, they identified a "security debt," whereby the wealthy would pay part of the economic cost of counterinsurgency which the military had been paying with blood — partly its own and mostly everyone else's — in the Guatemalan highlands. Third, the Army backed the tax reform program of the civilian government: a modest tax reform which, while it falls mainly on the middle class, is unprecedented in a country with one of the world's lowest tax rates.

The first message met with relative indifference from the oligarchs. Despite their ideological hostility to Managua, they are well aware that the regional conflict has torpedoed the Central American Common Market, once dominated by Guatemala. The only possibility of reviving it lies in a negotiated settlement with CIA-contra aggression and *some* kind of settlement, failing a clean government victory, in El Salvador. The second and third messages, while roundly applauded by the government functionaries, met with polite hostility from the assembled businessmen, who recognized a dangerous signal in that the Army had joined the civilian government to undertake tax reform. This public forum served notice, as one labor leader privately remarked,

2. In speech-making the Army engages in rhetoric about the need for rural development along with its security projects. Some officers have gone so far as to say that ideological retraining in the Army's forced relocation camps (model villages) would be unnecessary if the camps had a stable material base for development. (See Chris Krueger, conversation with Col. Eduardo Wohlers, draft version 1986, published version by the Washington Office on Latin America, Washington, D.C. 1987: *The Guatemalan Highlands: Democratic Transition or the Continuation of War?*) Repressive development-security projects and permanent counterinsurgency are actually two *different* strategies for the Army to follow, represented by the difference between the model village resettlement program and the civil patrol paramilitary security forces. Some observers have tried to see in the rhetoric of the "social debt" a move by the Army to imitate the populist militaries of Torrijos in Panama or Velasco in Peru; this comparison seems wishful rather than accurate, given the oligarchic pretensions of the officer corps and its extreme anti-communist ideology. The strategy of repressive development-security is itself normatively problematic from a human rights viewpoint, accepting pure authoritarianism in exchange for getting fed and the hope that someday control will ease. In practice the Army has chosen permanent counterinsurgency — permanent mechanisms of violence and the threat of violence in the highlands to try and ensure that insurgency does not reappear. Under either security option, democracy is not even under discussion.

that the Army no longer considered itself the lackey of the oligarchy. From now on it would deal with the oligarchy as an equal, not only in security matters but also in economic policy.

It was as the guardian of this national perspective that Gen. Gramajo responded to a businessman's plea that the military get rid of the "radical Marxists" carrying out various strikes — all of them in fact quite minor — in the new civilian climate. Gramajo shrugged and made it clear that the Army would keep order, but that the time was past when it would serve as the oligarchy's strike-breaker in every minor labor dispute. He then added, "You people have been asking us to kill your Marxists for the past four hundred years."

For its part, the oligarchy had hoped that the Army, having won the counterinsurgency war, would be happy with the profits of corruption, contraband, and graft — that it would remain a ferocious but ultimately subordinate organization, held in partial abeyance until the enormity of social injustice in Guatemala would once again produce an insurgency requiring it to return to the field. Since it would have been risky to take on the military, the oligarchy vented its displeasure against the civilian government as the tax reform was introduced in Congress; over the following weeks it organized demonstrations and a series of short general strikes.

II

The implicit claim in the tax reform struggle — that in Guatemala civilian government and so-called "democratization" is actually a vehicle for strengthening the military — must seem peculiar. After all, the received wisdom regarding Guatemala as well as the rest of Latin America is that the rise of civilian government entails the retreat of the military. Mainstream American liberals as well as conservatives converge on this thesis, even when they differ over whether these new civilian regimes are as yet "real" democracies, or merely democracies "in the process of consolidation." Some on the left accept part of this thesis for particular regions in Latin America. Garretón, for example, in his account of "transitions" in the Southern Cone, writes of those military regimes that "all of them have failed to carry out their *national projects* . . . the military dictatorships of the Southern Cone have ended or are inexorably headed in that direction."³

Garretón may be right, and he makes interesting observations about

3. Manuel Garretón, "Dictatorships in South America," *Telos* 68, (Summer 1986), p. 71.

the special "guardian" role of the military in the new civilian regimes. But the arguments offered both by him and Barros⁴ remain abstract and, although apparently referring only to the Southern Cone, are sufficiently general to apply to all of Latin America. Whereas the experience of Guatemala, by contrast, suggests that quite another outcome is possible, and perhaps will turn out to be the more general case over the long run. Civilian government, bearing the form but not the substance of democracy, may permit the military to carry out its national project and consolidate itself as the central institution of state and society — against the civilian government, against popular and mass organizations, and even against the oligarchy.⁵

It is therefore time to bring the arguments about change in Latin America down to *particular* cases. So, in Guatemala, the singular importance of tax reform. It is the primary symbol of divergence between the Army and the oligarchy, and it tests whether the Army remains subordinate in the all-important questions of the economy. But tax reform is not merely a *symbol* of the Army's changing relation to the oligarchy. The military's national project to consolidate itself as the central institution within the state, in a society whose central institution is to be, in turn, the state and not the private business community, simply requires *more money*. The budget for the entire state of Guatemala last year was under a billion US dollars. The consolidation of a strong state, however, demands greater state resources, not merely for the defense budget but also, in a state dominated by the Army, for all branches of the bureaucracy.⁶

4. Robert Barros, "Democratization in Latin America," *Telos* 68, (Summer 1986), p. 49.

5. Frank Goldman and Aryeh Neier have each independently suggested another version of the same thesis: the military acts, in effect, to consolidate a one-party state, and the Army itself plays the role of that party, bearing distinct resemblance to the single party systems of Eastern Europe. The form of a multiparty democracy is preserved, in order to have legitimacy in the Western international community, but the true aim is to eliminate the "divided sovereignty" created by the independent power of the oligarchy, and thus create the "strong state." (Unpublished remarks by Goldman at the 1987 Symposium of La Mara Internacional, Guatemala City 1987).

6. This picture of a state dominated from the inside by the Army — an Army which has made the institutions of the state its own, while preserving their civilian appearance — can be contrasted with Castoriadis' picture of the Soviet military establishing a two-tier bureaucracy: "There is not a Russian 'economy' and 'production', there are two. There is a Russian 'civilian' life with its production and economy, and a Russian 'military' life with its production and economy." (Cornelius Castoriadis, "Facing the War," *Telos* 46 (Winter 1980-81), p. 47). Castoriadis notes that this division is not rational; in this sense the Guatemalan military, insofar as it can overcome the oligarchy's

The Army tried to impose tax reform twice before, and failed. The evangelist general, Efraín Ríos Montt, tried in 1982 but was unsuccessful, despite the fact he was conducting a scorched-earth war in the highlands which demanded relatively huge military expenditures over previous years.⁷ In 1985, just prior to the transition to civilian government, then head-of-state Gen. Mejía Víctores again attempted tax reform as part of the Army's agreement with the incoming Christian Democratic government. The Army agreed to take the heat for tax reform; the Christian Democrats agreed, among other things, not to disturb the military's self-awarded amnesty for its past crimes.⁸ But Gen. Mejía was unable to deliver on the deal (although, predictably, the Christian Democrats had to keep *their* end) because the oligarchy scuttled it through threats of disinvestment and capital flight.⁹ Frustrated and angry, the Mejía regime responded in mid-1985 by gunning down

recalcitrance, may be considerably more rational in creating the "supple bureaucratic regime" which Castoriadis found practically inconceivable in Russia during the late 1970s. (See Castoriadis, "The Social Regime in Russia," *Telos* 38 (Winter 1978-79), pp. 32-47). The rationality of the Guatemalan Army's approach is that it does not develop an inefficient, two-track system; instead, it makes the civilian apparatus instrumental to its project, helping itself to civilian legitimacy in the process.

7. U.S. aid to Guatemala was cut off in 1977 by the Carter administration over the military's human rights record. Nearly all other countries followed suit and Guatemala became a pariah nation until the inauguration of civilian president Vinicio Cerezo Arévalo on January 14, 1986.

8. The amnesty is found both in decree laws issued by the military a few days prior to Cerezo's inauguration and in the new constitution, which guarantees that military personnel may be tried only in military courts. Most recently a retired colonel successfully argued that he could not be required to appear before a civilian court even for a traffic offense. The question of military self-amnesty affects not just Guatemala, but Argentina, Uruguay, El Salvador, and potentially several other Latin American countries. The Americas Watch has persuasively argued that as a matter of international law, military self-amnesties are invalid. Whether international tribunals (and, in particular, the Inter-American Commission of Human Rights and the Inter-American Court of the O.A.S.), will adopt such a position or, alternatively, accept the amnesties as part of the practical political compromise in obtaining the retreat of the military, is an open question which deserves an appropriate test case. If, as in Guatemala's case, civil government does not signify the retreat of the military, then the latter position may concede the moral and legal high ground for a "practical" political compromise which ultimately nets nothing. (Remarks by Robert Goldman at the International Human Rights Law Group-American University Law School Conference on the Inter-American Commission and Court of Human Rights, Washington, D.C., October 1987).

9. As Bob Stix has pointed out, the oligarchy sought international loans, credits and debt restructuring which the military, as an international pariah, was unable to deliver. The ability of the civilian government to deliver international economic perks to the oligarchy in return for permitting tax reform was thought to be a reason why the civilian government, with the support of the military, would have success in bringing the oligarchy along. As events have shown, that hope was reasonable, but not met.

a leader in the agricultural chamber of commerce.

