

The Crisis of Legitimacy and the Rise of the Armed Resistance in
El Salvador, 1932-1979.

by

Mario Jiménez

A Thesis presented to the University
of Manitoba in partial fulfilment of
the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts in the Department of
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ARMED RESISTANCE IN EL SALVADOR, 1932-1979

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MARIO JIMENEZ

A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies of
the University of Manitoba in partial fulfillment of the requirements
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MASTER OF ARTS

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Introduction

El Salvador, one of the smallest countries in Latin America, has been the scene of a destructive civil war since 1979. Of a population of 5,000,000, a million people have been either internally or externally displaced, and more than 75,000 have been killed. Crises in the political history of El Salvador are not new. In most cases these crises are resolved by the traditional means of the military coup d'etat. That pattern repeated itself in 1944, 1948, 1960 and 1961. A qualitative difference occurs when the crisis implies the participation of significant numbers of people and a threat, real or perceived, is manifested against the traditional socio-economic order. The first significant crisis of this type, a rebellion in 1932 by peasants and working class people in the south-west part of El Salvador led by Farabundo Martí, a leader of the Salvadoran Communist Party, was easily crushed by forces of the government, resulting in the death of more than 30,000 people. The second crisis is the current civil war, which erupted in 1979, and contrary to the first, aside from the number of casualties, is qualitatively different in terms of the significant popular participation in the armed

struggle against the regime. More importantly, the challenge to the traditional order has been so dramatic that it has been calculated that a third of the country is in the hands of rebel forces.

This last crisis occurred in a context of regional instability. The Nicaraguan Revolution was in place and the situation in Guatemala was deteriorating every day. In addition, Ronald Reagan's ascension to power in the U.S. complicated matters. It became a superpower issue, relegating the internal and historical roots of the crisis to the background. As a consequence, we see the emergence of explanations of the crisis based on ideological considerations and ignoring the historical root of the problem.¹

¹Two main schools of thought persisted in presenting the Salvadoran civil war as either a manifestation of Soviet expansionism or U.S imperialism, ignoring the role of important indigenous elements in the development of the crisis. For an illustration of the above see the works of Jean Kirkpatrick, John Buchanan, R. Bruce McColm and other apologists for U.S interference in the region. On the other side Fidel Castro, Tomás Borge, and others blamed the crisis on U.S. imperial policy in the region. Both explanations are found in Crisis and Opportunity: U.S. Policy in Central America and the Caribbean, edited by Mark Falcoff and Robert Royal (Washington, D.C.: Ethics and Public Policy Center, 1984) and The Continuing Crisis: U.S. Policy in Central America and the Caribbean, edited by the same Falcoff and Royal (Washington, D.C.: Ethics and Public Policy Center, 1987).

More serious scholarship, however, already exists. It is less constrained by cold war ideology and we find a more detailed study of the historical and economic development as a whole of the countries of Central America, and of El Salvador in particular. The causes of the crisis are examined in detail and even though some discrepancies exist, there is a historiographical consensus that in the case of El Salvador the structure of land tenure and the existence of an alliance between the oligarchy and the military are at the core of the problem.

David Browning's classic study of land tenure is conclusive about the characteristics of land distribution in the hands of the few to the detriment of the majority. The process of how this land came into the possession of a few families is uncovered with a wealth of information derived from primary sources.² Similarly, unjust land distribution is given as a cause of the problems that were at the root of the war between El Salvador and Honduras in 1969, a war that had serious consequences in the political history of El Salvador.³ For a general history of El Salvador since the

²David Browning, El Salvador, La Tierra y El Hombre, (San Salvador: Ministerio de Educación, 1975). There is a first edition in English under the title El Salvador: Landscape and Society, (London: Oxford University Press, 1971).

³See Thomas Anderson, The War of the Dispossessed: Honduras and El Salvador, 1969, (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1971), or a more detailed study in terms of

colonial era, Alastair White's study⁴ is perhaps the one most consulted by students of Salvadoran history. Besides the teaching value of this work, the analysis of the social, economical and political structures is presented with a wealth of information. More importantly, his prognosis, perhaps influenced by the electoral fraud of 1972, is correct, in the sense of the need for the dominant class of the country to develop some reforms in the political and economic areas in order to avoid the crisis which is devastating the country at the present.

Of course, the possession of land in a few hands was a prerequisite for the formation of the mono-export character of the economy. Coffee became the king of production, and to produce it intensively a process of forced dispossession of land from the traditional communities was necessary. In this process, the creation of the fundamental social classes of El

the land structure and the war in William H. Durham, Scarcity and Survival in Central America: Ecological Origins of the Soccer War, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1979). Also in terms of the land problem in both countries, El Salvador and Honduras, see Marco Virgilio Carías and Daniel Slutzky in La Guerra Inutil, (San José, Costa Rica: Educa, 1971).

⁴Alastair White, El Salvador, (San Salvador: UCA Editores, 1983). There is an edition in English published in New York by Praeger, 1973.

Salvador took place. This process has been detailed by distinguished Salvadoran scholars.⁵

Although proletarianization proceeded smoothly at first, it was in 1932 that the consequences were felt. The massacre of 1932, which was aimed at controlling a peasant uprising in the south-west of the country, was a reflection of the dispossession of land that had occurred before. Entire indigenous communities were destroyed, and in the process the oligarchy delegated the military to govern. This transfer of power, which brought the installation of a military dictatorship, had important consequences in the country's political history.⁶

⁵See Rafael Menjivar Larin, Acumulación Originaria y Desarrollo del Capitalismo en El Salvador, (San José, Costa Rica: Educa, 1980) and Formación y Lucha del Proletariado Industrial Salvadoreño, (San Salvador: UCA Editores, 1986). In analyzing this economic phenomenon in relation to the military events of 1932, the most authoritative work is by Rafael Guidos Vejar, El Ascenso del Militarismo en El Salvador, (San Salvador: UCA Editores, 1980). Also, on the origin of the social classes, the study of Leon Zamosc is valuable, "Class Conflict in an Export Economy: The Social Roots of the Salvadoran Insurrection of 1932," in Sociology of "Developing Societies": Central America, edited by Jan L. Flora and Edelberto Torres Rivas, (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1989).

⁶On this issue the literature is abundant. To cite the most important works, see Roque Dalton, El Salvador (Monografía), (Puebla, México: Universidad Autónoma de Puebla, 1984). From the same author, an eye witness of the massacre,

Because of the importance given in the literature to the transfer of power to the military, it is logical to find that several studies are dedicated to the analysis of the political system in El Salvador and to the crisis that erupted in the 1980s, both of which are related to the military control exercised in society. There is no doubt that the lack of democratic conditions and the civil war, which have plagued the country for over a decade, are directly related to the existence of a military government for almost 50 years.

Military control, violence and repression have been a constant feature of life in Salvadoran society. The military, as a primary force in Salvadoran politics, has been one of the groups with a major concentration of power and is the best example of the anachronistic political structure. Few scholars dispute the current role of the military in the state's affairs, but no comprehensive synthesis of its development in

Miguel Marmol: Los Sucesos de 1932 en El Salvador, (San José, Costa Rica: Educa, 1982). Also the classic study of Thomas P. Anderson, Matanza: El Salvador's Communist Revolt of 1932, (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1971). In terms of the events surrounding the massacre and the leadership of the insurrection, see Jorge Arias Gomez, Farabundo Martí, (San José, Costa Rica: Educa, 1972). In addition, the already cited work of Rafael Guidos Vejar, El Ascenso del Militarismo en El Salvador, is more complex in the socio-economic analysis as it defines the model of domination started decades before. It makes an analysis of the class structure and the social conditions prevalent in the country with the introduction of the coffee.

contemporary history has been made in order to understand the magnitude of the military's role in the development of Salvadoran society.

In the first serious attempt to deal with this military aspect, Colonel Mariano Castro Morán, a member of the Civil-Military Directorio which ruled from September 1961 to January 1962, published a work precisely to illuminate this neglected aspect of Salvadoran history. This work is valuable for providing a good understanding of the internal dynamics of the military institution, an aspect difficult to grasp due to its secretive nature. On the other hand, his work attempts to justify the military involvement in national life as a noble effort for the development of a better society.⁷ This effort, he implies, was frustrated by the greed of individual members or by the obstacles presented by the immense power of the oligarchy. In short, even though his work is important, it is limited by his institutional loyalty.

A more incisive analysis is found in the model suggested by Enrique Baloyra.⁸ In his work, the historical antecedents are clearly delineated since the introduction of coffee in the national economy. The period from the consolidation of

⁷Mariano Castro Morán, La Función Política del Ejército Salvadoreño en el Presente Siglo 1900-1982, (San Salvador: UCA Editores, 1982), pp. 25-28.

⁸Enrique Baloyra, El Salvador en Transición, (San Salvador: UCA Editores, 1987).

oligarchic rule in the final years of the last century to the rebellion of 1932, when the oligarchy-military alliance was formed, is the most important era in the development of what he called an hegemonic crisis in the Salvadoran system. This crisis is reflected in the imposition of a reactionary regime that governed by force instead of by consent. The role of the military was more prominent as repression became the norm instead of the exception. In his view the crisis of the 1980s will not be resolved if the issue of land tenure and the rule of law are not confronted in a radical way, which implies a break with the past.

In a similar vein, one of the most prolific scholars of the Central American region, Edelberto Torres Rivas, in referring to the oligarchic state typical of the region, says: "The oligarchic state was, without a doubt, a special kind of bourgeois state, marked by peculiar modes of interaction with society....At the same time, the state showed a strong inclination to defend the interest of the dominant class--to such an extent that the autonomy of the dominant class relative to the state was more or less nonexistent." He concludes "the forms of legitimation--as well as the values on which that legitimation was based--depended on numerous pillars of support. Among them were a rigid class stratification, the precedence of order over progress, and a submissive, fragmented citizenry. Naturally, the state constructed upon those pillars was strongly opposed to the

interest of the dominated classes.... In short, if politics in bourgeois society is a sphere of activity serving the construction of a social consensus, then the oligarchic state could be considered 'prepolitical.' Rather than proposing strategies aimed at the incorporation of popular struggles into the political system, the oligarchy continually resorted to the weakest aspect of any system of domination: violence."⁹

Indeed, the military, as a main pillar of the oligarchic state, was the fundamental agent of control and repression since the military's inception as power brokers in 1932. The hegemonic crisis referred to by Baloyra is expressed in the development of a system based on repression instead of consensus. So it is possible to understand the present crisis through the study of the military dictatorship in Salvadoran history based on the hypothesis that the crisis is of hegemonic nature and has expressed itself in the area of legitimacy. And that means that the oligarchy has been unable to impose its historical project on the rest of society. In delegating power to the military as it did in 1932 the oligarchy surrendered the ability to govern by consent. Instead its model of domination has been imposed by force. The

⁹Edelberto Torres-Rivas, Repression and Resistance, The Struggle for Democracy in Central America, (Boulder: Westview Press, 1989), pp. 25-26. From the same author and in terms of socio-economic analysis see his classic work: Interpretación del Desarrollo Social Centroamericano, (San José, Costa Rica: Educa, 1981).

hegemonic crisis exploded until the legitimacy of the regime is disputed even by the dominated classes. Thus, this thesis will study the military dictatorship from 1932 to 1979 from the perspective of the nexus of legitimacy and power exercise in relation to the subordination and insurrection of the population.

Legitimacy, as a political category, is useful in understanding political and military crises, especially in societies like El Salvador, where democracy has been nonexistent. The importance of this category for historical analysis is great. If, as this work will try to emphasize, the issue of legitimacy has been critical in the explosion of the crisis in El Salvador, then solving the crisis would require resolving the issue of legitimacy. And in doing that, real democracy may be constructed.

The legitimacy of a regime can be measured in different ways. The theoretical aspects of this category are related to the sources of legitimation that exist. Max Weber relates legitimacy to the issue of power, domination and authority. The state had the monopoly of force and the right to use it. Authority is legitimate in terms of obedience, and it is divided in three categories: charismatic, traditional and rational.¹⁰In Gramscian theory, legitimacy is associated with

¹⁰Max Weber, Economy and Society, Guenther Roth and Claus Wittich, eds., vol. 3, (New York: Bedminster Press, 1968), pp. 941-955.

hegemony, to consent as opposed to coercion, to direction as opposed to domination.¹¹ Others have developed their own models of measuring legitimacy, using categories as diverse as "support, passivity, withdrawal, dissent, and opposition."¹²

Besides the theoretical considerations, the issue of legitimacy has been used as a tool of analysis for some social revolutions. The origin of the social revolution in Bolivia, for example, is analyzed from that angle, and the relationship between revolution and a crisis of legitimacy is clearly established. The Chaco War (1932-1935) is given as a historical accident that created the internal dynamics conducive to a crisis of legitimacy as the government lost authority. This crisis of legitimacy was a direct cause of the social revolution.¹³ Similarly, the Iranian Revolution and its origins have been studied by analyzing the sources of legitimacy for the Shah's regime: modern nationalism, constitutionalism, and religion. It is argued that the failure

¹¹David Forgacs, ed., An Antonio Gramsci Reader: Selected Writings, 1916-1935, (New York: Schocken Books, 1988), p. 423.

¹²Mary Fulbrook, "The State and the Transformation of Political Legitimacy in East and West Germany since 1945," in Comparative Studies in Society and History, vol. 29, 1987, p. 213.

¹³Herbert S. Klein, "The Crisis of Legitimacy and The Origins of Social Revolution," Journal of Inter-American Studies, vol. X, No. 1 (1988), pp. 102-117.

of the regime in these three areas was the cause of its overthrow.¹⁴

In the case of El Salvador, the linkage between legitimacy and crisis would be established through the historical analysis of the military dictatorship. The analytical categories to work with in developing this thesis will be taken from the work of Antonio Gramsci.

The objective is to use the Gramscian concept of hegemony as a tool to capture the vicissitudes of the Salvadoran process. In that regard, it will be necessary to include the definition of the Gramscian category of hegemony and its correlative concepts as a way of situating the analysis in relation to Salvadoran political history. To simplify, I will follow the definitions given by David Forgacs in his interpretation of Gramscian theory.

Hegemony, in its more simple meaning, is " leadership of a class alliance." It means not only the economic domination of a class in a given historical situation but it is extended "by an expansion beyond economic class interest into the sphere of political direction through a system of class alliances." Furthermore, in its application it extends not only to proletarian direction, but "also to the rule of other classes at other periods of history," and its meaning is

¹⁴G. Hossein Razi, "The Nexus of Legitimacy and Performance," Comparative Politics, vol. 19, No. 4 (1987), pp. 452-468.

widened to articulate other important concepts. Hegemony means "cultural, moral and ideological leadership over allied and subordinate groups" and is "identified with the formation of a new ideological terrain, with political, cultural and moral leadership with consent." So hegemony is "linked by Gramsci in a chain of associations and oppositions to 'civil society' as against 'political society,' to consent as against coercion, to 'direction' as against 'domination.'"¹⁵

The prior classification requires the definition of civil society in order to have a better understanding of the category in question. Civil society is "the sphere in which a dominant social group organizes consent and hegemony, as opposed to political society where it rules by coercion and direct domination. It is also a sphere where the dominated social groups may organize their opposition and where an alternative hegemony may be constructed." And finally, to complete the conceptualization, it is required to define the concept of organic crisis, which is intimately related to the issue of hegemony. "An 'organic crisis' is a crisis of the whole system, in which contradictions in the economic structure have repercussions through the superstructures. One of its signs is when the traditional forms of political representation (parties or party leaders) are no longer recognized as adequate by the economic class or class fraction which they had previously served to represent. It is therefore

¹⁵D. Forgacs, Antonio Gramsci, pp. 422-424.

a crisis of hegemony, since it occurs when a formerly hegemonic class is challenged from below and is no longer able to hold a cohesive block of social alliances."¹⁶

From the prior definitions it is possible to infer that the historical development of the Salvadoran crisis could be traced through an analysis of the military dictatorship, using the theoretical model described. Consequently, this thesis will look at the development of the military dictatorship in Salvadoran history from 1932 to 1979. It will begin with a descriptive introduction of the socio-economic structures of the country until the installation of the military dictatorship under Maximiliano Hernández Martínez. Chapter one covers from the introduction of coffee to the Martínez era (1881-1948). In the second chapter I will attempt to establish the changes brought about by the modernization of the state up to the so-called "soccer war" between El Salvador and Honduras (1948-1969). The war is, in my view, a turning point in the Salvadoran crisis of legitimacy and the emergence of social groups that attempted to dispute the military regime's legitimacy. In the third chapter I will deal with a period of constant instability, where the roots of the armed confrontation and open civil war are found (1969-1979). This research has its limitations. For example, there is an absence of primary sources, to be expected because of the war in El Salvador. Therefore, this thesis is based mostly on the rich

¹⁶Ibid, pp. 420-427.

literature of secondary sources and relies heavily on the accounts of historians, political scientists, sociologists, economists, and others familiar by direct experience with the Salvadoran situation.

Chapter 1, From Coffee to the Martínez Era: 1881-1948

The class and economic nature of Salvadoran society can be traced historically to its integration in the nascent world mercantile system in the first half of the sixteenth century as a result of the Spanish Conquest. The economic evolution of the entire Central American region has since depended on one export product.¹In the case of El Salvador, this process was firmly established by the second half of the nineteenth century, from 1840 to 1880, through the introduction and widespread cultivation of coffee.²This forced and intensive cultivation contributed to the destruction of all communal properties and caused the disruption of the traditional life of entire indigenous communities. Indeed, this economic phenomenon was the original base of what is now the class composition of the Salvadoran society.³

This incipient agrarian capitalism created the social and economic conditions that forced the destruction of pre-capitalist methods of land exploitation and tenure. The legal apparatus underpinning this new regime was enacted, on 26 February 1881, by a decree approved by the National Assembly

¹Murdo J., MacLeod, Spanish Central America: A Socioeconomic History, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1973), pp. 47-48 and 374-389.

²Browning, El Salvador, La Tierra, pp. 261-270.

³Leon Zamosc, "Class Conflict," pp. 57-63.

that abolished communal land, which "impedes agricultural development, circulation of wealth and weakens family links. Its existence is contrary to the economic and social principles of the Republic."⁴The rationale behind that decree was to guarantee private property ownership over communal land, and probably to eliminate any legal obstacle for its free transfer. As a consequence, a process of proletarianization started; that is to say that thousands of peasants who were owners of their plots of land were dispossessed of their means of production and became wage-earners in order to survive.⁵

The extinction of communal lands was not only a process destined to create the conditions for the free transfer of land but was a means to create a free labour force in order to fulfil the labour needs of the big landowners during the coffee harvest.⁶In the same year, 1881, a law against "vagrancy" was passed which obliged people to work. The

⁴Legislative Decree quoted by Browning, p. 337.

