

Revolution for Freedom in El Salvador?

Democratic Fascism?

Our leaflet "Revolution for Freedom in El Salvador?" (text on pages 21-23)—a commentary on the guerilla army strategy for revolution, now unfolding in El Salvador, and on what it portends, was written prior to the March 28 elections in that war-and-recession-wracked nation.

Duarte's defeat has signaled the end of the semblance of reform—brought to center stage by the young military officer's coup of 1979, in the aftermath of the fall of Somoza in neighboring Nicaragua. Now even the pretense of reform is being dropped. The first act of the parliamentary fascists, after their victory at the polls, was repeal of the never-carried-out Phase II of the agrarian reform, which called for expropriating the coffee growing industry—the basis of the ruling oligarchy's wealth for a century.

Now that would-be social reforms can't be counted on by the U.S. government, to justify its support for Salvadoran State-Terrorism, the new rationale being offered is "democracy"—"The people spoke at the polling booths." (A similar justification could've been offered for supporting Hitler in 1933...)

In the past, when acting to set up regimes more closely allied to U.S. strategic and economic purposes, the U.S. government hasn't been so fussy about maintaining a democratic facade. Sending in the Marines—as in

the Dominican Republic in 1965—was more their style. But in the wake of the Vietnam debacle, the U.S. rulers are constrained to present their interventions in a better light.

In truth, the Salvadoran elections had nothing to do with democracy. The Salvadoran state is an institution that exists to defend the material interests of the bosses, and the existing system of exploitation. Even if the elections had been free and open, they don't challenge this social function. A change in the faces in the government offices will not challenge the existence of oppression.

In fact the situation of the rulers of El Salvador is not an enviable one. Mainly due to the ever-increasing costs of its civil war, the Salvadoran state is virtually bankrupt—last year it was in arrears on debts of \$65.5 million to private international banks. Massive capital flight has ravaged the private sector, with net capital outflow of over \$800 million between 1979 and 1982.

An International Monetary Fund emergency program for El Salvador—supported by the Reagan administration—proposes a Reagan-style cutback of social spending and reduction of the number of government employees, and forecasts a situation where only massive foreign aid will keep the Salvadoran economy afloat—including 35% of the country's imports. As one officer of the World Bank has remarked: "What you see is the creation of the same artificial economy, kept alive only by U.S. military expenditure and assistance, that you had in South Vietnam a decade ago."

Can the left learn from history?

The central focus of our leaflet was the revolutionary strategy of the FMLN/FDR. We might consider what the relationship is between these two organizations. The FMLN is not just the army of the FDR. On the contrary, the FMLN is a loose front—first formed in 1980—of five organizations that are political parties in their own right—political groups that have organized their own armies.

The various mass organizations of the FMLN groups are essentially "transmission belts" for the goals of their respective "vanguards." These mass organizations are in turn components of the FDR. The FDR is a broad inter-class front of political parties, unions and student, professional and business associations.

In reality, the strength of organizations in the FDR ultimately will depend on which FMLN groups they are aligned with. Social-democratic leaders like Manuel Ungo may have some clout now because the support of the social-democratic Second International is important in the struggle against the existing state. But in the absence of their own guerilla armies or mass organizations, this won't mean much when the revolution succeeds in toppling the existing State-Terrorist regime.

The very fact that the FMLN leadership look to Cuba and Vietnam as positive examples gives us an idea about what the FMLN will create once they get their hands on state power.

The basic problem is that guerillaism—as a revolutionary process—favors the emergence of a new state-centralist ruling class—based on the State's top-down control of social and industrial affairs. A number of revolutions in the 20th century—in Vietnam, Cuba, China, Russia, etc.—have shown that it is possible to overthrow capitalism but without creating genuine socialism—i.e., real workers social power. Instead of eliminating exploitation and class oppression, there is simply a change in its form. Can the left assimilate the lessons of this experience?