The military killed tens of thousands of peasants, it even killed an oligarch, but it could not single-handedly impose substantive economic and fiscal changes on Guatemala. Absolute control of the country's security forces was not enough to control tax collection, let alone the broader economy. Yet a new tax reform, even if in an attenuated form, has passed the civilian Congress. The only new element in this power equation is a civilian government which is estimated to control only 20 to 30% of the actual governing power in the country. What has the relatively powerless civilian government added that the military did not have while formally in command? Apparently, legitimacy — internal as well as external. That may not count for much when it comes to *collecting* the new taxes, but even so it has permitted the military, allied with civilian politicians, to accomplish on paper what the Army was unable to accomplish alone. In the future the Army may do more — Gen. Gramajo announced flatly that it *would* — and this must give the oligarchy pause.

The lesson of tax reform is that the military has appropriated the civilian government as its vehicle for consolidating a strong state with the

Rightist Leader Beneath his two Heroes

military at its core.¹⁰ The fact that civilians are brought into the government in order to give it legitimacy does not mean that the civilians have been given power, still less that the state is "democratic" or that the military, because it has disagreements with the oligarchy, is somehow more benign or more "liberal" in its national project. The Guatemalan Army is not benign; it simply does not believe that the oligarchy has a sufficiently unified vision to maintain national order. The business class, in relentless pursuit of disparate, short term profits, is unable to carry out the long term task of keeping order among labor and the peasantry. It reacts to the wrong stimuli, unable to see the problem of social order in any grand perspective.¹¹

III

The Army is well aware that the oligarchy prefers it shed its own blood rather than spend the oligarchs' money on long term security projects which would promote longer term social order. Those projects are mainly Vietnam-style model villages; the civil patrols which organize the peasantry into a gigantic, involuntary paramilitary force; and the Army's S-5 Civil Affairs section, which promotes rural development and dependence on military bureaucracies for aid and investment. Such projects — particularly the model villages and civil patrols — have created a virtual gulag across the Guatemalan highlands.¹²

10. The term "strong state" deliberately avoids the analytic and ideological baggage which has taken over some other terms. "Authoritarian states," in particular, while bearing closely on this discussion, has become too burdened with Jeanne Kirkpatrick's work to be helpful here. It should be made clear, however, that "strong state" in this context does not refer to a specifically fascist civilian government in either an economic or historical sense; not all repressive states are fascist. First, the strong state sought by the military in Guatemala is not a corporatist state. Army officers are far too engaged as individuals in the oligarchy and the market structure to seek true corporatism. Second, Guatemala has long had a truly fascist civilian party, the *Movimiento de Liberación Nacional* (MLN), which used to bill itself as the "party of organized violence," and its relations with the military have traditionally not been flawless. Indeed, for decades the Army had its own party, ideologically and politically separate from the MLN's traditional Francoist line. All that is meant by "strong state" here is the ability of the state, directed by the military, to carry out its security and economic agenda; there is undoubtedly important theory surrounding this concept, but it will not be explored here. [For further discussion, see *Organizational Interests and the State*, ed. by Alan Cawson, (Beverly Hills: Sage Publications, 1985), pp.221-226].

11. See Manuel Garretón's penetrating remarks about the special role of the Latin American military as the internal "protectors of the nation" which prompts them "to take control of the State during political crises to assure the unity of the Nation and the fulfillment of its destiny." Garretón, *op. cit.* p. 72.

12. See the Americas Watch (New York) reports on highland security in *Human Rights in Guatemala: No Neutrals Allowed* (1982), *Guatemala: A Nation of Prisoners* (1984),

Even when the ostensive purpose of the projects is development and not merely security, they avoid fundamental questions of land and wealth distribution: their function is simply to impose a repressive social peace through the weight of institutional and economic arrangements, resulting in less need to impose order by direct force of arms. In actual practice, the military has faced a decision on how to maintain order in the highlands, choosing between development-security projects on the one hand (model villages and various Army Civil Affairs refugee food distribution and health programs) and permanent counterinsurgency projects on the other (principally, civil patrols, which consume peasant resources but add nothing to rural development).

One option cannot be regarded as less repressive than the other: although development from whatever source has advantages, that alone does not mean that repression has been eased. A prison camp or model village remains such even if the inmates are fed. The decision between these two options has largely been taken in favor of permanent counterinsurgency rather than repressive development-security projects. Part of this decision reflects a simple lack of ideological interest by a significant portion of the officer corps; a colonel in the field, for example, explained in late 1985 how he hoped the civilian government would take the refugees off his hands so the Army could "buy weapons with its budget and not food."¹³ It also reflects the Army's consolidation of the strong state within the civilian government. The Army enjoyed a minor public relations coup when it publicly pulled out of various model villages in 1986 and 1987 — "withdrawing" but leaving the civil patrol to keep control. The burden of feeding the refugees was put on the civilian government and, ironically, the Army even made some ideological headway when the refugees discovered that in some cases the Army was more efficient than the civilian government in delivering resources.¹⁴ Finally, the permanent counterinsurgency decision reflects the inability of the Army to wrest sufficient resources from the oligarchy to make development-security a reality, even if it wanted to.

Under either plan for social control in the highlands, the Army has a strong and understandable bias toward security arrangements which minimize its casualties in the field — a number of its officer classes were decimated in the early 1980s — but it does not trust the oligarchy

Civil Patrols in Guatemala (1986), and *Human Rights in Guatemala During President Cerezo's First Year* (1987).

13. Author interview, Coban (December 1985).

14. See Chris Krueger, *The Guatemalan Highlands*, *op. cit.*

to share that bias. That preference leads the military to desire a strong state, but a strong state requires no more than the veneer of civilian rule — certainly not actual democracy — in order to provide legitimacy.¹⁵ Externally, civilian legitimacy is simply a means for opening the doors to foreign aid, military as well as economic. The international magic of a civilian president is such that a bare 18 months after the transition to civilian government, the US is already contributing police and military aid. The Reagan administration has signalled its aim to increase both categories significantly; this aid is to go to the country which, until two years ago, human rights monitors characterized as the most abusive in the hemisphere. Most of the liberal Democrats in Congress — including such human rights stalwarts as Kennedy, Kerry, Harkin, and Dodd — presently favor police aid as well. A senior Congressional staffer to a liberal Democrat remarked that “so long as Guatemala is on our side of the contra issue, we will delegate to President Cerezo to determine what the country’s human rights needs are, and if he wants police aid, he’ll get it.”¹⁶ Guatemala has even retained the radical-chic lawyer, Paul Reichler, who founded a law firm initially to represent the Sandinistas, as its Washington lobbyist. The interests of Reichler’s rightwing Guatemalan clients curiously dovetail with the interests of his leftwing Sandinista clients: since Guatemala supports “active neutrality” towards Nicaragua, it should therefore be rewarded with police aid. This dubiously “progressive” position is taken by Reichler as well as by US congressional liberals, despite the Guatemalan National Police’s much deserved reputation for human rights abuse (which continues in the Cerezo reign, “democracy” notwithstanding¹⁷) and the fact that the police structure is riddled with Army Intelligence agents.¹⁸

15. See Ken Anderson and Richard Anderson, “Human Rights in El Salvador,” in *Telos* 64 (Summer 1985), pp. 91-104.

16. Author interview, Washington, D.C. (October 1987).

17. The Americas Watch report, *Human Rights in Guatemala During President Cerezo’s First Year* (1987), covers in detail several cases of political disappearances and assassinations attributable to the police following Cerezo’s inauguration; the circumstances and the victims in those cases make it impossible to believe that this official violence is merely corruption and incompetence at low levels of officialdom. In recent months, Amnesty International has documented several other cases where the police — and not the Army or unidentified assailants — were implicated. Recently, union leaders and peasant organizers have once again begun to be targets of direct police and Army attack. (See “Urgent Action Letters” for October and November 1987 by Amnesty International).

18. The current police chief, Julio Enrique Caballeros, for example, is a colonel from Army Intelligence; he headed the Archives Section of the Army Intelligence Service and by various sources was one of the several top officers in Intelligence. Caballeros came to the National Police in July 1986 with a team of Army Intelligence

The willingness of US liberals to grant police aid to Guatemala is a telling sign about US foreign policy, for two reasons. First, it signals the abrogation of the long-standing ban on police aid—Americas Watch has correctly observed that if police aid can be justified for Guatemala, it can be justified anywhere. Second, tacitly conditioning police aid to Guatemala on its foreign policy rather than its internal human rights record represents a virtual disavowal of what human rights was supposed to have meant since its beginnings with Jimmy Carter—the willingness and moral obligation to look *inside* a regime and not just at its foreign policy. It appears to be a switch in liberal policy, brought on by the exigencies of preventing US adventurism in Nicaragua. But such rationalizations by liberals are possible only because the clear-cut situation of a military dictator was changed by the ceremony of a civilian presidential inauguration into the ambiguous situation of a civilian president seeking to “consolidate democracy.”

