Peru: Fading Hopes for Reform

Lima, June 1986: What happened?

In July of 1985, the Alianza Popular Revolucionaria Americana (APRA) came to power behind President Alan Garcia, after a half century of open and clandestine struggle for power. Nearly a year later, they still enjoyed overwhelming popular support—despite a situation of economic disaster inherited from the previous government in a context of worldwide recession. After his election, President Garcia had enacted a series of emergency economic measures including price controls on basic foodstuffs and a rise in the minimum wage and base salaries of the public sector. Some imports were restricted, the price of the dollar was frozen, and payments on the foreign debt were linked to export earnings. (See Carol Wise in NACLA Report, June 1986)

Garcia made a splash on the international scene with addresses to the United Nations and at the Food and Agriculture Organization. Presenting alternative positions to those of Fidel Castro, he sought leadership in Latin America, among debtor nations, and in the Non-Aligned Movement. The International Congress of Social Democrats (Socialists International) was scheduled to open in Lima hosted by the party which had dreamed since the 1930s of leading all of Latin America in a non-Marxist popular and anti-imperialist movement.

On July 18th, as Social Democratic leaders from around the world boarded planes for Lima, there were simultaneous uprisings in Lima’s four major prisons. These uprisings were orchestrated by a Maoist guerrilla organization, the Partido Comunista Peruano — por el Sendero Luminoso de José Carlos Mariategui (Sendero Luminoso), a highly sectarian group waging a war against all representatives of urban, state and multinational interests. Their primary demands were: 1) cancellation of government plans to transfer those accused of “terrorist” activities to the new prison at Canto Grande, where individual cells would bring an end to the rights to self-government won at

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great expense in the older prisons and 2) an interview between Sendero leaders and a number of representatives of the Socialist International. The second demand was unusual, coming from a group which spurns the "parliamentary left" and does not publicly present its plans or policies.

On the evening of June 19th, following the inaugural cocktail party of the International and a day of rumors of uprising and of police response, President Garcia appeared on television to announce that the uprisings had been put down with violence, in the course of which about 100 inmates had been killed. He expressed his profound regret at this occurrence and promised both an investigation into the conduct of the Guardia Republicana in charge of the prisons and prosecution of those guilty of excesses.

The International went on to conduct its business, but all the social gatherings hosted by the Garcia administration were cancelled, and the congress closed ahead of schedule on June 23, without its closing ceremonies. A number of major participants had cancelled because of the initial news of the uprisings, and the need to draft a position paper on the incident became a central and controversial aspect of the debates. The large numbers of foreign journalists in Lima to cover the congress dedicated themselves to covering the uprising and its repression, and the true scale of the horror came out in the foreign press before it was known in Peru. Sendero claimed a death toll of 300. The official toll settled at 250 dead in the reprisals conducted by the Guardia Republicana in the prison of San Juan de Lurigancho and by the Navy in the island prison of El Fronton. Elite anti-subversive troops and equipment were utilized and facilities were bombed - wounded inmates and those who turned themselves in to the authorities were shot.

As the nature and extent of the massacre became public, there were fears that Sendero would respond with an attack on members of the Socialist International. The guerrilla organization issued a statement promising reprisals directed at militants of the APRA party, and on June 25th a bomb exploded in the tourist train to the Inca ruins of Macchu Picchu, killing five tourists and wounding others. Immediate criticism of the administration from the Peruvian left pointed out that the responsibility for the massacre extended beyond the Guardia Republicana to the core of the Peruvian military. Also President Garcia, despite his regrets, had issued the order for "energetic measures" to control the uprising without establishing any control over what those measures would be.

Public opinion originally backed the swift action against the uprising, but as more information appeared, opinion shifted to a deep disillusionment with the Garcia government. The right made a similar shift from support for the reprisals to sharp criticism of the Garcia government for its violation of human rights. The same politicians who had been criticizing Garcia for lack of control of the spreading guerrilla problem and who had called for harsher measures and broader military control, then moved to call for the resignation of the entire cabinet following the prison massacre. On June 30, the Minister of Justice Luis Gonzales Posada resigned, but the clamor for resignations did not succeed in bringing down the Minister of the Interior, Abel Salinas, who is considered to be the most
active and effective member of the Garcia cabinet. As pressure on the government increased from the right, the left opposition shifted the focus of its analysis to emphasize the threat to democratic principles inherent in the whole sequence of events, and the question of who had benefited, and who had lost in the process.

Who was in Control?

It was immediately clear that Sendero had been slowly preparing for a prison uprising for some time. The fortifications within cellblocks indicated that the inmates had access to tools and building materials, and they had been able to acquire some arms. In the aftermath, it was clear that their preparations had been incomplete, probably because their uprising had been pushed forward to coincide with the Socialist International. It was also clear that the extent of their military resources had certainly not justified the intensity of the attacks launched against them.

Immediately after the massacre, documents from Sendero were published in two weekly papers published by the two major tendencies within the parliamentary left. One document acknowledged that Sendero had predicted about 100 casualties in the uprising, timed to demonstrate the fundamentally repressive and reactionary nature of the APRA government before the media and political representatives of the entire world. A unique interview in Lurigancho prison which had been offered to journalist Jose Maria Salcedo of the political analysis magazine Quehacer six months before had been clearly a preparation for this event. Other preludes included an attack on APRA Party Secretary Alberto Kita- rono, and the assassination of Admiral Ponce Canessa. The death of Ponce Canessa was particularly significant, as he was a member of a secret military think tank on counterinsurgency strategy, and knowledge of his importance suggested deep infiltration of the military.

