

INTERNAL REASONS FOR THE DEFEAT

by Manuel Galich

W.R. reprints this article on the smashing of the Jacobo Arbenz government of Guatemala in 1954 by U.S. Imperialism because it provides a detailed, factual account of the background and some of the internal weaknesses of the revolutionary forces at that time.

Although the article has some obvious weaknesses and does not arrive at a completely Marxist-Leninist analysis of the 1954 events, it is apparently written by a sincere patriot whose summary of these events and the mistakes made must be carefully considered.

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The Guatemalan Revolution of 1954

The entire world knows that U.S. imperialism crushed the Guatemalan revolution in 1954. But not everyone knows the internal causes that made possible that defeat. Manuel Galich, 54 years of age, relates his personal experience, from which general conclusions may be drawn. The official posts which he held in his country permit him to speak with authority on the subject: President of the Revolutionary Congress during the government of the Revolutionary Council (1944); Minister of Public Education (1945-46) and President of the Electoral Tribunal (1946-1950) in the government of Arévalo; Minister of Foreign Relations (1951-1952) and Ambassador in Montevideo (1953) and in Buenos Aires (1954) for the government of Arbenz.

PROFILE OF A "STRONG-MAN"

A student rebellion set off the popular movement that overthrew Jorge Ubico in 1944. This occurred in Guatemala, a still unfree territory of America, neocolony of U.S. imperialism and integral part of one of its far-reaching tentacles, the banana industry. All of these elements are important in this brief history of something more than a generation in one of the sorest spots of Latin America.

Jorge Ubico was a general who had twice aspired to the presidency: in 1922 and 1926. On both occasions, he had been defeated by other generals, although not because they were more popular than Ubico — a factor that has rarely entered into the Latin American electoral picture. It was merely that in 1922 and 1926, the winning generals already occupied the presidency, which made their presentation of a superior number of votes an extremely simple matter. In 1922 the incumbent

general was José María Orellana — precursor of what are today referred to as "gorillas" — who, as Army Chief of Staff, had overthrown the country's civilian president on behalf of the Yankee railroad monopoly that has encumbered Guatemala since the beginning of this century. With his grasp on power guaranteed by that act of nocturnal perfidy Orellana had had no difficulty in passing from interloper to "constitutional" president. Although this occurred exactly forty-five years ago, the same variety of metamorphosis undergone by Orellana has been repeated an infinite number of times in Latin America, under the same imperial auspices. Onganía, Stroessner, Costa e Silva, Barrientos, Somoza Jr. and López Arellano are current living examples in Central and South America of the species which has produced, over the years, some really unforgettable specimens, worthy of embalment and exhibition in special museums: the first Somoza, Trujillo, Pérez Jiménez, Castillo Armas and others of the same gang.

Orellana died of what the people

call "angina pectoris" one fine morning in 1926 and the presidency passed, by merest chance, to an obscure general named Lázaro Chacón, who, precisely because of his innocuity, occupied the post referred to in Guatemala constitutional terminology as "first deputy," the person designated to succeed to power in the event of the temporary or definitive absence of the president. Overnight "angina pectoris," like Cinderella's fairy godmother, brought Chacón from anonymity to the presidency. According to the constitution, Chacón was empowered only to convoke elections for the next constitutional period and was forbidden to participate in them by his status as provisional president. This was not respected. Via electoral sleight-of-hand, Chacón, president, ad interim, became Chacón, proprietor of the post. Ubico played at opposition, and lost, naturally. In 1931, nevertheless, Ubico was backed by none other than that great elector, Mr. Sheldon Whitehouse, U.S. Ambassador. What had he done to earn a place under that protective wing? During the

preceding nine years, while occupying minor posts as local political boss, Ubico had demonstrated his outstanding capacity for applying the notorious "fugitive law" on the slightest suspicion. At the same time, the United Fruit Company was clearly worried. Throughout the preceding decade, the workers' movement in Guatemala had been growing in strength. Ideological agitation in the form of "bolshevik ideas" had reached the railroad lines and the banana zones. Unions had sprung up in the principal cities, and the conviction that strikes were an effective weapon of struggle had taken root. Clearly, it was time to place a "strong-man" in power, and that general who had carried out so many assassinations in Retalhuleu was the ideal man for the job. A particular factor in his favor was his demonstrated phobia of Mexicans, who often crossed the Guatemalan frontier. All Mexicans for Ubico were revolutionaries, all revolutionaries were bolsheviks and all bolsheviks were delinquents, condemned, a priori, to death. Such an excellent philosophy easily won him the tutelage of Whitehouse.