Nicaragua: Towards State-Centralism

The tendency of a state-centralist oligarchy to emerge as the outgrowth of a guerilla revolution is being demonstrated a few miles to the south of El Salvador, in Nicaragua.

The Sandinista junta has created a huge state machine—controlling over 40% of the nation's economy, and ruling over the masses of the people. Key decisions affecting the whole society are essentially made by the Sandinista leadership in private. The mass



organizations—such as the unions and the local revolutionary committees—are used as vehicles to mobilize support—in a top-down way—for the policies of the FSLN “vanguard.”

Nicaraguan society is not run on the basis of democratic self-management, i.e. decisions being made by mass, self-managed bodies created and controlled by the people themselves.

In order to have a self-managed society—i.e. genuine socialism—freedom of expression is not a luxury—it is essential. The freedom of debate of ideas within the working class, the freedom to try to affect the decisions of the majority, is essential if the masses of the people are going to really control and shape their own destiny.

Freedom to organize or express opposition under the FSLN junta was already being severely circumscribed before the declaration of a state of emergency in March. Since then, the situation has become even worse.

Even before the tightening up in March, the government did not allow any organized opposition to issue leaflets, hang banners or posters or call demonstrations. The FSLN junta has a virtual monopoly on the dissemination of information—especially now that prior censorship has been imposed and news reports curtailed. Two of the three newspapers are under state control as are the radio and TV.

The FSLN leaders are Fidelistas and want to move Nicaragua in the direction of a Cuban-type set-up—in other words, one more state-centralist regime. Even the farm-worker co-operatives—formed by the workers themselves during the revolution that overthrew Somoza—have now been nationalized by the junta.

The FSLN does face one significant rival within the working class—the 50,000-member CTN (Confederation of Nicaraguan Workers). Many of its members work in agriculture, especially the sugar cane fields.

Like the CSN in Quebec and the CFDT in France, the CTN is an affiliate of the World Labor Federation. Originally founded as a Catholic Church-supported rival to the socialist labor internationals, a number of its affiliates have moved to the left in recent decades. The CTN is a left-wing union of this sort: “The CTN reiterates the need to guarantee the development of a union movement that is democratic, independent, unified, revolutionary and class-conscious . . . so as to rebuff every effort to impose a single union hierarchy that would be totally subordinate to the party in power.”

The CTN has faced various forms of harassment from the Sandinista regime—“coercive acts to induce workers to disaffiliate from our federation; organized campaigns of defamation on the part of the official press; the surveillance of our local offices and the houses of our leaders; the destruction of our vehicles; the prohibition, under threat of imprisonment, from freely visiting centers of work controlled by the state.” (Quotes are from a CTN Manifesto.)

The CTN believes that the sort of society the Marxist-Leninists of the FSLN want to create is “a model of oppression and new privileges; this model violates the most ele-

mentary rights of workers, as has been demonstrated in Cuba, Czechoslovakia, Hungary and most recently in Poland, where our brothers have organized Solidarity in order to confront the bureaucracy and corruption of that regime.”

The CTN's support for Solidarnosc is appropriate—given the FSLN's support for the repressive regimes in Eastern Europe. Last July “El Diario”—a paper that adheres closely to the FSLN line—hailed East Germany as “an admirable society” which was “organized on the basis of jobs for all, justice and peace.” Given their fondness for the barracks-state of Prussian Communism, it is no surprise they—along with Cuba—supported the Jaruzelski crackdown on Solidarnosc last December.

As an alternative, the CTN calls for “the development of a foreign policy which is not aligned with either of the imperialist blocs (capitalist or Communist).”

Saying that they are “committed to the construction of a society which is truly democratic and pluralist, and founded on economic, social and cultural democracy,” the CTN says this requires “the active and determined participation of the organized working class, in the form of self-management both within the national economy and in the individual enterprise.”