While the loss of so many militants was an unforeseen blow to Sendero, their overall strategy was a full success: they had set out to create a situation which would lead to brutal repression and to a loss of confidence in the Garcia government both nationally and internationally, as well as demoralization within the APRA Party. Their intent was to tear off the "mask of democracy" and promote political polarization and a more overtly repressive situation. They made great progress towards that goal.

The military response to the prison uprising corresponded to policies advocated in recent months by political and military representatives of the extreme right. These consist of: 1) greater freedom of action for the military, 2) an increase in the number of zones of the country declared as emergency zones under military control, 3) the trial of civilians accused of terrorism by military court and 4) reinstatement of the death penalty. Upon receiving the order for energetic measures from President Garcia, decisions were made which amounted to massive enactment of the death penalty under unilateral military initiative — directly carrying into effect those very measures being advocated by the extreme right.
While it is clear that the prison reprisals were an expression of the political will of the extreme right, many commentators went further to suggest that the actions were calculated as a step in preparing the ground for a military coup. The unusual popularity of the García government after one year in office meant that political conditions for a successful coup did not exist. The largest electoral opposition to APRA lies in the parliamentary left (Izquierda Unida) coalition which obtained about 27% of the vote, while the parties of the developmentalist right (Accion Popular) and military (FRENTE), dominant in the previous two governments, were reduced to insignificance. The hard-line right (Partido Popular Cristiano) attained about 12% of the vote, and its leader Bedoya is today the major civilian spokesperson for the right.

In the southern cone countries (Chile, Argentina, Uruguay, Bolivia) military coups have been the right wing option at times when there is no electoral entrance for the right; when elections and national dialogue are dominated by reformist and revolutionary parties. However, previous to a military coup there must be a sequence of events which cast doubt on the political capabilities of the parties in power, in order to paralyze some part of the public resistance to a coup which could render a country ungovernable even by a repressive military regime.

Forces of opposition

The primary form of right-wing resistance to the APRA reform platform has primarily taken the form of economic sabotage by large food producers and wholesalers who have reacted to price controls by creating shortages. A good proportion of their motivation is simple self-interest, and in many cases the producers have valid grievances, caught between expensive inputs and unprofitable market rates. However, political motivations were important from the first months of the García government, and the high price or unavailability of basic foodstuffs have emerged as the primary criticism of the government by the Peruvian people.

The second form of resistance has been a two-pronged attack by both Sendero and the military, both of whom (for different reasons) seek to increase the militarization of the government. The initial project to return the Central Andean departments (administrative regions) of Ayacucho, Apurimac and Huancavelica to civilian rule was frustrated, and the declaration of a State of Emergency in the capital Lima last February was a major victory for both extremes which was confirmed when the Emergency was extended in June. Under the State of Emergency, the military has taken over policing powers which include those of search and detention without a warrant. During curfew, from 1 to 5 am, any person on the street may be detained: while passes are available for urgent or emergency travel, the chance of being fired upon is considered by many people to be too great to risk.

Militarization of the capital has not significantly lessened Sendero activity there, and the group has opened new fronts in other highland regions of Peru. Spokespersons for the military and for the civilian right have united in pushing for expansion of the powers of the military within the capital, as well as for expansion of their territorial control. Some commentators draw a parallel with Uruguay, where a slow increase of military power under
A reformist civilian government led to de facto military rule some time before the actual removal of the elected government.

The "parliamentary left" is the strongest opposition force within national and local government. One major tendency, led by the Mayor of Lima, Alfonso Barrantes, has lent a great deal of support to the APRA government. This position is dictated by practical considerations, given APRA's majority in the Congress and the fact that Garcia had adopted most of the political platform of the left in his campaign. The other tendency, led by Congressman Javier Díez Canseco, has adopted a more critical position. Some APRA congressmen have joined with the extreme right in accusing Díez Canseco's tendency of "terrorism", merely because it characterizes APRA as insincere or incapable in its plans for profound reforms. Other sectors of the left have rejected participation in elections, disaffected by the importance of the Izquierda Unida as a congressional opposition. Some of those groups have begun preparation for armed combat, and among them there are tendencies which show a growing support for Sendero, or present themselves as an alternative to that Ayacucho-based group.

The intense military repression in Ayacucho and nearby districts (similar to counties) of the departments of Huancavelica and Apurímac has effectively destroyed Sendero's ability to maneuver in its home region. The tactics used by the military occupation have been described as a "Guatemalization" of the region. Sendero activity in a given district was followed by military incursions finding the Senderistas gone leaving only the local residents, the military would act against the entire community, or against individuals reported to have collaborated with Sendero out of fear or sympathy. Massacres resulted, followed by the organization of local vigilante groups, empowered to identify and take action against subversives in their own community and nearby. As in Guatemala, pressure to find such subversives has combined with land disputes or other family or community conflicts as grounds for denunciation to the authorities or direct attack. The result has been massive dislocation, as threatened people or survivors flee their homes, leaving behind their land and animals. Local government, commerce and education are totally disrupted, due to the targeting of their representatives both by Sendero and by the "forces of order".

Sendero has shifted its activity to other areas of the highlands, focusing more on attacks on transportation, communication and power systems. It has been active in the coca-growing areas, where local growers and transporters have been pressured to provide medical supplies and arms in return for "protection". As dislocated refugees from Ayacucho descended on Lima, Sendero shifted to an increased level of activity in the capital focusing on attacks on police, military and representatives of the governing party.