⁵Richard Goulet, "Proletarianization of The Highland Indians of Guatemala: An Incomplete Transition, 1871-1898," MA. Thesis, University of Essex, 1985, p. 1.

⁶Victor Bulmer-Thomas, The Political Economy of Central America Since 1920, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), p. 21.

purpose of this law was clear: to make a workforce available for the labour needs of intensive coffee production.⁷

This process of restructuring of the agrarian society destined to consolidate the coffee production was at the same time responsible for the radical transformation of the social bases and superstructure of the society. It is from this point that the fundamental social classes of the country emerged, and their basic contradiction in terms of the relations of production would determine the crisis of Salvadoran society.⁸

The process of proletarianization created an agricultural working class, while a class of families with political influence and economic capacity were transformed into big landowners, with control of the cultivation and export of coffee and political power as well. From the end of the last century until 1930, successive presidents of the country were prominent members of these families;⁹ the Dueñas, Regalado, Guirola, Menendez, Escalón, Melendez, and Quiñonez Molina occupied the presidency almost without interruption. To this traditional group of families, a new group of immigrants was added. They came from Europe and brought with them skills, capital and new techniques in coffee production. They were the Alvarez, Bloom, Canessa, Daglio, D'Aubisson, De Sola, and

⁷Menjivar, Acumulación, p. 150.

⁸Gomez Vejar, El Ascenso, p. 53.

⁹Ferman Cienfuegos, La Revolución Inevitable, (San Salvador: Resistencia Nacional, no date), p. 9.

Freund families.¹⁰ These families monopolized the lands, as 4.10 percent of property owners were able to possess 67.28 percent of all cultivable land. Furthermore, they controlled not only the land but credit, finance and banking. In sum, all the more important aspects of the economic life of the country were in their hands.¹¹

By the first decade of this century, the social and economic bases of the national state were in place. A juridical and political apparatus was consolidated and institutionally it was possible to define it as a liberal republic. The political constitution of 1886 was the ideological instrument by which political legitimation was established. A division of powers was legislated, and the right to vote in periodical elections was conferred to all citizens of legal age,¹² but in practice there were no political challengers to the immense power of the oligarchy, thus making political participation meaningless. The dominated class composed of peasants, artisans, semi-proletarianized peasants

¹⁰James Dunkerley, The Long War: Dictatorship and Revolution in El Salvador, (London: Junction Books, 1982), p. 13.

¹¹Cienfuegos, La Revolución, pp. 9-10.

¹²Percy F. Martin, El Salvador del Siglo Veinte, (San Salvador: UCA Editores, 1986), p. 31. First published in English under the title Salvador of the Twentieth Century, (London: Edward Arnold, 1911).

(permanent and seasonal workers)¹³ did not have any influence in terms of economic policies or political decisions. The liberal state of El Salvador was constitutionally and legally democratic, but a "democracy of landowners, exclusive and authoritarian."¹⁴

In summary, from the consolidation of coffee cultivation in 1860 to the establishment of the basis of the liberal state in the first years of this century, the restructuring of society in terms of economic conditions and political arrangements was relatively peaceful. Although social unrest occurred in the countryside on several occasions, such as 1872, 1875, 1885 and 1898,¹⁵ the security system could deal with it. From 1870 until 1914, all military expenditures were diverted from their original purpose--defense of the territory--to control the agricultural areas, thus maintaining order and security.¹⁶ It is possible to assume the non-existence of any serious challenges for the model of domination imposed in this period. The popular classes were not in a condition to challenge the system. An urban working class was not

¹³Classification taken from Zamosc, "Class Conflict," pp. 62-63.

¹⁴Torres-Rivas, Interpretación, p. 86.

¹⁵Mario Flores Macal, Origen, Desarrollo y Crisis de las Formas de Dominación en El Salvador, (San José, Costa Rica: 1983), p. 64.

¹⁶Baloyra, El Salvador en Transición, p. 21.

visible until the 1920s when some signs of discontent appeared.

The 1920s were a period of intense political activity among artisans and other workers. Intense organizational actions developed and secret meetings to discuss the literature about the Mexican and Russian revolutions were common. According to Miguel Marmol, a labour leader of that time, the impact of the Russian revolution was visible as artisans, teachers, and women market sellers were selling "Bolshevik" articles.¹⁷

At the same time, the government was implementing a monetary reform directed "at eliminating the relation of the Salvadoran currency with silver and to connect it with gold in order to eliminate fluctuations in the exchange rate" and to give it parity with the American dollar. The result was twofold. The banks were authorized to back up their emissions with a gold guarantee. This allowed the currency to circulate freely and the landowners were forced to pay salaries in cash, instead of coupons as they did before the reform, due to the lack of circulating money. Most importantly, the monetary reform allowed a more dynamic and expansionist market, especially during the coffee harvest, creating an increase in

¹⁷Dalton, Miguel Marmol, pp. 74-75.

urban artisan activity and some space for an incipient industrialization.¹⁸

These economic measures and diversification of domestic capital generated some political opening for the masses. In order to look for some popular and electoral support, some politicians from the dominant classes encouraged the mobilization of the urban middle class, artisans and peasants.¹⁹

In 1917, Alfonso Quiñonez Molina, who became president in 1923, founded a political organization called the Liga Roja (Red League) whose goal was to support the presidential candidacy of Luis Melendez and which Quiñonez Molina later used to further his own presidential ambitions.²⁰ After taking power on 1 March 1923, Alfonso Quiñonez Molina dissolved the Liga Roja, as it was becoming too militant and was going beyond the original reasons for its creation.²¹ This organization was important in generating a nucleus of activists and educating the masses. Even though the political elites used it to control and even to repress the workers,²²

¹⁸Guidos Vejar, El Ascenso, p. 84.

¹⁹Ibid., pp. 86-87.

²⁰Castro Morán, La Función Política, p. 42.

²¹Ibid., p. 43.

²²Anderson, Matanza, p. 22.

its organizational dynamics led to the formation of the Federation of Regional Workers (FRTS) in 1924.²³

The Federation of Regional Workers was of key importance in organizing the workers' movement in the cities and the countryside. From 1924 to 1927 this organization developed a platform of demands that included the establishment of a popular university and the reduction of the working day to eight hours. This organization became involved with the international labour movement and in 1929 participated in the International Labour Congress held in Uruguay. By 1930 the regional had 38 affiliates with a significant membership estimated at approximately 80,000 workers.²⁴

By 1925 a group of Mexican and Guatemalan activists formed the basis of the Salvadoran Communist Party (PCS). This party, under the direction of the Mexican Marxist Jorge Anaya, would have an organic structure in 1930²⁵ and would play a key role in the subsequent years of turmoil in the general crisis of 1932.

A new political period was inaugurated at the end of Quiñonez Molina's regime by the election of a new president. On 1 March 1927 Pio Romero Bosque, an intimate friend of Quinonez Molina, was inaugurated as new president. Romero Bosque was Minister of War in the governments of Quinonez and

²³Arias Gomez, Farabundo, p. 29.

²⁴Ibid, pp. 30 and 103.

²⁵Anderson, Matanza, p. 24.

Melendez and he was also a member of the coffee elite.²⁶ Romero Bosque was in relative terms open and independent. For some historians his regime signified a transitional period in terms of liberalizing the political structure.²⁷ In his first three months in power he had changed the administrative structure, even to the point of sending Quiñonez Molina out of the country. He allowed freedom of the press, initiated legal processes against bureaucrats who were involved in corruption, abolished the state of siege that had been in place for the last four years,²⁸ and more importantly, conducted free elections on two occasions.²⁹ A coup d'etat was attempted against Romero Bosque, as the oligarchy realized that his administration was out of control. As a consequence of this aborted military rebellion, the ex-president Jorge Melendez was exiled.³⁰ The ability of Romero Bosque to maintain power despite the wishes of the oligarchy is suggested as evidence that he had the support of powerful elements of the military and civilian groups.³¹ However, to date there has been no detailed study of the Romero Bosque regime that explores the possible existence of an organic faction within the oligarchy

²⁶Castro Morán, La Función Política, p. 49.

²⁷White, El Salvador, p. 105.

²⁸Castro Morán, La Función Política, p. 51.

²⁹White, El Salvador, p. 107.

³⁰Castro Morán, La Función Política, pp. 52-53.

³¹Ibid.

or the military who were susceptible to a reform of the political system. Certainly, that possibility would have changed the course of Salvadoran history. In fact, the tremendous modifications that the Salvadoran state was going to suffer in the crisis of 1932 would have needed a consolidated political system in order to survive without severe transformations, and in this regard, the Salvadoran oligarchy was unable to convert itself into a political dominant class, and this historical inability was going to prove costly for the development of Salvadoran society.

Up to 1931 the Salvadoran state adopted the form of a civil dynasty, where power was transferred in a constitutional and legal manner between different members of traditional families, "from Carlos Melendez(1913-1918) to his brother Jorge Melendez(1919-1923) to Carlos Melendez's brother-in-law Dr. Alfonso Quiñonez Molina(1923-1927)",³²and finally the brief democratic interlude of Romero Bosque(1927-1931), but without any possibility of contest from the dominated classes. The fiction of consensus and legitimacy intended by Romero Bosque in the electoral arena was interrupted by the economic crisis of the 1930s and its political consequences.

³²Michael McClintock, The American Connection: State Terror and Popular Resistance in El Salvador, (London: Zed Books Ltd., 1985), p. 103.

The Coffee Crisis

The start of the world depression in 1930 had an enormous impact on Salvadoran society. The fall of world coffee prices in the 1930's to half the level of 1929³³ had profound effects on the Salvadoran economy, which was based on coffee exports as the main source of income, creating a total disruption in the social life of the country.³⁴ This economic crisis aggravated the structural poverty of the population. In rural areas wages amounted to merely 15 cents a day.³⁵ In the cities, great masses of workers were dismissed, many public employees were not paid, and small and middle-size landholders went bankrupt or had their properties confiscated.³⁶ Because of these problems, the trade union and political movements increased pressure resulting in armed confrontations with the national guard.³⁷ In March 1931, Arturo Araujo, an engineer, was elected president of the Republic in what is considered the first and

³³Hector Dada Hirezi, La Economía de El Salvador y La Integración Centroamericana 1945-1960, (San José, Costa Rica: Educa, 1983), p. 25.

³⁴Mario Salazar Valiente, "El Salvador, Crisis, Dictadura y Lucha... (1920-1980)," América Latina: Historia de Medio Siglo, vol. 2, (México: Siglo Veintiuno Editores, 1980), p. 90.

³⁵Dunkerley, The Long War, p. 22.

³⁶Cienfuegos, La Revolución, pp. 11-12.

³⁷Salazar Valiente, "El Salvador, Crisis," pp. 90-91.

only democratic election in the country's history.³⁸ He promised in his electoral campaign to overcome the economic crisis, starting with the realization of a series of reforms, especially in the agrarian sector. The internal contradictions of the Araujo Government were a reflection of the profound crisis of Salvadoran society.³⁹ On one side, the massive mobilization of proletarians and peasants did not wait too long to demand the fulfilment of the electoral promises. Two days after taking power, Araujo was confronted with massive demonstrations for three consecutive days in front of the presidential house. On the other side, the powerful group of bankers proposed a devaluation of the Salvadoran currency in order to alleviate the crisis, but Araujo refused, thus alienating the oligarchy's support.⁴⁰ At the same time, violence started to appear. In May 1931, in Sonsonate, which was a focus of growing discontent, a street protest was violently repressed.⁴¹

Araujo became politically isolated. He was unable to deal with the pressure of the oligarchic groups that demanded a solution to the crisis through repression of the popular movement. But, these were the people who had made it possible

³⁸McClintock, The American Connection, p. 103, and White, El Salvador, p. 107.

³⁹Cienfuegos, La Revolución, p. 12

⁴⁰Gómez Vejar, El Ascenso, pp. 119-120.

⁴¹White, El Salvador, p. 110.

for Araujo to become president, so in order to maintain their support, he was reluctant to act against the popular movements. Violence was widespread and any peasant mobilization was confronted by force.⁴²

All the system was in chaos. The public employees, including the army, were not receiving their salaries, the bankers and financial groups were pushing the government to resolve the crisis and the peasants and urban workers were repressed. The administration that was supposed to be the most democratic in the history of the country was in ruins.⁴³ The democratic dreams of the liberal ideologists who established the political constitution of 1886 were on the verge of tragedy. The Romero Bosque-Araujo democratic interlude was finished.

In December 1931 a coup d'etat overthrew the government of Arturo Araujo and put into power General Maximiliano Hernández Martínez, who was the Minister of War and Vice-president of the deposed president.⁴⁴ The discontent and popular mobilization did not diminish; the Regional Federation of Salvadoran Workers, led by the Salvadoran Communist Party under the direction of its leader Farabundo Martí, continued with its demands and public demonstrations at the same time that the new government was preparing a plan of massive

⁴²Gómez Vejar, El Ascenso, p. 123.

⁴³Ibid., pp. 123-124.

⁴⁴Castro Morán, La Función Política, p. 89.

repression. Frustration and popular discontent were intensified even more with the fraud in the elections for mayors at the beginning of January 1932, which denied victory to the candidates of the Communist Party. The popular masses were moving towards armed insurrection, forcing the Communist Party to deal with this strong popular sentiment.⁴⁵ The last days of January saw the beginning of armed insurrection of poor peasants, agricultural day labourers, craftsmen and the proletariat of the Western and Central South regions of El Salvador. The insurrection was planned for 22 January 1932 by the Communist Party but groups of peasants started to control towns and cities as early as 20 January, creating confusion and accelerating the events. Furthermore, it was planned that the peasant insurrection would coincide with urban participation and a military uprising. The plan was discovered by the government with anticipation. The leadership of the Communist Party was captured and, after three days of fighting, towns and cities returned to government hands.⁴⁶ The insurrection was rapidly crushed by the government which, with greater resources, defeated the rebellion, killing about 30,000 people, among them all the leadership of the Communist Party, including Farabundo Martí.⁴⁷

⁴⁵Cienfuegos, La Revolución, pp. 12-13.

⁴⁶Gómez Vejar, El Ascenso, p. 136.

⁴⁷Robert Armstrong and Janet Shenk, El Salvador: The Face of Revolution, (London: Pluto Press, 1982), pp. 29-30.

This massacre resolved the crisis in the political context, but in allowing the military to take control the traditional form of oligarchic domination was modified by the transfer of political power to the military, creating an atypical form of state, the military dictatorship, and at the same time creating a "political vacuum. The absence of a legitimate government in El Salvador--that with the possible exception of the Osorio administration (1950-56) and Rivera (1962-67)--added, to that vacuum, a crisis of hegemony."⁴⁸

The period from 1932 until 1948 represented the first of a series of different governments that were to share the same form of state--that of the military dictatorship--with only minor superstructural variations. We will look briefly at each of the governments, assessing the variations, while noting the continuity of the same form of state.

Between 2 December 1931 and May 1944, the dictatorship of General Maximiliano Hernández Martínez remained in power. The Martínez regime had as a political goal the stabilization of the country, and to that end any political activity that was directed at subverting the public order was treated with an "iron hand" by Martínez.⁴⁹ Even the term "union" became synonymous with subversion and was declared illegal.⁵⁰ The autonomy of the University was violated several times. General

⁴⁸Baloyra, El Salvador en Transición, p. 30.

⁴⁹Castro Morán, La Función Política, p. 160.

⁵⁰Menjívar, Formación, p. 77.

Martínez, continuing the tradition of the Liga Roja created by Alfonso Quiñonez in 1918, founded his own official political party called Pro-Patria to support his elections campaigns.⁵¹In sum, the Martínez regime did not have any problems in maintaining political control and its violent creation with the matanza of 1932 signified the destruction of any organized opposition.

Similarly, in order to stabilize the economic situation, the regime declared a moratorium on debts,⁵²even cancelling some in order to benefit small coffee growers who were bankrupt,⁵³and modernized the state bureaucracy with the creation of government banks to control the emission of money and gold reserves, like the Hipotecario in 1935 and the Central Bank of Reserve.⁵⁴In general, the Martínez regime tried to maintain economic order without affecting the interests of the landowners. To that end a prohibition on the import of machinery destined to cotton and sugar cane enterprises was issued, in order to maintain employment in the countryside. In 1939 a decree prohibited the establishment of any factory with an investment capital of more than 200,000 colones

⁵¹White, El Salvador, 113.

⁵²Dunkerley, The Long War, p. 32.

⁵³White, El Salvador, p.113.

⁵⁴Cáceres Prendes, "La Revolución Salvadoreña de 1948: Un Estudio Sobre Transformismo," El Salvador: Una Historia sin Lecciones, (Costa Rica: FLACSO, 1988), p. 80.

dedicated to the production of shoes, soap and other articles, in order to protect artisan production and avoid any intent of industrialization.⁵⁵The goal was to maintain without alteration the existing order of the agro-export sector of the economy.

The end of the Martínez regime came about due to a combination of external and internal factors. Martínez was a strong admirer and supporter of Hitler and Mussolini and in that regard, in June 1940, the dictator made it illegal to support the allied forces fighting fascism. But his support for fascism would prove counterproductive. In 1943, the United States modified its import quotas for certain countries. As a result of the war in Europe, the U.S. went from absorbing 14.9 percent of the coffee production of El Salvador in 1930, to 96.4 percent in 1943.⁵⁶Thus, by economic necessity, the dictator was forced to change sides in the war and support the allies.⁵⁷This eventually created the opportunity for increased propaganda against fascism externally, and internally, against the dictatorship. Martínez was politically wounded. He tried to get re-elected, calling a constitutional assembly in January of 1944.⁵⁸This combination of factors generated an enormous discontent within factions of the oligarchy, the

⁵⁵Torres Rivas, Interpretación, pp. 160-61.

⁵⁶Dunkerley, The Long War, p. 33.

⁵⁷Ibid, p. 33.

⁵⁸Cáceres Prendes, "La Revolución," p. 81.

military and popular sectors that were mobilized against fascism. On 2 April 1944 a military and popular revolt erupted. A coup d'etat was intended but it was defeated, resulting in the execution of the principal military leaders.⁵⁹

In May of the same year, a massive strike of university students turned into a national strike that paralysed the country.⁶⁰ The U.S. and the oligarchy withdrew any support for the dictator, and he was forced to resign and to transfer power to his vice-president, General Andres I. Menendez.⁶¹

With the overthrow of Martínez in May 1944, a brief period began that opened political space for a significant resurgence of organizational activities. General Andres Isidro Menendez restored freedom of the press and convoked elections for October of the same year.⁶² In this brief period, seven political parties were organized, which included, among the most important, the United Social Democratic Party, that was a continuation of the Pro-Patria party of Martínez, under the leadership of General Salvador Castaneda Castro; and the Union

⁵⁹Salazar Valiente, "El Salvador, Crisis," pp. 99-100.

