



Foreign  
Assessment  
Center



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# Guatemala: The Climate for Insurgency

An Intelligence Assessment



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## Guatemala: The Climate for Insurgency (U)

### The Radical Left

The Guatemalan radical left—including both terrorist groups and sympathetic front organizations representing labor, peasants, and students—is the most tenacious in the hemisphere. It has survived constant repression and vilifying internal dissension. Drawing on their years of experience in subversion [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] the radicals are again challenging the government in a campaign reminiscent of the violence that wracked the country during the mid- and late 1960s [REDACTED]

### Guerrilla Groups

The modern guerrilla movement can be traced to 1962 and the formation of the Rebel Armed Forces (FAR)—an alliance of the Guatemalan Community Party (PGT), dissident military officers, and leftist students. The FAR spawned the first significant terrorist campaigns, which peaked between 1965 and 1969. A government counterinsurgency program killed several top leaders, decimated cadres, and broke up support networks. The FAR repudiated the PGT in 1968 for not helping enough in the fighting, and out of a series of factional splits and mergers grew the now predominant insurgent group, the Guerrilla Army of the Poor (EGP). A second major group, the Organization of the People in Arms (ORPA), began operations [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

### Affiliated Organizations


The Democratic Front Against Repression (FDCR), established in 1979, represented a fledgling bid to duplicate the broad front tactics of Nicaraguan and Salvadoran revolutionaries. During 1980, it focused on publicizing human rights violations in Guatemala and in promoting a negative international view of the government of President Lucas. In their travels through Europe, Latin America, and the United States, FDCR representatives tried to project an image of nonpartisan and nonviolent opposition to repression; their public statements, however, echoed the propaganda of the insurgents [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

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[REDACTED]


Propaganda flier exhorting the Guatemalan people to join the four guerrilla groups in the struggle against the "criminal Lucas government" and the "assassin Army." Guatemalans are also urged to support actively the insurgents in El Salvador.




**CONMEMOREMOS EL 20 DE OCTUBRE  
IMPULSANDO LA LUCHA PARA DERROCAR  
AL GOBIERNO CRIMINAL DE LUCAS**

Las cuatro Organizaciones Revolucionarias  
EGP, FAR, ORPA y PGT

Llamamos unánimemente al Pueblo de Guatemala: **¡UNIRSE PARA VENCER!**




- A enfrentar combatiéndolo la represión del gobierno y los peones que la Autoridades burguesas y organizadas, usando todos los medios a nuestro alcance.
- A incorporarse masivamente a la Guerra Revolucionaria Popular impulsada y dirigida por nuestras cuatro Organizaciones Revolucionarias, para dar nuevos y mayores golpes al sistema asesino.
- A apoyar activamente la lucha victoriosa del heroico Pueblo hermano de El Salvador y seguir su ejemplo combatiendo.



**ORGANIZACIÓN  
DEL PUEBLO EN ARMAS**

**LA UNIDAD REVOLUCIONARIA, POPULAR  
Y DEMOCRÁTICA ACERCA EL DIA DEL  
TRIUNFO PARA NUESTRO PUEBLO**



**PARTIDO GUATEMALTECO  
DEL TRABAJO**

Guatemala, 10 de Octubre de 1980.



Guerrilla commune in which the "EGP reveals the truth regarding the victorious attack on the Cotzal garrison and refutes the lies of the Army." Contradicting Army spokesmen, the guerrillas claim to have killed 35 to 40 soldiers. In reprisal, "the Army of the rich and its North American, Israeli and Somocista advisers" massacred 60 men, women, and children in that Indian town. "But with this genocidal attitude, the only thing they accomplish is heightening of the awareness of the people that POPULAR REVOLUTIONARY WAR IS THE ONLY PATH LEFT TO FOLLOW...."



## EJERCITO GUERRILLERO DE LOS POBRES

### COMUNICADO DE PRENSA

EL EGP INFORMA LA VERDAD SOBRE EL VICTORIOSO ATAQUE AL CUARTEL DE COTZAL Y REFUTA LAS MENTIRAS DEL EJERCITO.