IV

In seeking to explain why the military permitted even the appearance of civilian rule, too much emphasis may have been placed on the

advisors; some of these apparently remain in the police, while others have been recalled back to the Army. But matters would not be “cured” by replacing known senior Army personnel in the police; as a senior Guatemalan bishop noted privately, the National Police is institutionally “a dependency of the Army.” It would follow orders even if no senior Army officers ran it. Additionally, various low-ranking police detectives have indicated in author interviews (held between May and October 1987), that beyond their National Police duties, they also moonlight for the Army. The extremely complex relations between the Army and the National Police are explored in Allan Nairn and Jean-Marie Simon, “The Bureaucracy of Death,” *The New Republic*, (June 30, 1986), p. 13. (For an examination of the internal workings of the National Police, see the forthcoming report by the International Human Rights Law Group, Washington, D.C., by Ken Anderson). The available evidence indicates that, in general, political violence in Guatemala has been and remains directed from above, by the Army and Army Intelligence. This is not to say that there is not significant common crime and private crime committed by means of the official intelligence apparatus; even so, the Army appears to direct political violence in Guatemala to a degree which contrasts sharply to other places. Juan Corradi, for example, has written of Argentina during the terror: “The acquisition and consolidation of power by the military regime have issued not Leviathan but Behemoth . . . under the umbrella of a stern government, armed bands have been sovereign in many fields, powerful rival groups roam uncontrolled, having managed to control many strategic positions . . . The ‘classical’ state has actually been treated as a hindrance to domination over subordinate groups.” (Corradi, “Terror in Argentina,” *Telos* 54 (Winter 1982-83), pp. 70-71). In Guatemala the configuration is different; the Army has sought and largely achieved a Leviathan, except that it is one which depends for its stability on cyclical bloodletting. Moreover, the Army wants to have all the advantages of Behemoth — i.e., ‘deniability’ for the crimes and abuses committed by the Army.

strictly material advantages of international legitimacy. Although the Guatemalan military desires international aid, it also fears it. It fears that too great a dependence on international aid might eventually put it in the unenviable position of El Salvador, where some 60% of the national budget is provided by the US, which thus effectively owns the government, and where the Duarte government cannot persuade the oligarchy to accept even a modest war tax because the oligarchs figure — correctly — that the US will pay for the war, at the cost of national sovereignty.

The Guatemalan Army knows it cannot have a strong state if it is overly dependent on foreign resources. One of the covert messages of tax reform is that in a crisis the Army can call upon internal resources — the wealth of the oligarchy — and thus preserve some freedom from direct US hegemony. In the counterinsurgency war of the 1980s, the Army clearly felt it did not command sufficient internal resources, and it seeks to avoid a repetition in the future.

Internal legitimacy provides advantages to the strong state even more important than the advantages of international legitimacy, even if they are less economically measurable. The activities of political parties, for example, even if ineffectual, still give people a sense of participation and a hope that eventually they *will* become effective. The civilian bureaucracy — and not the military — becomes the buffer as well as the lightning rod for the ordinary complaints of a populace whose most elementary social needs are not met. Most importantly, internal legitimacy is a means by which the military can come to grips with the oligarchy.

For the oligarchy prefers a weak state. It prefers it because a weak state is cheap to operate and, provided the state maintains order and keeps the lid on incipient class war, gives business interests maximum room for economic maneuver. The weak state would not, for example, raise taxes to support a military modernization program *after* the counterinsurgency war has been won — why should it? — and less still promote the social spending urged by the High Command even for as repressive a program of social control as that envisaged by the Army.¹⁹ But a weak

19. It may be queried at this point whether the new tax laws are progressive or regressive, and how that affects their desirability to the oligarchy. One possibility might be that regressive taxes falling mainly on the poor and middle classes would be welcomed by the oligarchy as well as the military, because they provide greater revenue to the state, without burdening the oligarchy, and thus allow capital accumulation and infrastructure investment which could be useful to the military as well as to large-scale capitalists. The exact incidence of the taxes, whether the formal law or the actual enforced regime, is difficult to assess at this early date, but most observers in Guatemala

state practically demands, in a period of sharpening class struggle, a strong but subordinate Army, and especially one willing to make sacrifices which the oligarchy is not. Precisely to avoid these costs, the Army desires a strong state and, flush from its victory over the peasantry, it may well be in a position to strike a new bargain with the oligarchy.

Tax reform is a striking demonstration of the Army's attempt to assert control over the oligarchy. The ultimate basis of the strong state in Guatemala, however, is a program of permanent counterinsurgency against the peasants — counterinsurgency which, peculiarly and to the everlasting dismay of the Indians, does not depend on the existence of insurgency. Compared to permanent repression of the lower classes, moves to control the oligarchy are merely the icing on the cake of a long term strategy to consolidate the strong state.

V

One way to find out about the strategy of counterinsurgency against the peasantry is to compliment some bored countryside commander on how the Guatemalan Army was able to accomplish what the US could not in Vietnam and has not in El Salvador. The commanders are smug about their victory over the insurgents, and believe they have developed the most sophisticated and far-reaching strategy of counterinsurgency in the hemisphere. Although virtually all of them received training in US counterinsurgency programs (at the War College, for example, or the Southern Command in Panama) they feel that now it is they who have something to teach the US about counterinsurgency and not the other way around.

Particularly instructive is Defense Minister Gen. Gramajo's account of the Army's growing belief that only a strengthened, centralized, and stabilized state could save Guatemala over the long run, which resulted in a change of counterinsurgency strategy between the Lucas García regime of 1978-82 and the Ríos Montt regime of 1982-83.²⁰

believe the incidence falls mainly on the middle and upper-middle classes. The oligarchy has nonetheless adopted a public position stridently against the new taxes, attempting to ally itself with the middle classes — partly because it dislikes the *precedent* of taxes in a country which has never really had any, and partly because it apparently fears that capital accumulation within the state strengthens the hand of the military against it. Thus it appears to prefer that any large-scale infrastructure and development projects take place through the private sector in order to preserve its place as the central institution of Guatemalan society. It should also be noted that Army personnel are exempt from taxes.

20. General Gramajo's remarks were made in author interviews conducted in May-June 1987, and at the Army Forum on Counterinsurgency.

Counterinsurgency is not new in Guatemala; it has continued in an organized fashion since the first insurgents — themselves military officers — rebelled from the Army in 1962. Nor are murderous regimes new in Guatemala; in the 1960s Guatemala had the dubious distinction of inventing the technique of “disappearances” in the hemisphere. What is new in the 1980s is the coherence and rationality of purpose to which the slaughter has been put, quite apart from the sheer *number* of people killed. Gen. Gramajo, for example, will admit in vague terms that the regime of Lucas García committed mass killings, both in the countryside and in Guatemala City. That would be hard for anyone to deny, although the Guatemalan government and the US State Department did virtually nothing else during the whole regime. Gen. Lucas García “won” the 1978 presidential elections after receiving less than 7% of the vote in what *The Washington Post* called “a fraud . . . so transparent that nobody could expect to get away with it.” A campaign of terror ensued in the city and countryside; during the four years of the Lucas García rule, according to the cautious estimate of current Interior Minister Juan José Rodil Peralta, over 25,000 Guatemalans were killed.²¹

The incidents were endless; labor, students, and peasant leaders were predictable targets, although numerous seemingly random killings and disappearances took place as well. On June 21, 1980, 27 union leaders were abducted as they planned a funeral for Coca-Cola union leader Edgar Aldana, killed inside the plant that same day. According to the former rector of the University of San Carlos and current Education Minister, Dr. Eduardo Meyer Maldonado, at least 300 members of the university community were killed during 1980 and 1981, while another 1000 were disappeared or fled into exile. By June 1981, the Guatemalan Teachers’ Pension Fund was paying out more in life insurance claims than it was collecting in payments; the organization reported that in 18 months since January, 1980, 70 members had been assassinated.²²

As usual, the Indians suffered the highest casualties. A conservative Guatemalan congressman recounted a conversation he had with an Army general about killings in the Quiché Department during the Lucas García years: “Look, I’m going to give it to you straight,” said the general, “we did kill a lot of people in this area. We would get orders from the Army Chief of Staff to go in and eliminate two or three peasants. We would arrive at a village, and if the suspects weren’t there or if the

21. *Siete Días*, television news program (March 25, 1987).

22. See Julia Preston, “Guatemala: The Muffled Scream,” *Mother Jones*, (November 1981).

people wouldn't talk, we'd just raze the entire place."²³ The slaughter was not accidental, even if it was, by the standards of later regimes, haphazard and disorganized. A number of factors had come together by 1980. The Sandinista victory contributed enormously to insurgent expectations, and the guerrillas increased organizing and armed activity. A decade of Catholic popular organizing, following the precepts of Vatican II and the Medellín Conference, had increased political awareness among the Indians. The peasant organization, Comité de Unidad Campesina (CUC), first appearing in public on May Day 1978, succeeded in organizing migrant labor, which traditionally moved from undersized subsistence plots in the highlands to the massive sugar, coffee, and cotton plantations of the coast. CUC brought about a 15 day strike in February and March 1980, shutting down some 59 plantations. As George Black has observed, "the spectre of peasants lined up along the Pan American highway, brandishing their machetes in the air, was a nightmare come true for the plantation owners."²⁴

Business interests and the Army were not idle in intensifying the already intolerable social conditions which led to insurgency. Landowners, and particularly Army landowners, forcibly dispossessed Indians in order to take new land. Army officers suddenly metamorphosed into landowners; one of their largest acquisitions, in the northern Quiché, has come to be referred to as the "Generals' Strip." They in turn directed Army engineers to build roads to their fiefdoms. Corruption at the highest levels of government soared.

Counterinsurgency during the Lucas García period, while ferocious, did little to dampen guerrilla strength or civilian support; in fact the insurgency reached its highest level of popular participation in 1981. By the end of that year, armed insurgents were estimated to number 6000, and the Guatemalan Army itself put the number of unarmed collaborators at 276,000 (out of a nation of 8 million). On January 25, 1982, the four guerrilla organizations formed a coalition called the *Unidad Revolucionaria Nacional Guatemalteca* (URNG). Junior army officers — the ones actually fighting and dying in the field, and not, at least according to Gen. Gramajo, those simply helping themselves to ownership of the countryside — understandably began to be alarmed. As Gramajo put it, the Army did not seem to have any sense of purpose, except

23. Author interview, El Quiché (October 1985).

24. George Black, et al., *Garrison Guatemala*, (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1984), p. 100.

to defend private interests, whether of senior oligarchs or of corrupt senior officers—in particular Romeo Lucas García and his brother, Army Chief of Staff Benedicto Lucas García. The Army had lost its *national* vision.