A convenient circumstance facilitated the plans of Whitehouse and calmed the alarm of the United Fruit Company. The non-homicidal and relatively tolerant Chacón, whose "weakness" (in the opinion of the United Fruit Company) had allowed red ideas and organizations to prosper, was struck down by a cerebral hemorrhage on a December afternoon in 1930, throwing the country into a brief period of anarchy. Chacón's legal successor, the civilian "first deputy," was overthrown by a military coup d'état two days after taking office. The author of the coup, another Orellana, was eliminated by Whitehouse by means of payment of twenty thousand dollars, withdrawn from the national treasury. The plot to place Ubico in power was then organized with a minimum of difficulty under the direction of

Whitehouse. The president of the Supreme Court of Justice, an elderly, inoffensive and obedient gentleman, was called to assume the presidency and, in a lightning move which caught everyone off guard, elections were called in which no one voted for the simple reason that no one knew either where or when he was supposed to do so. But numbers appeared on billboards, by province, bestowing an overwhelming triumph upon Jorge Ubico, who awakened on the 14th of February 1931, as the new president of Guatemala. He immediately threw himself into the fulfillment of his mission: total destruction and extirpation of "red ideas and organizations."

IDEOLOGICAL LATITUDE OF AN UNHAPPY GENERATION

Although it seems incredible, in 1944 we did not know the meaning of imperialism. We had certainly heard of it, but were ignorant of its complexity, its voracity, its objectives of continental and world domination, the economic mechanism that moves it, its tricks, its resources, its implacable coldness in business matters, its lies, its doctrines and its dogmas; that is, of all that we were later to suffer and know too well, when it was too late. And, nevertheless, we were the vanguard of the university movement against Jorge Ubico, which meant the vanguard of the entire country, since until then — let us say between 1942 and 1944 — no other organized forces existed even in incipient form. Ubico had been bloodily "efficient."

We harboured a nebulous anti-Yankee sentiment, aroused perhaps by an emotion that was, more than anything else, mestizan and Latin American, and a basic and chauvinistic national jealousy which repudiated the image of the prepotent and intrusive Yankee.

As early as the beginning of our primary school studies, we had been diehard sandinistas, eager to march off to Nicaragua to join the forces of the hero of Segovia, to help them "throw the gringos out of Central America." A decade later, our repudiation was as much sexual as national, since it was equally intolerable to us that Ubico had ceded bases in the airport at La Aurora and in the port of San José to the Yankee military and that soldiers from these bases swarmed over the capital on Saturday nights, like great herds of capering goats, to insult our manners and customs in drunken and obscene clashes. We held the worst possible opinion of, and considered "traitors to their race, blood and people," the "gringueras," semi-prostitutes who felt flattered to walk arm-in-arm with blond, gum-chewing gringos dressed in khaki. And we gleefully participated in any scuffle that was organized against a drunken or impertinent Yankee, for example in Giro's.

None of this was anti-imperialist ideology. It was only instinctive reaction reduced to a most undoc-trinary postulate:

"Gringos, tremendous sons of bitches."

Our closest approaches to ideology were fervent sympathy with the Spanish Republic, sincere indignation at its solitude and its defeat, and very rational hatred, yes, of fascism and nazism. Because, at the same time that we were able to perceive what both meant for the world, we saw the tyranny that oppressed our own country as a grotesque, insect-scale version of the totalitarianism rampant in Europe. We did not know that this stupid and totalitarian tyranny was the handiwork of Yankee imperialism and the effect of that imperialism, pleasing to Franklin D. Roosevelt himself. For that reason, we were sincerely on the side of the Allies.

