

Letter From the Guerrilla Army of the Poor to the North American People

We, the Guatemalan revolutionaries and patriots of the Guerrilla Army of the Poor, wish to share with you the situation of our people, their struggles and sufferings, as well as their hopes and aspirations. We would also like to tell you about those who have spoliated our natural resources and profited from the efforts and the misery of Guatemalan workers. Above all, we need to let you know about the suffering successive US governments have wrought on our people by supporting the small wealthy elite in Guatemala, the very same that have imposed an oppressive and antidemocratic regime on our country. It is this very same support that the Reagan Administration is planning to increase today.

With this letter we hope to contribute to tearing down the wall of disinformation and silence that conceals Guatemala from the world. This wall has been imposed by those who are interested in hiding the horror our people are living, as well as the hope that springs from struggling by every conceivable means. Finally, we hope to win your solidarity with our cause of liberty, democracy, justice and peace for our country.

Guatemala is a small country which covers some 41,420 square miles and has a population of 7.5 million. It is located in Central America, and borders with Mexico to the North and West, El Salvador and Honduras to the East, and the new independent Belize to the Northeast. Nearly two thirds of our population lives off the land, both on small subsistence plots where corn and beans are grown, and on large plantations—*fincas*—dedicated to cultivation of export crops, mainly coffee, cotton, sugar cane and bananas, as well as cattle. It is to these plantations that thousands of peasants—*campesinos*—migrate every year to work as temporary labor because their plot of land is insufficient to feed their families year round. It is on these *fincas* that 71% of the country's exports are produced.

In contrast, the industrial sector is poorly developed, employing barely 4% of the economically active population. Guatemalan industry produces mainly consumer goods (food, textiles, beverages, shoes), and is largely controlled by multinationals, both through direct

investment and through technological dependence. This is why the vast majority of Guatemalans are peasants. Furthermore, roughly half of the population is Mayan Indian, forming one of the 22 ethnic groups that inhabit the Northern and Western highlands and the mountain ranges of our country. The indians, the majority of the population, have long been subjected to a barrier of discrimination and cultural oppression erected by the wealthy elite, both national and foreign.

A high percentage of our exports, 33%, go to the US and most of our imports come from your country as well, 34%. Out of 456 transnational firms that operate in Central America, 125 do so in Guatemala, 31% of the total; of these, 101 are US firms, and make up 81% of the total.

Out of total foreign investment in Guatemala, US firms own 88% in the agro-industry business, with 21 firms; 2% in the chemical-pharmaceutical business, with 36 firms; 73% of the banking and financial institutions, with 5 firms; 90% in the retail business and services with 8 firms; 71% in mining and forestry, with 4 firms, and 81% of transport and tourism, with 8 firms.¹

Because of the way our society is organized, there is great inequality between the living and working conditions of millions of poor people and the opulence and squandering of a few thousand wealthy people, both national and foreign. Their standard of living and lifestyle are similar to that of the ruling sectors in highly developed countries, and they enjoy privileges which are in brutal contrast to the generalized misery of the working population.

The grossly unequal access to our country's resources and wealth is best exemplified by the distribution of land: 2% of all landowners own 70% of the arable land, monopolizing the most fertile land. The average wage in the countryside is \$1.50 for an arduous day of work, a sum which is totally inadequate to meet minimum daily needs for a family. This situation is aggravated by a chronic deficit of jobs: 35% of the population is unemployed, and there is an even higher percentage of underemployment. The social consequences are staggering: according to 1982 figures, two out of three Guatemalans are illiterate; three out of four Guatemalans live in inadequate housing, and there is a deficit of 1 million housing units. Eight out of every ten children

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under 5 years of age are undernourished; common diseases are the cause of 80% of all deaths. Such is the situation in a country famous for its natural wealth and hardworking people.