EL EJERCITO GUERRILLERO DE LOS POBRES -EGP- informa a la Prensa Nacional e Internacional y al Pueblo guatemalteco, sobre el ataque que victoriosamente llevaron a cabo trabajadores indigenas en armas del Frente Guerrillero Edgar Ibarra, el lunes 28 de Julio.

Ese día, a las 3:20 horas, nuestras fuerzas iniciaron un ataque de hostigamiento en gran escala contra el Cuartel Militar de San Juan Cotzal, Departamento de El Quiché, en el cual habian entre 60 y 100 kaibiles fuertemente armados, bajo el mando de dos oficiales guatemaltecos y dos ex-oficiales de la odiada guardia somocista.

Después de 20 minutos de intenso enfrentamiento (reconocido públicamente como el mayor habido entre el ejército y las fuerzas guerrilleras), el fuego de fusilería de nuestros heróicos combatientes guerrilleros le causó al enemigo las siguientes bajas comprobadas:

- Murieron uno de los oficiales guatemaltecos (que si fue reconocido por el gobierno de Lucas ante la imposibilidad de ocultarlo) y los dos oficiales somocistas, que aparecian como miembros de la Guardia de Hacienda, torturadores de oficio.
- Entre 35 y 40 kaibiles muertos.
- Entre 25 y 30 kaibiles heridos que han sido distribuidos en diferentes hospitales militares del país (Huehuetenango y Guatemala).
- Ajusticiamos a dos elementos del poder local: Juan Ramos Chanay y Domingo Rodríguez Chanay, gufas y orejas del ejército.

Nuestras fuerzas no sufrieron ni una sola baja. Por eso el enemigo no ha podido presentar ni una sola arma capturada.

Hasta las 07:53, cuando ya nuestras fuerzas guerrilleras se habían retirado, llegaron refuerzos enemigos transportados en helicópteros desde el Cuartel de Chajul. Poco después la aviación comenzó a bombardear el centro y los alrededores del Pueblo y del cuartel, provocando tanta confusión que una bomba cayó en pleno cuartel, y los kaibiles dispararon contra la aviación. El cuartel quedó prácticamente destruido y actualmente ha sido saqueado. Posteriormente el ejército desató una feroz y salvaje masacre contra la población civil, ante su incapacidad de golpear a las fuerzas guerrilleras.

La masacre se continuó, contándose hasta el 31 de Julio 60 muertos y desaparecidos, entre niños, mujeres, hombres adultos y ancianos. Con esa cobarda represión, el ejército de los ricos y sus asesores norteamericanos, israelíes y somocistas, creen que podrán engañar al Pueblo y aislar al EGP de las grandes masas populares. Pero con esa actitud genocida lo único que hacen es acelerar la toma de conciencia de todo el Pueblo de que LA GUERRA POPULAR REVOLUCIONARIA ES EL ÚNICO CAMINO QUE LE QUEDA y aumentar su integración a las filas guerrilleras.

HASTA LA VICTORIA SIEMPRE  
EJERCITO GUERRILLERO DE LOS POBRES  
-EGP-

Guatemala, 4 de agosto de 1980.

### Selected Socio-Economic Regions



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In Guatemala City and other areas, terrorist acts include assassinations, kidnappings, and bombings. Uniformed personnel are attacked indiscriminately; particular individuals may be targeted for revenge because of specific acts of repression. A few businessmen have also been killed at random. The radicals hope these tactics will accelerate polarization and undermine the confidence of domestic and foreign companies and investors.

#### Indian Recruitment

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

The percentage of the indigenous population supporting the guerrilla movement apparently remains small and geographically limited. Most Indians still distrust the revolutionaries and would prefer to sit out the struggle—they sympathize with neither the insurgents nor the government.

Whether the guerrilla organizations can widen their appeal to the Indian masses depends to a significant degree on a variety of socioeconomic factors that are ending the isolation of the Indian communities and eroding their traditional lifestyles.<sup>1</sup> This process is producing a less submissive generation of Indians. But the changes affecting the indigenous population do not necessarily produce revolutionaries. In fact, the decline of the old culture has been accompanied by a strong desire among young Indians to participate in the national mainstream. Economic opportunity could provide an outlet for that desire, while the lack of opportunity could become a major factor in the radicalization of Indian youths.