⁶⁰Ibid.

⁶¹Dunkerley, The Long War, p. 34.

⁶²Stephen Webre, José Napoleón Duarte y El Partido Demócrata Cristiano en La Política Salvadoreña, 1960-1972. (San Salvador: UCA Editores, 1985), p. 25. First published in English under the title Jose Napoleon Duarte and the Christian Democratic Party in Salvadorean Politics 1960-1972, (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University, 1979).

Democratic Party, led by Dr. Arturo Romero, who was one of the most important leaders of the mobilization against Martinez. This party was composed of professionals, students and labour activists and proposed, as a main issue in its platform, the return to a democratic and civil society.⁶³ For the oligarchy, the situation resembled the years of the Araujo regime in 1931, and to them the terms democracy and civil society were equal to communism.⁶⁴ It was clear that if elections had been conducted freely as Menendez proposed, Arturo Romero would be the winner, due to his enormous popularity.⁶⁵ But this brief political opening ended when Colonel Osmin Aguirre Salinas, who had been Director of the National Police in the massacre of 1932, led a coup d'etat against Menendez, exiled Arturo Romero, and made it possible for General Salvador Castaneda Castro to win the presidency without any serious opposition in the presidential elections of December 1944.⁶⁶

The period of Castaneda, which began on 1 March 1945, was a turbulent one in terms of the internal structure of the military establishment. Castaneda assumed his mandate amid a very delicate balance of power. He had become president by imposition and, even more difficult, through a renovated civilian opposition that had been legitimized by the struggle

⁶³Cáceres Prendes, "La Revolución," pp. 83-84.

⁶⁴Castro Morán, La Función Política, pp. 196-197.

⁶⁵Webre, Duarte y El Partido, pp. 26-27.

⁶⁶Bulmer Thomas, The Political Economy, pp. 103-104.

against Martínez and against fascism. Furthermore, in his intention to maintain power he alienated a group of young officers who were discontented with the way some administrative rules were implemented within the army. Castaneda ordered a limit in the number of officers in every rank of the army and made promotions more complicated. This group of officers perceived these measures as counterproductive to their interests,⁶⁷ which generated the context for conspiracies directed at removing the president from power. On 10 June 1945 a coup d'etat was attempted against Castaneda, but it failed and some of the young officers involved were exiled, among them Major Oscar Osorio, who came to power in 1948.⁶⁸

On 13 December 1948 Castaneda convoked the National Assembly in order to reform the constitution and re-elect himself to power. The National Assembly extended his mandate for two years and that event gave the young officers the opportunity to organize a successful coup d'etat that overthrew the president on 14 December 1948.⁶⁹

In summary, the political period opened with the installation of the military dictatorship of General Maximiliano Hernández Martínez in 1932 and continued without any structural variation until the overthrow of General

⁶⁷Webre, Duarte y El Partido, p. 27.

⁶⁸Castro Morán, La Función Política, p. 201.

⁶⁹Ibid, pp. 201-202.

Castaneda Castro. As we have seen, the Hernández Martínez regime was the transitional solution to the structural crisis of domination which originated with the forceful introduction of coffee as a main product of export in 1860, creating the basic social classes of Salvadoran society. These classes had political expression in the decade of the 1920s with significant organizational activities, strikes, protests and the configuration of a strong popular movement that went to the length of expressing itself through armed insurrection in 1932. As for the dominant classes, this period concluded their ability to govern for themselves with the transfer of power to the military, though they still maintained the ability to dominate. The economic model of domination continued without any variation. Coffee was the staple of the economy. However, the crisis was never overcome; on the contrary, the stagnation of the political system and the maintenance of the same economic inequalities required some adjustments in subsequent years in order to avoid the repetition of the events of 1932.

Chapter 2- From Modernization to "Soccer War"(1948-69)

In this chapter I will look at the changes in the system of domination. While it manifested its coercive form through the military, it was also extended by a diversification of the dominant classes. The new phase, initiated with the "revolution of 1948," brought a more diversified economy and a serious push for industrialization that created an expansion of the urban sector, the bureaucracy and services. That trend was interrupted by the war with Honduras in 1969, an event whose political and economic consequences fundamentally shaped the course of Salvadoran history for the next decade.

The military coup of 1948 brought to power a Council of Revolutionary Government composed of military personnel and civilians. The official propaganda referred to the coup as the "Revolution of 1948." In fact, the initial actions of the Council demonstrated a new dimension of the Salvadoran state, at least in the ideological context. The Council of Government, formed by Majors Oscar Osorio, Oscar Bolanos, Colonel Manuel de Jesus Cordova and the civilians Reynaldo Galindo Pohl, a student leader, and Dr. Humberto Costa, proclaimed on 25 December 1948 a manifesto in which the ideological context and economic intentions of the new government were defined. The manifesto is important for establishing some parameters with regard to the direction of

the new government.¹The stated intention was to establish a democratic system, where the people would have the right to freely elect their government. Furthermore, effective freedoms would be guaranteed for all Salvadorans, a new constitutional order would be implemented and the standard of living would be improved through increases in production, improvement in technology and stimulus for private enterprise and social justice.²

As was predictable, the manifesto elicited tremendous enthusiasm and support among the population. The General Association of University Students as well as political parties publicly expressed their support for the new government. The University newspaper, Opinión Estudiantil, even organized a national day of celebration through street demonstrations to show popular consent to the promises of freedom and democracy.³

This popular support was an unequivocal expression of the democratic aspirations of the Salvadoran people, and in fact it demonstrated a real basis for this support. The new government called new elections for March 1950 and the creation of a new Constituent Assembly for September of the

¹Cáceres Prendes, "La Revolución," pp. 89-95.

²Appendix 8, Decree of the Revolutionary Council of Government, December 25, 1948, quoted by Castro Morán, in La Función Política, pp. 382-383.

³Ibid., pp. 204-205.

same year. Major Oscar Osorio as candidate of the Revolutionary Party of Democratic Unity (PRUD), the new political party of the military, was easily elected president.⁴Reynaldo Galindo Pohl, the student leader, and a prominent member of the same party, was elected for the Constituent Assembly, which promulgated the new constitution in September 1950. The distinctive trait of this new party and government was the ability of its leader, Oscar Osorio, to create an alliance between the military and middle sectors of society.⁵For example, the new cabinet was composed mainly of civilians who did not have any involvement with prior governments. The National Assembly was dominated by an absolute majority of members of the same political party. Nevertheless members of the party had different social origins, as it was a mixture of members of the oligarchy, the army and the middle class.⁶

⁴Ronald H. McDonald, "El Salvador: The Politics of Revolution," Latin American Politics and Development, Howard J. Wiarda and Harvey F. Kline, eds., (Boulder: Westview Press, 1985), p. 536.

⁵Jose Z. Garcia, "El Salvador: Recent Elections in Historical Perspective," Elections and Democracy in Central America, John A. Booth and Mitchell A. Seligson, eds., (Chapel Hill and London: University of North Carolina Press, 1989), p. 62.

⁶Cáceres Prendes, "La Revolución," p. 94.

Furthermore, Osorio not only was able to institutionalize military rule through civilian participation, but he also introduced new government programs that were to change the role of the state in the economic life of society. However, any serious modifications to the traditional order of Salvadoran society was likely to occur only in an economic environment conducive to the needs of the dominant classes. And that was precisely the case in the early 1950s.

As was the case for all Central American countries, the Salvadoran economy exhibited, at the end of the Second World War, the typical deficiencies of the mono-export market oriented economies, which in the case of El Salvador continued to be based on coffee, thus limiting any industrial development that would diversify the economy. Production of goods for the internal market was not increased. Physical infrastructure was poor and, as we have seen, the political system did not encourage any economic modernization. Nonetheless this economic environment was going to be modified substantially by the extremely high prices of coffee at the beginning of the decade.⁷ Coffee prices increased from 37.25 Salvadoran colones per 100 lbs in 1945, to 102.53 in 1950, and to 170.09 in 1954. The surplus accruing from the accumulation of capital produced by the high prices of coffee would allow

⁷Bulmer-Thomas, The Political Economy, pp. 105-111.

diversification,⁸ giving room for the Osorio government to negotiate with some sectors of the dominant classes.

As a result of this negotiation, the new government was able to introduce a series of fiscal measures directed at modernizing the economy, such as increasing taxes for coffee exports which in turn allowed the surplus to be transferred to other sectors of the economy; increasing the income tax; and promulgating laws that would increase productive activity through easy access to credit.⁹

Moreover, this economic modernization and institutionalization would require a legal framework substantially different from the traditional liberal heritage established with the constitution of 1886. The modern constitution of 1950 contained a new set of rules that replaced the old liberal principles of a non-interventionist state, thus creating the basis for a more interventionist approach. Likewise, the new constitution established that the state would provide the conditions for a dignified existence for all Salvadorans. That would regulate economic freedom for the majority, the relations between capital and labour, establishing the right of the workers to organize collectively

⁸Dada Hirezi, La Economía de El Salvador, pp. 38-47.

⁹Ibid., p. 47.

and to conclude collective agreements, and even legislating a minimum salary.¹⁰

With that legal framework in place and with prime economic conditions, the government was able to develop new programs directed at modernizing the country. In the social sphere, with the creation of political-administrative institutions such as the Institute of Urban Housing and the Rural Colonization Institute,¹¹ massive construction of houses and schools started. The infrastructure was modernized, big projects of electrification were developed, roads and highways were built.¹²

In summary, the Osorio regime was qualitatively different, not only in its political ability to create an alliance with the middle class and the oligarchy, but in its public policy as well. It expanded the role of government and developed public works, education and social programs. Some authors have argued that this government had an important degree of legitimacy,¹³ a plausible conclusion if analyzed narrowly in terms of the regime's capacity to develop an alliance with the middle class and the intellectuals. But if one accepts a fuller concept of democracy, where freedom is synonymous with participation of all social groups, especially

¹⁰Salazar Valiente, "El Salvador, Crisis," p. 189.

¹¹Browning, El Salvador, La Tierra, p. 453.

¹²Castro Morán, La Función Política, p. 209.

¹³García, "Recent Elections," p. 63.

those that traditionally have been excluded, then the legitimacy of the Osorio regime is, at the very least, dubious.

In this regard, an important characteristic of this regime was its ability to co-opt the labour and popular sectors under an elaborate revolutionary rhetoric as expressed in a speech by Colonel José María Lemus, who was to succeed Osorio in 1956. He affirmed that the army was a representative of the people and its existence was based on the right to maintain order and to defend the rights of the people.¹⁴

In reality, the regime met any sign of independent organization by the workers with reform and repression. On the one hand, rhetoric was supported with social legislation, but on the other hand with control and repression. For example, it must be noted that as early as March 1951, repression was initiated without any justification against the popular sectors on pretense of the discovery of a communist plot to overthrow the government.¹⁵ In September 1952, a campaign was directed against university students to purge the University of communists, and a law for the Defense of the Constitutional

¹⁴Mario Monteforte Toledo, Centro America Subdesarrollo y Dependencia, vol. 2., (México: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de Mexico, 1972), p. 183.

¹⁵Castro Morán, La Función Política, p. 209.

Order was promulgated,¹⁶ giving legal cover to the strict control of freedoms.

In spite of these realities, analysts concur that at the end of the regime of Oscar Osorio the basis for economic modernization and industrialization had been laid. However, the political order was intact, as was evident in the way that Osorio managed the transition of the presidency to his successor.¹⁷

The government of Oscar Osorio was followed in 1956, through electoral fraud, by Colonel José María Lemus, the candidate of the official party, the Revolutionary Party of Democratic Unity.¹⁸ Because of the obvious fraud, all opposition candidates withdrew from the elections.¹⁹ Lemus took some liberal measures that were more permissive than Osorio. For example, he abrogated the Defense of the Democratic and Constitutional Order Law, which had been instituted by the previous government and had been the legal instrument for political repression directed against the popular sectors. Furthermore, he promulgated an amnesty for all political

¹⁶McClintock, The American Connection, pp. 134-135.

¹⁷Bulmer-Thomas, The Political Economy, p. 166.

¹⁸Harry Kantor, Patterns of Politics and Political Systems in Latin America, (Chicago: Rand McNally & Company, 1969). p. 114.

¹⁹White, El Salvador, p. 118.

exiles.²⁰This political opening allowed the return of exiles and increased freedom of organization. The General Confederation of Salvadoran Workers (CGST) was formed. A leftist political party, the Revolutionary Movement of April and May, was organized, the first organization of a communist-directed party since 1932. New popular organizations emerged, such as the Young Association of November Fifth and the Fraternity of Salvadoran Women.²¹

This process of regrouping and reorganization of the popular sectors was radicalized as a result of what was a permanently cyclical structural crisis of the Salvadoran economy rooted in the oscillation of coffee prices on the international market. Coffee prices fell drastically in 1957 and 1958,²²creating unemployment and lower salaries for urban and rural workers.²³The popular sectors, which had become organized under the direction of revolutionary nuclei, started to pressure the government in order to meet the new crisis with measures in their interest. The streets of San Salvador and other cities were full of protesters in continuous demonstrations. The University became a symbol of protest and

²⁰Salazar Valiente, "El Salvador, Crisis," p. 110.

²¹Dalton, El Salvador (Monografía), p. 111.

²²Kantor, Patterns, p. 114.

²³Dalton, El Salvador (Monografía), p. 112.

revolutionary ferment.²⁴ Mobilization and popular demands reached their peaks in 1959-60, as a result of the Cuban Revolution.²⁵

In January 1959, with the triumph of Fidel Castro, the process of reorganization of the Salvadoran left took a very important turn. This unexpected event produced profound repercussions in the strategy and unity of the leftist movement with regard to the ideological struggle, which had as its culmination the organic factionalism of the Salvadoran Communist Party in 1970.²⁶ The ideological debate centred on the most appropriate strategy to make a revolution possible. The issue of armed struggle versus electoral means as the principal method of gaining power was going to have profound effects on the development of Salvadoran society in the 1970s.

The optimism provoked by the Cuban example and the economic crisis, coupled with the inability of the Lemus regime to develop new policies or initiatives to placate unrest, were such that even the traditional oligarchy was disaffected.²⁷ On 2 September 1960, the police invaded the University with the result that many professors and students

²⁴Ibid.

²⁵Armstrong and Shenk, El Salvador: The Face of Revolution, p. 40.

²⁶Dunkerley, The Long War, pp. 90-91.

²⁷Kantor, Patterns, p. 114.

were injured.²⁸ But the repression intensified popular resistance and organization. As a result, the National Front of Civic Orientation was organized, in which the economic and political demands of the opposition were expressed through a democratic program.²⁹ By October 1960 repression, arrests, and torture of political opponents³⁰ were the norm. In the midst of radicalization of the popular sectors in the capital city and provinces, a coup d'etat against Lemus was organized, and that same month he was overthrown. The coup d'etat was staged by a group of progressive military officers and backed by middle-class and leftist groups. A new Civic-Military Junta was installed, formed by civilians and military personnel.³¹

The new Civic-Military Junta came to power on 26 October 1960, and immediately abolished the state of siege and liberated all political prisoners of the Lemus regime. Furthermore, all constitutional rights and guarantees were restored, aiming to establish a political climate that would

²⁸White, El Salvador, p. 118.

²⁹Ernesto Ritcher, "Social Classes, Accumulation, and The Crisis of Overpopulation in El Salvador," Latin American Perspectives, vol. VII, No. 2-3, Issues 25-26, Spring and Summer, 1980, p. 114.

³⁰Armstrong and Shenk, El Salvador: The Face of Revolution, p. 41.

³¹Ritcher, "Social Classes," p. 115.

make free elections possible.³²The people enthusiastically celebrated the democratic measures taken by the new government. The National Front of Civic Orientation (FNOC), an organization comprised of people from different social groups such as students, university professors, workers, and militants of democratic political parties, called for a public demonstration the same day to support the government and organized a meeting of 80,000 people in downtown San Salvador.³³

While supporting the government, the FNOC, seizing the political opening, organized workers and especially peasants, an opportunity that had not existed since the massacre of 1932. A national campaign started to create committees of the FNOC in the countryside.³⁴The oligarchy was alarmed. To complicate matters, the Junta pursued diplomatic relations with the new Cuban government,³⁵leaving itself vulnerable to accusations, by the oligarchy, of being communist. The oligarchy argued, moreover, that one of the members of the Junta, Dr. Fabio Castillo, a University leader, was a known communist.³⁶Facing this political situation, the oligarchy and

³²Ibid.

³³Webre, Duarte y El Partido, p. 49.

³⁴Dalton, El Salvador (Monografía), p. 117.

³⁵Ritcher, "Social Classes," p. 115.

³⁶Castro Morán, La Función Política, p. 213.

the military reacted in a predictable way. A new coup d'etat on 25 January 1961 put an end to the brief interlude of democracy initiated by the Junta of government. A Civic-Military Directorio was installed, and again the people's response was to demonstrate and protest the overthrow of the Junta, this time with violent results: 100 people were killed by the security forces.³⁷

The new Civic-Military Directorio was composed of two military men and three civilians. Among the military, there was Colonel Julio Adalberto Rivera, who was going to be the president of El Salvador from 1962-67. Among the civilians there was a prominent lawyer of the oligarchy, Dr. Jose Antonio Rodriguez Porth. The Directorio, unlike the earlier reformist Junta, was of a conservative nature,³⁸ and in its first proclamation delivered a statement expressing the military's new role.

The proclamation claimed that in the face of a plan of destabilization organized by forces against the interests of the Salvadorans, the military should assume its historical responsibility. Consequently they replaced the Junta that was governing the country, with the goal of re-establishing the constitutional guarantees and the development of a social reform program to benefit the majority. The armed forces stated that the only way to obtain freedom, security, and

³⁷McClintock, The American Connection, p. 149.