The ruling sectors have historically maintained this contemptible situation, in which the people are deprived of even the most basic rights, through the use of violence. When workers and peasant masses have organized and attempted to change this state of affairs through trade unions and grass roots pressure, the wealthy and the government with their Army and gangs of assassins have responded by prohibiting or dissolving all legal popular organizations, by eliminating free expression, by perpetrating scandalous electoral frauds, kidnapping and assassinating leaders, and massacring entire populations.

It is this reality of misery and terror which has led thousands of Guatemalans into a struggle to change a situation which is indignant and inhuman. Our struggle stems from deep social and national roots, and in no way from the so-called East-West confrontation, as the Reagan Administration would try to have you believe.

Given the situation in our country, what role have successive US governments played? Have they in any way contributed to improving the living conditions of our people, to guaranteeing or at least respecting our sovereignty, to helping our people obtain the basic rights they are entitled to? Or, on the contrary, have they supported the landowners and wealthy businessmen so that they can continue to be a privileged minority, all under the pretext of guaranteeing the national interests of the USA?

The history of relations between your country and ours is full of political maneuvering, diplomatic pressures, economic blackmail, corruption, impositions and contempt for our own national interests, which are repeatedly subordinated to foreign interests. Threats and actual intervention are ominously present. A few relevant cases should suffice to illustrate our point. The monopoly of the United Fruit Company over the most important economic activity in the country, which lasted well into the late fifties, earned Guatemala the tragic motto of "Banana Republic." Even more tragic was the armed intervention which in 1954 overthrew Jacobo Arbenz's democratic government (1951-54). Arbenz set out to foster independent capitalist development and democratic liberties in our country. As has been revealed by US leaders of the period—Eisenhower, Allen Dulles, etc.—that intervention was planned, promoted, organized, financed and led by the US government through the CIA.

During the sixties, the counterinsurgency program that was carried out in Guatemala under US auspices, financing and advisorship, was taken from the activities which at that time were being carried out in Viet Nam: so-called "Civic Action," and the use of terrorist practices against population. During this time 373 Guatemalan officers were trained in US counterinsurgency training camps; there were many US advisors in the country at the time and it was denounced there was a military base with close to 1,000 Green Berets.

Since 1954 successive US administrations, to varying degrees and using diverse methods, have set about the

task of creating an army trained and ideologized to commit the most horrendous crimes against its own people. The Guatemalan Army has been trained to massacre children, women and old people, and to destroy their homes and crops using weapons and techniques provided by the US or through its allies, such as Israel.

And what has been the Reagan Administration's attitude since it took power? The Reagan Administration's plans to bolster the Guatemalan Army in its war against its own people are becoming increasingly evident. Reagan has already officially expressed his intent to renew military aid, suspended during the Carter Administration because of the obvious crimes committed by the Army and various security forces. Fearing rejection by the American people and Congress, the Administration is planning to renew direct aid gradually. But in the meantime, the Guatemalan Army is being given essential military items through third parties, and military aid has been disguised as spare parts and civilian equipment. What has this meant in practice?

In 1981 the Reagan Administration granted the Guatemalan Army \$3 million worth of trucks and jeeps for military transport. These trucks are used to transport genocidal troops that raid villages in the Guatemalan highlands, massacring entire populations. Cessna passenger planes and civilian helicopters equipped for offensive operations have been sighted bombing and strafing civilian population. The Guatemalan Air Force has at least 14 UH-1H (Huey) helicopters, well known for their role in Viet Nam, also made in the USA. The US government also supplies the genocidal Guatemalan Army with spare parts and ammunition. \$250,000 in military training funds have been proposed for fiscal year 1983 as a formal step towards obtaining Congressional approval for renewing direct military aid. The Reagan Administration has taken steps to obtain the informal approval needed to sell \$3.7 million in spare parts for helicopters. At the same time, \$50 million have been proposed for alleged development programs in the Western highlands where the population is being massacred indiscriminately. These funds will clearly be used for military purposes, to build garrisons and erect strategic villages, also reminiscent of Viet Nam. These emplacements are being used by the Army to relocate people who have been expelled from their communities by the official scorched earth policy, a policy that has already displaced over one million people, and totally disrupted their economic, family, social and cultural lives.