#### Government Response to the Radical Challenge

Guatemala possesses the resources to offer more social mobility to its poor. Concern over the potential for insurgent successes has caused the government to begin significant social and economic reform aimed at improving the living conditions of the lower classes. (U)

An economic downturn in 1979 and early 1980—brought on by rising prices of imports, a squeeze on credit, and the disruption of Central American trade—is likely to cause a cutback in the government's reform program. Nevertheless, the economy is basically strong, and continuing high prices for most agricultural exports and the expected significant increases in oil production promise to ease the situation over the long term. (U)

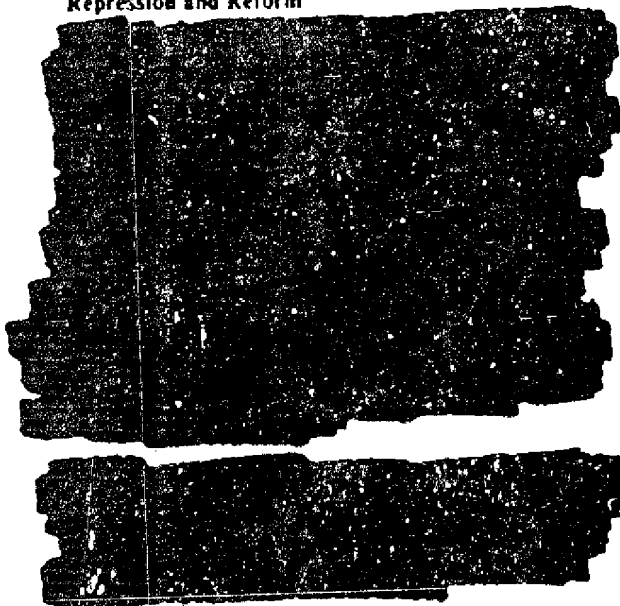
So far, the country's rapidly growing middle class—between 15 and 18 percent of the urban population—sees little attraction in revolutionary activity. The main interests of working class youth also appear to be

<sup>1</sup> See the appendix for a more detailed discussion of the socioeconomic changes affecting the Indian population. (U)

employment, education, and social mobility. If economic conditions decline significantly, however, the radical left would probably gain many new adherents, particularly among urban and rural youth. (U)

Current economic problems, therefore, threaten not only the stability of the urban sector but—by reducing tax and other revenues—the continuation of government-financed social welfare programs for rural areas. The Lucas government, aware of the potential difficulties and particularly concerned over agitation by leftist labor unions, raised minimum wages significantly in 1980, doubled the traditional Christmas bonus, and implemented other measures benefiting both urban and rural workers. Nevertheless, the antagonism of the authorities toward politically active unions, coupled with the murders of labor leaders and others by rightist death squads, undercut government efforts to gain good will. (U)

#### Repression and Reform



The ruling classes traditionally have viewed the national government primarily as an instrument for maintaining the peace, providing minimal services, and allowing laissez faire capitalism to run its course. Even today, despite the new emphasis on social programs,

the ratio of government expenditures to national income remains one of the smallest in Latin America. (U)

The Lucas regime, however, has initiated a significant break with the past. Although continuing to believe that prosperity in the private sector will ultimately benefit the poor, the government is investing in the public sector and making the other expenditures—at least partially because of the current business decline. Budgeted public spending has risen from \$282 million in 1978 to \$418 million in 1980, while estimated actual expenditures went up by \$91 million from 1978 to 1979—a major increase compared to the record of previous regimes. (U)

The government's programs and activities are highlighted by:

- The Social Action Plan, emphasizing employment and basic services in rural areas.
- A variety of reform measures including land distribution, wage hikes, and improved public relations.
- Armed forces' involvement in civic action and social welfare programs. (U)

#### The Social Action Plan

The government's main effort in the area of socio-economic reform is embodied in its ambitious Social Action Plan. Aimed primarily at the rural poor, the plan intends to generate jobs and provide basic services to the large segment of the population that has failed to benefit from the economic progress of the past two decades. On paper, the plan looks good, but about one-third of the proposed projects are still under study and many of those already approved are bogged down in the planning stages. The overall results may not be apparent for several years and it is questionable whether the government has the intention or the capacity to fully implement this far-reaching program. (U)

Government technocrats have warned that should present trends continue, conditions will have deteriorated further by the time President Lucas's term ends in 1982:

- More people will be suffering from malnutrition, which now affects 80 percent of children under five years of age.