Finally, Sendero has opened up fronts in the tourist center of Cuzco and in the southern regions, particularly in the high plains around Puno, where the Lake Titicaca region has suffered a recent series of natural disasters.

"Informers" killed by Sendero
Several years of drought followed by massive flooding, has exacerbated the poverty of the region. While Puno resembles Ayacucho in being one of the poorest regions and one where Andean traditions have been most preserved, it differs in being more socially integrated and politically organized. There Sendero has had to compete more with other left and church organizations which have been integrated into local political struggles for some time.

The immediate effect of Sendero activity in that region and throughout the country is to make any form of organizing for social change a very dangerous business. The police and military response continues to be the arrest and persecution of all activists, and there has been a resurgence of human rights violations. The possibility of legally sanctioned action for social change on the part of the left opposition has been largely destroyed. Government-sponsored social and economic change is also a receding hope. The actions of the Garcia administration have shifted from an aggressive to a more defensive mode, and after over a year in office promised reforms have remained promises, and the integrated platform which should have followed the initial emergency measures has never appeared. Such a platform would have necessarily included controversial measures, harder to sell to the Peruvian people after the government’s loss of face following the prison massacres. Perhaps for that reason, Garcia’s July 28 state of the union address focused on restriction of payments on the foreign debt and on restriction of capital flight, rather than addressing promised internal structural change.

The APRA Government: An Evaluation

The prison reprisals highlight a fundamental characteristic of the Garcia government - the preponderance of the president in decision making, which is often at conflict with the political decision making structure within the party. Garcia’s order for vigorous action was made without consultation with and subsequent surveillance by party representatives which might have averted the tragedy. APRA’s great strength is its party structure and discipline, yet in gaining power it has fallen victim to the cult of the individual leader so prevalent in Peruvian political history. The overwhelming role of the president in outlining new legislation and presenting it to the public has led to a nearly functionless congress, where the APRA majority merely works out the details of legislation announced by Garcia and passes it without meaningful debate. The opposition parties are reduced to the role of commentators on legislation, without the power to block its approval.

Despite attempts to counteract its partisan image and advocacy of popular organizations, the APRA government had been guilty of establishing parallel labor unions and advocacy groups for the poor, and of funneling government support to groups and communities led by APRA officials. Major strikes by teachers and by doctors in the state hospital system met with police repression and a refusal to dialogue by APRA ministers.

Initially, the extent of the human resources mobilized by the APRA party structure and the campaign promise not to indulge
in wholesale partisan redistribution of government jobs led many observers to hope that the APRA government would not be marked by the mediocrity characteristic of its predecessor. APRA held to its promise in the first couple of months, but with time it became clear that government positions were steadily being distributed on the basis of party affiliation and not on that of competence. After an initial campaign against government corruption, it has reemerged in the form of party-based favoritism. The problem of APRA mediocrity in municipal governments and in ministerial bureaucracies is considered to be a major block to implementation of core reforms promised by Garcia, such as political and economic decentralization and the restructuring of national agriculture and of the fishing industry.

Most cabinet ministers have not shown the kind of skill and initiative necessary to attempt to pull the country out of economic disaster. It is hard to tell whether such ministerial inaction has led to the lack of development of an integrated party platform, or vice versa. One exception to this tendency is Luis Alva Castro, Prime Minister and Minister of Economy, who engineered the emergency economic program. This program had marked success in halting the process of financial disintegration begun under the previous government, and thrust Peru into the international spotlight as the advocate of directly linking debt payment to export revenues.

The other exception is Minister of the Interior Abel Salinas, who instituted both the restructuring of the police forces and the crackdown on the cocaine trade which were the cornerstones of the "moralization" campaign of the first months of the new government. A number of generals "retired" as the military was called to account for human rights violations for the first time.

Such actions were applauded as forceful and courageous, but even at the time it was noted that the APRA government clearly lacked the power to impose reforms and controls on the military like those within the police. It was clear that some kind of a deal had been struck between government and military which limited investigation into military involvement in the drug trade. It soon became clear that the military retained tactical control over the war against Sendero, and as the military extended its areas of control, close links became more obvious between the anti-terrorist strategy of those now in power in the armed forces and the political and economic platforms of the extreme right.

Despite the fact that the Garcia government has recovered substantially from the crises of June 1986, it is now obvious that ARPA cannot enact programs to substantially reduce the levels of poverty and violence, or to diffuse the political polarization being fostered by Sendero and by the military.

As a result, only a year after Garcia came into power offering himself as the only hope for social harmony and as the representative of all Peruvians, the dominant theme of discussion among political and social commentators is the hope for defense of democracy itself.

Ann Peters is a graduate student in Anthropology who recently returned from 1 1/2 years' field research in Peru.

Caretas, no. 912, July 7, 1986

Oct. 8, 1986

NACLA Report, May/June 1985; June 1986

The Nation, Sept. 6, 1986

The Progressive, Oct. 1986

Quasar, no. 39, Feb/March, 1986; no. 41,
June/July 1986

Time, Jan. 27, 1987
STOP THE LIES

LIE #1: US Policy in Central America Promotes Democracy in the Region.

The Reagan Administration claims that the goal of its policies in Central America is "to promote democracy." It is for this reason, Administration policy makers say, that the United States has poured billions of dollars into the army, air force, and conventional and incendiary weapons arsenals in El Salvador, has installed thousands of US troops in Honduras and built extensive military bases there, has determined to support the government of Guatemala despite its continuing human rights abuses, and has openly established, trained and funded the contra army in Nicaragua.