Of course, it isn't clear here what they mean by “democracy”—this is compatible with a social-democratic perspective—and their social-democrat-inclined sister union—the CFDT in France—also has used the language of “self-management.” While the present political ideas of the CTN may have their limitations—similar perhaps to the limitations of Solidarnosc or the CFDT—at this point the CTN seems to be the only independent and democratic mass organization through which Nicaraguan working people can fight for their aspirations and their freedoms.

The increasing consolidation of a total centralization of power in the hands of the state has also provoked opposition from other participants in the anti-Somoza revolution—such as Eden Pastora—who, as “Commandante Zero,” gained notoriety for his daring attacks on the Somocista regime. Recently he has joined up with the social-democratic opposition, headquartered in Costa Rica. In part these people have been irked by the FSLN's drive—cautious though it has been—to expropriate more and more small businesses, which they view as a betrayal of the FSLN's programmatic commitment to a mixed economy (similar to the FDR/FMLN program for El Salvador); also, the failure to establish a Western-style representative “democracy”—i.e., a form of state where the people who rule in the interests of the bosses must submit themselves to periodic popular elections to keep their jobs, as here in the U.S.

While we are saddened by the emergence of another totalistic state-centralism—and the loss of popular freedoms—in Nicaragua, we don't see the social-democratic program as superior—maintaining the “freedom” to sell 40-hour-a-week chunks of your life to capitalist bosses and the farce of electoral statism. The libertarian alternative would

also entail expropriating the property of the capitalists—big and small—in Nicaragua—putting the economy under the collective self-management of all the people, a society of free and equal humans based on mass participation in direct democracy.

Though the Marxist-Leninist guerilla armies in El Salvador, Guatemala and elsewhere in Latin America can't be a basis for popular self-emancipation, the consolidation of new state-centralist regimes isn't “inevitable”—the very fact of revolution, of instability and discontent throughout the region, and the possible downfall of the State-Terrorist regimes, provides an opening—a possibility of the masses of the people inserting themselves into the process through the development of genuinely independent and self-managed movements of working people, which could provide the basis for self-emancipation.

Latin American Libertarianism

The basic ideas in our leaflet—about self-managed labor organization and workers' militias as the alternative to guerilla armies run by vanguardist political groups—did not arise in a vacuum. We didn't originate these ideas. They have long been present in Latin American labor and revolutionary movements. E.G., in their statement of November 1980 the “Coordinadora Libertaria Latino-Americana” [reprinted in this issue]—a group of Latin American libertarian exiles in Europe—refer to the Bolivian miners' assemblies and the “cordones industriales” created by Chilean workers in the early 1970s as “indicating the way forward” for the revolutionary popular movements in Latin America.

The “cordones industriales” were worker co-ordinating councils, made up of delegates elected by the workers' assemblies at various workplaces, including many shops that had been seized by the workforce. This is the sort of thing we were proposing. We projected the possible extension of this type of mass workers' democracy to the level of the whole society—we think it foreshadows a whole social order.

The issue of the relationship between a working class seeking its emancipation and the armed conflict that seems to be an unavoidable part of the overthrow of oppression is not a new question for anarcho-syndicalism. The principles of the International Workers Association—an organization that included hundreds of thousands of Latin American workers in the 1920s/30s, in organizations like the Argentine Regional Workers Federation (FORA)—had this to say on this issue: “[Anarcho-syndicalists] do not forget that the decisive struggles between the capitalism of today and the Free Communism of tomorrow, will not take place without serious clashes. They recognize violence, therefore, as a means of defense against the violence of the ruling classes, in the struggle of the revolutionary people for the expropriation of the land and the means of production. Just as this expropriation cannot be successfully carried through except by the revolutionary mass economic organizations of the workers, so also the defense of the revolution should be

in the hands of the mass labor organizations, and not in those of any military or other organization, separate from the mass labor organizations." The central point in our leaflet was the application of this basic anarcho-syndicalist principle to the current situation in El Salvador.