- Illiteracy, now reaching 80 percent in some rural areas, will have increased.
- Unemployment, now at 30 percent, will have increased. (U)

The plan's goals, therefore, are to "quickly reorient state activity," emphasizing programs "to increase employment and income, provide basic services to impoverished communities, and improve administrative efficiency." Over the next two years, the plan budgets \$566.7 million for health, housing, education, and child nutrition. (U)

The Social Action Plan seems to be a pragmatic effort to gear new programs to local realities. For example, it deemphasizes hospitals and doctors, which provide services only to a small segment of the rural population, and stresses public health clinics staffed primarily by paramedics. Reversing previous policy, the government is also promoting birth control information and the distribution of contraceptives through these clinics. (U)

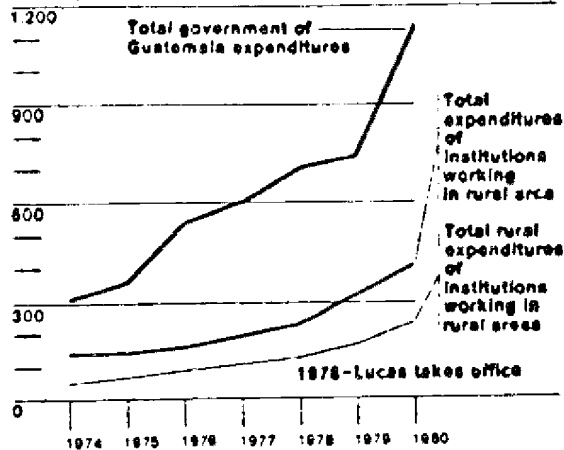
#### Other Government Measures

A number of other government programs dovetail with the Social Action Plan and are a key to its success or failure. These include incentives to industries moving to the provinces, resettlement of Indians, higher minimum wages, and a stepped-up public relations campaign. Like the broader Social Action Plan, these programs are aimed primarily at improving the lot of the rural poor. (U)

A new decentralization law offers substantial tax breaks and other financial incentives to businesses that relocate plants outside Guatemala City. Government planners hope that as firms relocate in the provinces, employment opportunities will increase significantly and help ameliorate the sharp disparity between rural and urban income. (U)

The government has undertaken little land reform—in the traditional sense of breaking up large land holdings. Instead, the Lucas regime has focused on colonizing jungles in the Northern Transversal Zone with cooperative units that will receive technical/agricultural assistance as well as access to roads, markets, schools, and health clinics. (U)

**Figure 4**  
**Government of Guatemala Total Actual Public Sector Expenditures, 1974-80**  
 (Investment and Operating Costs)  
 Million \$