None of these policies has gone even a little way towards "promoting democracy" in Central America. To the contrary — the exact reverse has been true.

In El Salvador, billions of dollars in US military aid (including extensive monies for white phosphorous and napalm bombs) have propped up a government that a majority of Salvadorans do not support. Brutal army officers remain the real power behind the showplace "civilian government" of Jose Napoleon Duarte, and the US government's strong financial and political support for these officers and their program has crippled whatever possibility might have existed for peaceful democratic change in El Salvador. The last time members of El Salvador's church- and labor-based democratic opposition, the Democratic Revolutionary Front (FDR), attempted to take part in a national election (1980), all six of its candidates were murdered by the armed forces. Since that time, no opposition members have taken part in elections, despite the fact that the FDR enjoys wide support throughout El Salvador. In the 1984 Presidential election, soldiers supervised the casting of ballots into transparent ballot boxes, and voting for one of two candidates backed by the Salvadoran military was mandatory, under pain of detention (and possible death). When people have reason to be afraid that running for office, giving a political speech, voting for the "wrong" candidate, or refusing to vote in protest will run them the risk of being tortured or killed, elections are meaningless.

These were the kind of "elections" that brought President Vinicio Cerezo into office in Guatemala in 1985 (with the full backing of his country's notorious armed forces), and that the Administration has hailed as evidence of Guatemala's "democratization." But the Guatemalan Army continues to seize and, almost always, to kill anyone suspected of being in opposition to the government — especially people who work to improve the human rights situation and people fighting for the freedom and the lives of their detained relatives.

When speaking out in even the most limited way against government policies amounts to risking one's life, there is no democracy. Yet the Reagan Administration has taken pains to improve Guatemala's image internationally, and has lately resumed sending Guatemala military aid that was suspended under the Carter Administration.

In Honduras the sheer presence of two foreign armies installed by the United States — the 8,000-man contra army and thousands of US troops — along with massive allotments of US military aid to the Honduran armed forces and the construction of a vast network of military bases and airstrips, have turned Honduras...
into a giant military camp. This militarization has been accompanied by a severe erosion of democratic freedoms. In the past two years, torture and the political assassination of civilians opposed to the Honduran Army or to the US presence here have begun to be reported in large numbers.

Nicaragua is the only Central American country that the Administration has denounced as "undemocratic." But Nicaragua's 1984 elections were judged "a model of probity and fairness" by the Latin American Studies Association, the major scholarly organization for Latin American Studies in the United States, an opinion echoed by a host of international observers. Six opposition parties participated, and the governing Sandinista Front won 55% of the vote — a fact which, in addition to showing Sandinista popularity, shows perhaps more importantly that 35% of the electorate felt free to oppose the government currently in office. Nicaragua is also the only Central American country where a form of direct democracy — public participation in determining government policy — is a reality. Organizations in which a majority of poor Nicaraguans actively participate, such as the Women's Association, labor unions and peasants' associations not only have the power to make decisions at the local level in their neighborhoods and workplaces, but also sit on Nicaragua's Council of State, a national decision-making body much like our Congress.

To combat this government, the Administration has spent billions of dollars recruiting and funding the contras, whose leadership is composed of members of the Guardia Nacional, Somoza's vicious personal army. The contras call themselves "democratic guerrillas," but Amnesty International and Americas Watch have condemned them for making the murder, torture and rape of civilians a regular part of their activities. Nicaraguans oppose the contras so vehemently because they know that the most intense wish of the contra leaders is a return to the economic and political structure of the age of Somoza — which would mean a return of the disappearances, widespread political killings and terror that Nicaraguans have for only seven years escaped. If democracy has anything to do with the right to dissent and with the right of poor people — who form the majority of the Nicaraguan citizens — to have major impact into the decisions which affect their lives, a contra victory would be the ultimate defeat for democracy.

Lie #2: US policy in Central America is a response to a Soviet threat.

THE FACTS:

The United States Government's explanation that its policy in Central America is in response to a Soviet threat is a lie. In fact, manifestations of Soviet military involvement in the region are practically non-existent: the Soviet Union has no military bases, holds no war games and indeed has never used military force in the region. The United States, on the other hand, maintains 13 military bases, conducts frequent war exercises involving up to 120,000 troops at a time, and has intervened militarily 33 times in Central America in this century. Clearly there is only one major external military force active in the region, and it is not the Soviet Union. In the words of President Kennedy's National Security Advisor, McGeorge Bundy, "No one is going to make war on us from Central America. There is something genuinely zany in thinking about the area in those terms."

Some US Government officials, recognizing that the USSR is an insignificant military force in Central America, argue that the threat it poses to North America is indirect, as a result (cont. on pg.16)
Earthquake

The earthquake that hit San Salvador on October 10 left at least 600 people dead, 10,000 injured and 50,000 homeless. The poorest barrios were hit the hardest; many who had already been displaced by the war lost what little they had. No food, water or medicine are available in large parts of the city. Damage was also reported in the Guazapa area.

The Salvadoran government responded to the earthquake by declaring a state of emergency and militarizing San Salvador. The head of the Treasury Police, Col. Gelcher, was put in charge of ensuring that aid is distributed in an orderly manner. They put a military cordon around the city to prevent any unauthorized flow of aid. Tensions heightened as the army patrolled the barrios, guns in hand, without offering any assistance to the earthquake victims. Many of the poorer barrios have been denied access to aid.