Who are we?

Our own Latin American solidarity activities go back several years. Through our association with the International Workers Association (the anarcho-syndicalist international), we had been receiving information about the situation in a number of Latin American countries and appeals on behalf of Latin American libertarians. Because of these channels of information we were able to participate with others in concerted solidarity activities.

Thus, for example, at the time of the the coup in Bolivia in July 1980, a number of IWA-sympathizing groups were able to protest the imprisonment of activists of the COB (Bolivian Workers Central—a mili-

tant independent union federation) and the Bolivian human rights movement. At the same time, we were able to express our concern for the fate of Liber Forti—a well-known anarcho-syndicalist and cultural secretary of the Miners' Federation, who was one of those arrested. (Forti had been the target of an attempted assassination during a previous coup. After his arrest in July 1980, he was subsequently released into exile by the Bolivian regime.)

The Norwegian Syndicalist Federation—the IWA section in Norway—provided not only information but also a good example. They had been successful in getting local unions—through the insistence of their people in those unions—involved in these solidarity efforts and they were also instrumental in organizing a number of labor protests against the repressive regimes in South America.

Also, about two years ago, the anarcho-syndicalists in Chile were beginning to reorganize, including not only the organizing of an oppositional rank and file tendency in

the unions but also participation in neighborhood committees and a Women's Liberation Front. But due to the depression-level unemployment and low wages—thanks to repression of the labor movement—they were in need of financial assistance to carry out their political activities. Thus we set up a Chile Solidarity Fund which ultimately succeeded in raising about \$500 on behalf of the Chilean libertarians.

Like other tendencies in the workers' movement, libertarians in Latin America are fighting for their rights and their lives in the face of severe repression. The successes and difficulties of libertarian militants receives little or no public attention. We are trying to change this, and provide support for libertarians, and working class movements "that practice autonomy of the masses and move in the direction of self-emancipation" (as the CLLA says), by translating and publicizing information, raising money, organizing demonstrations and educational meetings to express our solidarity and inform the public.

The following text is from a leaflet "Revolution for Freedom in El Salvador?" which we distributed at a March 27 demonstration in Oakland, CA against U.S. intervention in El Salvador.

Do you feel sick with each grisly report of the war in El Salvador—a war that is pitting U.S.-backed generals, coffee barons and landlords against the Salvadoran people???

If you're like most people, you instinctively side with the Salvadoran people. You, like us, oppose growing U.S. intervention in Central America.

Thousands of people in the U.S. and Europe are actively exploring ways to build support for the Salvadoran people's struggle—and to develop concrete opposition to further U.S. intervention. We realize that this activity is more than a personal expression of solidarity with a just cause. It's needed desperately to stop the million\$\$\$ in U.S. "aid" to El Salvador. Why? Because U.S. dollars keep the Duarte coffee dictatorship afloat in a sea of blood—the blood that flows daily from the sadistic guns and machetes of the U.S.-trained Salvadoran "forces of order."

State-Terrorism Defends Class Rule

The underlying cause of the civil war in El Salvador is *not* small bands of Cuban-influenced "terrorists." It is brutal class oppression. It is the concentration of social power and wealth in the greedy hands of a tiny minority—the Salvadoran ruling class.

Ruling classes dominate and exploit the working people of all countries—whether they have a capitalist economic set-up, like the U.S. or a bureaucratic statist arrangement, like the USSR, Cuba, etc. Civil war has erupted in El Salvador because ruling-class oppression has reached intolerable proportions.

The real terrorist in El Salvador is a savage institution that has tortured, raped or murdered over 30,000 people in the last two years. It is the Salvadoran state.

Like states the world over, the Salvadoran state speaks and acts for the ruling class minority whose economic power and vast possessions are stolen from working people's labor and social resources. Working people can have no real control over a state and its professional

armed bodies—just as we can have no control within the oppressive, top-down economic arrangements that states exist to maintain.