Source: Agency for International Development

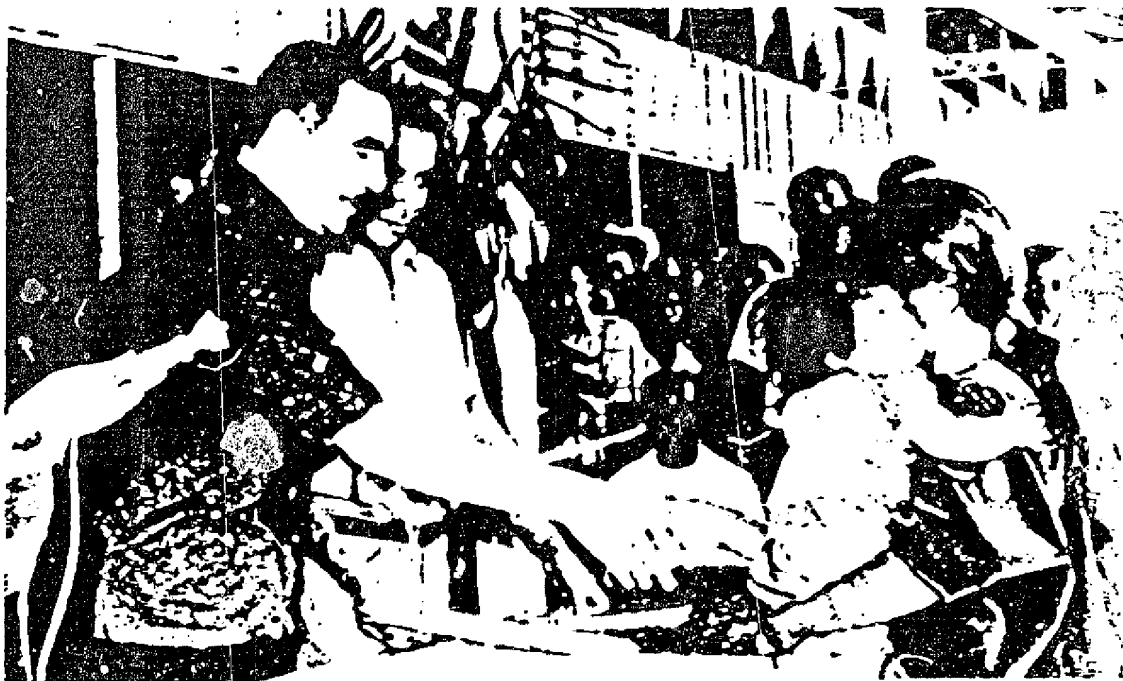
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A top priority is resettlement of Indians from the Western Highlands, where overpopulation and soil exhaustion are major problems. The administration claims that 22,000 titles have been granted during the past two years, but many obstacles remain. Uncontrolled deforestation may ruin the agricultural potential of the new lands, for example, while critics charge that the whole program is merely perpetuating the traditional dependence of small farmers on temporary work on larger holdings nearby.

Low wages, traditional for agricultural workers, led to unprecedented work stoppages in Pacific coast plantations in February 1980. The authorities reacted with uncharacteristic restraint, and eventually decreed a minimum wage nearly three times higher than the





General Lucas personally distributing land titles to Indians resettled in the Northern Transversal Zone. (U)



previous rate for workers in cotton, sugarcane, coffee, and livestock—the main exports of agrobusiness. Wages for urban workers also were raised substantially. (U)

Some large landowners laid off workers, however, and others refused to meet the minimum wage, despite a public threat by the Labor Minister to prosecute those who refused to comply. Even if a nationwide minimum wage were instituted, workers' purchasing power would still continue to erode because of inflation—currently 13 percent and likely to increase.

Concerned over signs of widespread antipathy toward its policies both domestically and internationally, the government has initiated a nationwide public relations campaign emphasizing the benefits of its social welfare program and depicting soldiers as compassionate and nationalistic citizens. The government stresses the high percentage of Indian soldiers to discount allegations of atrocities against the Indians, and exalts as a patriotic rallying point the Maya Indian heritage. This tactic could be particularly effective because of the massive numbers of Guatemalans who retain an Indian identity, and because some officials do maintain close relations with the indigenous population. President Lucas, for example, is intimately familiar with the Indians of his native Alta Verapaz, and speaks the Kekchi language. (U)

Guatemalan Army public relations advertisement: "Let us maintain peace in Guatemala. Soldiers are men of the people. People like yourself. Who love and cherish Guatemala as you do. I am your brother. You are my brother. We are a single Guatemalan race."

**mantengamos la paz  
EN GUATEMALA**

**LOS SOLDADOS SOMOS PUEBLO.  
PUEBLO COMO TU. QUE SIENTEN Y AMAN  
A GUATEMALA COMO TU.**



**Soy tu hermano.**

**Eres mi hermano.**

**Somos una misma raza chapina.**

Reacting to international and domestic criticism of forced conscription, the Ministry of Defense issued new recruiting and pay regulations in July. Material benefits were raised, and now even include a monthly allotment to compensate families for the loss of a working member.