³⁸Castro Morán, La Función Política, p. 218.

social peace was to eradicate misery by using the available resources to revitalize the private economy and public finances.³⁹

The proclamation clearly had a reformist character, promising economic and social justice. In addition, whether planned or coincidental, it matched the content of Kennedy's Alliance for Progress, a response to the Cuban revolution.⁴⁰ More importantly, the proclamation implied a new role for the army. From now on it would have the historical task of transforming the socio-economic structures of the country in conjunction with U.S. interests in the region.⁴¹

The Alliance for Progress initiative, adopted in 1961, was designed to create the environment for accelerated social and economic development in Latin America through the institutionalization of public policies that would elevate the standard of living of the Latin Americans. That initiative contained specific policies, such as the development of public

³⁹Annex No. 11, Proclamation of The Armed Forces to the Salvadoran People, Castro Moran, La Función Política, pp. 397-398.

⁴⁰Howard J. Wiarda, "Did the Alliance 'Lose its Way,' or Were its Assumptions All Wrong From the Beginning and Are Those Assumptions Still with Us? The Alliance For Progress, L. Ronald Scheman, ed., (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1988), p. 107.

⁴¹Salazar Valiente, "El Salvador, Crisis", p. 111.

housing, health, education and social rights,⁴² in an effort to achieve the economic integration of Latin America.⁴³ For some critics, the initiative was another imposition of the U.S hegemonic policy for Latin America.⁴⁴

In addition, the alliance's main goal for the 1960s was to transform the anachronistic social and economic structures of Latin America through agrarian reforms.⁴⁵ This, it was hoped, would create dynamic economies in tune with the industrialization process that had been initiated at the end of the 1950s. Consequently, Central America's role was going to be redefined within the framework of the Latin American integrationist scheme that was proposed.

Central America's economic integration was an issue that had preoccupied El Salvador's dominant class since the beginning of the 1950s. Owing to the financial boom provoked by the high prices of coffee in the international market⁴⁶ and the consolidation of cotton as the second most important

⁴²L. Ronald Scheman, "The Alliance For Progress: Concept and Creativity," The Alliance For Progress, Ronald L. Scheman ed., (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1988), pp. 22-24-25.

⁴³Wiarda, "Did The Alliance," p. 106.

⁴⁴Ibid., p. 3.

⁴⁵Scheman, "The Alliance," p. 20.

⁴⁶Liisa North, Bitter Grounds: Roots of Revolt in El Salvador. (Toronto: Between the Lines, 1981), p. 51.

export product,⁴⁷ the capitalist class was looking for ways of investing its surplus into industry and the creation of external markets.⁴⁸

In terms of industrialization, we have seen that the infrastructure was developed by the Osorio regime. In terms of the creation of external markets, the process was opened as early as 1950 through some bilateral agreements with the rest of the Central American countries: in March 1951, with Nicaragua; in December of the same year with Guatemala; in October 1953 with Costa Rica; and in 1957 with Honduras.⁴⁹ During that decade it was clear to the Central American leaders that a new model of development was needed, to modify the economy's traditional dependence on one or two exports, as was the case of El Salvador. What was needed was a model that could reduce dependence, preferably by producing for the internal market, developing its own manufacturing capacity, and industrializing.⁵⁰ But even with that clear perspective in mind, the nature of the bilateral agreements signed with the other Central American countries was, in essence, very simple. It consisted of the possibility of

⁴⁷Ibid., p. 45.

⁴⁸Dada Hirezi, La Economía de El Salvador, p. 121.

⁴⁹Ibid. p. 105.

⁵⁰Roger D. Hansen, Central America: Regional Integration and Economic Development, (Washington, D.C., National Planning Association, 1967), p. 14.

developing mechanisms to allow the free circulation of capital, goods, and people. Perhaps for the Salvadoran elite the issue of free circulation of people was more important--due to population pressures--than the strategic issues of diversification of the economy and promotion of industry.⁵¹

At the same time, a United Nations agency, the Economic Commission For Latin American (ECLA), was trying to implement a different approach to integration, through the concept of internal development, planning for balanced growth, and the regional integration of industries.⁵² This developmentalist approach was unattractive for the Salvadoran elites. They did not see the need to plan for balanced growth in the context of integration, because of the possibility of favouring weaker economies, such as the Honduran, which they saw as a potential market for Salvadoran manufacture. Instead, El Salvador's dominant classes preferred the free interchange model that was supposed to favour the Salvadoran economy, which, in their eyes, was more advanced due to the light industrialization started in the 1920s and continued by the Osorio and Lemus regimes, as well as the existence of a more proletarianized labour force.⁵³

⁵¹Dada Hirezi, La Economía de El Salvador, p. 122.

⁵²Gary W. Wynn, Politics and Planners. (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1972), pp. 42-45.

⁵³This discussion is taken from Dada Hirezi, La Economía de El Salvador, pp. 118-119.

In spite of all these difficulties, a Multilateral Treaty of Central American Free Trade and Economic Development was signed on 10 June 1958. It was the forerunner of the Central American Common Market,⁵⁴ which was inaugurated with the signing of the General Treaty of Central American Integration in 1960.⁵⁵ By that time the original proposal of planning growth in specific industries for each country to avoid duplication, and limiting foreign investment, as was conceived by ECLA, no longer existed.⁵⁶ The U.S. had started to add pressure in favour of integration based on the free market model and the creation of favourable conditions for foreign investment.⁵⁷

The U.S. approach of integration had profound consequences in the Salvadoran situation. The penetration of U.S. capital became consolidated for the first time in Salvadoran history. Until this period, U.S. financial intervention was relatively minor. It was initiated at the beginning of this century through investment in railroad transportation with the International Railways of Central

⁵⁴Hansen, Central America, p. 25.

⁵⁵Yale Ferguson, "Cooperation in Latin America: The Politics of Regional Integration," The Dynamics of Latin America Foreign Policies, (Boulder: Westview Press, 1984), p. 39.

⁵⁶Armstrong and Shenk, El Salvador: The Face of Revolution, p. 46.

⁵⁷North, Bitter Grounds, p. 52.

America (IRCA).⁵⁸In the beginning, U.S. capital had to compete with the financial interests of Great Britain, Germany, and France. But after the Second World War American capital became dominant and started to consolidate its position in Central America through the industrialization of the 1950s. The following table⁵⁹details the course of investment in El Salvador:

United States direct investments in El Salvador										
(in millions of US Dollars)										
1897	1908	1914	1919	1924	1929	1936	1940	1943	1950	1959
1.8	6.6	12.8	12.2	24.8	17.0	11.0	15.0	17.0	43.9	

Corresponding to this renewed American interest in the integration of Central America, owing to financial investment, and the political problem that the Cuban Revolution signified, U.S. policy supported the new Civic-Military Directorio installed on 25 January 1961. The U.S. assessed the regime as anti-communist and pro-U.S. and ready to initiate social reforms,⁶⁰in agreement with the new development strategy of

⁵⁸Dada Hirezi, La Economía de El Salvador, p. 20.

⁵⁹Table and statistics are from Amilcar Figueroa Salazar. El Salvador: Elementos de su Historia y sus Luchas (1932-1985). (Caracas: Fondo Editorial Topykos, 1987), p. 64.

⁶⁰McClintock, The American Connection, p. 149.

the Alliance for Progress. In fact, the most prominent architect of the coup d'etat and spokesperson of the new government, Colonel Julio Adalberto Rivera, said on the day of the coup that "the orientation of the rebellion was anticommunist, anti-Castro and anti-Cuba."⁶¹ This statement did not oppose the idea of development put forward by the Alliance for Progress. On the contrary, the Alliance had as its stated goal economic development, in order to fight poverty. The main object, though, was avoiding the Cuban example. Immediately after announcing the program, the aborted U.S. invasion of Cuba, at the Bay of Pigs in April 1961,⁶² exposed the real policy hidden behind the rhetoric of the Alliance.

In addition, in 1961 the initial stages of a Central American Defense Council (CONDECA) were being prepared. The Condeca agreement, signed in 1964, was the legal instrument that would link the armed forces of the region, with the exception of Costa Rica, to assure regional security.⁶³ U.S. military aid went for training and modernizing equipment to prepare the military for the expected internal security problems. In 1965, the U.S. Secretary of Defense claimed that 50 percent of the total aid for Latin America was for internal

⁶¹Webre, Duarte y El Partido, p. 55.

⁶²Mario Rodriguez, Central America, (New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1965), p. 1.

⁶³Walter LaFeber, Inevitable Revolutions, (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1984), p. 151.

security, and only 15 percent for civilian aid.⁶⁴ It is possible to conclude that the integration vision of the U.S. was not limited to economic policy, but extended to military policy as well.

Michael McClintock, in his detailed and authoritative study of the security system of El Salvador, discloses that U.S. embassy cables to Washington considered as early as 1961 the possibility of El Salvador falling to pro-Castro communist forces. Given such developments, an adequate security system was imperative. Recruitment, training, communications, and development of intelligence services, among other measures, were implemented.⁶⁵ In 1964, to complement the internal security of El Salvador, a Salvadoran military officer, General José Alberto Medrano, CIA asset for the region,⁶⁶ was in charge of coordinating a security intelligence service. The service's secretive nature did not prevent it from having a political component which operated openly under the name of Orden (Spanish for order), a paramilitary force designed to control the rural population. More importantly, Orden became a vehicle of the military dictatorship to organize the peasantry into

⁶⁴Polémica Internacional, Las Fuerzas Armadas de El Salvador, (San Salvador: Fapu, 1980), p. 21.

⁶⁵McClintock, The American Connection, pp. 200-204.

⁶⁶Daniel Siegel and Joy Hackel, "El Salvador: Counterinsurgency Revisited," Low-Intensity Warfare, Michael T. Klare and Peter Kornbluh, eds., (New York: Pantheon Books, 1988), p. 113.

a quasi-fascist organization with the double function of supporting the military's political party and of supporting the state terrorist policies of the 1970s.⁶⁷

In spite of the military implications of the Alliance for Progress and its rhetoric, it did offer significant economic aid. In 1961 El Salvador received 25 million dollars in loans from the U.S.⁶⁸ This aid had some impact in the reforms introduced by the Directorio during the time it was in power. A series of programs were initiated by the government in order to diversify production. New autonomous institutions were created, such as the National Association of Telecommunications, the Agency for Peasant Welfare, the National Housing Financial Agency, the National Association for Water and Sewer Systems, and the Institute for Industrial Promotion. In addition, a new system of financial credit and savings was implemented.⁶⁹ These measures were directed at modernizing economic production through the development of housing plans, modern highways, rural electrification, improvement of water systems, etc. In short, the modernization of the institutional apparatus of the state was realized. The reform program was implemented but it lacked the most important aspect from the view of the Alliance for Progress,

⁶⁷Polémica Internacional, Lo que El Pueblo Debe Saber Sobre Orden, (San Salvador: Fapu, no date), pp. 21- 29.

⁶⁸Webre, Duarte y El Partido, p. 59.

⁶⁹Castro Morán, La Función Política, p. 225.

the structural transformation of the agrarian structure. The oligarchy was not ready to negotiate in this sacred area. Dr. Jose Antonio Rodriguez Porth, a surrogate of the oligarchy, resigned from the Directorio. His action is given as an example of the landowning sector's intransigence concerning any proposals aimed at altering the system of land tenure.⁷⁰As a consequence, U.S. policy accommodated itself to the fundamental interest of the dominant classes in El Salvador, and the result was the impulse and development of a process of industrialization based in the import-substitution model under the Central American Common Market.⁷¹In the words of Tommie Sue Montgomery, this model of "establishing industries that produced goods that had previously been imported and were, by and large, capital-rather than labour intensive" resulted in more dependence on foreign investment.⁷²

In summary, during the early 1960s the economic initiative of the Alliance for Progress, with the integrationist instrument of the Central American Common Market, was characterized by a significant reform of the productive apparatus of the state, accompanied by a process

⁷⁰Ibid., p. 223, and Ritcher, "Social Classes," p. 117.

⁷¹Rafael Menjivar, "Crisis del Desarrollismo", El Salvador: Una Historia Sin Lecciones, (Costa Rica: FLACSO, 1988), p. 234.

⁷²Tommie Sue Montgomery, Revolution in El Salvador, (Boulder: Westview Press, 1982), p. 67.

of industrialization realized under the import-substitution model allowing multinational companies to operate free of taxes and, more importantly, to associate with national capital controlled by the oligarchy through the financial system.⁷³In fact, the predominant position of the oligarchy in the economic life of the country was not weakened by this process of industrialization. On the contrary, it was directed by them in alliance with foreign capital, as was the case with the partnership ventures with Esso, Kimberley Clark, Proctor & Gamble, Westinghouse, and others.⁷⁴The industrial sector in El Salvador grew impressively from 1961 to 1969, on average by 8.5 percent annually,⁷⁵producing during the mid-1960s chemicals, textiles, paper, and processed food for the entire Central American region.⁷⁶It rarely meant, however, the solution of the unemployment problem in the countryside as industrial investments was limited to urban centers.⁷⁷Also, because of the nature of the import-substitution model,

⁷³Centro de Investigación y Acción Social, El Salvador: Estado Oligarquico y Desarrollo Económico Social, (México, 1986), p. 36.

⁷⁴Armstrong and Shenk, El Salvador : The Face of Revolution, p. 46.

⁷⁵Centro de Investigación, El Salvador: Estado, p. 36.

⁷⁶Armstrong and Shenk, El Salvador: The Face of Revolution, p. 47.

⁷⁷Tommie Sue Montgomery, Revolution in El Salvador, p. 92.

industrialization was realized on the basis of the "labor-savings technology introduced by U.S. firms"⁷⁸

Given the limits of the industrialization process (in terms of not affecting the agrarian structure, and logically, maintaining the same order of things) the need for political stability was more urgent than ever. People started to move in massive numbers from the countryside to the cities, especially to San Salvador, hoping to find jobs and a better life. In 1969, thousands were living in new neighbourhoods without minimum services of water or electricity.⁷⁹ A new group called United Front of Revolutionary Action (FUAR), which appeared at the end of 1961, published a series of articles denouncing the demagogic manoeuvres of the Directorio in conjunction with the Alliance for Progress strategy, asserting that the Army had become an instrument of the imperialist forces and of the creole oligarchy, and that for the democratic forces and the popular sectors the only way for radical change was to gain power by force, as was the case in Cuba.⁸⁰

In order to establish some mechanism of wider participation by different political sectors in the political

⁷⁸Armstrong and Shenk, El Salvador The Face of Revolution, p. 47.

⁷⁹Ibid.

⁸⁰Dalton, El Salvador (Monografía), p. 124.

system, the military regime explored the possibility of establishing new political alliances. José Napoleón Duarte, the leader of the recently founded Christian Democratic Party (PDC), said that only months after the coup d'etat of January 1961, Colonels Portillo and Rivera members of the Directorio, offered his party all the cabinet posts and control of the Legislative Assembly if the PDC supported his candidacy for president, warning of the danger of communist victory in the next presidential elections in 1962. Duarte claimed that the party refused to collaborate and further argued that the military's willingness to allow real democracy was a precondition to resolving the political problems.⁸¹

Similarly, the military tried to get the political support of the Renovation Action Party (PAR),⁸² a party organized since the overthrow of the Martinez regime in 1944 and, in Enrique Baloyra's opinion, a perennial opposition party that apparently had the support of some moderate sectors of the dominant classes.⁸³ But again, the answer was negative. It is possible to assume that the intention of Colonel Rivera's efforts in his quest for political alliances was to legitimize the system.

⁸¹José Napoleón Duarte, Duarte: My Story, (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1986), p. 51.

⁸²Webre, Duarte y El Partido, p. 60.

⁸³Baloyra, El Salvador en Transición, p. 61.

Meanwhile, in the popular sectors, apart from the Revolutionary Front already mentioned, which was a creation of university students influenced by the Cuban Revolution and in a way a reflection of the popular movement that was organized to resist the attacks of the Lemus regime at the end of the 1950s, the situation seemed confused. In urban working class circles and middle class sectors, the strategy to follow in order to resist a new military regime that was in clear alliance with the U.S. was the subject of intense discussion. Apparently, the majority position favoured following the Cuban example, that is, to construct the armed nucleus that would carry the people to the revolution, discarding the organizational work with unions as of secondary importance. This uncertainty in strategy allowed the regime the opportunity to organize the workers. In 1964 the majority of workers were organized in the Salvadoran Confederation of Syndicates, controlled by the government.⁸⁴

In this situation, with the popular sectors dispersed, the parliamentary opposition almost ineffectual, and with all the ideological and practical support of the U.S., the military regime had a golden opportunity to create the political transition to a more consensual type of political system.⁸⁵ But instead of promoting the basis for a real democracy, meaning the possibility of creating a free

⁸⁴Menjivar, Formación, pp. 97-99.

⁸⁵Baloyra, El Salvador en Transición, p. 65.

political environment, allowing the gradual transition of power to the civilians and more importantly, returning the military to an institutional role, the opposite happened.

On 2 September 1961 the Directorio announced the formation of the National Conciliation Party (PCN), with the same characteristics as Osorio's PRUD. The military's intended vehicle to advance its new corporative interest derived from the strategic importance of the support that the U.S. was giving to El Salvador. Elections were announced for April 1962, and as was the norm in the political history of El Salvador, the candidate of the official party PCN, Colonel Julio Adalberto Rivera, won the elections by an absolute majority. The opposition parties refused to participate.⁸⁶

The political period of Colonel Julio Adalberto Rivera (1962-1967) was in general characterized by political stability due to the relative economic prosperity derived from the advantages the Salvadoran dominant class experienced with the Central American Common Market. Trade between participant countries increased by 32 percent annually,⁸⁷ favouring the more advanced economies of El Salvador, Guatemala and Costa Rica which had a proletarianized labour force and industrial base, to the disadvantage of Honduras and Nicaragua.⁸⁸ In the case of

⁸⁶Ibid, p. 66.

⁸⁷George Black, "Central America: Crisis in the Backyard," New Left Review, No. 135, September-October 1982, p. 11.

⁸⁸Salazar Valiente, "El Salvador, Crisis," p. 114.

El Salvador, 50 percent of its total manufactured production was by 1967 destined for export to the other Central American countries, and 25 percent of this total was exported to Honduras,⁸⁹ a constant source of friction between the two countries.

The relative economic stability allowed the military regime time to implement modifications of the juridical, political and ideological apparatus of the state. New labour tribunals were created and laws protecting salaries were promulgated. For example, it decreed payment for the seventh day of labour in a six day work week, meal provisions for rural workers, and the creation of a new labour legislation.⁹⁰ Political reforms were manifested in the creation of a new electoral law that allowed the representation of minority parties in the National Assembly.⁹¹ The Christian Democratic Party capitalized on the growing middle class sectors that the economic prosperity created. In the elections of 1964, the party won in thirty-seven municipalities and gained fourteen seats in the National Assembly.⁹²

⁸⁹Carias and Slutzky, La Guerra Inutil, p. 322.