Still more alarming, this gradual privatization of the Army appeared to fit the junior officers' sense of what had gone wrong in Somoza's Nicaragua, when it still *was* Somoza's. In Gramajo's view, the Sandinista victory was due not so much to cleverness by the FSLN as stupidity by Somoza; in particular, the gradual fragmentation of the government into a bunch of competing private interests, each scrabbling to get what it could as the ship of state sank. As a colonel in Cobán put it at the time of Cerezo's inauguration, "if Somoza had looked out for the interests of his class and not just those of his family, he'd be there today, and the *nueve comandantes* wouldn't know what to do with themselves."²⁵ In the view of those Guatemalan officers, ultimately successful insurgency depends crucially upon errors by the ruling class. And they feared the Guatemalan ruling class, in its grasping and short term vision, was committing those very errors.

Thus Gen. Gramajo, in his role as Army intellectual and revisionist historian, carefully distances the Army as an institution from what he describes as a corrupt government — the Lucas García regime — which "merely happened to be led by an Army officer." The Army's "distance" from the corruption could certainly be disputed; in any case, the concerns of the junior officers translated into a coup on March 23, 1982.²⁶ Throughout the day Army helicopters circled the National Palace; light tanks and artillery were positioned in the main plaza, aimed at the president's office, and by 4 p.m. President Lucas García had resigned. Gen. Efraín Ríos Montt was installed as head of an Army triumvirate running the government. He was the Christian Democratic presidential candidate in 1974, and the election had been stolen from him by another Army officer. A convert to evangelical Protestantism, Ríos Montt was widely known for his strident stand against corruption. After Lucas García, Guatemalans were desperately hoping that real change had come and that a campaign against corruption would translate into an end to the killing.²⁷ Ríos Montt's first speech

25. Author interview, Cobán, (January 1986).

26. See the account in *Inforpress*, Guatemala City (March 25, 1982).

27. Although offered under different historical circumstances, the same claim that a campaign against corruption can slowly and incrementally undertake human rights reform is being recycled today by Cerezo's civilian government. It is a view widely subscribed

to the nation held out that hope: "Take down your machine gun from your roof," he said, "and replace your pistol with a work machete." He went on to declare there would be no more death squad killings, and "if someone violates the law, they will be tried, and if convicted of a capital crime, shot. Only the Army will carry guns."²⁸

Real change *had* come, although not what ordinary Guatemalans had hoped. According to Gramajo, the Army finally had found its vision and was ready to wage counterinsurgency in a wholly coherent and rational fashion. The campaign against corruption, far from ending human rights abuse, focused the Army's resolve and led to a vastly more efficient apparatus of state terror. In order to improve the country's dismal image abroad, however, Ríos Montt disbanded the government's death squads, which had been leaving hundreds of bodies each month in the streets of Guatemala City. The National Police established a "disappearance office" to investigate past abductions, although it was closed after a few months without solving any cases. As the then-National Police Director later explained privately, "We had to phase it out little by little. The information we received would have backfired."²⁹

Death-squad killings were then legalized into the Special Military Tribunals, which held Star Chamber proceedings for suspects in both common and political cases.³⁰ The trials were secret, the judges were secret, there were no lawyers, no *habeas corpus*, no presentation of witnesses, no court records, and frequently the accused were not even made aware of the charges brought against them. One lawyer foolhardy and courageous enough to try and bring a *habeas corpus* petition on behalf of a suspect could not find anyone in the High Command willing to sign receipt of the papers — no one would accept responsibility for the existence of the Special Tribunals, no one seemed to know anything about them, and one captain finally said: "Don't you know you are out of your mind to bring those papers here?" Executions of those convicted of capital offenses were held against the wall of the National Cemetery; more often the victims were simply tortured, killed, and buried in secret graves. Ríos Montt concluded that the government

to by functionaries inside the civilian apparatus as well as many foreign observers — but it is a false claim, resting upon an erroneous view that corruption and common crime share the same etiology as political crime in Guatemala, and that developing civilian power against one gives civilians power against the other.

28. See *Central America Report*, Vol. IX, No. 12 (March 26, 1982), p. 90.

29. Author interview, Guatemala City (June 1985).

30. See Conrado Alonso, *15 Fusilados al Alba* (Guatemala City: Serviprensa Centroamericana, 1986), for a general description of the Special Tribunals.

could now "kill legally," declaring it "preferable that it be known that 20 people were shot, and not just that 20 bodies have appeared by the road."³¹ The US Embassy, for its part, was pleased to call procedures of the Special Tribunals "streamlined."³²

Even some prominent Guatemalans were ready to celebrate the Special Tribunals as a step in the return to the rule of law. Of special interest among these is the current Minister of the Interior, Juan José Rodil Peralta. During the Ríos Montt years he was president of the Guatemalan Bar Association and a special legal adviser to the military government. A number of sources have indicated that Rodil Peralta was a leading drafter of the Special Tribunal statutes. A diplomat formerly stationed at the US Embassy reported: "Although I don't have documents to prove it — there are no records anybody knows about — I am pretty sure Rodil Peralta helped write the statute and at least one (current) Vice-Minister of the Interior served as a judge."³³ But were the Special Tribunals a step toward the rule of law over bodies left in the streets by the government's death squads? One merely substituted for the other, and the rule of law means nothing if it cannot provide a minimum of personal security and legal procedure; arbitrary is arbitrary whether done in the dead of night in a Cherokee van with polarized windows or against the wall of the National Cemetery; all the Special Tribunals did was codify insecurity and give it the comfort of

31. Michael McClintock, *The American Connection: Vol. II: State Terror and Popular Resistance in Guatemala* (London: Zed Books, 1985), p. 230.

32. US Embassy, *Briefing Notes: Guatemala* (Guatemala City, June 1983) p. 10.

33. Author interview, Guatemala City, August 1987. Rodil, for his part, claims that he did not draft the Special Tribunal statute, and points out that under his leadership the Guatemalan Bar Association condemned the Tribunals. Minister Rodil may indeed have had a change of heart, but the timing is suspiciously convenient. The Bar Association condemnation did not appear until March 1983 — when it was clear inside Guatemala that Ríos Montt was on his way out in a few months, and after the Tribunals had been denounced around the world. Moreover, the sources inside Guatemala pointing at him are too reliable and varied to be ignored. Some foreign observers sometimes try to paint Rodil as facing a difficult choice between the lesser of two evils — roving death squads or a repressive but regularized trial process which would at least bring *some* norms and civilian apparatus into the procedure, rather than simply thugs operating on Army instructions. But the two methods simply and obviously reach the same results by different means. Perhaps Rodil should not be criticized for *initially* having worked with Ríos Montt; in the very first days Ríos Montt's aims and methods were not yet known, and the general public euphoria surrounding his ascendancy was undeniable. But for a prominent lawyer, a leader in his country's legal community, to draft laws which established kangaroo courts with no semblance of due process, was as immoral as the tribunals themselves were illegal. There can be no excuse that the outcomes were not foreseen, since there could *be* only one purpose in establishing such tribunals. Even so, Rodil may be Guatemala's next civilian president.

law. In any case, the death squads were back on the streets by mid-1982, in the same vehicles used by the Lucas García government, but with different license plates.

VI

Rodil Peralta's current ministry in the civilian government supervises the National Police, and he is sometime described as a "realistic progressive"; one gathers from the Special Tribunals just how "realistic." He spends considerable time in Western capitals, seeking aid for his police forces. He speaks in sophisticated language of the need for "structural changes" in the security forces. At the same time, however, he has told US human rights lawyers that it would be "counter-productive" to try and bring individual writs of *habeas corpus* in Guatemalan courts, on behalf of actual persons. Apparently, it is better to forego individual justice and wait for abstract "structural changes" which will make individual justice superfluous. Taiwan, West Germany, France, Italy, Mexico and Spain have all begun to give police aid, and the US is scheduled to increase significantly its contribution next year.

The Guatemalan government urges that the problem of the police (and the problem of human rights generally) is not a matter of state terrorism directed from above by the Army, but instead a matter of low-level corruption and incompetence. The issue is thus transformed from a question of political ability and will to confront political crime into a question of finding a technical "fix" to cure incompetence and corruption. Not surprisingly, the proposed "fix" is police aid dollars to provide training and equipment. This is a road the US has gone down before (in the 1960s), providing supposedly non-lethal equipment to the Guatemalan police, only to discover later that the vehicles supplied for the "mobile crime labs" had been converted to death squad vehicles. Nonetheless, the US appears ready to proceed down this road again.

Accepting the wholly unwarranted but comforting assumption that human rights violations in Guatemala are a matter of corruption and incompetence rather than state terrorism makes it easy to accept police aid as the solution. Some US liberals are privately even willing to argue that, in any case, police aid is warranted because the apparatus of state terror in Guatemala already has achieved top efficiency — it can kill whoever it wants. Thus police aid would not increase that capacity, but instead might help strengthen the hand of civilian government by reducing the soaring levels of violent common crime. This latter argument is factually wrong — virtually any police aid, from fingerprinting

equipment to computers, would materially aid the security force apparatus in its political crimes. Moreover, it adopts a moral consequentialism wholly at odds with fundamental principles of human rights.