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

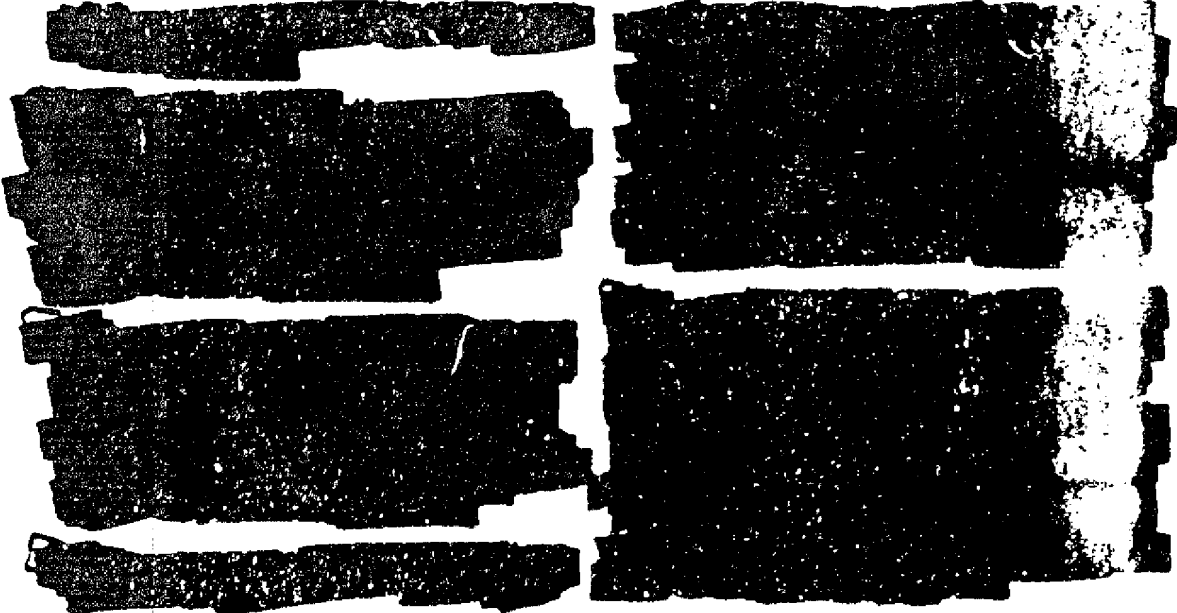
[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

Rightwing death squads often seek to make a psychological impact on the local populace by dumping the bodies of their victims along public roads.



©TRIPLE CRIMEN. — Habitantes de la finca Torallia, de Escuintla, ven con estupor cómo quedaran los cuerpos sin vida de Salvador Del Cid Murrantz, Feliciano Cardona Castro y Inocencio Barillas Ponce, muertos a tiros ayer por hombres desconocidos. Los ejecutores del triple crimen, previamente ataron a sus víctimas con los manos hacia atrás, dándoles muerte con ráfagas de metralleta. (GMS)



## Appendix

### Cultural Change Among Guatemalan Indians and Its Impact on Guerrilla Recruitment

#### New Aspirations

Indigenous culture is experiencing a profound transformation as long-established attitudes and patterns of behavior are being altered by diverse factors:

- Traditional *minifundia* (small plot) agriculture is unable to provide adequate livelihoods, thus intensifying dependence on the national money economy.
- Missionaries and catechists have introduced the concept of social justice as well as undermined fatalistic religious beliefs and rituals.
- The Indians have increasing communication with the outside world.

These changes—guerrilla leaders reason—could produce a generation of Indian youth who will seek a better life by overthrowing the capitalist system.

But these changes could go either way; an expanding horizon does not necessarily produce revolutionaries, and, in fact, the decline of traditional culture has been accompanied by a strong desire among young Indians to enjoy the benefits of participation in national life. Whether Guatemala's socioeconomic system can accommodate changing Indian aspirations is an issue that will be resolved over time.