⁹⁰Dalton, El Salvador (Monografía), pp. 121-122.

⁹¹White, El Salvador, p. 230.

⁹²Donald E. Schulz, "El Salvador: Revolution and Counterrevolution in The Living Museum," Revolution and Counterrevolution in Central America and the Caribbean, Donald E. Schulz and Douglas H. Graham, eds., (Boulder: Westview Press), p. 198.

In spite of all these reforms, the failure to modify the agricultural system and resolve the oppressive economic conditions of the peasant majority meant that Salvadoran society was structurally unaffected. Furthermore, no evidence of the majority's real political expression is found in this period. On the contrary, any protest activity within the dominated classes was discouraged through the occasional attacks by security forces against selective targets within the working class.⁹³

Nevertheless, by 1964 FUAR's strategic line of development of the armed nucleus was modified, and under difficult conditions organizational work among unions started to have some results. In October 1965, a Committee for Union Unity gave rise to a new and independent federation of unions, the United Federation of Unions of El Salvador (FUSS).⁹⁴ This organization formed the basis of what was to become a very strong union movement during the convulsive 1970s and 1980s.

The demands of this renovated working class movement were in the areas of housing, water, electricity, health, education, and especially, jobs. The industrialization process had created a solid urban proletariat, without resolving their most urgent needs. The result was an increase in street

⁹³White, El Salvador, p. 120.

⁹⁴Menjivar, Formación, pp. 98-99.

demonstrations. When Colonel Fidel Sanchez Hernández (1967-72) rose to power he encountered a militant working class.⁹⁵

For 1966 the FUSC had doubled its membership to 21 militant and independent unions. At the same time, the National Renovation Party (PAR), had reorganized and replaced the old and traditional leadership with younger members of the middle classes who had enormous prestige in the country.⁹⁶ Among them was Dr. Fabio Castillo, a member of the Civic-Military Junta that overthrew the regime of Colonel José María Lemus. The party had changed its platform, and for the election campaign of 1967 its main demand was the radical transformation of the economic and social structures of El Salvador.⁹⁷

The working class movement recovered from years of stagnation. In April 1967, a significant strike started in the steel factory of Zacatecoluca, situated in the South-Central part of the country. An unusual aspect of this strike was that it was coordinated in solidarity with simultaneous strikes by thousands of workers.⁹⁸

The year 1968 saw a period of intense activity by middle sectors, especially teachers and students, culminating with

⁹⁵Schulz, "Revolution," p. 199.

⁹⁶Kantor, Patterns, p. 122.

⁹⁷Ritcher, "Social Classes," p. 119.

⁹⁸Rafael Menjivar, El Salvador: El Eslabón más Pequeño, (San José, Costa Rica: Educa, 1980), p. 79.

a general strike of teachers organized by the National Association of Salvadoran Educators (ANDES-21 de Junio). More than 10,000 teachers invaded the offices of the Ministry of Education demanding better salaries. The strike again provoked the solidarity of political parties and unions. A general strike in solidarity with the teachers was declared, and more than 60,000 workers demonstrated in the streets of San Salvador.⁹⁹This strike was important in that the teachers became independent of the ideological control of the government.¹⁰⁰

The government confronted the strike in the traditional way--with violence. In the cities and in the countryside the new features of the internal security system were practised. Orden and the National Guard persecuted and killed strikers, as the security forces did in the cities. In Zacamil, a suburban working class neighbourhood of San Salvador, two union leaders were kidnapped and their mutilated bodies were found in Zacatecoluca.¹⁰¹It was becoming clear for the Salvadoran popular sectors that in order to obtain better living conditions and political changes, new methods of struggle were necessary.

In spite of that violence, people voted in the municipal and legislative elections of 1968. The results were a signal

⁹⁹Schulz, "Revolution," p. 199.

¹⁰⁰Dunkerley, The Long War, p. 69.

¹⁰¹Ritcher, "Social Classes," p. 120.

that the model of domination was in crisis again. The National Conciliation Party was able to maintain its majority in the National Assembly by a margin of only two members.¹⁰²

Additionally, the crisis was compounded by signs of weakness in the Central American Common Market. Honduras, the major recipient of Salvadoran manufactured products, argued that it was not receiving proportional benefits from the exchange of products.¹⁰³ In fact, the Salvadoran exports to Honduras were three times higher than Honduran exports to El Salvador.¹⁰⁴ Furthermore, Honduras always provided an escape valve for the Salvadoran population problems that were related to the issue of land tenure. Thomas P. Anderson, in his detailed study of the Salvadoran-Honduran relationship, recalls the historical pattern of Salvadoran emigration as early as 1895 with the Honduran banana industry's requirement for labour, the exploitation of mines in central Honduras in the 1910s, and the cultivation of cotton in the 1950s.¹⁰⁵ In 1969 more than 300,000 Salvadorans were living in Honduras.¹⁰⁶ This factor, combined with the imbalances caused by

¹⁰²Monteforte Toledo, Centro America, p. 81.

¹⁰³Castro Morán, La Función Política, p. 231.

¹⁰⁴Webre, Duarte y El Partido, p. 144.

¹⁰⁵Thomas Anderson, The War of the Dispossessed, pp. 71-73.

¹⁰⁶John E. Findling, Close Neighbors, Distant Friends, (Westport: Greenwood Press), p. 121.

the Central American Common Market, was the cause of public discontent and government preoccupation in Honduras.

Honduras had complained all along about the unequal character of the Common Market. As early as 1962, Honduras had refused to ratify the economic agreement, requesting special treatment due to its underdevelopment. By 1965 the Honduran demands were close to breaking the agreement, and it was not until 1966 that a solution was found, providing special treatment by fiscal incentives.¹⁰⁷ In addition, Honduras was having economic, political and social problems of its own.

Politically, the democratic trend initiated in Honduras in 1957 with the election of Dr. Ramon Villeda Morales, a moderate and reformist, was interrupted by a military coup d'etat in October 1963. The military imposed the presidency of Colonel Oswaldo Lopez Arellano, who, in fraudulent elections, became the president of Honduras in 1965.¹⁰⁸ Arellano personified the traditional military dictator who did not allow political expression. Under pressure from business sectors, he was driven to move against the Common Market initiative, since it was perceived as the origin of economic disadvantages in the Honduran economy. In fact, between 1960

¹⁰⁷Hansen, Central America, p. 62.

¹⁰⁸Findling, Close Neighbors, p. 130.

and 1967 the Honduran public debt increased to 195 million lempiras from 65 million.¹⁰⁹

In addition, the Honduran working class was not in a passive mood. In 1954 a massive strike mobilized about 35,000 workers and resulted in the legalization of trade unions.¹¹⁰ The political awareness of this sector was expressed in more militant ways by a general strike in 1968 in the north of the country. This strike forced the government of Lopez Arellano to decree a state of siege and it applied repressive measures to contain the workers' discontent. The imposition of a new tax by the government to alleviate the deficit problem provoked the strike.¹¹¹

Similarly, the Honduran peasantry was exercising enormous pressure on the government to deal with land claims and land invasions. The National Peasant Union, organized in 1963, had a reputation of being combative and radical. By 1967 it was directing massive land seizures as a way of pressuring the government to comply with the agrarian reforms enacted in 1962.¹¹²

¹⁰⁹Carias and Slutzky, La Guerra Inutil, p. 187.

¹¹⁰Steven Volk, "Honduras: On the Border of War," Revolution in Central America, Stanford Central American Action Network eds., (Boulder: Westview Press), p. 68.

¹¹¹Ritcher, "Social Classes," p. 125.

¹¹²Ibid, pp. 125-127.

As a consequence of these pressures, the military government of Lopez Arellano decided to divert attention from its own political problems by focusing on the issue of the Salvadoran residents in Honduras. In April 1969 the government issued a legal disposition requesting all Salvadorans to legalize their status and to abandon the land they had possessed.¹¹³ As a result of this legal request and the propaganda campaign mounted against Salvadoran people and products, animosity turned to violence. The Mancha Brava, a kind of paramilitary force, attacked Salvadorans, forcing the return of 11,000 displaced refugees to El Salvador by May 1969.¹¹⁴

Meanwhile, the Salvadoran internal situation was plagued with problems. Labour unrest that had been so intense in 1968, intensified during the first half of 1969. In this period there were more than ten major strikes resolved in the workers' favour.¹¹⁵ The struggle of the working class, along with students, teachers, university professors, opposition parties and peasants, culminated with massive demonstrations in celebration of the International Workers' Day on 1 May

¹¹³Anderson, The War of the Dispossessed, p. 92.

¹¹⁴Volk, "Honduras," p. 71.

¹¹⁵Schulz, "Revolution," p. 199.

1969, when thousands demonstrated in nineteen cities across El Salvador.¹¹⁶

Of course, the Salvadoran military had the means to resolve the problem by force, as was the norm. But an unexpected and dormant social actor was becoming visible at this conjuncture. The peasants had been in a lethargic state since the events of 1932, which is understandable when one considers the severity of the massacre and repression. That event had given a permanent suspicion of communist conspiracy to any sign of mobilization or political awareness among the peasants. Added to this particular stigma were the efforts of the dominant classes and of the military to maintain strict control over this strategic segment of society. In reality, the security system developed during the 1960s was fundamentally directed to control the peasantry by any means available. The creation and consolidation of Orden was precisely oriented to that end. It is worth noting that in 1967 President Fidel Sanchez Hernández declared himself general commander of Orden, and later in the same year called on the big landowners to support that organization as it was the guarantee against the malevolent forces of communism. In 1970, Orden was able to mobilize more than 100,000 peasants in support of the official party.¹¹⁷

¹¹⁶Ritcher, "Social Classes," p. 123.

¹¹⁷McClintock, The American Connection, pp. 206-207.

Orden's role was not limited to the support of the official party. Together with the national guard and army personnel it conducted civic campaigns to develop diverse projects benefiting the peasants, such as building bridges and water irrigation projects. Its fundamental goal, however, was political control and repression.¹¹⁸ In addition, the government developed a system of cooperatives as a pre-emptive device over the peasants' explosive potential. Accordingly, more than 111 cooperatives with over 21,000 members were functioning during the 1960s.¹¹⁹

The government's effort in the countryside was effective, but it was not uncontested. The miserable conditions of exploitation and poverty of the peasants had created awareness in some sectors of the Catholic Church of the need to alleviate these conditions. The same method of cooperative organization was implemented by an organization related directly to the church, the Fundacion Promotora de Cooperativas, which in the same period of the 1960s was able to organize 29 cooperatives with a membership of 7,493.¹²⁰

This church-oriented effort had some qualitative variables that are worth examining in light of the importance

¹¹⁸Ibid, p. 207.

¹¹⁹Walter Guerra, quoted by Mario Lungo, La Lucha de las Masas en El Salvador, (San Salvador: UCA Editores, 1987), p. 63.

¹²⁰Ibid.

that the church-peasant relationship had in regard to state control and revolutionary struggle in the 1970s. By 1963-64, a group called the Union of Christian Workers started to organize peasants in different regions of the country, and in 1965 they were able to organize the first congress of peasants, where the bases of a new organization were outlined. The Christian Federation of Salvadoran Peasants (F.E.C.C.A.S.) was born, and under its direction a second congress was celebrated in August 1968, where the demands were clearly different from the initial efforts of cooperativism. The federation discussed the right to organize unions and the perennial question of agrarian reform.¹²¹ Furthermore, the fact that FECCAS was able to mobilize peasants during May Day of 1969, in solidarity with the working class, students, teachers and university professors, was a clear signal to the dominant class that the model of domination had serious problems.¹²²

In the meantime, the persecution against Salvadorans in Honduras heightened. The Salvadoran media started a systematic campaign denouncing human rights violations against Salvadorans, in many cases publishing misleading information of cases of mutilation and of brutal treatment of the refugees.¹²³ There was a golden opportunity for the Salvadoran

¹²¹This discussion is taken from Mario Lungo, La Lucha de las Masas, p. 64.

¹²²Ritcher, "Social Classes," p. 123.

¹²³Anderson, The War of the Dispossessed, pp. 102-103.

government to direct attention away from internal political problems caused by the revival of the popular organizations. Of course, the Salvadoran government was not going to be humiliated by the Hondurans. On 25 June 1969 the national newspapers published a statement of the president Fidel Sanchez Hernández accusing the Hondurans of "violations, outrages, attacks and robberies."¹²⁴

The bellicose climate was exacerbated by the soccer matches between both countries in their quest for a berth in the World Cup Soccer tournament which would take place in Mexico City the next year. Both countries accused each other of mistreating the others' nationals. But as we have seen, both countries had their own serious political, economic, and social problems. So the propaganda and war-like climate were perhaps convenient for both countries. Politically it was an expeditious way of diverting the masses' attention from their chronic problems of poverty, unemployment and especially, lack of freedom and democracy.

On 26 June 1969, the Salvadoran government broke diplomatic relations with Honduras. In the words of Thomas Anderson, in his vivid account of the events: "The word of this rupture was broadcast to the Salvadoran people about eight o'clock in the evening, and in the capital even movie theatres stopped the film to make the announcement to crowds

¹²⁴Ibid., p. 104.

which immediately broke into wild cheers."¹²⁵ On 3 July 1969 the majority of political parties, the unions, the General Association of University Students (AGEUS), and the entire left, including the Communist Party, called on the Salvadoran people to close ranks with the military in defense of the honour of all Salvadorans.¹²⁶

The stage was set. The military would be transformed from oppressors to heroes.

The "Soccer War"

On 14 July 1969 the Salvadoran Air Force and the rest of the ground forces and security corps launched a massive attack against Honduras in what the international press labelled the "Soccer War." But as we have seen, soccer was not the reason for the armies' involvement in armed conflict. In the five days of fighting, 2,000 people, the majority Hondurans, were killed, and more than 100,000 Salvadorans became refugees.¹²⁷ The winner in both confrontations--soccer and military--were the Salvadorans. The consequences, though, were a different matter.

¹²⁵Ibid, p. 105.

¹²⁶Ritcher, "Social Classes," p. 130.

¹²⁷Don L. Etchison, The United States and Militarism in Central America, (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1975), p. 32.

The perception of winning a war is, in the majority of cases, a motive for jingoism, and the Salvadoran case was not an exception. In the words of one member of the Salvadoran military, Colonel Mariano Castro Morán, in the "war of the 100 hours all the Salvadoran people manifested in support of their armed forces and the most beautiful unity of our history was realized."¹²⁸In the same spirit, José Napoleón Duarte, leader of the Christian Democrats and mayor of San Salvador at the time, recalled a conversation with President Sanchez Hernández: "I told him: We'll organize a triumphant welcome, a parade and tribute to our nation's heroes at the national stadium." And he continues: "The Army came home to a grateful people, and one avenue leading to the stadium was renamed 'Boulevard of the Heroes.'"¹²⁹

In fact, this writer remembers that parades were celebrated in most important cities of El Salvador. As a teenager at the time, I recall the euphoria my friends and relatives felt with the enormous "accomplishment" of our army. I accompanied my uncle, Colonel Manuel Antonio Nuñez, to a welcoming parade in the city of San Miguel, 200 kms to the east of San Salvador. People were stopping us on the road to salute the colonel, and in the city, thousands of people were congregated in the central park, where the president of El Salvador, Colonel Sanchez Hernández, delivered a triumphant

¹²⁸Castro Morán, La Función Política, p. 232.

¹²⁹Duarte, My Story, pp. 65-66.

speech to the delighted crowds. In spite of all this euphoria, the economic conditions of the majority did not improve. On the contrary, the consequences of the war, as is the case in all wars, affected the economic, social and political structures of the country.

Politically, the military regime clearly was able to articulate consensus around the issue of the war, and in relative terms, attained a significant level of legitimacy for the first time. Apart from the population's strong show of enthusiasm and admiration for the military, there were more concrete examples of support. There was no evidence of the heated labour and popular confrontations that existed before the war. On the contrary, in the general elections for municipal and legislative seats in March 1970, the official party, the National Conciliation Party (PCN), had tremendous success. It won nearly 60 percent of the votes, while the Christian Democrats, who had organized the heroes' welcome, received only 28 percent, reducing its number of mayors from 78 to 8.¹³⁰ In the National Assembly the PCN won 34 of the 52 seats.¹³¹ For the first time since 1931, electoral fraud was not necessary to win the elections; jingoism was enough.

This relative political legitimacy for the regime was devastating not only for the traditional political parties,

¹³⁰Philip L. Russell, El Salvador in Crisis, (Austin: Colorado River Press, 1984), p. 47.

¹³¹Schulz, "Revolution," p. 199.

as was evident from the result of the elections, but for the leftist movement as well. The General Association of Students and the unions' support of the military regime was seen by the left as proof of the erroneous strategic line of the Salvadoran Communist Party (PCS), and some militants questioned the party's reformist approach to power and the means of obtaining it.¹³² Robert Leiken, in his study of the Salvadoran left, asserts that: "By the early 1970s most of the emerging leaders of the Salvadoran revolutionary movement regarded the PCS as having sold out to the Salvadoran establishment. They attacked it as chauvinist for supporting El Salvador in the war against Honduras, as reformist for opposing revolutionary armed struggle, and as revisionist for its fidelity to Moscow."¹³³

In fact, a division within the ranks of the Communist Party appeared. Salvador Cayetano Carpio, a baker and influential leader of the party, decided to leave, arguing his opposition to the policies of the party, especially the support of the war against Honduras.¹³⁴ This split led to the formation of the Popular Forces of Liberation (FPL), which

¹³²Lungo, La lucha de las masas, p. 62.

¹³³Robert S. Leiken, "The Salvadoran Left," Central America: Anatomy of Conflict, Robert S. Leiken ed., (New York: Pergamon Press, 1984), p. 114.

¹³⁴Armstrong and Shenk, El Salvador: The Face of Revolution, p. 66.

was to become one of the most powerful armed guerrilla groups in the next decade.

At the same time, a group of young Christians was reevaluating their relation with the Christian Democratic Party. Duarte, again, is a useful source. He mentions that the electoral defeat of 1970 forced a reexamination of the party's policies. The support given to the regime for the war did not result in more freedom and democracy, he explains, quite the opposite. But his worries were more serious, concerned as he was with the radicalization of a faction within the party. "Our youth were angry. They would push harder on agrarian reform, and some were preparing for armed revolution," he affirmed.¹³⁵

Duarte was apparently correct. According to Fermán Cienfuegos, one of the leaders of the guerrilla movement of the 1970s, in his analysis of the origins of the revolutionary movement in El Salvador, the crisis of the Communist Party was reduced to two issues: the armed struggle as the correct way for revolution, and the party's incorrect stance in supporting the war against Honduras.¹³⁶ This discussion was at the origins of the two dissident factions within the party: Carpio's faction and Cienfuegos's group, which Cienfuegos claims was part of a working class and intellectual nucleus. Cienfuegos

¹³⁵Duarte, My Story, p. 67.