"THE GIANT AMAPOLAS"

Nevertheless, Ubico signed a death decree against us as "nazi-

fascist agitators." That textual phrase is unforgettable for us. Fortunately, his police did not manage to get hold of us and we were able to secure asylum in the Mexican Embassy. Had we not done so, we should have fallen into the hands of the head of Ubico's police, David Ordoñez, and of the head of the "investigating police," as the secret police was then called, José Linares. Such a possibility in 1944 was enough to give any Guatemalan gooseflesh and set him trembling. Thirteen years and four months of an uncontrolled, sadistic, sanguinary, stupid and genuinely savage tyranny had abolished, by the sole and brutal will of Ubico and the total compliance of the human garbage that served him as ministers, deputies, judges, etc., all traces of constitution, laws, courts, legal recourse, rights, principles, and guarantees. The national press, without exception, was nauseatingly fawning and self-censored. Among foreign magazines, only *Life* in Spanish and *Selecciones* entered the country. Books were the object of a rabid inquisition. Old copies of *Das Kapital* were removed from the library of the Faculty of Juridical and Social Sciences to avoid "poisoning" the students. Official use of the word *worker* was prohibited. Such terms as *union*, *strike*, *proletariat*, *labor justice* and *social laws* were blasphemies punishable by torture and several years of prison.

Ideologically, even the university students were illiterate in 1944. We hated the tyranny simply because it offended our human dignity. And we worked like ants during two years to unify and organize the university in the midst of that universal fear. We began as a cell in the law school (Faculty of Juridical and Social Sciences). Later, we set up a law association and, finally, in 1943, the AEU (*Asociación de Estudiantes Universitarios*). At least, those of us who participated in that initial cell wanted to direct the agitation that we promoted in the

university consciously toward the overthrow of Ubico. Our challenge was finally issued in mid-June of 1944 in the form of an ultimatum — and we used the word — to Ubico, threatening a general strike (Strike! Horrors! No one had even dared to use the word) if our demands were not settled within a period of twenty-four hours. The most daring of these demands was for university autonomy. It was at that point that we were condemned as "nazi-fascist agitators."

But a miracle occurred. Behind us arose the Guatemalan people, which, until then, had seemed to be mere zombies, without blood or soul. The poor, teachers, artisans, women from the markets, housewives, employees, workers from our few factories, school children and adolescents, boot-blacks, everyone moved into the street, surrounded the *Palacio Nacional* and shouted for the resignation of the tyrant. The spontaneous demand was significant:

"Resign! We are hungry!"

Professionals, lawyers, intellectuals, some merchants, some industrialists and even some resentful farm-owners — what might be called our "bourgeoisie" — joined the rebellion. The people resisted cavalry charges, sabre thrusts, burns, shots, tear gas and clubbings. Some fell, among them a teacher, María Chinchilla, who became a heroine and a symbol. These were the "days of June," which were followed by a silence that terrified Ubico. Buses, trains, taxis, even bicycles, were immobilized. Movie houses, law offices, pharmacies, stores, schools, hospitals and courts all closed their doors. For an entire week, Guatemala City seemed dead. Helpless against this unrecognizable Guatemalan people, Ubico resigned and left the country. He fell apart, like Alberti's *Giant Amapolas*.

THE REVOLUTION OF OCTOBER 20

The people did not seize power at that moment, although they were on their way to it. A band

of thieves and opportunists fell upon the vacant seat of public authority and imposed, via the legislative assembly, the designation of an imbecile with the rank of general, Federico Ponce, as president ad interim with the idea of imposing him later as "constitutional" president and perpetuating themselves, with him, in power. Slow-witted by nature, they named themselves the Liberal Party, which constituted an additional provocation of the people, since Ubico had also called himself a "liberal" and "progressive liberal." No other phrase was more detested than this. But these individuals, like Ubico, like the country itself until then, still lived in the previous century and saw the great, popular anti-Ubico, anti-Ponce movement as a maneuver of the *cachuredos* (nickname of the conservatives of the past century). As the people began

to speak of the exiled professor Juan José Arévalo as a possible candidate to oppose the underhanded maneuvering of the Ponce clique, the group in power invented the term *arevalo conservatismo*. Hitting closer to home, it called us *sinarquistas*. Bells were ringing...

But behind all of this, with its flavor of comic opera, of Grand Guignol, lay a number of factors. There were the coffee plantations which Ubico, by Yankee order, had expropriated from their powerful German owners, led by Nottebohn & Company, as "enemy property."