Salvadoran working people have begun to realize that ending their own oppression must begin with the military defeat of the state-terrorism and its beneficiaries—Salvadoran and U.S. bosses and generals. This growing realization is what gives the civil war in El Salvador its class character.

Like any revolution-in-the-making, though, the success of the Salvadoran people's struggle for freedom depends on the character of the opposition movement—and on who controls the guns after the smoke clears.

What political currents animate the struggle to overthrow the Salvadoran state-terrorism?

This is the opposition?

Most anti-U.S.-imperialism groups (including socialist ones) in the U.S. and Europe pin the hopes of the Salvadoran people on the leftist opposition known as the FDR/FMLN (Democratic Revolutionary Front/Farabundo Marti National Liberation Front). The FDR is the coalition political front of the FMLN. The FMLN is the unified organization of the various guerilla armies fighting the Duarte dictatorship.

Will the program of the FDR/FMLN lead to the emancipation of workers and *campesinos*? Will a new state apparatus controlled by a ruling class emerge?

The FDR/FMLN fiercely oppose the tyranny of the Duarte dictatorship. They promise to replace it with "economic justice" for workers. But the program and politics of the FDR/FMLN will most likely lead to either a "mixed" capitalist economic set-up like Nicaragua or to Cuban-style bureaucratic statism. Neither means working class emancipation.

The FDR/FMLN's program condemns property privately-owned by absentee coffee capital, but champions private property and "public" (i.e. state-controlled) ownership that would mean top-down, minority control

by businessmen and politicians. It opposes a ruling class—the current one in El Salvador—but proposes a new form of class rule, a new form of exploitation. It cries out against the totalitarianism of the Duarte military state, yet offers workers nothing more than a promise that the FDR/FMLN state would protect political freedoms.

Under the FDR/FMLN scheme of things, workers would be locked out of all vital social decision-making. They would entrust their future to the small group of Stalinist, Maoist and social-democratic politicians and military commanders who would control the new FDR/FMLN state. In fact, many FDR/FMLN leaders are career politicians who have served in previous military juntas. Many of them now speak of a “negotiated settlement” and a role for current government bureaucrats and generals in some “new” state set-up.

Do “national liberation movements” liberate?

Some groups engaged in support for the Salvadoran struggle think the issues that we raise here are “divisive” or even “reactionary.” They insist that defeating the U.S.-backed junta is the main objective: that to question the program and political approach of the FDR/FMLN “objectively” hinders the freedom struggle. But can anything short of *genuine* liberation justify all of the courage and sacrifice, blood and tears of the social war now underway in El Salvador?

We don’t think you have to give up the struggle against U.S. imperialism in Central America to raise questions about the politics of the FDR/FMLN and the same is



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true of other national liberation movements. Our questions are sadly relevant because numerous revolutions in the 20th century have overthrown a capitalist ruling class—but without liberating the masses of working and farming people from state oppression and economic exploitation. Revolutions in places like Cuba or China have merely marked a transition to a new form of class oppression, not based on capitalist private property, but based on top-down control of industrial and social affairs by a class of party/state hierarchs.

Let’s face it. The path to genuine liberation in El Salvador and the Third World is full of obstacles that tend to perpetuate class rule. The gross state-terrorism of U.S.-aligned states like El Salvador requires that workers organize their own military power. Yet, state-terrorism makes openly organizing mass opposition movements difficult. As a result, guerilla armies emerge that are not controlled by the workers—they aren’t controlled by mass workers’ organizations, run directly and democratically by the rank-and-file. The guerilla armies tend to be run by political groups, which are necessarily a small minority of the populace. This tends to set in motion a dangerous social dynamic.

