

# Guatemala: new base for Shining Path?

by Ana M. Mendoza-Phau

The election of Ramiro de León Carpio as President of Guatemala on June 5, by that country's Congress, opens the door to a Shining Path-style power takeover by terrorists in the region. De León, who for the past three years served as Guatemala's "human rights" ombudsman, distinguished himself in two ways: providing support for the political apparatus of the Guatemalan National Revolutionary Unity (URNG) terrorists (allies of Peru's Shining Path), and warring against Guatemala's Armed Forces.

The current crisis began when President Jorge Serrano decreed emergency rule on May 25, with the support of the Armed Forces. He said that one of the reasons for his decision was that "drug trafficking has begun to infiltrate sovereign institutions of the left and right. What has been confiscated in drugs in this country in total quantity equals the national budget of \$2 billion."

Immediately after the emergency decree was declared, the U.S. government cut off all economic aid, and threatened to deny Guatemala's goods preferential access to U.S. markets, unless "democracy" was restored and the military silenced.

Then on May 29, the military was pressured to withdraw its support from Serrano, announcing that Vice President Gustavo Espina should succeed him as President. That option too collapsed, however, after the United States, the Organization of American States (OAS), Guatemala's oligarchical business community, and Rigoberta Menchú's terrorists all vowed that there would be no aid for Espina, because he was supported by the military.

Pro-terrorist forces joined the State Department in attacks against Serrano's measures. Menchú, the Guatemalan Nobel Peace Prize winner, said Serrano's actions were "unjustifiable" and organized street demonstrations against the government. The head of the FMLN guerrillas, responsible for the murder of thousands of civilians including hundreds of children, and Shafik Handal, a member of El Salvador's Communist Party, called for a "broad alliance to build a strong wall against this negative, reactionary, and troglodytic wave."

The real intent of this mobilization was clear after the OAS foreign ministers met in extraordinary session in Washington on June 4 to discuss the Guatemala crisis. The meeting issued a final statement which showed that their worries had nothing to do with democracy, but rather the U.N. program of forcing "negotiations" with terrorists upon every govern-

ment, on the El Salvador model. The resolution presented at the meeting charged that Guatemalan President Serrano's attempt at emergency measures had a "harmful effect on the process of dialogue and participation" with the communist insurgency, and demanded that dialogue be resumed "as quickly as possible."

## Armed Forces targeted

As soon as De León was elected President, Menchú praised his election and called for renewed negotiations with the Guatemalan guerrillas. De León "has fought for human rights," she said, and she insisted that purging the three branches of government is a "very important task that the President is going to have to face."

Obeying Menchú's demands, De León's first actions were, in fact, purges in the military. In virtually his first act as President, De León retired Gen. José García Samayoa from the military command, at the same time relieving him of his post as defense minister. However, in what was described as the result of last-minute negotiations with the military, indicating that so far he must still compromise somewhat with the Army, he appointed Gen. Roberto Perussina to replace Samayoa. Perussina is said to be a leader of the hardline tendency in the military. How long the Army can force De León to compromise even this much is an open question. In fact, De León told the press on June 9, when asked why he carried out the military shakeup: "I was elected the constitutional President of Guatemala and the Army is obedient and non-deliberating."

De León made clear where he stands on the Army in statements reported in the *New York Times*, to the effect that "I am the leader in this country who has been the most confrontational with the government and the Army in some ways. Now, taking the position of President of the republic and the responsibility of Commander in Chief of the Army, there is no doubt that the Army will have to accept it."

After De León's election, U.S. State Department official Clifton Wharton announced that Washington would resume its full aid program, and told reporters on June 9 that "the United States strongly supports the government of De León. . . . Peace is vital to stable democratic institutions and greater respect for human rights, objectives our two nations share."

As *EIR* has reported, the policy of the Anglo-American establishment is to eliminate the Armed Forces as an institution of national sovereignty in Ibero-America. One week after President Serrano decreed emergency rule, the *Washington Post* admitted as much, in an article stating bluntly that "Washington no longer sees Central America's armies as essential, and has slashed aid."

The biggest worry for Washington, as the *Post* reported, is that local rivalries among countries are dissipating, as the various armed forces make common cause. The armies of the Central American region "have bluntly rejected attempts

by civilian politicians to control their budgets and commanders. . . . 'We are seeing the formation of a Central American guild of the military,' said one veteran diplomat."