The Guatemalan lobbying strategy has succeeded in recruiting Harvard Law School — not to provide police aid, but to train Guatemala judges in criminal procedure. The program is funded by the US government, although no one in the government seems to have asked Harvard hard questions about what precisely it proposes to do with \$500,000 a year, why common law professors are suited to train civil law judges, and what exactly Harvard Law School knows about criminal procedure in Guatemala and especially about the police. The reason no one in the US government has asked such questions, however, is that the answers do not much matter; from the State Department and Guatemalan government points of view, \$500,000 a year is a cheap way of buying the Harvard name for use in the police aid campaign. The law currently specifies that any police aid to Guatemala must be supervised by judicial or prosecutorial personnel, and although no one (Harvard least of all) suggests that any supervision as yet takes place, it is still convenient to point to liberal Harvard Law School professors training Guatemalan judges in criminal procedure in order to plead that a good faith effort is being made. Harvard professors respond, justifiably, that the support for Guatemalan police aid predates any Harvard involvement, strong liberal support for it in Congress goes far beyond any legitimation that Harvard might add and, moreover, that judicial training can be sufficiently marked off from police aid. Besides, they add, what Harvard legitimates it can also delegitimize; Harvard Law School pulling out of a judicial training program because its professors believe that the program is contributing to political crime or the failure to investigate political crime would, they suggest, make it far more difficult for US congressional liberals to support police aid.³⁴

The same defenses cannot be made, however, for the most ill-considered program presently under debate by US liberals. Former UN ambassador and current mayor of Atlanta, Andrew Young, has proposed that the Atlanta Police Department train the Guatemalan National Police. The Guatemalan government, naturally, is enthusiastic to have such a prominent black liberal supporting its police aid agenda.

34. In any case, as the outlines of the Harvard project become clearer, it may be possible for human rights monitors to pressure it, especially by pushing it to seek a consensus among governments donating aid to Guatemala that some minimum progress has to be made on selected human rights cases.

Young, seeking a voice in Democratic foreign policy discussions, publicly adopted a position in favor of police aid during a brief visit with high level government officials in Guatemala (during the Esquipulas II conference at which the Arias Peace Plan was signed). A senior aide to Young, who would have a key hand in setting up the program, later replied to questions about who might fund Guatemalan police training, that private funding might be preferable and "there are a lot of US corporations and banks with an interest in security and stability in Guatemala" who might pay for the program. The aide mentioned the Coca-Cola company, headquartered in Atlanta; he seemed unaware that the local Guatemalan Coca-Cola franchise had fought a bloody war for years with its striking workers, and that dozens of workers had been killed, wounded, or disappeared while fighting for labor rights on the company premises. In any case, when it was pointed out that the Guatemalan police chief was an Army intelligence colonel, the aide replied that the chief's role in the Army secret police was "irrelevant" to his police duties.³⁵

35. Author interview, Washington, D. C., (July 1987).

Guerrillas in the Highlands

VII

It was in the highlands during the Ríos years, however, that the Army demonstrated a new mettle in counterinsurgency. The violence shifted from extensive but strategically haphazard killing to a systematic program of scorched-earth and depopulation. The order of attack under Ríos Montt was carefully planned; a colonel in charge of model villages later said that the region of the Ixil Triangle, long isolated and culturally independent, was targeted for early treatment because it was believed the local guerilla organization, the Guerrilla Army of the Poor, was overextended there.³⁶ By late 1982 the Americas Watch stated: "One of the 23 linguistic groups, the Ixil in El Quiché, has been all but wiped out as a cultural entity."³⁷ The criterion for defining subversives in the scorched-earth sweeps was so easy even an illiterate foot soldier could follow it — "shoot those who run and capture those who remain behind."³⁸

Eventually some 400 villages were razed, many tens of thousands of Indians killed, and several hundred thousand driven into exile, mostly to Mexico. This was precisely in step with the campaign set out by the Army in its five-year plan, which dubbed Ríos Montt's first year "Victory '82."³⁹ According to the zone commander in Cobán, the destruction followed a two-phase counterinsurgency doctrine elaborated by the officer corps at the time Ríos Montt took office.⁴⁰ In the first phase, said the Cobán colonel, the plan aimed to break both the guerrilla military organization and its peasant support base. In this operation there was no room for considerations of human rights, since the Army plan *was* state terrorism. The colonel went on to say he did not mean that "securing" guerrilla zones was as crude as simply killing everybody in the area. "We had to play rough," he said, "but you have to know what you're doing." He emphasized two considerations in the first phase of counterinsurgency. First, the Army had to be willing to confront the guerrillas in battle on the ground — gut it out on the guerrillas' turf.

36. Author interview, Guatemala City (December 1985).

37. Americas Watch, *Human Rights in Guatemala: No Neutrals Allowed* (New York: 1982).

38. Author interview, Sololá (October 1983).

39. Other years were also titled; 1986 was known as "Consolidation '86." Documents from Army meetings outlining the counterinsurgency campaign have been only partially released, but even so they reveal an unusual fidelity to the initial strategy. The plan has not sustained its initial vision, however, in the push for repressive development-security projects to supplement permanent counterinsurgency.

40. Author interview, Cobán (January 1986).

Second, it was critical to push the peasants off the land — to show them who was in charge, to show them that the guerrillas could not protect them, to break the cycle of agricultural production which fed both peasants and guerrillas. “Two seasons, at least,” said the colonel.

Moreover, once the peasants were off their lands, starving in internal exile or fled abroad, then their reentry could be completely controlled by the Army. Whole areas would be completely emptied of inhabitants, and repopulated as the Army prepared civil patrols and model villages to receive them. Frequently, ethnic and linguistic groups would be mixed up to make organizing by the Indians more difficult outside the military’s own structures. The weakness of US counterinsurgency doctrine, according to the colonel, was that it did not recognize the necessity of the first phase. Model villages, civil patrols, development plans, ideological and political work, all that is important, stressed the colonel, but only after the war is won. You had to be willing to pay the price to win the war before techniques of consolidation would make any difference. In Mao’s terms, if the guerrillas swim like fish in the sea of the peasantry, then the first thing to do is drain the sea.

Of course, phases one and two overlap to a considerable degree. The model villages and so-called “poles of development” were an integral part of Ríos Montt’s “Beans and Bullets” program even as the policy of scorched-earth went into high gear. In the “poles of development” program (abandoned except as rural development rhetoric over the last several years in favor of permanent counterinsurgency civil patrols) military-led teams rebuilt villages which the Army earlier had destroyed.⁴¹ Guatemalan Archbishop Próspero Penados, among others, has noted the resemblance of the model villages to concentration camps.⁴² Instead of the traditional Indian village consisting of houses and huts scattered around a wide area, the new compounds have been built packed together, with geometric precision, along a main street generally wide and long enough to serve as an airstrip in an emergency; “just in case,” said a development pole colonel, “we have to send in medicine.”⁴³ Several of the camps—Acamal and Saraxoch, in particular, situated near Cobán—were designated special re-education centers for former subversives, although the definition of a subversive,

41. See the description in the British Parliamentary Human Rights Group, *Bitter and Cruel . . . Report of a Mission to Guatemala* (London: House of Commons, October 1984), pp. 15-18.

42. Author interview, Guatemala City (April 1987).

43. Author interview, Guatemala City (January 1986).

in keeping with the Army's eminently practical view that every Indian was a subversive, seemed to be simply whoever the zone commander found convenient to send there.

Saraxoch has a large sign at the entrance to the village (always controlled by the civil patrol): "Welcome to the New Urban Center Saraxoch, An Anti-Subversive Community, Discipline and Organization." Except when it rains, the entire population is required to line up at dusk in the main square to salute the flag and have a patriotic exercise, perhaps to sing the Hymn of the Civil Patrol: "... I swear to my country . . . to reject the subversives . . ." ⁴⁴ A blackboard in the village office lists each adult male and where he was working during the day. Passes are required to leave the village. Inhabitants of Saraxoch knew to say to foreigners the words taught them in ideological retraining classes, and even Indians who could hardly speak Spanish would say over and over, "Thanks to God and the Army, we were saved from the lies into which we had fallen." ⁴⁵

Little changed in Saraxoch under "democracy," except that discipline is somewhat more lax and passes are not always required to leave. ⁴⁶ Some internees were allowed to leave the camp permanently in 1987; others will take their places as new refugees are brought in, either from the mountains or from Mexico. Once the families in Saraxoch had their own villages; they were destroyed. But the former head of one village, now an internee in the camp, confided that the land titles to his village had been hidden in a metal box and buried, and their marimba, too, the soul of the village, wrapped in oilcloth. ⁴⁷

VIII

Because it is easier to burn villages than rebuild them, the development poles and model villages have always been secondary in importance to the civil patrol system or, more formally, the Patrullas de Autodefensa Civil (PAC). ⁴⁸ In recent years, the development-security

44. See brochure from the Guatemalan Army Information Office, *Las Patrullas de Autodefensa Civil*, 1985.

45. Author interviews, Saraxoch (January 1986 and August 1987).

46. Crystal Nix, "Re-education and Other Trials for Broken Tribes," *The New York Times*, (August 12, 1987).

47. Author interview, Saraxoch (January 1986).

48. Americas Watch, *Civil Patrols in Guatemala*, (New York: 1986). A 1985 paper has attempted to assess the contradictions between the program of state terrorism and development; it is a good source of factual material, but unfortunately fails to bring the two themes together. [Gordon L. Bowen, "The Political Economy of State Terrorism:

projects of development poles and model villages have been turned over to the civilian government to do what it can, under the watchful eye of the Army. Whereas model villages require capital investment by the government and frequently constant food supplies because the land is insufficient to support the population, the civil patrol system simply requires forced peasant labor, which is easier to come by. It operates by converting all peasant males over age 15 or so into a paramilitary force required to patrol the region of a village and to protect its entrances, stopping, registering, possibly arresting any strangers in the area, and carrying out any other tasks which the Army might assign it.