The earthquake provides a pretext for increased U.S. intervention. The U.S. government may send in National Guard rescue units. Duarte will utilize the situation to ask for more direct U.S. aid. More importantly, the State Department is ensuring that private relief efforts from the U.S. go through the Salvadoran government, or through agencies over which it is able to exercise significant control. This aid will be used to further the counterinsurgency effort; it fits the existing model of "United to Rebuild": destroy communities, and rebuild them under government control. The Salvadoran government is trying to use the earthquake and subsequent aid to achieve the same objectives. As in Managua in 1972, we can expect little aid to get to the poor, and much to be lost in corruption.

Material Aid

CUSLAR recommends that funds be sent to El Salvador through organizations independent of the Salvadoran government to ensure that aid gets to those who need it most.

Currently, many groups are involved in sending aid to El Salvador. Below we list those organizations whose work in El Salvador we know and trust. Organizations collecting aid:

1. The New El Salvador Today (NEST) Foundation has set up a special Earthquake Disaster Relief Fund to provide food, reconstruction materials and emergency supplies directly to the poorest barrios in San Salvador, to repopulation efforts by the displaced and to communities in the countryside that have been cut off from supplies. NEST has ongoing projects in health care, food production, agriculture and shoe-making. Gus Newport, mayor of Berkeley, sits on the Board of Directors.

Send checks to: NEST—Earthquake Relief, P.O. Box 4762, Berkeley, CA 94704. For more information, call: (415) 549-2114.

The CUSLAR Newsletter provides CUSLAR members and other concerned individuals with the opportunity to present information and analysis on topics relevant to Latin America and the Caribbean. The positions of the authors do not necessarily reflect the positions of CUSLAR as an organization. If you are interested in writing an article for the Newsletter please call the CUSLAR office. We also welcome letters to the editors.
2. Salvadoran Medical Relief Fund (SMRF). Support for Rural Community Health Workers is critical in the aftermath of the earthquake. They provide the only access to health care to many rural areas. SMRF is also working with Medial Aid for El Salvador on sending emergency medical supplies to the Archdiocese in San Salvador. SMRF is known to many because of the work of Dr. Charles Clements (Witness to War) who is a member of its Board of Directors.

Send checks to: SMRF Dept. C, P.O. Box 1194, Salinas, CA 93902. For more information, call: (408) 758-4001.

3. Medical Aid for El Salvador (MAES). Support for Mobile Surgical Units like the one we have been funding in La Union province is also critical at this time, especially with the blockade of supplies to the countryside. Emergency Medical Supplies are being shipped by MAES to the Archdiocese of San Salvador. You may know of this group through the promotional work of the actor Ed Asner, a member of its Board of Directors.

4. Oxfam America has an ongoing aid program for the civilians who, due to napalm bombing or direct troop assault, have been forced to leave their homes. A special earthquake fund has been set up.

Checks can be made out to: Oxfam America—El Salvador, 115 Broadway, Boston, MA 02116. For more information, call: (617) 482-1211.

We encourage material aid contributions to El Salvador on a continuing basis as well as at times of crisis.

The Committee on U.S./Latin American Relations (CUSLAR) is a Cornell University-based group which works in Ithaca and the surrounding area to promote a greater understanding of Latin America and the Caribbean. We are particularly concerned with the role of the United States in influencing the social, political, and economic conditions of the region.

The CUSLAR office is in G-29 Anabel Taylor Hall at Cornell (255 7293). The office is open to the community on weekdays. Weekly meetings are held on Mondays at 5pm in Anabel Taylor.
Inside Guatemala
Families of the Disappeared Organize

The three-year-old on my lap didn’t care what page I was trying to read. She only wanted to look at the pictures. And she found one, an image all too familiar to even the youngest of Guatemalans — members of the army, dressed in camouflage, armed with machine guns. “Those,” she said, looking up at me, “are the ones who took my daddy away.”

For Alejandra and her mom, Nineth de Garcia, the pain and anguish of Fernando Garcia’s disappearance is a wound that will never completely heal. From where I sat with Alejandra, I could see his picture, displayed prominently in the living room, a testimony to his presence in their hearts if not in their lives.

As Nineth began the lonely and fruitless search for Fernando, visiting the city’s morgues, writing countless letters, and placing newspaper ads, she met the families of other “desaparecidos.” They shared their stories and their pain. It was out of these encounters that in the spring of 1984 the Grupo de Apoyo Mutuo (GAM) or Mutual Support Group was formed.

GAM is not the first organization in Guatemala to demand simple human dignity — it is the first to survive. Virtually all opposition to the last 32 years of military rule has been systematically eliminated through terror, assassination, torture, and disappearances. Clergy and lay workers involved in helping the displaced or poor, teachers doing literacy work, students, journalists, trade unionists, health care workers, and peasants make up Guatemala’s 38,000 disappeared. In a country where 2% of the population hold most of the political power, wealth, and land, anyone suspected of opposing the status quo can become a victim. And even under newly elected civilian President Vinicio Cerezo, GAM counts 120 disappeared between January and May of this year.

A voice of the powerless, GAM is primarily an organization of indigenous women. Carrying babies on their backs, dressed in brilliantly colored handwoven clothing, wearing sombreros and carrying banners with the names of Guatemala’s desaparecidos, and shouting, “Alive you took them, alive we want them back”, GAM members make their weekly vigils a vibrant and haunting call for justice.

