

# REPORT FROM GUATEMALA

Antonio Pérez-Esclarín

Guatemala, the largest Central American country, is suffering today under a system of terror. The government of Colonel Carlos Arana Osorio has decided to eliminate the opposition by annihilating it. Mere suspicion of being an active "Communist," "Castroist" or "Leftist" can lead to imprisonment and death. And under the facade of institutional government, and in the name of pacification, "institutional terror" rules this agricultural country in which 2.2 per cent of the population possesses 70 per cent of the cultivable land.

Days after his election to the Presidency, Arana Osorio bluntly stated: "People elected Arana president and Cáceres vice president, and they gave them an order: to pacify the country. *They did not impose on us any condition; neither did they tell us how . . . the government that you elected made a promise, and it is going to fulfill it whatever it costs. . . .*" Or, in the words of another member of the Arana regime: "Only the government must have the monopoly of terror in order to fulfill its objectives. . . . For killing a Communist we will, for sure, have to kill sometimes nine innocent people, but this is irremediably the social cost of our pacification."

Unfortunately, these are not merely deterring words. The deeds go even further than the brutality of those statements. More than 6,000 people have been reported killed and hundreds missing since July 1, 1970, the day on which Carlos Arana Osorio came to power.

November 12, 1970 was, however, the day that unleashed the most systematic and acute phase in this campaign of extermination that prostrates Guatemala today. For what it claimed was a necessary drive against violence and subversion, the new regime decreed for an unlimited time total suspension of constitutional guarantees, a state of siege, and a curfew in the whole country from nine in the evening until five in the morning. During this time nobody could go out on the street, not even doctors or the fire department or Red Cross. The following are some of the consequences of this state of siege and some of the deeds perpetrated during this state of siege:

- The inviolability of domicile was suppressed and

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citizens put in jail indefinitely without trial. According to the international press, 1,600 persons were arrested during the first fifteen days. "Cateos" (home inspections) were allowed and were made at any time of day or night.

- Important leftist personalities, for instance the head of the Communist Party, have been killed; and with them, persons never before involved in any violent action or ideology. Still others, positively committed to non-violent practices, have been eliminated. Among these, for instance, are the leaders of the independent trade union, Jaime Monge Donis and Teresa de Jesús Oliva (the latter once an international leader of the Christian peasant union), and a law professor, Adolfo Mijangos, deputy of the National Front of the Democratic Left that is headed by the Christian Democrats. Mijangos, a paralytic who put his hope for survival in his painful situation, since, in his words, "they might hesitate before shooting a man in a wheelchair," was gunned down with twenty-seven shots in his back at six in the evening, three blocks away from the Palacio de Gobierno. Mijangos was an outstanding speaker for dialogue between all parties opposed to violence and oppression.

- The autonomy of the University was suspended and two professors—Julio Camey Herrera and Mijangos—have been killed. At least two others have suffered unsuccessful attempts against their lives. Some University officials have been arrested without any reason. The head of the Students' Association of the Humanities, Juan Luis Molina, twenty-seven, an amateur actor who last year played a role as Che Guevara in a performance of the University, a member of the Students' Association of Odontology, and three newsmen have disappeared; and since nothing has been heard from them for many weeks, friends fear they have been killed.

- Recently, thirteen corpses were found close to a volcano in a place that seemed to have been used as a concentration camp.

- The national press was completely muzzled. Newsmen were told that they could publish only the news sent to them from the Government Information Office, and they were forbidden to print even "things that happened in front of them." The killing of the Union leader Oliva was carried out in front of the office of the director of a newspaper, but

he could only publish the news two days afterwards—when and in the way that it was released by the official bulletin. Not even foreign newsmen could send news without censorship.

- At the beginning of January, the capital and largest city in the country was encircled by the army for seventy-two hours. During this time nobody was allowed to leave the city while the army carried out a meticulous search of all buildings. Unable to discover the reason for such an Hitlerian action, people began to spread rumors that the son of the President or the Vice President had been kidnapped. The government, however, explained afterwards that the measure had no special reason, and that “it was only one of the extraordinary measures allowed in the actual state of siege.”

- The National Congress reformed the Law of Public Order to enable the President unlimited power in exceptional cases like the actual state of siege. To make this possible, the Constitution has been reformed, and the Recourse of Protection against functionaries who abuse their power or dictate illegal measures has been abrogated.

- A massive killing of citizens is being perpetrated and, if because of the strict censorship of the press it is impossible to have an accurate count, we can only guess at the enormity of the number. The Communist Party is reported to have lost twenty-five members in the medium ranks and many others in the lower ranks of the Party. In government circles it has been said that “in the first two months of the state of siege, at least 700 members of the opposition were killed.”

On November 23 of this year, the state of siege

was officially ended. Nevertheless, I think these figures are enough to give a general idea of the national tragedy that Guatemala is still experiencing. The country is bleeding from all her limbs. Terror is the rule. Pacheco Arana is a former army captain who was reported to have killed 3,000 people during an anti-guerrilla campaign in northeastern Guatemala between 1966-68. He and his bloodthirsty party in power believe they have to suppress the opposition completely before the next elections, since they plan to hold power for at least ten years—“the only way,” they say, “of avenging the loss of power in 1956 when the then President Carlos Castillo Armas was killed,” and the only way of “bringing to reality the promises of pacification.”

Numerous death squads of rightist radicals—MANO (Movement of National Organized Action), APRI (Patriotic Association of Anti-Communists), M.A.G. (Anti-Communist Movement of Guatemala), Ojo por Ojo (Eye for an Eye), Los Cuchillos del Rey (The Knives of the King) and others—carry on this systematic extermination of the leftist and even central opposition, under the direction of secret police and military police who have benefitted from American military training.

The *New York Times* reported in January of this year that Guatemala had received strong endorsement from the present Administration of the United States. Yet, under the facade of “pacification” and “social development,” and raising the flag of an “anti-Communist crusade,” the Arana regime is carrying on in Guatemala a criminal extermination of freedom and human rights.

## THUNDER FROM THE RIGHT

*James R. Jennings*

“Free enterprise has destroyed itself,” Pope Pius XI said in 1931, and has been replaced by an “international imperialism whose country is where profit is.” No wild-eyed radical or flaming liberal, Pius XI was one more in a long line of conservative Roman churchmen raised to the papal office. His elaborations about the world’s economic systems, delivered in his

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encyclical *Quadragesimo Anno*, have particular relevance this year, since the whole network of international trade and finance has come under severe attack by the actions of President Nixon in August, and the subsequent reactions of other nations.

Forty years ago in *Quadragesimo Anno*, Pius XI gave the customary defense of private property and condemnation of communism; however, it is his sharp criticism of the system of private capital and his skepticism about the system’s survival that merits