(Having declared war against the Axis powers, Ubico was an ally of the democracies.) The clique which had taken possession of the *Palacio Nacional* had its eye especially on those plantations. But the great popular movement that grew steadily more gigantic as it spread from the capital to the entire nation, stood in its way. Even rural Indian sectors, the most lethargic in the country because they were the most humiliated and exploited both in depth and time, responded to the agita-

tion of the students, and were now consolidated in a political party which we named the Frente Popular de Liberación, although no one knows precisely why. New political parties had sprung up among the people, purely electoralist and lacking any ideological platform, but stoutly willing to struggle against the Ponce clique, which they saw as a continuation of all that Ubico had represented. Embryonic labor organizations were raising their heads and voices against exploiting enterprises, especially the railroads and the banana industry. And, finally, something new and decisive had occurred: army officers from the rank of major on downward, who saw the shape of things to come or simply wished to "cleanse themselves of the filth which the tyranny had smeared them were speaking of instituting a "democratic" government. Within that officialdom, an exception was a 29-year-old captain who sensed the depth of what was occurring, the most far-sighted and determined of them, a man of deep social and patriotic sensibility. His name was Jacobo Arbenz. Other discontented army officers had more or less private reasons for rebelling against Ponce, but their democratic sense was superficial and short-lived, as became evident shortly thereafter, and totally apparent ten years later. As we shall see, the roots of what was to occur in 1954 were already present in 1944. But, during the night of October 19, these officers distributed arms to the people and led them in battle against the clique in the Palacio Nacional and against the forts and military elements that obeyed it. The 20th was a day of popular triumph that marked the end of what the people called "the 108 days" of struggle against the Ponce clique. The triumph had been won by the popular masses throughout the country, almost spontaneously and admirably mobilized, in open defiance of the forces of repression, the spies, informers and assassins to whom Ponce had given free rein since August in an attempt

to halt the movement toward arevalismo.

Why arevalismo? An explanation is necessary, since it confirms the general ideological illiteracy that existed, without excepting Arévalo himself, who had been chosen by the voluntary will of the masses to be the civil leader of "the revolution." The masses, certainly, were clearly aware of the need to wipe out the shameful political past of the country and to open new horizons. In that respect, they were clear-sighted. But they were mistaken in their solutions, because they believed that the shameful past could be liquidated by the mere overthrow of Ubico in June and the triumph over Ponce in October and that new horizons would automatically open with the honest and overwhelming election of Arévalo, "the pure-white candidate." Unsullied by politics, a civilian, thirty-nine years old, a Doctor of Philosophy and Pedagogy, Arévalo was also a courageous and eloquent man who knew how to speak to the people in a language previously unknown among the cowardly and conformist intellectuals who had most often been unscrupulously servile in their attitude toward the country's de facto governments. Thus the popular battle cry and standard was "Viva Arévalo!" which the indigenous masses deformed in their own way to: "Viva Révolos!"

Since no one knew what a real revolution consisted of, we thought that it was complete with the fall of Ponce. And so it was baptized, and continues to be known as "the Revolution of the 20th of October." But it was as yet no such thing. It was, yes, a great conquest, won at the cost of great sacrifice and great courage on the part of the people of Guatemala, the greatest, perhaps, in its history. But, so far, all that had been won was "the right to begin," as Fidel Castro said in 1959, referring to the Cuban Revolution.

But we did not begin where we should have. A Revolutionary Junta integrated by the leaders

of the armed struggle of the 20th of October — Major Francisco Javier Arana, Captain Jacobo Arbenz and with Jorge Toriello, civilian — adopted drastic measures that were both just and necessary but insufficient to give the movement a genuinely revolutionary character. The germs of the reaction that was to place itself on the side of imperialism in 1954, destroying the process of transforming the country — by then genuinely revolutionary — were left intact. The constitution, that had never been used, was abolished; the mock legislative assembly left by Ubico and used by Ponce, was dissolved; some sixty old-line generals were expelled from the country; the three men of the new government pledged themselves not to run for the presidency and to respect the popular will, overwhelmingly favorable to Arévalo. All former police agencies were liquidated and a civil guard was created, composed of students, teachers and workers. Teachers, students and workers were elected to a new congress and then to a constitutional Assembly. The people acclaimed these measures, but their almost-total political inexperience, as I have explained, prevented them from demanding a greater and genuinely revolutionary deepening of the movement. With enormous goodwill, the Revolutionary Junta issued Decree Number 17, on the 28th of November 1944, that now, in the light of our own and others' experiences, seems pathetically candid and demonstrates the degree of ingenuousness of those of us who considered ourselves revolutionaries. We were the generation that had grown up sequestered in the tyranny of Ubico. The first article of that Decree stated:

"The following are declared to be fundamental principles of the Revolution of the 20th October:

- I. Decentralization of the executive power and effective separation of State powers.
- II. Suppression of presidential-

designates and their substitution by a vice-president.

III. Alternation in power, abolition of reelection and recognition of the right of the people to rebellion when this is attempted.

IV. A new constitution and the organization of the army in such a form as to guarantee its apolitical position and permit its fulfill-

ment of the function for which it was instituted: the defense of liberty, the constitution and national integrity, creating through the new organization an effective guarantee for its members that their profession rest on solid bases that cannot be destroyed at the whim of the chief executive, who will have no authority in regard to the technical or professional aspects of the military organization, these being delegated to a superior military council for the purpose of assuring the social and professional position that the members of this organization deserve.

V. Democratic organization of municipalities through the popular election of members.

VI. Effective autonomy of judicial power.

VII. Autonomy of the national university.

VIII. Constitutional recognition of political parties of democratic tendency organized in compliance with law, and representation of minorities in the nation's electoral colleges.

IX. Obligatory suffrage and secret ballot for the literate. Obligatory suffrage and public ballot for the illiterate, but limiting the exercise of this right to municipal elections. Recognition of citizenship for women prepared to exercise it.

X. Effective administrative probity."

The army remained intact. Minus generals — who were useless in any event — it is true, but with colonels and other officers, who gave the impression, in the first moments, of having reeducated themselves overnight, of having abandoned their militarist habits, their traditional authoritarianism,

their sense of superiority in regard to the rest of society, their brutal past; in other words, to have become civilized. It was an illusion. In every high-ranking officer — with, of course, a few honorable exceptions — the spirit of the old army of the tyranny remained alive, notwithstanding the fact that the military apparatus was now known as "the National Army of the Revolution." Thanks to their last-minute incorporation and unquestionably effective participation in the events of the 20th of October, the army officers considered themselves the sole authors of "the Revolution," owners of it and judges of both what it could do and what it could not do. From the first moment, they — totally ignorant of all that was not military — showed suspicion of what they considered "communism." Until 1949, although grumblingly, they remained respectful of the civilian authority represented by President Arévalo because he had in his favor the overwhelming moral force of popular support. But the leaders of the "revolutionary" political parties themselves set about to weaken this moral force, inviting the military to abandon its attitude of respect.

Also left intact was the fiercely dominant class of coffee barons. Dependent on its major client, Yankee imperialism, it was made up of semifeudal landowners who had always both supported, behind the scenes, and leaned upon the strong-arm regimes of the past as their guarantee of the permanence of the existing agrarian structure: backward, unjust, barbarous, the cause of national inertia and the landowners' instrument for exploiting the rural masses, in their majority indigent. The coffee barons and other, equally parasitic, landowners, not only survived the 20th of October as a class but infiltrated "the Revolution" and even contributed to marking its course, for some of these — or their lawyers, bankers, newspapermen and other agents directly or indirectly on their payrolls, — were elected to the

constituent Assembly elected amid the enthusiasm of the candid and euphoric democracy that followed in the wake of popular triumph. No one spoke in those days, nor in the first years of Arévalo's Administration, of agrarian reform, which should have been the first revolutionary measure, carried to its ultimate consequences, prior to convoking a constituent Assembly or preparing a constitution and electing a president who would be bound to its text.