¹³⁶Fermán Cienfuegos. Veredas de la Audacia: Historia del FMLN, (San Salvador: Ediciones Roque Dalton, no date), p. 13.

explains that as leader of one of the factions, he met Cayetano Carpio and Shafick Handal, the leader of the Communist Party, on 24 December 1969, where it was decided to start the armed struggle.¹³⁷ Furthermore, Cienfuegos confirms Duarte's assertion when he explains: "There is a third group that decided to start armed struggle, and it does not come from the Communist Party, but from the youth section of the Christian Democrats...It was the directorate of The Revolutionary Front of University Social Christians, the university wing of the Christian Democratic Party. Our faction and this group started to meet and discuss the issue of the armed struggle".¹³⁸

Consequently, if on the one hand the military regime was able to obtain a significant degree of legitimacy as a result of the war, there was also, on the other hand, an unforeseen result, that is the firm decision of some groups to start an armed struggle. This decision would have costly political results for the military and for the dominant classes in the forthcoming years.

If the political results of the war were complex, the economic and social ones were dramatic. Honduras's withdrawal from the Central American Common Market was the most immediate

¹³⁷Fermán Cienfuegos. Estrategia de una Lucha Popular, (San Salvador: Resistencia Nacional, 1982), pp. 1-2.

¹³⁸Cienfuegos, Veredas, p. 14.

economic consequence of the war. This lucrative market of more than 23 million dollars for Salvadoran industry disappeared.¹³⁹ Furthermore, Honduras prohibited the transit of Salvadoran goods through its territory, blocking the commerce between El Salvador, Costa Rica, and Nicaragua. In addition, Honduras closed the door for any immigration from El Salvador.¹⁴⁰ As for the material costs of the war, the Salvadoran government spent 20 million dollars in the five days of confrontation.¹⁴¹

Socially, more than 130,000 people returned to El Salvador, and as was to be expected, the Salvadoran government had tremendous difficulties dealing with this new pressure, given the perennial problem of land tenure. The popular sectors were the most affected by the war. No programs aimed at reabsorbing refugees were developed, thus aggravating the structural crisis of the country.¹⁴²

In summary, the political history of El Salvador from 1948 to 1969 was complex and contradictory. The intended pattern of modernizing the state, initiated by the Osorio

¹³⁹Montgomery, Revolution in El Salvador, p. 82.

¹⁴⁰Russell, El Salvador in Crisis, p. 47.

¹⁴¹Montgomery, Revolution in El Salvador, p. 82.

¹⁴²Steffen W. Schmidt, El Salvador: America's Next Vietnam, (Salisbury, North Carolina: Documentary Publications, 1983), p. 54.

regime and completed by the Rivera government, had the advantage of being developed in a relatively peaceful atmosphere. The complexities of the period were provoked by external events. The Cuban Revolution awakened American attention to El Salvador. This attention was reflected in two different areas. In the economic and political sphere, the Alliance for Progress contributed to relative industrialization of the Salvadoran economy, without affecting the basic social relation in the agrarian structure, and at the same time allowed the military regime to experiment with some liberalization of the political system. The reemergence of the opposition parties was a concrete result of this policy. The complexities of the economic integration through the Central American Common Market were evident in the war between El Salvador and Honduras. Perhaps the major obstacle to this continued economic experiment was the reluctance of the Honduran industrial sector to operate under the same integrationist policies that were detrimental to their economic interests.

Another policy developed during this period as a result of the Cuban Revolution was the national security approach. The Salvadoran government developed, with the assistance of the U.S., a sophisticated system of political control through the modernization of equipment and training of El Salvador's security forces. Orden became an additional social and paramilitary force in the regime's support. This strategy paid

dividends to the dominant class as the working-class and other social groups threatened it in the middle 1960s by demanding a real opening of the political system.

Finally, the war between El Salvador and Honduras was an important event in the collapse of the Central American Common Market, the legitimation of the regime and of the armed forces, and the decision of some radical groups to start the armed struggle as a strategy to acquire political power in El Salvador.

Chapter 3 - On the Road to Civil War, 1969-1979

The military's legitimacy after the war with Honduras gradually eroded with the electoral frauds of 1972 and 1977. As a result, the armed left gained a significant level of legitimacy. This process developed in such a contradictory way that the state's efforts to maintain the status quo only had the opposite effect, that is, it helped give legitimacy to the armed left and open the confrontation for control of the state. This was a transitional period where the viability of the regime was challenged by a popular movement. In spite of all the state terror and other means of containment applied by the military, such as the agrarian reform in 1976, nullified by the oligarchy, and the cooptation of the popular sectors, these measures were insufficient to control the revolutionary ferment of the dominated classes. For the first time in the political history of the country, the pattern of domination came to an abrupt halt with the military coup of 1979, when a new historical phase was opened.

As we have seen, the political situation before the hostilities with Honduras started was unstable. The working and middle-class were in a combative mood, striking, marching, demonstrating, and even invading public properties, as for example, when the teachers' organization occupied the Ministry of Education. The mobilization of the peasants and

the incorporation of a small sector of the Catholic Church through the base communities model emerging from the theology of liberation were new ingredients in the political context, perhaps fundamental ones in light of the struggles of this period.

This period is a contradictory one because its uneven development contains elements of unity and disunity of the military and of the popular movement. In its synthesis, it contains the dichotomy of legitimacy and crisis. The complexity of this situation has its origin in the war with Honduras. Its consequences legitimized the military. At the same time it created the conditions for the radical development of the popular movement, which at the end of the period, through the development of armed struggle and the combination of legal and extra-legal activities, had acquired a significant level of legitimacy. The result was the violent struggle for power. A system that based its domination on state violence was challenged by violent means. The permanent structural crisis of the system became an organic one. The dominated tried to assert themselves by using power in order to constitute a new historical block, which implies that they can become the fundamental and hegemonic class.

As we have shown, the war with Honduras gave the military regime unexpected legitimacy as direct rulers of the country for the first time in its history. This legitimacy, however, had a price. The return of the Salvadoran refugees from

Honduras, the closing of the border, which blocked the movement of people and goods not only to Honduras but also to Costa Rica and Nicaragua, as well as the logical result of the collapse of the Central American Common Market, are events that required a high level of structural adaptability for any country to cope with, and even more for a system like the Salvadoran one, based on an unequal economic structure and a coercive political style.

The return of more than 100,000 Salvadorans from Honduras forced the government to adopt a policy of relocation, which consisted of dispersing all refugees over the territory without developing any settlement programs to alleviate the food, clothing, and land problems of this new population.¹The result was more pressure for land in the countryside. Perhaps this situation was what made it possible for the Legislative Assembly to convoke, for the first time, in January 1970 a Congress of Agrarian Reform.²However, no concrete results were achieved.

In spite of all the problems associated with the war, the most remarkable political development was the impressive electoral victory of the official party (PCN) in the municipal and legislative elections in March 1970. This event, and the

¹Ricardo Sol, Para entender El Salvador, (San José, Costa Rica: Departamento Ecumenico de Investigaciones, 1980), p. 45.

²Segundo Montes, El Agro Salvadoreño (1973-1980), (San Salvador: UCA Editores, 1986), pp. 42-43.

apparent consensual spirit then existing, could have allowed the military the opportunity to develop a more competitive and open political system based on freedom of organization and expression for all social classes.

Indeed, President Sanchez Hernández's agrarian reform probably hinted in that direction. The Congress of Agrarian Reform contemplated not only the issue of land tenure but also the key issue of the peasantry's right to organize, a right that was denied by law. The popular sectors and political parties supported this initiative of the government, arguing that if the peasants were permitted to organize the agrarian reform could be a success. At the same time, they told the government that to create a real agrarian reform the military and the oligarchy would have to be neutralized.³

In November 1970 President Sanchez Hernández signed a decree promulgating a new Law of Irrigation, aimed at making marginal land available to the peasants, an act that would displease the oligarchy and cool its support of the government.⁴ The oligarchy was disturbed by the effects of the Congress of Agrarian Reform. The promulgation of this law was the culmination of the inconveniences provoked by a government that was acting, in the eyes of this sector, against its interests. It is very likely that the government's actions reflected its own sense of independence in its relationship

³Webre, Duarte y el partido, pp. 164-165.

⁴McClintock, The American Connection, p. 162.

with the conservative power, probably as a result of its popularity after the electoral victory of March 1970.⁵

The conservative sectors became convinced that the official party, PCN, was no longer the best alternative to defend their interests in the political arena. In the early months of 1971, the Salaverria family, one of the oligarchy's most prominent and influential members which was directly involved in the PCN's leadership, left the party and concentrated its efforts on the creation of an alternative party. The United Independent and Democratic Front (FUDI) was formed under the leadership of general José Alberto Medrano, a war hero, CIA agent and founder of Orden. In the words of Baloyra, the connection between the oligarchy, paramilitary groups, and security forces that crystallised in this party would not be limited to the electoral campaigns of 1971-72,⁶ but would have an important role in the tumultuous years ahead.

In addition to this significant dissent within the official party, the opposition parties were re-evaluating their strategy for the 1972 presidential elections. The most important opposition party, the Christian Democratic Party (PDC), badly beaten in the 1970 municipal elections, proposed an alliance with two other opposition parties in order to

⁵Baloyra, El Salvador in Transición, p. 70.

⁶Ibid., p. 71.

present a united front against the military.⁷ Accordingly, under the leadership of the Christian Democrats, a coalition, the National Opposition Union (UNO), was organized. The National Revolutionary Movement (MNR), a small organization formed by intellectuals under the leadership of prominent lawyer Guillermo Manuel Ungo, the National Democratic Union (UDN), formed by former members of the now illegal Action of Renovation Party (PAR), and members of the Communist Party participated in this coalition.⁸

While the political arena was becoming contested, other events were configuring a different kind of competition. On 11 February 1971 Ernesto Regalado Dueñas, descendent of former Salvadoran president General Tomas Regalado Dueñas (1898-1903) and prominent member of the most powerful family of the country, was kidnapped. His body was found in a suburb of San Salvador seven days later. Because of the victim's prominence, the crime shocked the nation. The government immediately associated the event with the National University, a place where, the accusation went, the Communist conspiracy originated. A new organization called "The Group" was accused. This organization supposedly harboured young Marxists and young Christian Democrats.⁹ According to Michael McClintock, President Sanchez Hernández denounced groups of the extreme

⁷Duarte, My Story, p. 67.

⁸Russell, El Salvador in Crisis, p. 47.

⁹Schmidt, El Salvador America's Next Vietnam, pp. 68-69.

left as responsible.¹⁰ But the author suggests that the evidence shows that the crime was committed by either general Jose Alberto Medrano or the security forces, due to signs of torture found on the victim's body. Moreover, at the time of the kidnapping, General Medrano had killed a security officer who other sources confirmed was Regalado's security guard.¹¹ In fact, the case of Regalado Duenas, as it was known in El Salvador, was confusing, and the general public did not accept the government's version. On the contrary, the public commonly believed that the government was somehow involved.¹²

According to Fermán Cienfuegos, one of the founders of the accused group, this kidnapping was in reality the first independent action of a group that had separated from the Communist Party, and as he recounts: "We decided to realize the first historic kidnapping in the country, to take as prisoner the head of the oligarchy, Ernesto Regalado Dueñas.... Because the operation was not successful, ... we had to live clandestinely due to the repression, and this radicalized us. Here is where the history started. From the beginning things became critical, because we had struck at the oligarchy's heart, and it [the oligarchy] answered just as

¹⁰McClintock, The American Connection, p. 166.

¹¹Ibid., pp. 167-168.

¹²Alfredo Parada Jr, "Secuestro y Asesinato de Ernesto Regalado Dueñas," Reportajes, No. 30, 1988, pp. 1-10.

strongly as well".¹³And he continues: "The shift in the war happened with two operations that took place in 1972. The first one on March 2 had the goal of taking two machine-guns from the two national guards at the Children's Hospital.... This action was successful because we took the machine-guns, one guard was killed....The other operation was carried out by the FPL¹⁴and in that... a working class leader, Mauricio Gonzalez Dominguez, was killed".¹⁵Although these last events seemed irrelevant, when one considers El Salvador's violent history, the symbolism establishes these groups' determination in using the armed struggle as the strategy to take power.

Besides the FPL, the "group" that killed Regalado Dueñas, emerged under the name of the People's Revolutionary Army (ERP). As one of the leaders expressed, it was a "chaotic organization... composed of different groups with different strategies, but sharing the desire to promote armed struggle in El Salvador".¹⁶

¹³Cienfuegos, Veredas, p. 25.

¹⁴Cienfuegos is referring to the Popular Liberation Forces (FPL), the other group separated from the Communist Party, under the leadership of Marcial Cayetano Carpio, a very important leader in the violent struggles of the years ahead.

¹⁵Ibid., p. 26.

¹⁶Joaquin Villalobos interviewed by Mario Rodriguez, quoted by Armstrong and Shenk, El Salvador: The Face of Revolution, p. 67.

While the armed struggle strategy was in its infancy, the radicalization of popular sectors showed signs of recovery. Again, the teachers called for a national strike in July 1971, and again the support of workers, peasants and students was massive, to the point of attacking public buildings in the capital. Popular discontent was related to the regime's incapacity to resolve the issues affecting the peasantry, as President Sanchez Hernández had promised in the 1967 electoral campaign.¹⁷In fact, the regime had only attempted to address agrarian reform, and as we have seen that provoked the oligarchy's anger.

The government's action dissatisfied the oligarchy. But the murder of one of their own, the industrialist Regalado Duenas, was in their view, the clearest sign that guerrilla warfare was on their front step. The government's incrimination of the Christian Democratic Party in the murder was evidence enough in their eyes, of an alliance of extremists with the legal political parties. In oligarchic circles, this warranted taking strong actions against otherwise tolerated parties.¹⁸The heat of the electoral campaign for the 1972 presidential elections was evident. The political system was going to be the subject of a real test in February 1972.

¹⁷McClintock, The American Connection, pp. 162-164.

¹⁸Ibid, p. 168.

The Electoral Fraud

Electoral fraud in the political history of El Salvador is the norm rather than the exception. In fact, with the exception of the 1931 elections, when Arturo Araujo was elected president, and the 1970 elections, at the height of the military's popularity following their military victory against Honduras, fraud and manipulation were a constant in Salvadoran politics.

Guillermo Manuel Ungo was a social democrat and the vice-presidential candidate for the coalition National Opposition Union (UNO), which was composed of his own party, the National Revolutionary Movement (MNR), as well as the Communist Party and the Christian Democratic Party. Referring to the electoral fraud, he said: "El Salvador's history is filled with examples of this type of fraudulent exercise. It must not be forgotten that voting is compulsory in El Salvador and that the regime used all of its propaganda resources to accuse those who would not vote of being subversives."¹⁹

The political developments which preceded the February 1972 elections had some characteristics worthy of analysis. By September 1971 the UNO coalition had been organized, and

¹⁹Guillermo Manuel Ungo, "The People's Struggle," Crisis And Opportunity: U.S. Policy in Central America and the Caribbean, Mark Falcoff and Robert Royal eds., (Washington, D.C., Ethics and Public Policy Center, 1984), pp. 28-29.

after lengthy negotiations between the political parties involved, a program was announced. The political platform contained clear reference to the necessity of agrarian reform in order to change the large estate composition of the land structure. Furthermore, the coalition blamed the oligarchy, imperialism, and the official party as the main source of El Salvador's problems.²⁰ The fact that for the first time in the country's political history, three different political parties were able to form a coalition to face the government was a key event. Logically, the expectations of the population increased. The coalition's presidential candidate, Jose Napoleon Duarte, had the charisma and popularity to lead the people, and in his 6 years as mayor of San Salvador had proven to be effective, favouring the majority during his administration.²¹ The electoral campaign motivated the parties, and large public meetings were held everywhere. The popular mood was confident. People thought that finally El Salvador was going to change. The popular expression "Con Duarte aunque no me harte," which means "with Duarte even without food," reflected the majority's decision to participate in the political system and decide its own destiny. At this time, the armed struggle, still in its embryonic stage, was a non issue.

²⁰Webre, Duarte y el partido, pp. 201-202.

²¹Armstrong and Shenk, El Salvador: The Face of Revolution, p. 51.

In reality, the environment conducive to this election was an expression of what I believe are the democratic dreams of freedom and liberty of the majority of Salvadorans. It was only a matter of a clear strategic vision of the dominant classes to allow these dreams to become reality, and of the military to return to an institutional role, where they belonged, which was required to construct a different country. But in El Salvador, even dreaming is prohibited. Future events would demonstrate that in order to develop a democratic system in a country like El Salvador, divided in antagonistic classes, dreams were not enough.

At the opposite end of the political spectrum, the military, in keeping with tradition, selected as its candidate the incumbent president's choice. Consequently, Fidel Sanchez Hernandez hand-picked as his successor Colonel Arturo Armando Molina, a candidate whom the oligarchy considered too soft to deal with the crisis facing the country.²²

Consistent with that perception, the oligarchy decided to run its own candidate, general Jose Alberto Medrano, a decision which probably reflected the divisions existing within the official party and, of course, the oligarchy's profound suspicion that things were getting out of control. Furthermore, there was the spectre of Chile. In September 1970 a coalition of leftist parties had won the elections in that country, bringing to power Salvador Allende, the first elected

²²Ibid, p. 60.

Marxist president in Latin America.²³ For the Salvadoran oligarchy, communism was knocking at the door.

Apparently, these events as well as the internal divisions in the official party and the enormous popularity of the opposition coalition, assured the election's outcome. The war fever was gone, the popular sectors were ready for change. On 20 February 1972 elections were celebrated in a festive atmosphere. Massive voter turnout was a sign that the population's expectations were high. Early in the evening of February 22, the Central Election Council announced the astonishing opposition lead.²⁴ The people were attentive to their radios and as soon the results became official, the opposition's victory was a reality. It was the advent of a new era.

On 25 February 1972 the Electoral Council, claiming that the results released earlier were a mistake, gave victory to Colonel Arturo Armando Molina, the official candidate of the National Conciliation Party (PCN). In fact, as a result of the electoral fraud, national reconciliation would be elusive for years to come.

Nonetheless, the fraud taught Salvadorans an important lesson. It was possible to defeat the official machinery of the state at its own game, the electoral arena. What was

²³Webre, Duarte y el partido, pp. 185-186.