Those tasks may include accompanying the Army on its rounds, which effectively makes the civil patrol cannon fodder because the Army, fearing to arm the peasants, only gives them ancient weapons or, frequently, mere sticks painted to look like rifles. In the past, the Army has used them to draw fire, and the guerrillas are in a quandry whether to shoot or not once they realize there are unarmed villagers mixed as hostages among the soldiers.⁴⁹ Or the Army may order a civil patrol to carry out atrocities, either in its village against particular suspects or in the neighboring villages. Atrocities serve the purpose of compromising the civil patrol with the Army, creating bad feelings between people and between villages, and destroying solidarity. A civil patroller in southern Quiché recounted to a nun how, in late 1983, the Army had come to a village with five prisoners, all taken from a neighboring hamlet. The villagers knew the prisoners and knew they were innocent, but the Army squad told the local civil patrol it must decide what to do—kill them or let them go free. The Army squad said it would come back to see what happened and left. The civil patrol did not know what to do; they didn't want to kill the 5 prisoners, but they also feared reprisals by the Army.

Most of the patrol were Catholic catechists, and they began to pray — the prisoners as well as the patrol. They came to a community decision to kill the men because “if we don't . . . the army will come back and massacre the entire village, and then the women and children will die too.” The villagers lined up and embraced the condemned men, asking their forgiveness. One of the 5 asked them to “please take care of our widows and children, so they do not die from starvation, and please guard our crops and help our widows to harvest the corn.” The Army

Barrier to Human Rights in Guatemala,” in *Human Rights and Third World Development*, ed. by G. Shepard and V. Greenwood (Westport, Conn.: 1985)].

49. Americas Watch, *Civil Patrols in Guatemala*, *op. cit.*, pp. 56-57.

squad reappeared shortly after the shooting; it had been hidden nearby, and that day there were 5 new widows and 18 fatherless children.⁵⁰

Such actions — Army war crimes, for what that is worth — are part of the first phase of counterinsurgency; direct action against the guerrillas and scorched-earth against civilians. But, as a senior US military officer at the Embassy remarked of the civil patrols, “it is a brilliant idea in the end . . . if you’re going to take an army that small — forty thousand men — and try to spread them out, then, for godsakes, you’ve got to have something else. It came right out of the Little Red Book; you have to separate the guerrillas from the civilian population.”⁵¹ Civil patrols are most important over the long run, however, as the new center of village life and the centerpiece of the permanent counter-insurgency strategy. In many villages of the highlands, now in the consolidation phase of counterinsurgency, the civil patrol and its military-appointed commissioners have replaced the traditional mayoral government of the indigenous Mayan communities. Indeed, civilian leaders in several highland communities indicated that fewer than half the villages in their municipalities had civilian mayors anymore. As one municipal secretary in the Quiché explained, whether a village has a civilian mayor or not, the municipal government (sometimes in the position of funnelling aid from the central civilian government) was always careful to work through the heads of the local civil patrol, who are appointed by the local Army commander. “The people are fearful of being led astray by subversion,” he said, “even when it comes from the civilian government. They always want to be sure the Army has approved whatever they do, through the civil patrol chief.”⁵²

In Nubilá, an isolated village in the Department of Huehuetenango, the mayor was completely pushed aside by the local civil patrol commissioner, who had been helping himself to the harvests of villagers who fled to Mexico in earlier years.⁵³ The official mayor of the village, the traditional *alcalde*, responded to an important question about the division of lands and harvests by saying simply, “The *comisionado* decides.” By May 1987 — nearly a year and a half into the new “democratic” regime in Guatemala — the *comisionado* still held life and death power over the village. Since his power was derived directly from the Army

50. Author interview, Guatemala City (June 1985).

51. Jean-Marie Simon, *Guatemala: Eternal Spring, Eternal Tyranny*, (W. W. Norton, New York 1987).

52. Author interview, El Quiché (September 1987).

53. Author interview (Nubilá, May 1987).

base commander, it did not appear the situation would change soon, even if one *comisionado* were substituted for another. The *comisionado* decided who could enter the village, who would get passes to go to the fields, how often the men had to serve in the civil patrol and who to report to the local base commander as a subversive. Gradually, all important decisions in the village came to be decided by him, or the base commander himself. The chain of authority rises directly from the village into the Army. Civilian institutions of the "democratic" government function, in Nubilá, as mere technical advisors to the Army, even if the official organization chart says otherwise — for what civilian bureaucrat would argue with the Army? The civil patrols, in effect, are the Army's way of saying in the highlands, we are here to stay.

Consolidation began to predominate over scorched-earth after Ríos Montt was ousted as head-of-state on August 8, 1983, following a meeting of the military commanders at the Honor Guard Barracks. He was replaced by Gen. Oscar Humberto Mejía Víctores. Much has been made of Ríos Montt's eccentric evangelism as a reason for his departure from the National Palace, and certainly it played its part. He sermonized on television, and installed advisors from his US-based fundamentalist sect, The Church of the Word (El Verbo), in the Palace itself, which raised nationalist and Catholic hackles. However, sources in the officer corps also emphasize that Ríos Montt's departure was contemplated from the beginning. He had a job to do — roughly speaking, to carry out the policy of scorched-earth — and when it was done, he was replaced with another general, Mejía Víctores, who was to gradually shift the emphasis over to consolidation techniques. Mejía Víctores' other task was to prepare (or at least serve as figurehead in the preparation of) the non-Indian "*ladino*" population for the form of civilianized "strong state" contemplated by the military. This is not to say that rural massacres, urban killings, and disappearances did not continue under Mejía Víctores. They did, but even so the consolidation phase gradually gained *institutional* priority, as guerrilla organizations declined in strength and the Indians gradually found themselves facing starvation or grudging cooperation. The foundation for the strong state had been laid in the countryside; the war had been won and occupation began. The Army's long term task in the highlands was to minimize the cost of social control while maximizing security; it created a gulag and called it development. Among the *ladino* sectors, mostly in the cities, however, the problem was different. The *ladino* civilians were needed for the next project, the project of legitimacy, and

so some kind of bargain, however unequal, had to be struck with them. With the Indians, by contrast, there was no need to bargain; they were, as the Americas Watch called them, "a nation of prisoners."⁵⁴

The watchword of the military counterinsurgency strategy from 1982 forward has been continuity — continuity and a long-range vision of the strong state. The zone commander from Cobán took pride in observing that the Guatemalan Army, by its own estimation, was the most professional in Latin America because it had mastered the technique of preserving a continuous strategy even while changing personnel. Guatemala, he said, was far ahead of a country like Paraguay, where an aging *caudillo* had held on to power for thirty years. It was far ahead of Somoza's Nicaragua, where the ruling class had foolishly committed its interests into a single family. It was even ahead of Pinochet's Chile, where the officer corps was united behind a single general, who, because he had held power so long, served as the lightning rod for all national and international opposition, and was unable to see the way forward to a strong, but simultaneously *legitimate* state.⁵⁵ In Guatemala, the leaders rotated each to his task, while the guiding vision remained the same.⁵⁶

The same Army strategy that guided Ríos Montt also guided, in his turn, Mejía Vítores. "But don't think," added the Cobán colonel, "that Cerezo is any different. He's just a continuation of everything that's gone on before." And so, after so much slaughter, Vinicio Cerezo Arévalo — the logical next step in the Army's campaign of permanent counterinsurgency — might better have begun his inaugural speech in the manner of a joke current during the Lucas García years, where the president steps to the balcony and addresses the crowd, "Dear . . . survivors."

IX

But some things *have* changed under the new civilian government. The presidential election was clean, in the narrow sense of being free

54. Americas Watch, *Guatemala: A Nation of Prisoners*, *op. cit.*

55. Which is to acknowledge the unfortunate fact that a strong and repressive state can indeed be legitimate. Legitimacy, in the contemporary sense, combines moral factors such as popular participation in government and respect for human rights with such non-moral factors as simply ruling a *long time*. One might well dislike the governments of Eastern Europe, but one would be hard-pressed in contemporary usage to say that they are not *legitimate*. See Istvan Lovas and Ken Anderson, "Friendly Repression in Hungary," *Telos* 54 (Winter 1982-83), p. 85.

56. Author interview, Cobán (January 1986).

from electoral fraud, which by itself is unusual for Guatemala. The winner was actually sworn into office and was, moreover, a civilian which again is unusual for Guatemala. Congress meets and passes laws, some of which the Court of Constitutionality has found within its independent power to strike down. To some degree, the three branches of civilian government are operating again. Guatemala has a new constitution — its fourth in as many decades — which, just like the old ones, is impeccably respectful of individual rights. Congress even passed the tax reform, over the objections of the Chamber of Commerce; the middle and upper classes, under the direction of the parties of the middle and far right, are assembling in the streets to air their considerable disagreement with the Christian Democratic government.

Such participation is not limited to the right. Earlier this year the private sector labor unions held a sizable May Day parade. The banners carried by unionists went so far as to call for human rights trials of military officers — to be sure, many of the marchers prudently wore scarves over their faces. A major strike by public sector workers in May of this year was tolerated by the government without killings or disappearances, even though in the government's view it was illegal. Street vendors held their own protests against government plans to push them off some major streets.

Even with such natural caution, the main plaza has been witness to various popular demonstrations since Cerezo took office. Padre Andrés Girón, for example, marched on the capital with tens of thousands of peasants on the capital last year demanding, if not precisely expropriation of land, then *some* kind of agrarian solution. This year Girón held a hunger strike in the main square, until the government handed over several of its large farms to his peasant organization. After the not-unexpected threats on his life, the priest was assigned bodyguards from Army Intelligence by President Cerezo himself.