The Constitution proved to be a counterrevolutionary hybrid. As something really new in constitutional legislation in Guatemala, it included a section of social guarantees and recognized, in abstract, certain rights of the working class. In exchange, ably wrapped up in highfalutin phraseology, it consolidated the agrarian structure of the country and, with it, the interests of the landowning class. It also consolidated the army as an autonomous entity with self-jurisdiction, almost as a fourth power of the Republic. At the same time, the executive authority was rigorously limited — as if the deputies, instead of legislating for the future, had legislated for the past, so as to shut in the same cell, full of articles, clauses and provisions, the Ubicos, the Ponces and all the other wild beasts which had governed prior to the 20th of October. And, to what purpose? When other wild beasts, similar to or even worse than they were, came to the forefront in 1954 from the ranks of the same army that had called itself "the National Army of the Revolution," the cell was demolished by a single blow, as though it had been made of cobwebs.

So far, imperialism had only sounded a few deep growls in response to the demands presented by the railroad and banana workers during the combative 108 days of Ponce, who, like Ubico and Orellana, had acted as a gendarme under the orders of Bradshaw or Turnbull or any other proconsul of the Boston Group. On October 21, the Yankee Ambassador, Boaz Long, presented him-

self in the Palacio Nacional to indicate to the Junta that General Miguel Ydígoras Fuentes — one of the three exceptions made in the round-up of generals — should be the provisional president. The reply of the Junta was excellent: Boaz Long and Ydígoras Fuentes, tutor and pupil, were obliged to depart rapidly from Guatemala.

Except for this incident, the imperialists limited themselves to observing the course of developments. The famous mastodon of intervention, Spruille Braden, presided over the U.S. delegation at the inauguration of Arévalo, and congratulated the outgoing Junta and the incoming president for their "untarnished and brilliant revolution" — precisely because, until that moment, no such revolution had taken place. Arévalo decorated Braden with the Gran Cruz de la Orden de Quetzal. The word imperialism still formed no part of the vocabulary of our political leaders.

THE UNHAPPY TASK OF THE "REVOLUTIONARY" PARTIES

Those of us who had so abominated the phony Partido Liberal Progresista, composed of Jorge Ubico and his toadies — and no one else, proved to be, ironically enough, the true progressive liberals in the strict sense of the word. Institutionally, the Guatemalan State had not varied substantially. It continued to be a liberal bourgeois democracy, with moderate progress made in labor legislation, which, nevertheless, did not affect its essential character. The difference lay in the fact that the government was now in the hands of men who were sincerely convinced of the value of the principles of liberal democracy and were disposed to respect those principles, that is, to faithfully support the constitution. That, at least, was the case of Arévalo and of many of those who accompanied him in his government. And we believed that this would suffice to change Guatemala, to make it into a happy country, and that this

was the revolution.

In reality, the country had changed in one respect: from within the government, we did everything possible to wipe out the dark, anachronistic and brutal past. Political liberty could be breathed in deeply in a way that had been impossible in the previous half century. And we tried to educate ourselves rapidly in an ideological sense, knowing that we were several decades behind the times. And this began to anger imperialism, the clergy, the landowners, a group of the military leaders, the old and adulatory press of the past (there was no other) that insolently called itself "independent." (It was indeed independent from the government, but not from its advertisers, the coffee growers of the AGA (Asociación Guatemalteca de Agricultores) and the United Fruit Company among the most lavish, nor from the Interamerican Press Association, dominated by "Colonel" Jules Dubois, well-known bloodhound of imperialism.) But among the very political parties that called themselves revolutionary, that is, among the leading groups, united until this moment, the same reaction took place, and the parties began to split apart. The well-known splinters began to appear. Some of us believed that the unlimited exercise of liberty by all, without discrimination of any kind, was positive and revolutionary. Others, from ignorance or other motives, maintained that the "revolution" was being infiltrated by "communists," basing their arguments on the existence of unions, strikes and the restiveness of an incipient Marxism-Leninism among the younger political and labor leaders. Those who assumed this position, among them two of the ex-Junta triumvirate, Arana and Toriello, and other influential political figures such as Mario Méndez Montenegro, who committed suicide in 1966, moved gradually to the right under the slogan, "We didn't make the Revolution for this," until they found themselves,

literally, walking arm-in-arm with their former enemies: the ex-Ubico supporters, the ex-Ponce followers, members of the AGA, the more fanatic Catholics, and all of the reactionary elements of the country. Méndez Montenegro was one of the leaders of the frustrated attempt at a coup in 1949 against Arévalo. Arana, author of the conspiracy and Head of the Armed Forces elected by Congress, was killed when a government picket-guard attempted to lay hands on him for being what he was, a conspirator.