²⁴Armstrong and Shenk, El Salvador: The Face of Revolution, p. 62.

impossible was to defend the electoral victory and to impose it. The issue of armed struggle, the problem of power and how to get it, seemed less academic. The regime had exhausted the last trace of legitimacy obtained after the war with Honduras. The necessary consensus to make the military regime viable was shattered. A new era opened in El Salvador, although it was qualitatively different from what one would have predicted, given the electoral campaign and its initial results.

From Molina to Romero, Reforms and Polarization. (1972-1977)

The transition of power from Sanchez Hernández to Arturo Molina was partly a reflection of the difficult times ahead. At two o'clock in the morning, on 25 March 1972, Colonel Manuel Antonio Nuñez, with a group of soldiers under his command, approached Sanchez Hernández's residence in a San Salvador suburb. After disarming the security guards, Colonel Nuñez captured the president, who at the time was accompanied by the Chief of the General Staff, Colonel Carlos Humberto Romero, who later became Molina's minister of defense and president of El Salvador from 1977 to 1979. Both were taken to the San Carlos garrison, where they were kept in custody after being informed of the coup d'etat against their regime.²⁵

²⁵This writer interviewed Colonel Nunez after his return to El Salvador from Panama, where he had been exiled after the mediation efforts of General Omar Torrijos, the head of state

The coup d'etat was under the leadership of Colonel Benjamin Mejia, a young officer belonging to a group of military officers²⁶ calling themselves the constitutionalist tendency of the armed forces. It was the first time that a qualitative division was evident in the military structure, and, of course, that was an unexpected addition to the regime's legitimacy problems.

The coup d'etat failed when the uprising was attacked by forces loyal to the government. More than two hundred people were killed, some civilians but the majority soldiers and officials belonging to the insurgent group. The leaders of the attempted coup were exiled, among them the candidate who won the popular election for president, José Napoleón Duarte, who

of that country and intimate friend of the colonel. In that interview Colonel Nunez expressed his motives. Two aspects were mentioned as fundamental: Colonel Nunez was disillusioned because he had not been promoted by Sanchez Hernandez. The colonel considered himself a war hero in the confrontation against Honduras. He was commander of a battalion that invaded Honduran territory and captured several towns in 1969. Secondly, the most important one was that, in his view, the Armed Forces were going in a direct confrontation against the people, and that the electoral fraud of February 1972 had made the government illegitimate. Consequently, the only way to return to the constitutionality of the government and to recover the prestige of the armed forces was to overthrow the illegal government and call national elections in a constitutional climate.

²⁶Castro Morán, La Función Política, p. 235.

in the midst of the confrontation appealed on radio for Salvadorans to support the military uprising.²⁷

In spite of all the events, Colonel Molina assumed the presidency on 1 July 1972. It was clear from the start that his administration was hampered. He came to power under the cloud of fraud, his official party was divided, the traditional unity of the armed forces was in doubt. In addition, the oligarchy had little confidence in Molina's capabilities.

But if there were any doubts about Molina's intentions, they were soon dissipated. On 10 July 1972, in what appeared as a move to clearly indicate who was in command, President Molina ordered the invasion of the National University. A traditional target of the oligarchy as the centre of subversion and communism, the university was occupied by security and military forces, who captured all those suspicious of anti-government activities and expelled foreign professors.²⁸

The National University was an institution with an interesting tradition of opposition and, in the coercive environment of Salvadoran politics, an oasis of freedom denouncing the oppressive conditions of the country. Founded in 1841, it obtained autonomy in 1871. That autonomy was exercised historically in a literal manner. As early as 1897

²⁷Duarte, My Story, pp. 80-81.

²⁸Montgomery, Revolution in El Salvador, p. 88.

the university had been closed by the government because of its criticism of the national administration. By 1939 the government of dictator General Maximiliano Hernández Martínez abolished university autonomy in order to control it. These efforts proved short-lived. By 1944 the university, through its combative students, had an instrumental role in organizing the general strike that overthrew Martínez.²⁹In essence, Molina's actions were pre-emptive. In his view, closing the university eliminated a source of protest and dissent against his regime. At the same time, it sent a message to the oligarchy that he had the ability to control the country.

Indeed, Molina decided to impose order and control. By February 1973 his Minister of Defense, General Carlos Humberto Romero, announced the discovery of a communist plan to destabilize the government. As a result, working-class and opposition leaders, as well as members of the Christian Democratic Party, were deported.³⁰Repression spiralled. All means of expressing opposition were closed. The political parties were in disarray, and the most important one, the Christian Democrats, with Duarte and other members in exile, was unable to devise any strategy to face the uncertainty provoked by the repression.

²⁹El Universitario, Vida y Lucha, (San Salvador: Universidad de El Salvador, 1982), pp. 6-7.

³⁰McClintock, The American Connection, pp. 171-172.

One can assume that in the prevailing conditions of repression a vacuum for organizing the popular sectors existed. The traditional means of representation in the political system were severely affected by the electoral fraud. The military seemed incapable of offering innovative solutions to the crisis. So the long-standing social problems of El Salvador were met by repression. Consequently, the organizational vacuum needed to be filled.³¹ The answer to that problem was a radical departure from the past.

As early as 1964 groups of Christians were ministering to and organizing the peasantry in several countries in Latin America as part of a commitment to the poor.³² This effort had a tremendous impact, at least from a doctrinal view, on the Conference of Latin American Bishops held in Medellin, Colombia, in 1968. In this event, the principles of equality, education for all, and better living conditions for the oppressed majorities were adopted as fundamental to the pastoral work with the poor in Latin America. And more importantly, in directing special attention to the peasantry, the documents of Medellin were clear that the just promotion of the peasants "would not be viable if an authentic and urgent agrarian reform of the structures and of the agrarian policies was not in place." Moreover, they reaffirmed the

³¹Baloyra, El Salvador in Transición, p. 74.

³²Phillip Berryman, Liberation Theology, (New York: Pantheon Books, 1987), p. 34.

right of peasants and workers to unionize.³³The Christian base communities emerged as instruments of organization to fulfil this new theological role. Penny Lernoux, in her work on the Catholic Church in Latin America, argued that throughout history the behaviour of the Church and governments in relation to the poor was similar. She affirmed that in the educational system for example, most of the Catholic schools served the educational needs of the rich, and inculcated the social and moral values established for the traditional order. But the Medellin Conference reversed that perspective by establishing the need to work and to create new programs for the illiterate masses, where educators became educated and the students became masters of their own destiny.³⁴The crisis in the countryside presented the perfect environment to implement this new theological role for the Salvadoran Church.

From 1972 to 1974 some evangelical projects were developed near the north-central towns of Suchitoto and Aguilares. These projects resulted in a network of base communities, each with its own leaders, who were addressing the most urgent needs of the people. In the conditions of extreme poverty and repression prevalent in the countryside,

³³UCA Editores, Los Textos de Medellin y el Proceso de Cambio en America Latina, (San Salvador: UCA Editores, 1977), p. XII.

³⁴Penny Lernoux, Cry of The People, (New York: Penguin Books, 1982), p. 40.

the base communities did not limit their demands to the basic needs of their members. The problem of land tenure, social justice, and employment³⁵ became part of the language of a sector that, traditionally, was a pillar of the system. It is worth noting that the paramilitary organization Orden had operated in the countryside since 1967, sponsored by the official party, PCN, and having as its main goal controlling the peasantry and organizing them in support of the government's policies. In this regard, the Church's pastoral work after the Medellin Conference was likely to have a fundamental impact on El Salvador, which was in a profound political crisis.

Consequently, the regime's answer to these initiatives of the church and the base communities was to intensify repression. A wave of repression and persecution followed. Paramilitary groups started to kill union leaders, peasants and intellectuals. Of particular importance were the massacres of Chinamequita, Cayetana and Tres Calles, three towns situated in the north-central part of the country, where in late 1974 and early 1975, more than fifty people were killed and more than 200 wounded after days of occupation by the army and paramilitary forces.³⁶ The need to find different forms of

³⁵A. Douglas Kincaid, "Peasants into Rebels: Community and Class in Rural El Salvador," Society For Comparative Study of Society and History, vol. 29, 1987, pp. 484-485.

³⁶Schulz, "Revolution," p. 202.

struggle and new methods of organization was becoming a matter of survival for the popular sectors.

By this time, it was perfectly clear that the traditional system of legitimation through the electoral game had suffered irreversible damage. The government was implementing a strategy of security, ignoring all the formal legalities and structures of participation in the system. But the strategy was not limited to the security issue. The economic area needed to develop some strategic initiatives. After all, the Central American Common Market was already dead.

A new strategy of accumulation was implemented and directed to the external market with traditional exports and new products of exportation. This strategy required modernization of the productive structure in order to succeed in a more competitive market.³⁷ The state allowed foreign firms to operate tax-free. To that effect, areas of development were created, such as San Bartolo, in Ilopango, where a diverse group of transnational companies were operating, such as Dataran International, with 900 workers, and Bourns International, with 142 workers, both founded in 1975 with U.S. investment.³⁸ Furthermore, the import of raw materials, technological instruments, and machinery was allowed tax-

³⁷Mario Lungo, El Salvador 1981-1984: La Dimensión Política de la Guerra, (San Salvador: UCA Editores, 1986), p. 31.

³⁸Menjivar, Formación, pp. 108-109.

free.³⁹Likewise, in order to make this strategy work, the regime strictly controlled any union activity or protest in this industrial belt on the outskirts of San Salvador.

Concurrent with this economic initiative, the tourism industry was promoted. The natural beauty of beaches, volcanoes, and exotic mountains was marketed under the slogan that El Salvador was "the Country of The Smile." In 1975 El Salvador organized the Miss Universe pageant and announced the spending of \$30 million U.S to hold the event.⁴⁰The official explanation justifying such an extravagant expense in a country where poverty was rampant was that Salvadorans would be dignified.

Both economic initiatives required a stable political climate. As far as foreign investment was concerned, transnational capital was unlikely to flow to a country in the midst of a crisis, a fact that was also true for the tourist industry. In that regard, the efforts of the Molina regime were directed at maintaining security and order. This is probably the rationale that explains the government's reaction to any popular opposition.

Let us take for example the student demonstration opposing the Miss Universe pageant. On the afternoon of 30

³⁹Robert Armstrong, "El Salvador: Why Revolution," Revolution In Central America, Stanford Central America Action Network, eds., (Boulder: Westview press Inc), 1983, p. 54.

⁴⁰Montgomery, Revolution in El Salvador, p. 89.

July 1975 the students' association organized from the National University campus a demonstration to denounce the pageant and its accompanying expenses. The march was peaceful but very noisy. The regime's answer was to conduct a military operation that involved security and paramilitary forces, military personnel, tanks, and heavy machine-guns. In a disproportionate show of force, they encircled the demonstrators and opened fire indiscriminately, killing more than 30 students. Several others disappeared.⁴¹

This criminal action had special significance in light of the existing crisis. First, the message to students was clear. Do not intervene in political protest or face the consequences. For the general public, the message was no less clear. If university students, who had a tradition of protest, were violently repressed, workers, teachers, and others could expect the same if they dared challenge the regime. In fact, as was pointed out earlier, the massacre of peasants in Tres Calles, Chinamequita and Cayetana was the most explicit message directed to these sectors.

In spite of all the repressive acts, the result was not quite what the government expected. On the contrary, the groups who had started the armed struggle at the beginning of the decade filled the vacuum left by the political parties. The legitimacy of the armed left increased at the expense of the regime's.

⁴¹McClintock, The American Connection, p. 173.

The Armed Left

The ideological struggle within the Communist Party brought about by the Cuban Revolution and the Communists' policy of supporting the war against Honduras in 1969, generated an internal crisis which in the early 1970s led to the parting of two factions. These two factions formed the first nucleus of a new left. In 1970 the nucleus of what was to become the Popular Liberation Forces (FPL) was organized. In 1971 the group that killed Regalado Dueñas was organized as the People's Revolutionary Army (ERP).

This organic split of the left was important for the future of the revolutionary process. The different conceptions of the character of the revolution and differences over the necessary strategy, tactics and programs that were required to take political power derived from this split.

The new left organizations were born with a militaristic approach as a corollary to their formation. Armed struggle was the answer to the electoral strategy adopted by the Salvadoran Communist Party (PCS). But this approach ignored the social and economic demands of the popular sectors. Furthermore, the influence of the Cuban Revolution was not limited to the theoretical issue of armed struggle, but extended to the method of developing it. The concept of the "foco guerrillero" implied the formation of a small number of cadres that would

start armed struggle and then ignite the revolutionary consciousness of the masses.⁴² This theory, applied by the Cuban guerrillas and taken to Bolivia by Ernesto Che Guevara, was transferred to the Salvadoran situation.⁴³ The need to form a revolutionary party was not contemplated in the strategies of either faction.

The FPL adopted the Maoist strategy of a popular prolonged war, which presupposes the combination of clandestine political work along with the formation of a guerrilla army that would be capable of conducting a war of attrition against the enemy and finally taking power.⁴⁴ In a different way, the ERP adopted a strategy of revolutionary war, which implied military action to incite a popular uprising, but without considering any mechanism of insertion within the popular sectors, in other words the foco strategy.⁴⁵

Accordingly, from 1970 to mid-1974, the left dedicated its efforts to making their existence known, in order to attract people to their ranks. Sporadic armed attacks against

⁴²Brian Loveman and Thomas Davies, Che Guevara Guerrilla Warfare, (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1985), p. 12.

⁴³Cienfuegos, Veredas, p. 20.

⁴⁴Cynthia Arnson, El Salvador: A Revolution Confronts the United States, (Washington, D.C. and Amsterdam: Institute For Policy Studies, 1982), p. 30.

⁴⁵Armstrong and Shenk, El Salvador: The Face of Revolution, p. 69.

military personnel and security forces and some bombing of banks and kidnapping of businessmen was conducted. For the regime, these activities confirmed the existence of armed groups, so the repressive trend initiated by Molina was reinforced.⁴⁶

It was clear that the sporadic activities of armed groups were insufficient to incite the popular sectors to get involved. The problem of finding an organic way of popular expression persisted. The solution was a matter of strategy and tactics, not easily solved by a theoretical approach in the midst of a complex situation. It is worth noting that Molina's regime was not only increasing repression and violence, but, in a more strategic approach, organizing significant sectors of the population by coopting them and using counterinsurgency measures. In a study of El Salvador's working class movement, Salvadoran economist Rafael Menjivar states that "in a new geopolitical strategy of counterinsurgency and reproduction of capital in the midst of crisis, the state moved in two directions." By way of repression, from 1972 to 1978 an intense period of control of urban and rural sectors gradually increased to the point that military operations were conducted in which hundreds of kilometres of territory were encircled in order to conduct campaigns of terror and massacres. By way of cooptation and control, the state used the old tactic of creating unions and

⁴⁶McClintock, The American Connection, p. 172.

associations in order to divide and manage the urban proletariat, and in the rural areas, the state consolidated "the Salvadoran Communal Union (UCS) and integrated it to the paramilitary organization Orden."⁴⁷Of course, the challenge seemed insurmountable to the armed left, and in their quest for a correct strategy to deal with it, the existing divisions were exacerbated.

In May 1974 the government announced the development of an important hydro-electric project to provide services to several cities in the Chalatenango and Cuzcatlan areas. The construction of the Cerron Grande dam was part of the national transformation drive, as Molina named all his administrative initiatives. The building of the dam resulted in the dispossession of 15,000 peasants. These landless peasants organized in the Christian Peasants Federation (FECCAS) and opposed the project.⁴⁸Mobilization and demonstrations focused around this issue. To the armed left the experience made clear the need of developing an organic relationship with the popular sectors, especially the peasants and urban workers.

In June 1974, as a consequence of the mobilization organized around the peasants' eviction in areas affected by the hydro-electrical project, the Popular Action Unified Front

⁴⁷Menjivar, Formación, p. 112.

⁴⁸Armstrong and Shenk, El Salvador: The Face of Revolution, p. 70.

revolutionary party as necessary to conduct the armed struggle. The division generated by this violent incident led to the formation of a new faction, the National Resistance (RN), and from this group, the Armed Forces of the National Resistance (FARN), as the armed component.⁵⁰

As a result of the divisions between the different factions of the armed left, the FAPU experiment failed. The division was based on the different approaches of the two major factions within the front: the FPL and the now divided ERP-RN. The latter faction considered, in its insurrectional line, the necessity of mass education, and for that purpose the struggle for reforms was a pragmatic tool to consolidate the political work with the masses. This pragmatic line also was applied to the politics of alliances. All democratic sectors could be involved in an anti-fascist front that would include not only peasants and working class sectors, but middle class and members of the armed forces as well.⁵¹

On the contrary, the FPL considered the peasants as the most important element, opposing the idea of struggling for reforms and rejecting the formation of a broad front. They argued, moreover, that this differed in the context of the

⁵⁰Montgomery, Revolution in El Salvador, p. 122.

⁵¹Leiken, "The Salvadoran Left," p. 116.

class struggle, and that the proposition of attracting members of the armed forces was selling out to the enemy.⁵²

The result of these ideological differences was the most profound division within the armed left. As a consequence the FPL formed, in June 1975, the Popular Revolutionary Block (BPR). As part of the division of the ERP, the National Resistance (RN) took the remnants of FAPU. In 1977 the ERP formed its own front, the Popular Leagues of February 28 (LP-28), as a symbol of the massacre which occurred that day, and its own party, the Salvadoran Revolutionary Party (PRS). At the end of 1979 another organization, the Revolutionary Party of the Central American Workers (PRTC), although small, structured its own front, the Popular Liberation Movement (MPL). By 1979 the Salvadoran Communist Party had changed its strategy and formed its own military organization, the Armed Forces of Liberation (FAL).⁵³

All these mass fronts and military organizations created tremendous dispersal of the popular movement. But at the same time an immense work of integration of the masses to the political-revolutionary objectives was generated.

The period from 1975 to 1979 is for the armed left a period of intense ideological conflict, as well a period of massive organizational work without precedent. It is during this period that the masses decided to become masters of their

⁵²Ibid.

⁵³Montgomery, Revolution in El Salvador, p. 124.

destiny. It is a contradictory period, where even though the armed left was divided on the issue of revolutionary strategy and its forms of struggle, the masses responded to the different political lines of the revolutionary organizations. The organic relationship referred to by commander Ernesto Jovel was established. A gradual process of legitimation of the armed left was in motion.

The legitimation of the armed left as a historical alternative for radical change received a push when General Romero succeeded Molina to the presidency.