Even the GAM — the Grupo de Apoyo Mutuo, an organization of relatives of the disappeared and the sole human rights organization currently operating in Guatemala — has been able to protest publicly and even engage in civil disobedience. By contrast, in 1985, during the last year of military government, then head-of-state Gen. Mejía Victores was asked by a journalist what he thought of the GAM; he replied, "You'll know it when you see it."⁵⁷ Within weeks two leaders of the GAM, as well as several of their family members, had been brutally

57. Comment by Head-of-State Gen. Mejía Victores to reporter from Teleprensa Television (March 1985).

tortured and murdered. In 1986, the first Cerezo year, however, the GAM physically intruded into an Army parade; the Army column, although angered, gave way and withdrew. In 1987, frustrated by the government's failure to appoint a promised commission to investigate the disappeared, GAM occupied the Congress; that, too, was settled peacefully. GAM holds weekly protest meetings in front of the National Palace, unmolested.⁵⁸

The political parties have clearly benefitted the most from the political opening. All of them agree that the current political space has permitted them to return to organizing, building local support, training party leaders to replace those killed in earlier years, and holding mass meetings. Even the head of the most left-leaning party, Mario Solórzano of the Social Democrats, confirms the existence of this political space.⁵⁹ Several radicalized Social Democrats, who privately see the party as cover for organizing a revolutionary socialist agenda, agreed that this civilian opening had given them essential breathing room to regroup and rebuild their cell organization.⁶⁰

But all this is the result of the military's dual project of counter-insurgency with legitimacy. Legitimacy requires a civilian regime, and a civilian regime requires political parties. Moreover, the demands of the political parties are satisfied fairly easily with civilian offices in the government, patronage, and seats in Congress — none of which goes to the basic power equation in the country. The parties fight among

58. See Americas Watch, *Guatemala: The Group for Mutual Support* (New York: 1985). The subsequent history of GAM has been one of political marginalization, partly through actions by the government and partly through its own strategic difficulties. GAM has become marginalized through its understandable attempt to make the issue of disappearances prior to Cerezo a crisis of political legitimacy for the Cerezo government. The military, however, had ruled that possibility out of bounds from the beginning as a condition under which Cerezo took office. In its fear of losing focus on disappearances occurring prior to Cerezo's 1986 inauguration, GAM never succeeded in becoming the voice for disappearances occurring after the beginning of civilian government, which has further marginalized it. At the same time, GAM has eschewed participation in the admittedly limited possibilities of the legal system, holding out again for a political crisis and resolution, which as time goes on becomes less and less important on the national agenda. In the first weeks of civilian government Cerezo may have felt that he *had* to respond to GAM, although he believed he had very few options to do so and none which would satisfy the group. Therefore he did nothing — no crisis ensued, and now he finds himself under no substantial pressure to respond at all. In recent weeks a member of GAM *has* attempted to file court papers in a *habeas corpus* action and use the court system, but has received death threats as a consequence. This calls further into question the efficacy of utilizing the legal machinery within Guatemala.

59. Author interview, Guatemala City (May 1987).

60. Author interview, Guatemala City (May 1987).

Girl at the Funeral of her father, who was killed by the Security Forces

themselves, and largely neutralize each other as a source of confrontation against the military. In the current struggle over taxes, the parties of opposition hope to have found an issue with the leverage to cripple the Christian Democrats in the next elections.

X

Unlike political parties, by contrast, unions are far less necessary to the project of legitimacy, although abroad President Cerezo has claimed that "the biggest [positive] change that happened was in the Army and the trade union[s] We have had a very good dialogue. . . ." ⁶¹ Moreover, unions have to measure their effectiveness against the harsh

61. Vinicio Cerezo, Speech at the Center for Interamerican Relations, (New York, September 1986).

reality of the wage struggle of the rank and file, not by the relatively meaningless number of seats in Congress controlled by this or that party. Indeed, the unions are a positive challenge to the legitimacy of a government which, for all its talk, never seems to do anything concrete for labor's economic agenda. Not surprising, they have found the new political space far smaller and far more fraught with danger than the political parties have. Unions face their traditional enemies in the oligarchy and the Chamber of Commerce. They face their traditional enemies in the Army who, nonetheless, in order to show that their line is independent of the oligarchy and in order not to undermine their project of legitimacy for the civilian government, have shown a certain restraint in killing and "disappearing" people even while stepping up intimidation, at least during the initial months of civilian government.⁶²

Finally, unions also face the ruling Christian Democrats who see them as a threat because they question the *effectiveness* and hence the legitimacy of the government. The ire of the civilian government has been directed mainly against the public employee unions which dared to strike. It acquiesced, apparently, in the kidnappings of several public employee union leaders.⁶³ Yet so far the kidnapped public employee leaders have been released alive — often tortured and beaten, but alive — symptomatic of the mixed messages broadcast by a government trying to consolidate both counterinsurgency and legitimacy. Union leaders in the private sector have not been so fortunate; several have been killed despite the protection supposedly provided by the political opening. No one is suggesting that Cerezo is responsible — clearly he is not — but since he took office at least six unionists have been killed, two disappeared, and several attacked.⁶⁴ One union leader, asked what the civilian political space meant, shrugged and said, "Well, for the

62. This restraint is breaking down in recent months. Violence by the Army and police hidden under the civilian surface apparently is escalating considerably, to judge from reports on political violence from *Central America Report* (Guatemala City: 1987) and from information currently being gathered by Americas Watch for a report in early 1988. Evidence of military or police involvement belies the claim that killing labor leaders is essentially a private function of the oligarchy to which the military merely turns a blind eye. On the contrary, it supports the far more distressing view that political killing is coordinated by the Army. These labor leaders were not apparently directly involved in actions which might irk industry or ranch owners. Rather, the logic is that to be a labor leader is to be a communist, which is to be a subversive, which is to be a target of counterinsurgency, which makes it *directly* an Army problem.

63. See Simon & Anderson, "Guatemalan labor and human rights," in *Against the Current*, 1988, forthcoming.

64. Guatemalan Human Rights Commission (July 1987).

moment they are not killing us outright.”⁶⁵

For the unions the political opening means their leaders are not being killed *en masse*. There is still violence against them, and there is always the threat that levels of violence could be raised at any moment if the unions attempt real political action or attempt to join forces in an effective coalition. Presently ineffectiveness is their best protection against kidnapping. For GAM the political opening has meant official indifference to its protests rather than death; in response to its demands for information about the disappeared, Cerezo merely replies that he is not responsible for what went on before his inauguration. “We are not going to be able to investigate the past,” he said shortly before the 1985 election, “We would have to put the army in jail.”⁶⁶ Gen. Gramajo has blandly suggested that, anyway, the disappeared are all in communist Nicaragua, while the judge appointed by the Supreme Court to investigate disappearances has suggested they went to the US to work.⁶⁷ For public sector employees, the opening means the chance to strike — but they got nothing from the action, and were forced to back down. Even Padre Girón has not really succeeded in putting the *national* issue of land reform on the table; all he has been able to attain is a limited amount of land for a few thousand members of his organization. Land for the millions, rather than for the few thousand, cannot be satisfied merely by the government handing over some of its own farms.⁶⁸

Even those who work in the political parties, who have gained the most from the opening, constantly look over their shoulders to see if this fragile space is about to collapse behind them. The reason is clear enough: this opening is wholly the result of military will. The Army opened up this space for reasons of its own, which have little to do with sentimental attachment to democratic institutions. If and when it feels like, it can shut it again. It need not require anything as clumsy as a *coup d'état* — that would cost all the legitimacy for which civilianization was carried out. Besides, Cerezo has indicated that the real point of his “transitional” regime is not democracy but rather to show that a civilian can last a full five-year term in Guatemala. Whether Cerezo has accurately assessed the power of his office or not, it is clear that he does not have the power to prevent Army security initiatives, whether in rural

65. Author interview, Guatemala City (July 1987).

66. *International Herald Tribune* (November 4, 1985), as cited in *The Human Rights Record* (London: Amnesty International, 1987), p. 6.

67. Author interviews (Guatemala City, May 1987).

68. Author interview, Nueva Concepción (May 1987).

counterinsurgency or urban state terrorism. Labor and peasant leaders indicate privately that they fully expect another wave of repression against them, another round in the cycle of violence which has operated since the 1954 CIA coup. The question for them is not whether but when, and none of them believes that Cerezo has the ability to protect them. Thus it is not surprising that Cerezo, even during his first year in office when his legitimacy was strongest, backed off an investigation following the murder of one of his own Christian Democratic party secretaries outside Guatemala City. Before the man died he named the police and local security forces as his killers.⁶⁹

XI

The Army has defined a perimeter for civilian political activity — a playground, really — and made it clear that its limits are not to be breached. Unfortunately, that political space does not contain the necessary political resources to take on the issues which define class and ethnic struggle in Guatemala — wages and working conditions for the working class, employment for the unemployed, and land for the peasants. Sooner or later, some group will have to take on that perimeter, because there cannot *be* many other reasons for politics in Guatemala. The Army will be ready for them, with the whole structure of counterinsurgency refined and finely-tuned enough to satisfy the demands of both security and legitimacy. The same officers who ran the operation of counterinsurgency in the field during Ríos Montt and Mejía Víctores have been promoted — after all, unlike Argentina, they *won* their war. They have not been exiled to posts in Paraguay and Iceland; they are in the National Palace in the Ministry of Defense, in the Military Academy, in the National Police.⁷⁰

It should not be thought that the structure of terror is especially in abeyance, waiting for the popular sectors to make a move. To be sure, the rural massacres presently do not occur, and 800 bodies are not found in the streets every month. On the other hand, people are still disappearing and being murdered in Guatemala, and even if it is not convenient to the project of legitimacy to make them obvious, bodies are still found with the marks of assassination by Army Intelligence — hands tied behind the back and the famous *coup de grace* through the forehead. Newspaper stories, although there are fewer of them, do not

69. See Americas Watch, *Human Rights in Guatemala During President Cerezo's First Year* (New York, February 1987), p. 33.