Attempting to hide its crimes, the Army blames the guerrillas for the massacres its own troops are committing. But according to an Oxfam America report, out of 115 US citizens living in Guatemala who were interviewed, 69% believed that the Army and rightwing paramilitary groups are responsible for the massacres.

The Army not only massacres the Guatemalan people. It has also killed three North American priests in recent years. The last priest to be slain was James Alfred Miller, last February 12th, and the people of the US have yet to see a report on the investigation into his assassination.

Whatever direct aid is granted by the US government at this point will only complement aid granted through third parties. Galil rifles, Uzzi submachineguns, Arava transport planes and other standard military equipment are all made in Israel, and sold to the Guatemalan government through Marcus Katz, the well-known dealer of Israeli arms. In this way the Guatemalan government has been kept generously supplied during the last few years, while the US government has not had to dirty its hands directly and has been able to maintain the appearance of respect for the human rights of the Guatemalan people. Nevertheless, we know that this systematic flow of military supplies to our country can only take place with the express approval of the US government.

The steps the Reagan Administration has taken so far in regard to Guatemala foreshadow a more intense intervention, similar to the one directed against the Salvadorean people. Reagan wants to make the war in our country his own, siding with the powerful and with those responsible for genocide. While he sends millions of dollars in aid to murderous regimes in El Salvador and Guatemala, Reagan suspends all aid to the heroic Nicaraguan people, and is submitting them to an economic blockade. Reagan is also spending millions of dollars to destabilize the Popular Sandinista Revolution, and is providing the Somocista bands with political and military support.

Faced with an unjust situation of exploitation, oppression, repression and dependence which blocks any possibility of achieving basic demands through legal forms of struggle, the Guatemalan people have developed their own organizations. These are the Guerrilla Army of the Poor, EGP; the Rebel Armed Forces, FAR; the Organization of the People in Arms, ORPA; and the Guatemalan Workers Party (Leadership Nucleous), PGT, which have now come together in the Guatemalan National Revolutionary Unity, URNG. They are waging a Popular Revolutionary War, and have called on the people to struggle to take power and set up a Revolutionary, Patriotic, Popular and Democratic Government based on five programmatic points that can be summarized as follows:

I. The Revolution will eliminate once and for all the repression against our people and will guarantee to our citizens the supreme rights of life and peace.

II. The Revolution will set down the foundation for resolving the basic needs of the great majority of our people by eliminating the political domination of the repressive rich, both national and foreign, who rule Guatemala.

III. The Revolution will guarantee equality between Indians and Ladinos, and will end cultural oppression and discrimination.

IV. The Revolution will guarantee the creation of a New Society, in which all patriotic, popular and democratic sectors will be represented in the government.

V. Based on the principle of self-determination the Revolution will guarantee a policy of non-alignment and international cooperation which poor countries need in order to develop in the modern world.

We, the revolutionaries and patriots of the Guerrilla Army of the Poor, realize that you, the North American people, are subjected to the disastrous effects of the Reagan Administration's warmongering policies and of its support for the weapons manufacturers. We must all unite to confront those who attempt against people's sovereignty, and against social justice and world peace, in defense of their own selfish interests.

Finally, we call on the North American people, democratic and progressive forces, the young, Christian, ethnic and national minorities, to take all the necessary steps to block any increase in military and economic aid and every other form of intervention by the Reagan Administration on behalf of the military government in Guatemala.

We ask you to tear down the wall of silence and disinformation, to denounce the crimes committed by the government and the Army, and to make known the advantages in the struggle being waged by Guatemalan revolutionaries and patriots.

We also call on the North American people to redouble your efforts in support of the thousands of refugees produced by this cruel war, and to broaden and deepen your solidarity with the struggling Central American people. In this way you too will come closer to obtaining your own aspirations and demands.

This will be the best contribution you can make to our struggle.

Hasta la Victoria Siempre

Guerrilla Army of the Poor (EGP)

Guatemala, July 1982

