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El Salvador: Another Popular Front

What about revolution?

Lazarus Jones

1980

The desperate so-called "final offensive" of the Salvadoran guerrilla movement has ground to a halt in the face of the bitter resistance of the junta's forces. The guerrillas had hoped to catch the ruling junta off-guard and bowl it over before Ronald Reagan could assume the American presidency and, as widely expected, resume shipments of U.S. arms to the beleaguered junta. To their chagrin the guerrillas discovered that "human rights" or not no American government was going to stand idly by and watch another Central American "domino" fall. Shipments of "non-lethal" material were immediately resumed despite the American commitment to suspending aid until a commission of inquiry into the murder of four American nuns completed its work: This "non-lethal" material included jeeps, trucks and transport helicopters, items that are indispensable in a guerrilla war in which the state must be able to rapidly move and deploy its "lethal" forces to counter guerrilla initiatives. When the guerrillas scored some early successes all pretense was dropped and \$5 million, in emergency "lethal" supplies,

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including M-16 rifles, M-79 grenade launchers and four more combat helicopters, were immediately shipped to the junta. With this aid the Salvadoran army was able to defeat the guerrilla offensive and inflict heavy casualties.

Ideologically the guerrilla movement in El Salvador is a dog's dinner of Marxist-Leninist factions with a few insignificant Trotskyite grouplets desperately trying to break into the Unified Revolutionary Directorate (DRU) big time. The DRU is a coalition of the four major Marxist-Leninist guerrilla armies the largest of which is the Forces of Popular Liberation (FPL) under the leadership of Salvador Cayetano Carpio 'who split from the Moscow line Salvadoran CP in 1969 over the issue of armed struggle. The attempts by the various left factions to unite both among themselves and with reformist elements has produced a particularly disorienting brew of Marxist alphabet soup. The latest manifestation of this recipe for "revolution" is the Farabundo Marti National Liberation Front (FMLN) under whose umbrella the "final offensive" was launched.

The aim of the various factions of the FMLN is to set up a "democratic revolutionary government" uniting the leftist guerrillas, Social Democrats and Christian Democrats. Ferman Cienfuegos, a spokesman for the FMLN, made a point of emphasizing that this government will not be "socialist" and that "the property rights of capitalists will be guaranteed." So, as in Nicaragua and elsewhere in the Third World, the Marxist-Leninists aspire to the mantle of a discredited comprador bourgeoisie. In a bastardized version of Trotsky's theory of "Permanent Revolution" the Marxist-Leninists seek to incorporate the most progressive elements of the national bourgeoisie in a strategy of primitive capital accumulation and state-building under the euphemism of "a government of national reconstruction." The guerrillas hope that their monopoly of armed force in a post-revolutionary situation will ensure that they maintain the whip hand.

Even in this extremely limited "revolutionary" goal the guerrillas face a formidable task. The Salvadoran bourgeoisie is incomparably

more unified and cohesive than was Somoza's clique in Nicaragua. The Salvadoran bourgeoisie will also have the unconditional military backing of the U.S. as well as help and support from their increasingly nervous neighboring dictatorships. El Salvador recently patched up its quarrel with Honduras, which arose out of the farcical four-day "soccer war" of 1969, to ensure better policing of their border areas. The Mexican daily Excelsior has also reported that the armies of El Salvador, Honduras and Guatemala have approved a joint military operation known as "Operation Sandwich" designed to annihilate the Salvadorian guerrilla movement and possibly to invade Nicaragua as well.

In light of this Nicaragua's self-righteous denials of aiding the Salvadoran insurgents are pathetically shortsighted. Undoubtedly Nicaragua is aiding the guerrillas in some slight way and hopes to avoid American wrath by keeping title aid to an absolute minimal level placing the burden of proof on the Americans. If it is not already clear to the Sandinistas that such "proof" will if necessary be manufactured and that a U.S. backed Central American war to crush the left and restore "business confidence" in the region is almost inevitable then undoubtedly it will not be long before Ronald Reagan and Alexander Haig wrench them back to reality. The U.S. will use indigenous troops if possible but direct involvement of U.S. forces is by no means out of the question.

The first line of defense will, of course, be the Salvadoran army loaded down with American military equipment and well staffed by U.S. "advisors." There will be no fifth hour cut-off of supplies to El Salvador, and given a national bourgeoisie willing to fight to the death, the future does not look bright for the Salvadoran people. They are caught between a vicious ruling junta that is little more than a "respectable" facade behind which the death squads of the bourgeoisie mete out death and retribution to anyone who dares dissent and a fractured and authoritarian left whose only "socialist" vision is a state-capitalist monopoly to benefit "all the people."

There is little in El Salvador, or in any of the Third World "national liberation" struggles, for anarchists to cheer about. Vicious, thuggish regimes are overthrown only to be replaced by equally vicious, if somewhat less thuggish, Marxist regimes and the vicious circle is completed. The only hope for revolution in El Salvador, Nicaragua or the rest of the Third World is a victorious social revolution in one or more of the advanced industrial societies. Only then could meaningful international solidarity and aid be extended in the true spirit of proletarian internationalism. Until then El Salvador and the rest will merely be pawns in the geo-political and ideological conflicts of the Marxist and capitalist super powers.