70. See Naim & Simon, "The Bureaucracy of Death," *The New Republic*, *op. cit.* p. 13.

vary much from how they read in earlier years: "Heavily armed unknown assailants pushed so-and-so into a van with polarized windows."

Perhaps the clearest recent case showing continuing Army involvement in disappearances was the abduction during Holy Week of Débora Carolina Vásquez, an architecture student who returned from abroad to spend the holidays with her family.⁷¹ A few days after her arrival, she was abducted at a gas station in front of a crowd of people; her father was severely beaten when he tried to intervene. Uniformed police agents followed the kidnap vehicle to the entrance of the Army's General Barracks. Vásquez' father, however, was a Central Bank economist with high level connections, and he was able to negotiate his daughter's release from Army Intelligence. She subsequently fled to England. The total number of political killings and disappearances — which certainly number in the hundreds since Cerezo took office — is difficult to determine with precision, and will be, until some human rights monitoring group is able to open safely in Guatemala and keep count. But the real point, as a former US diplomat in Guatemala observed (departing drastically from the Embassy's official line) is that whether the numbers are up or down this month or last, the structure of terror is in place and *operational*.⁷²

The civilian sectors — and especially the political parties — have recognized that the only game in town is to maneuver for *relative* advantage within the confines of safe political space. Political activity is almost entirely inwardly directed — the civilians are all talking, fighting, and negotiating *with each other*. For them it is a zero-sum game with a certain quantity of political goods, and what one civilian group or party wins comes at the expense of others. This is convenient for the Army; the civilians all tend to cancel each other out. They are careful not to take on the Army. When they attack the government, they attack the *civilian* government. Everyone comes to demonstrate at the National Palace; no one routinely shows up to protest in front of the Military Academy. Although every political party has lost dozens (in the case of Cerezo's Christian Democrats, hundreds) of party workers to Army repression over the years, no serious attempt is made by the parties or the government to investigate. The political goods offered by the military are essentially a chunk of the technocracy of government, but nothing touching fundamental security or economic policy. The civilian government is free to *back* the established line, and even to take

71. Author interviews, London and Guatemala City (April-July 1987).

72. Author interview, Guatemala City (August 1987).

credit (as well as heat) for it, but it is not free to *change* the line fundamentally — which is not democracy.

The justification for this state of affairs is that this is how Cerezo can “consolidate” power and carry forward the slow transition to true democracy. One begins with the trappings and moves to the substance. Unfortunately, the available evidence does not give reason to think this maneuvering by civilians within the defined political space has any impact whatever on the perimeter of that space and the Army beyond it. Cerezo has made no fundamental challenge on economic issues and the division of land and wealth in Guatemala. With the sole exception of tax reform, the oligarchy has reasons to be satisfied with Cerezo.⁷³

Cerezo once proposed, a few months into office, local community votes on whether to continue the supposedly voluntary civil patrols in the highlands; the Army opposed it (and it was never aired again). Gen. Gramajo made some public complaints about the quality of the police force, and within weeks the police chief had been fired and replaced by an Army colonel. The timidity of Cerezo’s actions in security as well as economic matters suggests, contrary to the myth of consolidation, that by accepting the trappings of democracy without the substance, Cerezo forever bound those who come after to the social compact and its division of power, security arrangements, and relative economic burdens and benefits as they existed when he took office.

Yet everyone in government talks a great deal about the process of consolidation, though no one is able to come up with concrete examples of how civilian maneuvering will shore up the perimeter of political space against the day when the security forces decide that enough is enough, much less open the gates to encompass something that could be called democracy in substance as well as electoral form. Instead, one is left with appeals to the “changing ideology” of the Army, and the exceedingly sentimental thought that victory in the counterinsurgency war has taught the Army that it does not really need counterinsurgency, whereas the whole point of civilian government, for the Army, is to institutionalize it. On this point the High Command is absolutely explicit. Gen. Gramajo has taken to inverting Clausewitz in his speeches, saying that here in Guatemala, “we have made politics the continuation of war by other means.” But in fact the Army has simply denied the distinction between politics and war, and the tactics of the “dirty war” have become the tactics of peacetime politics.

73. Moreover, the truly wealthy were not planning on paying the new taxes anyway.

Meanwhile, the desire to maintain at least the trappings of power leads the Cerezo government to claim it has more power than it actually has. It must cling to the façade that “consolidation” is in fact taking place. Cerezo used to admit freely that he holds no more than 30% of the government’s real power. He no longer makes those speeches, at least not to the Guatemalan public; he saves it for occasions when he has to explain to foreigners why he has not done anything about the thousands of “disappeared.” He used to admit that the security forces engage in human rights violations, but not any more because they were supposedly “reorganized” and cleaned up last year. The Cerezo government has become trapped in the amber of its own public relations, the myth of democracy, and it has ceased, except feebly, even to struggle.

XII

“The military in Guatemala,” said the Bishop behind the closed door of his office, “has its project.”⁷⁴ That project is not democratization; it is time to give up the myth that the civilian government is taking tiny but incremental steps toward democracy. The evidence does not indicate that the civilian government is gaining control over fundamental security and economic policy; rather, it is the Army which is consolidating control. At the same time, the project is not an authoritarian form of development-for-security, either. It is time to give up another myth, nurtured openly by some on the right and in secret by some liberal left authoritarians, that with the problem of social order solved in the short term — no matter how abusively — the Army will institute a heavy-handed version of social justice and development at the expense of the oligarchy, if only to forestall new threats in the middle and long term. The facts of highland development do not corroborate the Army’s occasional rhetoric of rural development and, in any case, even rural development does not wave a moral magic wand over the human rights objections to repressive development-security programs. The Army and the oligarchy have their disagreements, particularly over who will ultimately be preeminent in civil society, but that will hardly lead the Army to a wholesale change of class allegiance, even if it becomes a third-world, Latin version of the New Class. It is not seeking to develop the highlands and externalize the costs onto the oligarchy.

The Army’s project is permanent counterinsurgency — the evolution of a state consolidated around the Army, and an Army consolidated around

74. Author interview, Guatemala City (September 1987).

a long term strategy of counterinsurgency. An uneasy peace reigns in Guatemala, imposed by the Army which imbued it, by Gen. Gramajo's admission, with all the threat and insecurity of war. There is always the threat that yesterday's levels of violence will reappear, and people still die and disappear through political violence in today's Guatemala. Political violence remains what it has always been during the 1980s — state terrorism directed by the Army. Those most at risk in the new Guatemala are those who have always been at risk in the midst of so much arbitrary government violence — especially unionists and peasant leaders still willing to address, even cautiously, the questions of land and wealth and social justice which this freighted social peace rules out of bounds.

In the meantime, the Army goes about building the strong state. Its building blocks are counterinsurgency, on the one hand, and the legitimacy of civilian government, on the other. The peasants have been flattened as a political force: who will speak for them? Their own leaders are dead and the guerrillas reduced to occasional desultory ambushes against the Army, which serve principally to justify permanent militarization in the highlands. The civilian government has no incentive to speak for the Indians who make up two-thirds of Guatemala's population; it represents the urban classes, and even if it were to give voice to the Indians, they would ask for land reform and the end of Army presence in the highlands. Since the civilian government cannot deliver on either demand, it is easier not to enfranchise them at all; better, from the government's view, to leave the highlands as a permanent military reservation. With one eye always fixed to monitor the counterinsurgency apparatus of the civil patrols, the Army turns to use civilian legitimacy to restructure its relationship with the oligarchy. Maybe it will succeed with tax reform, maybe not; there will be other issues as it seeks its lever into the economic soul of the oligarchy.

The strong state aims to reduce the destabilizing effects of a sovereignty divided historically between the Army and the oligarchy; founded directly on techniques of permanent counterinsurgency, it contemplates renewed insurgency over the long run and accepts the logic of cycles of political violence. The Army appears effectively to have checkmated the residual guerrilla organizations; perhaps it will get lazy or corrupt and permit existing groups to renew themselves, but as the colonels remark, such a possibility requires a substantial error by the Army itself. At the same time, future insurgency need not take on the same ideological or political character as existing organizations patterned on the Sandinistas in Nicaragua. It is not impossible that an

indigenous ideology, for example, parallel to groups in Peru and fundamentally reactionary in character, might develop in the highlands. The strategic development of such groups cannot now be predicted.

There is no reason why permanent counterinsurgency cannot be the way of life for whole generations. There is no reason why it cannot be achieved within a framework of law and legitimacy. As long as minimal civilian forms of government are maintained, there is no great enthusiasm for challenging the right of Guatemala's rulers to rule — inside Guatemala it is too dangerous, and outside Guatemala, US liberals apparently prefer to accept surface forms so long as its foreign policy takes a politically correct line on Nicaragua. Legitimacy and counterinsurgency are dual projects for the Army to manage over the long term. It hopes to have both at once, and that gives it an incentive to remain concealed by the veil of civilian government. Which is why the true nature of "democracy" in Guatemala is reflected less in the actions of the civilian government than in the reflections of a colonel in the Army Civil Affairs Office, found at his desk, at the time of Cerezo's inauguration, reading Machiavelli. He had on the shelf behind him Hobbes, Mao, and Jeanne Kirkpatrick. When asked why Machiavelli, he replied: "Now that the war has been won, we have to learn how to govern these people."⁷⁵

75. Author interview, Guatemala City (January 1986).

Guatemalan Family