In the course of the struggle against the old state, the emerging mass organizations are subordinated to the military/political command of a leftist minority. This embryonic state-in-the-making—the “dual” power that challenges that of the old state-terrorism—is not the democracy of self-managed labor organizations, which field their own democratic workers’ militias. It is the minority-controlled military/political apparatus of the guerilla movement leaders—leaders who seek to integrate, disarm or replace any mass workers’ organizations that emerge, and make them powerless junior partners of the new state power.

We do not belittle the real improvements in daily life that frequently accompany victorious national liberation movements. To the degree that the mass organizations play an active role in defeating the old imperialist ruling class, some of the worst forms of exploitation/repression are wiped away. To the degree that the mass organizations and militias are dominated by a new state of politicians and generals controlling a professional army/police apparatus, the newly-won gains and political freedoms are jeopardized.

Just ask Iranian men and women, who are being ruthlessly deprived by the "anti-imperialist" Islamic Republic. Or ask Nicaraguan and Zimbabwean workers, whose "anti-imperialist" governments have declared strikes illegal and close down media not controlled by the state.

Will the working class in El Salvador hold real social power through mass democratic labor organizations, controlled from below, or will the armed struggle just lead to the creation of a new state—one more armed apparatus not directly possessed by the workers through their own self-managed mass organizations? To answer this question, lessons must be drawn from the failure of national liberation movements to liberate—hard lessons seemingly more easily grasped by workers than by many "socialists."

From self-managed struggle to self-managed society

A social order doesn't just drop out of the sky. The society that emerges from a revolution will already be foreshadowed by the way the struggle against the powers-that-be has been organized. Those who control the process of social reconstruc-

whole economy, and ensure that production is geared to satisfying the collective needs and desires of the working class majority, within the constraints of the available resources. Any austerity made inevitable by the revolutionary territory's position within the larger capitalist world market would be best implemented by the workers themselves—not bureaucrats or a self-appointed leadership.

Workers could ensure that any committees that they elect to carry out the decisions of the congresses and co-ordinate economic and militia activities would not become a new set of order-givers, an entrenched bureaucracy with separate interests of its own, through such measures as immediate recall by the ranks, mandatory rotation from office, absence of special pay or privileges, etc. The idea is to avoid establishing any separate decision-making power that rules over the mass of working people at the base of society. To be free is to be genuinely self-determining.

By self-directing the reconstruction of society through self-managed labor organizations, working

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tion will determine who controls and benefits from the new social set-up. The antidote to building a "leftist" junta in El Salvador is conducting the armed struggle by means of a mass worker militia, controlled and organized by self-managed labor organizations. This way, Salvadoran working people could ensure that they end up in power, instead of finding out after the smoke clears that they've just hoisted into power a new class of bureaucrats, bosses and generals.

We think the alternative to national liberation governments that govern instead of liberate is the control of society by unions based on the face-to-face democracy of mass worker assemblies and society-wide congresses of all working people. Congresses that are made up of delegates elected to present the ideas and proposals decided by the local worker assemblies. Congresses that include delegates of groups defined by other social interests than employment in industry, groups whose interests are consistent with working class emancipation—students, women, elderly people, etc. The armed defense of the workers' revolution would be solely the responsibility of a militia organized and controlled by these unified mass workers' organizations.

Through the class-wide congresses, in which all working people are represented, the rank-and-file labor organizations could plan and direct, in a genuinely democratic way, the management of the

people would be defining their own future. They'd be taking control of their own lives. And that's what the struggle for freedom is all about. And they'd also be creating a model of liberation for workers everywhere to study and emulate.

The struggle of workers against bosses is a worldwide struggle. Developing unity in action across national frontiers is crucial to victory in this struggle. A workers' revolution that is successfully isolated by the world's states is more likely to fail. Within Central America, this suggests the importance of the development of unity of revolutionary workers' movements throughout the region. But it is important for working people everywhere to support—and try to learn from—each others' social struggles.

Agree? Disagree? Outraged? Confused?
Want to talk about it?
Get in touch.

ideas & action

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