GAM’s history is characterized by persistent and creative nonviolent action, perhaps most dramatically noted by its five day occupation of the National Cathedral during last fall’s Presidential election. For their courageous organizing efforts, GAM was nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize by a group of British Parliamentarians.

During these last two years, GAM has grown in numbers, visibility, and power; but like most movements for change in Guatemala, the cost has been dear. In late March and early April of 1985, two GAM leaders, Rosario Godoy de Cuevas and Hector Gomez Calito were tortured and assassinated. It was after the assassinations that Peace Brigades International (PBI) began to take a more active role in support of GAM.

Since 1984, PBI, an international pacifist organization, has provided an international presence, a measure of safety at GAM public events. PBI’s house in Guatemala City serves as a place for GAM’s meetings, mail and messages. And since April 1983, PBI volunteers have provided 24 hour escorting service for threatened GAM leaders.

GAM members live with a level of fear that our presence does little to alleviate. Walking home from school with Genara Lopez at night, I could sense her fear as she looked anxiously down the dark streets, and then back at me. As my weeks in Guatemala went by, my fear for my own safety lessened as I began to think more about the risks those around me were taking, risks so much greater than my own. PBI volunteers open the door several times a week to people reporting a
disappearance for the first time. The journey to GAM is a long one. Often people come after months or years of waiting and searching for their loved one, others are admitting for the first time what really happened, many barely speak Spanish, and virtually all know that to be associated with GAM is to risk one's life.

Although the roots of racial violence and economic injustice in Guatemala stretch back to the Spanish usurpation of Mayan lands in the 1500's, were it not for the interference of the United States, these last thirty-plus years of bloodshed and terror could well have been avoided. Philip Roettiger, employed by the CIA, assisted with the US sponsored coup in 1954 that overthrew democratically elected Guatemalan President Jacobo Arbenz. Roettiger writes (LA Times, 3/16/86), "When I authorized Castillo Armas to return to Guatemala to assume the presidency that we had prepared for him, I had no idea of the consequences of the CIA's meddling. Our 'success' led to 32 years of repressive military rule and the deaths of more than 100,000 Guatemalans. Furthermore, the overthrow of the Arbenz government destroyed vital social and economic reforms, including land distribution, social security, and trade union rights." Roettiger writes now out of his fear that the US is following the same deadly course by arming the contras to overthrow Nicaragua's elected government.

Although much heralded by the Reagan Administration, the election of Vinicio Cerezo as Guatemala's President in December of 1985 is not the return to democracy that Guatemalans long for. Virtually the entire military apparatus that created the death squads, carried out a brutal counter-insurgency program in the highlands, and silenced dissent in the cities remains intact. As the country's economy worsens, Cerezo continues to oppose land reform. And recently, after months of negotiations with GAM over forming a govern-

The Mutual Support Group (GAM) holds a human rights vigil in Guatemala City.
mental commission to investigate the disappearances, Cerezo announced that the commission was unnecessary. No investigations have ever taken place.

Members of GAM, and other Guatemalans I came to know, work against overwhelming odds to bring peace and justice to their country. As people of the United States, we owe them our support and our ardent opposition to all US economic and military aid to a system that has already brought them untold grief and suffering.

Karen Beetle

Karen Beetle was in Guatemala from March to June this year with Peace Brigades International serving as a nonviolent bodyguard to threatened human rights activists. She is a former Syracuse Peace Council staff-person.

JOIN THE LETTER WRITING CAMPAIGN!

CUSLAR has joined efforts with other groups nationwide to raise the visibility of human rights violations in Guatemala. A major national objective is to generate 10,000 letters to President Cerezo expressing concern for ongoing human rights violations in Guatemala and asking for respect for the lives of the members of the Grupo de Apoyo Mutuo.

ADDRESS YOUR LETTERS TO:
Sr. Presidente Vincio Cerezo
Palacio Nacional
Ciudad Guatemala, Guatemala, C.A.

MAIL YOUR LETTERS TO CUSLAR.
The letters will be delivered personally by a brigade of concerned US representatives which includes CUSLAR coordinator Mary Jo Dudley.

Sanctuary Caravan

2 videos on the Sanctuary Movement in Ithaca
Wed., Nov. 19, 4:30 pm
Warren Library rm 104

CUSLAR)

One World Room

DONATIONS REQUESTED -
for nonviolent defense.

Jewish Students Council

El Salvador

A Salvadoran family will also be present.

80pm

Three Hills
Update on Chile

Excerpts from an Interview with Isabel Aldunate, Chilean Human Rights Lawyer.

The massive demonstrations against Pinochet began in 1983. From that point on the opposition became more united. All sectors of the middle class have joined in, as well as some from the upper class. The opposition came together in a tremendous strike on the 2nd and 3rd of July of this year. The government tried to stop the strike by creating an environment of increased terror. Troops in full combat gear, accompanied by tanks, occupied shantytowns and poor neighborhoods in Santiago. They arrived in the middle of the night and dragged people out of their homes. All males over 14 years of age were taken to a stadium or plaza to be checked out. Once their papers were examined, they were stamped on the hand.

In spite of this kind of repression, the strike was a great success. Some were killed, many were wounded, which is common in our demonstrations. But the most dramatic event was the terrible case of the two young people, who were burned alive, Rodrigo Rojas De Negri, and Carmen Gloria Quintana. They were stopped by soldiers, an flammable liquid was poured over them, and they were set on fire. They were burned over 60% of their bodies, and Rodrigo Rojas died from his burns. Now the government says that they were trying to attack a military patrol, and burned themselves accidentally in the process.