The Molina-Romero Transition (1976-1977)

Although the decision to have General Carlos Humberto Romero as the official candidate for the 1977 presidential election was a result of the traditional technique of hand-picking by the incumbent president Colonel Molina, the events that preceded that decision are worth examining. General Romero was the candidate preferred by the oligarchy to resolve the crisis. The general's experience was impressive. He was the head of the general staff of the Sanchez Hernández government and Minister of Defense of the Molina government. What was attractive for the oligarchy was not only his administrative skills but his abilities to direct, as the general coordinator of the killing machine known as ANSESAL (the Salvadoran Agency of Security), the massacres that were

being conducted against the popular sectors. Ansesal was of great strategic importance for the government's counterinsurgency efforts. Through it the President and the army general staff had direct control of Orden and all the intelligence system.⁵⁴

Ricardo Castro, an intelligence officer for the Salvadoran Armed Forces, who was sent by the military to receive his training in the U.S. Military Academy at West Point, and later his masters degree in engineering at the University of Illinois, candidly related his role in the policy of killings and torture conducted by the military in El Salvador. He affirms that his work as an advisor of Department 5, the substitute agency of Ansesal after it was formally dissolved in 1979, allowed him to know the operation of this agency. "It pretty much became the political intelligence apparatus within the general staff. They also got a large paramilitary force dressed in civilian clothes, and they are capable of acting independently. In military theory, they should be doing the investigation and then they should be relying on actual organized forces to carry out whatever they deem is necessary, but sometimes they don't need them. The elements they deal with--labour leaders and so on--they

⁵⁴McClintock, The American Connection, p. 221.

are capable of doing it all themselves. They can knock someone off all by themselves."⁵⁵

The general's suitability went beyond his ability to direct repression. The oligarchy had a confrontation with Molina on the perennial issue of agrarian reform. As we discussed before, this problem was addressed in very general terms by Sanchez Hernández in 1971, and at that time the oligarchy showed its displeasure by abandoning the official party, PCN, and creating a new party for the 1972 presidential elections. Molina had been more aggressive than Sanchez Hernández on this issue.

On 26 June 1975 the National Assembly passed the Law of Creation of ISTA (Salvadoran Institute of Agrarian Reform), an administrative structure destined to foresee the change of the land tenure structure. On 29 June 1976 a new law promulgated the first project of agrarian transformation that would implement the legislation of 1975.⁵⁶ It was clear that with this reform Molina was trying to diffuse the increasing unrest in the countryside. After all, the agrarian reform project was going to affect less than 4 percent of agricultural land. Furthermore, it was offering a very

⁵⁵Allan Nairn, "Confessions of a Death Squad Officer," The Progressive, March 1986, p. 28.

⁵⁶Instituto de Estudios Políticos Para America Latina y Africa, Con la Lucha del Pueblo Salvadoreño, El Salvador y su Historia, (Madrid, 1980), pp. 87-88.

generous package of compensation to the landowners affected.⁵⁷ In spite of the fact that Molina's tactical move seemed directed at halting the growth of the popular organizations in the countryside and strategically defeating the armed left, the historical blindness of the oligarchy continued.

From July to October 1976, when the project was legally defeated by the National Assembly, the oligarchy, through the National Association of Private Business (ANEP), developed a systematic campaign of attack against the agrarian reform project,⁵⁸ arguing that it would affect the country's economic productivity. In fact the oligarchy would resist any tinkering with agrarian policies.⁵⁹

Meanwhile, Molina, hounded by the oligarchy's unexpected attacks, appealed to the armed forces for support, visiting different garrisons and explaining to the army rank and file the government's intentions of reforming agriculture. In addition the government mobilized Orden. More than 70,000 peasants marched in San Salvador to show the massive support of this sector for the government's actions.⁶⁰

⁵⁷Tom Barry, Roots of Rebellion, (Boston: South End Press, 1987), p. 111.

⁵⁸Con La Lucha, p. 88.

⁵⁹Baloyra, El Salvador en Transición, p. 84.

⁶⁰Ibid., p. 85.

It was evident that the decision to continue with the project, in spite of the oligarchy's vociferous attack, would depend on the armed forces. But they rejected it, arguing the possibility of civil war, and they forced the government to retreat.⁶¹The oligarchy had won, and in the process they had allied themselves with Molina's Minister of Defense, General Romero, who would become El Salvador's next president. Romero's multi-million dollar campaign for the 1977 presidential elections was financed by ANEP (private business), which portrayed him as the leader and the strong president the country needed.⁶²The stage was set for confrontation. Open civil disobedience, violence, repression and death would characterize Romero's regime. In the process, the Salvadoran dominated class would perceive the armed left as a plausible alternative that would propose its own historical project for the nation.

The Romero Regime (1977-1979)

The 1977 presidential election was as fraudulent as the one in 1972, with the difference that it was conducted in the midst of violence. As early as November 1976, the FECCAS-BPR group organized a series of massive demonstrations in four provincial capitals, involving peasants protesting against

⁶¹Con La Lucha, p.88.

⁶²Castro Morán, La Función Política, p. 253.

changes in agrarian legislation. The police violently repressed the demonstrations.⁶³ By December 1976, a protest organized by FECCAS in the countryside resulted in violence, in which a landowner was shot to death. The oligarchy started a public campaign accusing the Jesuits and some sectors of the Catholic Church of promoting violence and communism.⁶⁴ Even foreign priests were forced to leave the country. In February 1976, a Belgian priest was captured by the National Guard and after being detained and tortured was compelled to leave.⁶⁵ These events were important because they signalled the start of systematic attacks against the church, especially Jesuits and priests involved with the popular sectors. All that would culminate with the killing of the Archbishop of San Salvador, Monsignor Oscar Arnulfo Romero, on 24 March 1980.

The violence was not limited to the countryside. On 27 January 1977, Roberto Poma, a wealthy industrialist, president of the Salvadoran Institute of Tourism (ISTU), as well as advisor and principal collaborator of President Molina and of the National Council of Planning and Economic Coordination (CONAPLAN), was kidnapped by the ERP, one of the armed

⁶³McClintock, The American Connection, p. 178.

⁶⁴North, Bitter Grounds, p. 75.

⁶⁵McClintock, The American Connection, p. 179.

organizations of the left, and died as a result.⁶⁶The objective of this action was to obtain the release of several members of the ERP from the government's clandestine jails. This incident, along with the unrest in the countryside created a tense climate for the elections.

The election itself was in a sense a futile political exercise that only contributed to more violence and increasing the military's illegitimacy. The traditional opposition political parties that had coalesced under UNO again decided to participate. They selected Colonel Ernesto Claramount as a candidate for president, perhaps assuming that the armed forces could respect the results since the candidate was one of their own. In fact, if any doubts existed about the system's functionality, the election on 20 February 1977 was conclusive. The idea that the people's only alternative lay in the armed struggle, as was proposed by the armed left, was reaffirmed.

As had happened in 1972, fraud was expected to be the norm. But the similarities stopped there, for in this election fraud was not only flagrant but accompanied by violence and intimidation. Orden and the police were arresting the opposition's poll watchers even before the voting

⁶⁶Ana Guadalupe Martínez, Las Carceles Clandestinas de El Salvador, (Culiacan, México: Universidad Autónoma de Sinaloa, 1986) pp. 293-317.

started.⁶⁷Early in the morning ballot boxes were already full of votes for the official party. In the towns of Morazan and La Union violence was used to prevent people from voting. In Aguilares, the process was suspended in mid-day due to violence. No electoral results were given. Nevertheless General Carlos Humberto Romero was declared the landslide winner.⁶⁸The next day the opposition candidate, Colonel Ernesto Claramount, led a demonstration of more than 40,000 to the Libertad central plaza. He affirmed that he would stay indefinitely until the opposition victory was recognized. In the ballot boxes that were opened, UNO had a lead of more than 36,000 votes. On 28 February 1977 the military encircled all the protesters in the plaza. A massacre ensued with more than 200 people dead.⁶⁹The cycle of democratic pretence as a way of legitimation for the military was closed.

Meanwhile, repression and violence increased. On 12 March 1977, the Jesuit priest Rutilio Grande and people that accompanied him were ambushed and killed when he was going to offer mass at El Paisnal, a town in the north of the country.⁷⁰In April 1977, the FPL kidnapped the Minister of

⁶⁷Duarte, My Story, p. 95.

⁶⁸Castro Morán, La Función Política, pp. 244-245.

⁶⁹McClintock, The American Connection, pp. 183-184.

⁷⁰UCA Editores, Rutilio Grande: Mártir de La Evangelización Rural en El Salvador, (San Salvador: UCA Editores, 1978), pp. 109-110.

Foreign Relations of El Salvador, Mauricio Borgonovo Pohl.⁷¹In order to release him, they demanded the freedom of a long list of members of their organization who had disappeared. During negotiations, the Molina regime was forced to publicize several proclamations of this group in major newspapers, an action that ignited popular awareness. Until this incident, the armed organizations had not been able to propagandize their struggle in such a massive way. The regime did not acknowledge the existence of political prisoners and on May 10 the minister was executed.

In revenge, following the threats against Jesuits and priests made by paramilitary organizations such as the White Union Warriors (UGB), the military encircled and lay siege to Aguilares, a town where the base community work of the Catholic Church was first organized. Many people were killed and others were abducted, not to be found again.⁷²The attacks against the Church and the popular organizations, and the armed left's response made a bad situation worse. The rise of Romero to power would only worsen it more.

On 1 July 1 1977 General Carlos Humberto Romero became president. He compromised with the oligarchy, who had financed his political campaign, to restore order and legality in the country. To that effect the National Assembly, under the PCN's

⁷¹Armstrong and Shenk, El Salvador: The Face of Revolution, p. 93.

⁷²Ibid.

total control, promulgated a Law of Defense of Public Order. This law was the instrument that legalized an already existing situation. All meetings of more than three people were prohibited, strikes were outlawed, freedom of expression was not permitted, and public demonstrations were banned.⁷³ This law provoked more resistance from the popular organizations. Strikes were conducted by occupying factories and forcing the government to allow negotiations. Military operations were directed, on a major scale, by the armed organizations. Foreign executives were abducted and ransom in millions of U.S. dollars was paid to the armed groups in exchange for their freedom.⁷⁴ Mass organizations were able to mobilize thousands of people in the streets to demand better living conditions and political freedoms.⁷⁵

By 1978 the political and social crisis of El Salvador had reached a point of no return. People were organizing more and more. Independent organization and participation in

⁷³Castro Morán, La Función Política, pp. 253-254.

⁷⁴Raymond Bonner, Weakness and Deceit, (New York: Times Books, 1984), p. 95.

⁷⁵McClintock, The American Connection, p. 187.

political events was without precedent.⁷⁶ The Romero regime did not have any solutions to the crisis other than repression.

By the middle of 1979 the military regime was in a profound crisis, not only in the social and political sphere, but in the economic sphere as well. Foreign investment was no longer available. On the contrary, capital fled to Miami and Europe. Furthermore, the regime was isolated internationally. The political campaign that took Romero to power had coincided with Jimmy Carter's arrival to the U.S. presidency. For the Carter administration the human rights issue was a consideration in its foreign policy. Since the violent incidents occurred after the electoral fraud of February 1977, the Carter Administration had been preoccupied with the situation in El Salvador.⁷⁷ But as was usual, cosmetic measures taken by the Romero regime, such as assuring moderation and

⁷⁶By the end of 1978, this writer was in charge of the Legal Aid Office of the Faculty of Law of the National University. The main work of this office involved providing free legal counsel to people who for socio-economic reasons were unable to hire a lawyer. As the political and economic situation worsened under the Romero regime, the office was unable to cope with the demand of services from unions, associations, relatives of political prisoners, workers in general who wanted to form a union or any mechanism of defense and participation. This work was interrupted when, in June 1980, the National University was invaded by the military, resulting in several students being killed.

⁷⁷Con la Lucha, pp. 100-101.

the deploring of terrorism of the left and the right, or the affirmation that all political exiles could return to the country, were enough to convince critics in the U.S. that things were returning to "normal."

What was abnormal was the situation in Nicaragua. By July 1979, a coalition of diverse forces under the Sandinista National Liberation Front (FSLN) had taken power by insurrection. The old U.S. ally, the dictator Anastasio Somoza, had fled to Miami as the Sandinistas were approaching Managua.

As was predictable, the euphoria in El Salvador was remarkable. The end of the Somoza dictatorship brought hope and increased the revolutionary activity of the armed opposition. With time running out, the military regime called all social forces to a national forum to discuss the country's problems. The apparent motivation was to attract all democratic forces to that forum and isolate the revolutionary movement. By August 1979 the political manoeuvre failed because only the rightist forces and the official PCN attended the call. Conversely, the popular organizations, unions, teachers, universities and other sectors, came together and formed the popular forum. The forum issued a platform stating that only the real participation of popular organizations would guarantee democracy.⁷⁸ The problem of power was on the

⁷⁸Arnson, El Salvador: A Revolution, p. 37.

table. Romero was hounded on all sides. His days in office were numbered.

As was expected, on 15 October 1979, Romero's government was overthrown by a group of young officers from the Salvadoran armed forces. That action apparently put an end to the hopeful political phase started in 1970. The stage was set for an open civil war. The political-military organizations of the left, which by this time included many of the most important sectors of the organized masses, had, after a decade of tenacious struggle, obtained much legitimacy. For its part, the military dictatorship, as a form of state, had exhausted the basis of the authority which had made it, if not legitimate, at least viable in the eyes of the Salvadorans. The problem of legitimacy is a perennial one which had accompanied the military dictatorship since its inception in 1932. The crisis of legitimacy, though, only arose when the dominated sectors were able to dispute the conduct of the country by its traditional rulers. This was the case in 1979. How the crisis will be resolved is a matter of speculation.

Conclusion

In this thesis, I have traced the political and historical development of the military dictatorship as a specific form of state in El Salvador. This form of state emerged in the 1930s with the Martínez regime, and in its inception a crisis of hegemony resulted, which manifested itself in the illegitimacy of the military regime in the historical period under study. We have brought this investigation up to 1979, which saw the weakening of the Romero regime. The political deterioration of General Romero's regime was manifested openly, because for the first time since 1932 the masses had accumulated sufficient experience to dispute the conduct of El Salvador's destiny by the dominant class.

Since 1932 the oligarchy had lost its hegemonic capacity in the political system. From that time onwards the oligarchy was unable to articulate a historical project for the rest of the social and political classes of Salvadoran society. The military was able to fill the political vacuum left by the oligarchy as a guarantor of the status quo. In this regard, the so-called "Revolution of 1948", was the beginning of a transitional period, where the military asserted itself as the most important sector able to lead the country. In 1950 they started a process of modernization of the state and in doing so they became actors on the national stage, impossible to

disregard if there were to be any solution to the crisis in El Salvador. This process, however, was a contradictory one and full of complexities. Although the oligarchy was unable to impose consensual domination in the period under study, in the process of delegating domination to the military, they played a pivotal role in the course of events. To see the immense power of this class, one only has to point to the events of the Molina government's agrarian transformation project in 1976, when the oligarchy imposed its verdict and, moreover allied with the military to facilitate General Romero's rise to power.

In spite of the oligarchy's ability to impose its decisions, the internal contradictions generated in that process uncovered the profound crisis at the level of domination. In fact the failed project of agrarian transformation made it clear that for the dominated classes the military regime, as a type of government, was becoming less viable. More importantly, the crisis of hegemony was becoming an organic one.

The hegemonic crisis, which emerged with the installation of the military dictatorship in 1932, was in a sense diffused. The formal exercise of democratic rights through the successive elections gave an appearance of legitimacy to the military regimes. As long as the regime was viable, the legitimacy problem was not an issue. The viability of the regime suffered serious damage with the electoral fraud of

1972, when the UNO coalition was able to win the presidential elections. The open fraud by the military in its efforts to maintain power had two results on the political situation. First, the legitimacy of the military regime was questioned and consequently its viability was in doubt. The second result was lethal: armed struggle as the correct method to obtain power was legitimized.

Consequently, the period from 1972 to 1977 was a period of constant class struggle, where the state through its repressive apparatus aimed at destroying any semblance of independent organization by the popular sectors and, more strategically, avoiding the growth of the armed organizations. In addition, Molina's project of agrarian reform was an attempt to regain credibility and to obtain an aura of legitimacy. The results were quite contrary to what the regime had intended. Instead of reducing the level of confrontation, it increased them to levels reminiscent of the 1932 massacre. To aggravate the already polarized environment, the electoral fraud of 1977 was the latest chapter in the elimination of elections as a means of legitimacy. The armed left and the popular organizations were on the offensive. A revolutionary situation was set.

The defeat and destruction of the Somoza Dynasty in Nicaragua accelerated the crisis. The open civil disobedience and struggle for power made it necessary to launch a last attempt to avoid of what was becoming inevitably a revolution.

The answer to this was a traditional one. On 15 October 1979, General Romero was overthrown and a Civil-Military Junta was installed.

If the answer to the revolutionary situation was a traditional one, a coup d'etat, as had happened in 1944, 1948, 1960 and 1961, this time, the relation of existing forces was qualitatively different. The dominant classes were in the midst of a crisis of hegemony, which as a result of the dominated classes' emergence in the struggle for power, was of an organic character. The military regime was delegitimized. The struggle of the popular sectors, through the political and military strategy of the armed left, had gained the upper hand. In the process, they acquired a level of legitimacy never obtained before. A new political process opened in the midst of an organic crisis.

It is possible to conclude that the resolution of the crisis would establish a new order, that is, either the dominated classes would be able to get political power to make revolutionary change possible, or the system would be able to maintain the oligarchic order, with some modifications. What is clear is that the issue of legitimacy and the crisis provoked by it will continue to dominate the political future of El Salvador. Its solution would be possible by establishing real democracy, one where a precondition to free elections is the existence of economic equality, social justice, and political freedoms. Only then will the vote in periodical

elections take on significance. Otherwise, a political system that recreates itself with the fiction of voting every given number of years, that allows the gap between rich and poor to widen, that denies political access for the majority, is condemned to fail. And when the dominated, after overcoming this ideological fiction, are able to present their own model of democracy and dispute its implementation with the dominant classes, then dreams of freedom are possible.

The challenge in El Salvador, and for its people, is to find a way to transform the unjust structures of its society. In that respect the popular sectors have shown an admirable determination to make it happen. The outcome is unpredictable. Unfortunately, the civil war, begun after the failure of the coup d'etat of 1979 to resolve the irresolvable through the traditional means, added an external factor to the crisis. The United States is determined to affect or influence the outcome of events, a fact which only exacerbates the crisis.

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