The Constitution itself served as cover in the shadow of which the forces of reaction moved freely. Counterrevolutionary parties proliferated; the press attacked and launched misleading campaigns; conspiracies came into fashion (there were no fewer than thirty during the six years of Arévalo's term of office). The church proselytized, and converted the pulpit into a political tribune; the AGA and the Yankee railroad and banana monopolies lavishly subsidized newspaper campaigns and conspiracies and sent infiltrators into the ranks of the army. The publication of the Labor Code of 1947 and its respectful observance by the government set off the big guns of imperialism. Its powerful publicity media in the United States and all of the reactionary forces in Guatemala synchronized their offensive: the government of Arévalo was "communist." Yet Arévalo, as he demonstrated in word and deed, was anti-communist.

All of this, of course, was natural. Imperialism is imperialism, and reaction is reaction. To attempt to placate them, to explain that this was merely liberal democracy, that the laws and union organizations and labor policies were within the constitutional framework and that none of this was even remotely communist or socialist or anything of the sort, since the political philosophy that inspired the constitution was not only remote from, but contrary to, Marxism-Leninism, was to waste one's

time. Imperialists and reactionaries grew steadily more insolent and the latter perfected their organization. What was not natural, what was absurd, was that the political parties that called themselves "revolutionary" — El Frente Popular Libertador, Acción Revolucionaria and Renovación Nacional — became involved in a bitter internecine struggle. What was more, the fierce attacks were not only inter-party but inter-factional within the parties. It was not even a question of ideological polemics, although the word communism was interminably bandied about, for these parties had no ideology; they were arevalistas and later arbenzistas or antiarbenzistas. The question was to obtain more cabinet posts or more key bureaucratic positions or more seats in congress or the control of more municipalities, with an eye to obtaining new electoral gains. An endless fight.

This was, perhaps, the greatest service that the "revolutionary" political parties rendered to imperialism and national reaction. The sole exception in this regard was the Guatemalan Labor Party (Partido Guatemalteco del Trabajo), the infant Communist Party that had been organized clandestinely in the last days of Arévalo's Administration and was legalized under that of Arbenz. The dog-eat-dog struggles ended by completely undermining the confidence of the masses in the governmental parties. The union movement, which was developing and unifying itself, wanted as little as possible to do with the parties. The campesinos were disconcerted by the proselytizing of each political party against the others. Weren't they all a part of the government? The army that, even in 1949, was partially loyal to civilian authority and shared with the political parties and unions the task of armed defense of constitutional order, ended by seeing the politicians as a band of opportunists and demagogues and by growing much more receptive to the insidious and misleading calumnies of

the imperialists and reactionaries and to their promises, flattery and bribes.

THE RESULT OF THE ERRORS OF 1944

The Colonel Jacobo Arbenz who took possession of the presidency on March 15, 1951, was no longer the Captain Jacobo Arbenz that had signed the Revolutionary Junta decree of November 28, 1944. He was now a genuine revolutionary who knew what the essential problems of Guatemala were and what their solutions were and he was resolutely determined to apply them as drastically as reactionary and imperialist opposition might make it necessary. He was aware of the enemy's extraordinary ferocity and capacity for violent reaction against the slightest harming of its interests. What matters is not that that is exactly what happened. The fact is that he stood up to it, conscious of his historical responsibility and of his pact with the people who had elected him. He proposed agrarian reform and prepared to carry it out against all of the forces that opposed it: the powerful landowners of the AGA; the press that was paid by these landowners; the archbishop and his priests and fanatics — in brief, against all of Guatemalan reaction, and also against the country's most powerful landowner, the United Fruit Company, and all that stood denied it — for the lands expropriated from the monopoly the Department of State, the Pentagon, the CIA, the OAS, etc. The question was now set forth in genuinely revolutionary terms. Against all that array of reactionary classes, Arbenz assumed the representation of the "poor of the earth," the campesinos without land or with very little land, the workers of the banana and coffee plantations, exploited for centuries, only somewhat less than slaves. Or slaves.