After this, even before the attempt on his life on September 7th, Pinochet enacted a State of Siege. Of course, there has been some kind of State of Emergency almost constantly for the last two years. Now all opposition magazines are censored. Pinochet can expel people from the country or exile them to isolated regions of Chile, and he can restrict the right to hold meetings. He can hold people for 5 days under the State of Siege, and in fact, there is no right of habeas corpus. When people are brought to tribunals, it’s mainly symbolic, because the government has control of most of the judiciary. Hundreds of opposition leaders were jailed.

After the attempt to assassinate Pinochet, several of the imprisoned opposition leaders were killed. A journalist for the opposition journal, ANALYSIS, was arrested during the early morning hours. They did not even allow him to dress himself completely. The next day, he was found in a cemetery with 12 bullets in his head. That is our situation in Chile today.

On repression and its effects on our music.

It’s a little hard to refer to a specific kind of repression or a particular moment, because it is constant fear. We have been able to face this by being organized and united. For example, we have meetings in which we teach oursevles psychological self-defense. One of our psychiatrist friends gives us talks on how to face fear so that it does not paralyze us. Sometimes we see things as being larger than they really are, so it is good to know exactly what you can expect to happen. We share our personal experiences. For example, one of our friends found that when confronted by the police, it is very important to look them straight in the eye. This kind of training is necessary, because the forms that repression can take are so many.

A form of repression that has had a tremendous effect on us is censorship. Recently, we have been able to gain a little space to express our ideas, but that wasn’t the case a few years ago. During 1978-79, our whole movement had to use a very metaphorical language. You tried to say things without actually saying them. When we spoke of spring, we knew we were referring to democracy. When we spoke of winter and night, we understood it meant the dictatorship and repression. Flowers and birds meant political prisons and the disappeared. And once the movement toward democracy grew in Chile, our songs also grew into that expression.
of support for Central American revolutionary movements. Again, this is an assertion which is based on little fact. The actual role of the USSR in the control of Central American revolutionary groups was described in a document issued by the US's own State Department as "more limited than generally realized." This 1984 report went further to state, "The Soviet Union has conceded US dominance in Central America." Yet, in spite of such reports, through the use of false information, the Reagan Administration continues to promote the notion that Central American revolutions are Soviet-inspired and guided. For example, in the case of Salvadoran guerrillas, the US government has made claims that arms are being supplied by the Soviet Union via Nicaragua. Yet Wayne Smith of the State Department's Cuba Section commenting on a major Administration White Paper stated: "None of the documents linked the USSR to the supply of guerrilla forces in El Salvador." Likewise, the Nicaragua-El Salvador arms connection, which is commonly cited by government officials, has been refuted by former CIA analyst David MacMichael, who said, "There has not been a verified report of arms moving from Nicaragua to El Salvador since April, 1981... The Administration and the CIA have systematically misrepresented Nicaraguan involvement in the supply of arms to Salvadoran guerrillas to justify efforts to overthrow the Nicaraguan government." Thus allegations that Salvadoran rebels are supplied by the Soviet Union via Nicaragua are not based on actual evidence.

Finally, to attribute Central American revolutionary movements to Soviet involvement is to deny that the people of that region are capable of assessing and demanding change in the inequitable conditions under which they live. The real source of revolutionary movements is not Soviet infiltration, but the understandable anger that develops among people who must endure conditions of extreme poverty while a tiny percentage of the population enjoys enormous wealth. It is time for the people of North America and the United States government to recognize this fact and to respect these calls for justice from the people of Central America. It is time for the Reagan Administration to stop the lies about the war in Central America.

LIE #3: US Policy is Improving Human Rights in Central America.

THE FACTS:

Ever since his inauguration in 1981, Ronald Reagan has been pushing for military and economic aid for the so-called "democratic" regimes in El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras, and for the contra "freedom fighters" in Nicaragua. Reagan has justified giving this assistance by insisting that it is promoting human rights in Central America. This policy of unquestioning support for these "democratic institutions" has in most cases not improved human rights. On the contrary, in many cases our tax dollars are being used to brutally repress countless thousands of innocent civilians in Central America. Over 100,000 civilians have been killed in Central America since 1979, the overwhelming majority of them by US backed forces and with American made weapons. Vast numbers of others have been tortured by people trained by the CIA in the use of sophisticated torture techniques.

Human Rights In Nicaragua:

Soon after the Nicaraguan Revolution in 1979, the US began to covertly support the counter-revolutionaries (the contras) who were and are fighting to overthrow the Sandinista government. In both 1983 and 1984, Congress voted to cut off all aid to the contras, then
later backed down in the face of Reagan’s all-out battle for renewed aid. In June 1985, by accusing congressmen of being “soft on communism,” Reagan won enough votes to obtain $27 million in “humanitarian aid” for the contras. Subjected to similar red-baiting tactics, in the summer of 1986, Congress passed a $100 million package for the contras, consisting of primarily military aid. In addition to this aid, the contras are recruited, trained, armed, and directed by the CIA. The contras have so blatantly abused human rights that it is ludicrous to call them “freedom fighters.” They have destroyed over 2,000 homes, burned down nearly 700 buildings, including dozens of health centers, schools, and child care centers. In its 1985 report, Americas Watch documented countless incidents of the contras kidnapping, torturing, raping, mutilating, and murdering innocent civilians, including women and children. The contras’ target teachers, doctors, agronomists and others who bring social services to remote areas in order to deprive the Sandinistas of support. Ironically, the US in 1986 will be giving 20,000 contras more money than Nicaragua will earn from exports this year. If, as predicted, the CIA uses $300 million of its discretionary funds to support the contras.