It is yet to be seen whether the Guatemalan people will allow the takeover by pro-terrorist forces, and let the institution of the Armed Forces be destroyed. In spite of the propaganda barrage accusing them of being "human rights violators" to the point of comparing them with the Nazis, the Guatemalan Armed Forces is the one institution that has held that nation together.

## Venezuela at a crossroads

*This statement was issued by Alejandro Peña Esclusa, secretary general of the Venezuelan Labor Party (PLV).*

The June 5 edition of the Caracas daily *El Nacional* headlined its front page, "We Are Facing the Most Dangerous Crisis of the 20th Century," a quote taken from that day's inaugural speech by Dr. Ramón J. Velásquez Mujica, upon assuming the Venezuelan presidency in place of deposed President Carlos Andrés Pérez.

The newly chosen President Velásquez was not wrong in his assessment, for Venezuelans have been living through one of their most dramatic and turbulent periods in modern history. Pérez had scarcely assumed the presidency in 1989 when he decreed drastic across-the-board increases in service rates, on the instructions of the International Monetary Fund (IMF). That in turn provoked the riots and demonstrations of Feb. 27, 1989, when the government massacred more than 3,000 people. On Feb. 4 and Nov. 27, 1992, Venezuela experienced two separate coup attempts; on Dec. 8, 1992, we hit the highest record of electoral abstention for state and municipal elections.

On May 20, 1993, the Supreme Court ruled in favor of trying Pérez for embezzlement and fraud, and the next day ordered his suspension from office and the swearing-in of Senate President Octavio Lepage as interim President. On June 5, Senator Velásquez was chosen to replace Lepage. . . .

Caracas has taken second place only to New York in number of assaults per capita. And the number of deaths per week from violent crimes is now rivaling the figures from countries suffering outright civil war. Reaching home safe and sound has become a daily adventure in Caracas. A large part of the explanation for this dramatic social degeneration is the hatred generated by the cruel dictates of the IMF. Inflation, devaluation, unemployment, 80% poverty levels,

85% interest rates, collapse of services, particularly in the area of health, are the immediate results of the IMF "packet." One bolivar of every three in the national budget goes to paying the foreign debt. . . .

But before we can analyze the perspectives of the new government, it is necessary to emphasize that Pérez did not fall merely because of his corruption: He was defenestrated precisely because of his imposition of IMF policies that were driving the nation into bankruptcy. Venezuela had reached the boiling point, with daily mass demonstrations against Pérez and the system, and so the system made a decision not to handcuff its future to that of Pérez. Pérez is gone, but not the system.

The new President, who will rule until February 1994, knows perfectly well that he is seated atop a powderkeg. His inaugural comment, cited by *El Nacional* above, suggests so, as does his first televised interview June 6, in which he stated: "We will have six months of serious fiscal, financial, and economic conflicts . . . six months in which each month will be equivalent to a year." Regarding the social situation, he added: "I can neither ignore nor hide the social situation threatening the national majority. . . . This is a factor of imbalance."

Faced with the crisis he himself describes, Velásquez—who is known for being a conciliator—will have to take a radical stance: Either he continues the IMF policy of his predecessors and plunges the nation into disaster and possibly civil war, or he adopts a nationalist position and takes on the financial superpowers. There is nothing in-between.

The daily *Ultimas Noticias* published June 3 the joint proposal of the Venezuelan Labor Party and the Ibero-American Solidarity Movement (MSIA) for confronting the current crisis: "1) Put Pérez on trial, not only for embezzlement but for many other more serious crimes: the surrender of the country to the International Monetary Fund and to his banker friends such as Kissinger and Rockefeller. . . . 2) Put Pérez's corrupt circle on trial. . . . 3) Allow the unrestricted circulation of the banned book *Dope, Inc.* 4) Install a system of genuine popular participation. 5) Immediate freedom for the military men who were involved in the uprisings. . . . 6) Launch an emergency plan to rebuild the national economy, to include: strict exchange controls; lower interest rates; suspension of foreign debt payments; a development plan to rapidly generate 2 million jobs; through projects such as the construction of a national railroad; a war to the death against the drug trade and the money-laundering bankers; implement an Ibero-American Common Market as an alternative to the ominous IMF."

The profiles of those ministers already named by the new President indicate that Velásquez does not wish to continue Pérez's economic policies. It remains to be seen whether he will launch a serious battle against the IMF—with which we are fully prepared to collaborate—or whether the brewing storm will sweep him away.