But if Arbenz was not the same as in 1944, the situation was not, either. If we had the political capacity in 1944 to install a revolutionary dictatorship, to create a popular army instead of leaving

the old army virtually intact, to crush the reactionary landowners and clergy, to carry out agrarian reform without consideration for legal and juridical obstacles, thus giving the revolution an immense and solid popular base, it is improbable that Roosevelt would have undertaken any aggression against us, as he had not undertaken it six years before, against Cárdenas's expropriation of Mexico's oil wells. The Second the U.S. military capacity and it was not prepared to embark were not prepared to embark upon intervention or outright military aggression in Latin America. The revolution would have been consolidated and discussions would have been held afterwards, concerning the payment of indemnification to the United Fruit Company — which we never denied them — for the lands expropriated from the monopoly (although in point of fact it would have been undue indemnification, since those lands had been obtained fraudulently by the UFCO from servile Guatemalan politicians between 1901 and 1944). But we already know why none of this was done.

In 1952, when the long overdue Decree 900 on agrarian reform was issued and the program to liberate the national economy was carried into effect under the guidance of Arbenz, the mediocre Truman was President of the United States; virulent McCarthyism infected the U.S. political atmosphere; the CIA was already the "invisible government" and wielded the classical "big stick," as it had done in Iran against Mossadegh; Hiroshima and Nagasaki had been carbonized by atomic bombs; and the socialist camp had not yet recovered from its deep war wounds. Yankee imperialism was omnipotent. Even so, Arbenz counted on the support of the people. And he received it amply and firmly. But he overestimated — not only he, but everyone — the revolutionary quality or, at least, the patriotism of our army officers. And this proved to be dangerously er-

ronous on their part. Even if it had not been so, nothing could have been done. The time for arming the people and for organizing them into a revolutionary army, to replace the reactionary army that was in the military barracks and command posts, had passed. It might have been possible in 1944, but by 1952 it was impossible. And that was the definitive factor. The army sold out to imperialism. It betrayed Arbenz and the revolution.

Arbenz called on the people and the people responded. He ordered that the people be armed, but the bribed officers who held the keys to the arsenals disobeyed the order and, contrariwise, passed over with these arms to the side of the enemy, to the side of reactionary retaliation, to the side of the past that returned in the figure of Castillo Armas, chaperoned by Yankee Ambassador Peurifoy and Papal Nuncio Verolino. Perfectly symbolic. The real revolution, which had barely commenced, was strangled in its cradle.

NOW THEY KNOW WHAT MUST BE DONE AND HOW TO DO IT

The 1954 defeat without a struggle was the worst disaster suffered by the Guatemalan people in modern history. I believe that it can only be understood by going back to 1944 and even earlier, as I have tried to do here. My intention has not been to point an accusing finger at anyone or to define responsibilities, which no longer has any point, but to offer an experience, an example, to the new revolutionary generation — not only Guatemalan, but Latin American — not so much of what must be done as of what should not be done when — as must sooner or later occur — it takes power.

The ten years between 1944 and 1954 were not sterile, nor have the sufferings of the Guatemalan people in the past twelve years been in vain. From both periods a new generation has arisen that has not lived in limbo — as occurred with the generation of 1944 before it took power. The present

generation has capitalized on all of the experiences of our generation and knows the causes for our defeat. For that reason, it is putting up the only fight capable of eliminating them: revolutionary war. The new Guatemalan rebellion is not directed merely against a government, be it military or civilian, *de facto* or elected by the misled masses. Now, the objective of rebellion is clearly defined: liberation of the country from imperialist neocolonialism. Now, the magnitude and the methods of the enemy are well-known, and no one is in doubt about the cost of this struggle. It will require immense sacrifices, and many obstacles must be overcome. This has been true of all of the revolutions and wars of liberation in history. It was true of the one that liberated Latin America from European colonialism in the last century. But, like all of these revolutions and all of these wars of liberation, that of Guatemala will eventually triumph within the great framework of Latin American redemption.



"We'll hang on in Vietnam forever!"
by Ta Luu (D.R.V.)