Human Rights In Honduras:

To protect the contra bases along the Nicaraguan-Honduran border, the Reagan Administration has promoted rapid militarization of this poverty-stricken Central American country. This militarization by the US includes airfields, training camps, radar stations, a CIA base, and endless military maneuvers — all to support the contras terrorizing the civilian population of Nicaragua. Over 20,000 Hondurans have been forced off their land to make way for contra bases. In other words, our tax dollars have turned farmland into military bases. Reagan insists that the newly elected civilian government of Honduras is committed to eliminating human rights abuses and therefore should be given more aid. In reality, the human rights situation in Honduras is deteriorating due to increased militarization and the government’s growing obsession with national security. Individuals suspected of subversive activities are routinely arrested without due process, and political prisoners are often tortured. Since 1981, reports of torture, clandestine cemeteries and jails, political murders and disappearances have escalated.

Human Rights In El Salvador:

The Reagan Administration has been supporting the government of President Jose Napoleon Duarte since he was elected in 1984. To continue aiding El Salvador, the White House has promoted the lie that the Salvadoran military’s and government’s respect for human rights has improved. US training and aid have focused on the “professionalization” of the Salvadoran security forces. The aims of such efforts are to create the appearance of an improved human rights situation with fewer public disappearances and less obvious abuses and tactics of repression. The US, in addition to training Salvadoran officers and soldiers, supplies the military with bullets, bombs, helicopters, and gunships. US planes run reconnaissance flights 24 hours a day, while US military advisors oversee the escalating ground war. Since the Armed Forces are almost totally dependent on the US Congress for the war effort, cutting off military aid would force the military to reform and reduce their indiscriminate attacks on the civilian population. Duarte’s government has failed to prosecute military officers responsible for murder and torture — including those responsible for the brutal 1980 murders of Archbishop Romero and the four churchwomen. The Reagan Administration has not shown any sign of cutting back on aid to El Salvador even though human rights abuses continue.

Human Rights In Guatemala:

Just two days after the Guatemalan presidential elections on December 8, 1985, the mutilated body of Beatriz Eugenia Barrios, a 26-year old teacher and mother of two, was found with a note saying “More is to come.” This brutal murder was a message to the newly elected Christian Democratic president,
Vinicio Cerezo, that although the military was allowing the transfer of formal power, it still held the real power. The Army under Cerezo is the one responsible for Beatriz's death and over 50,000 others as well as thousands of "disappeared" in the last five years. Ignoring these violations, the Reagan Administration has consistently praised the human rights situation in Guatemala. Reagan is seeking to end the stigma of the Guatemalan government as a "gross consistent violator" of human rights in order to increase its military and economic aid. The situation is very similar to that in El Salvador: The Administration sells the Guatemalan Army helicopters that are used to attack villages from the air. Cerezo, like Duarte, is unwilling and, to a certain extent, unable to challenge the widespread authority of the army. The Reagan Administration has used the elections to increase US aid to Guatemala — $140 million was approved for fiscal year 1986 and Reagan has requested $144 million for fiscal year 1987. As shown by the murder of Beatriz Barrios, human rights abuses have continued and will continue under the new civilian government. Congress needs to cut off aid in order to pressure Cerezo into establishing a real democracy: one devoid of killings and disappearances, which respects the rights to organize and speak freely.

JOIN THE HARVEST

Looking for a truly unique holiday gift?

Nicaraguan Coffee

Available at:
CISLAS Office, Anabel Taylor Hall, Cornell
Sonesta Restaurante
416 Bible Bldg.
Santochea Rotary
Bryant Mall
Medellin Sanatorium
156 N. Aurora St.
Belden Center/Phacon
The Commons
The Choco Shop
222 N. State St.
A & C Cafe
306 Stewart Ave.

Support Justice in Central America

JOIN THE HARVEST! Help bring in Nicaraguan coffee and cotton crops. Groups leave every few weeks, late November through early March. For more information, contact CISLAS (255-7293)
Buying holiday gifts from Rio directly supports Latin American craftspeople and helps Cuslar, too!

We are in the process of updating our mailing list. Please help by filling out the coupon. If you know of anyone else who might like to receive the Newsletter, please send us their name and address.

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PHONE

Would you like to receive the newsletter? 

Can you help us out with a donation? $ ______ (Suggested: $15/annum)
Calendar

Nov. 12  CUSLAR film series. "Pixote" (Brazil, 127 minutes): A film on homeless children in Brazil as they are exploited by criminals, mistreated with off-hand savagery in "reform" school. Anabel Taylor Auditorium


Nov. 19  Showing of "Esperanza Means Hope" and "Until It's Safe to Return", two videos on the sanctuary movement in Ithaca. Uris Library, Room LO-4

Nov. 20  Sanctuary Caravan: Four Salvadors (student, businessman, engineer, etc.), will present testimony on their experiences and will share Salvadoran music and refreshments. One World Room, Anabel Taylor Hall

Dec. 20  U.A.W./CUSLAR Christmas Party. Location to be announced

Don't forget to write a letter to Guatemalan President Cerezo regarding the human rights situation!

CRESP
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Ithaca, New York 14853

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