#### Cultural Challenges and Guerrilla Problems

Radical left propaganda, an integral facet of the strategy to legitimize the insurgency and gain foreign support, depicts Guatemala's Indians as a homogeneous mass being collectively oppressed. This stereotype ignores the linguistic and cultural diversity among Indians, as well as the economic progress enjoyed by a growing number of Indian merchants. Guerrilla propagandists also give the inaccurate impression that all peasants are Indians. Although most of the rural population in the Western Highlands is indigenous, most of the peasants in the eastern zones are not. Furthermore, not all Indians are peasants; many are active and successful in commerce. Anthropological studies increasingly refer to an emerging indigenous elite in various locales. (U)

Indians generally consider themselves racially distinct from the dominant, Spanish-speaking Ladino population of Guatemala, but the distinction is primarily cultural rather than racial. The most obvious cleavage is that of language; however, this also separates Indians from each other, since many Indian languages and dialects are spoken. In the same manner that each dialect is limited to a specific area or locality, the traditional cultural orientation of the Indian centers on his native community. This localism, with its particular code of behavior and set of beliefs, distinguishes the traditional Indian from the Ladino, who views himself as part of a wider Spanish-American culture with centers in Guatemala City and abroad. (U)

Ladino domination of the economic and governmental structures in the Western Highlands has been facilitated, in part, by the rural Indians' general lack of knowledge about the outside world. During recent decades, however, the Indians' isolation has been reduced by a host of factors including new roads, literacy campaigns, foreign missionaries, an increase in migrant labor, and the availability of transistor radios.

Guatemalan guerrillas: many of them apparently are Indians.



These have brought a growing sophistication that, while making some Indians more accessible to insurgent appeals, has made others strive for personal economic advancement within the national mainstream. (U)

The insurgents are attempting to take advantage of changing Indian aspirations by promising that a revolutionary government would bring about social and economic improvements that could never be attained under the present capitalistic system.

Nevertheless, before a substantial number of Indians takes the risk of joining the armed rebellion, the radical left must prove that it is capable of successfully challenging the armed forces militarily.

The left's task is compounded by a growing fragmentation within many indigenous communities, a result of culture changes that pit old values and practices against new social and economic aspirations. Although the attendant polarization has made some Indians increasingly susceptible to insurgent appeals, it also has reinforced the desire of others toward material benefits within the present political order. (U)

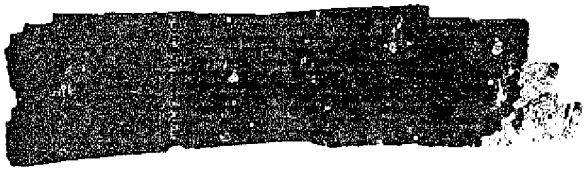
Over the last few decades, a major factor contributing to polarization among the Indians has involved traditional Indian religious organizations known as *cofradías*, whose power and influence have declined as indigenous participation in modern commercial activity has increased. In the past, the most prosperous Indians bore many of the heavy financial costs of the *cofradías*—including fiestas and rituals in honor of patron saints—thus enabling these organizations to level wealth, promote group solidarity, and reaffirm traditional customs. Now, however, individual Indians are more likely to use their money for personal advancement, a reflection of the inroads made by modern Western culture. Moreover, class divisions are emerging in some communities as wealthier Indians marry among themselves, thereby establishing an economic elite more likely to favor the status quo—

The reduction of the socioeconomic and religious significance of the *cofradías* has been accelerated by Protestant and Roman Catholic religious modernizers, who have attacked the system as idolatrous and wasteful. Primarily concerned with social justice rather than traditional religious practices these innovators work through native converts or lay catechists—usually assertive, literate youths—to focus the attention of the Indians on human rights and other issues. (U)

#### The Erosion of the Indian Economic Base

\* An EGP manifesto states: "Christians play an important role in the consciousness raising and organization of our people and have made of their faith a generous force for the liberation of Guatemala. . . . Aware Christians should understand and believe that when peaceful means to achieve justice have been exhausted, revolutionary violence is legitimate and just. In our country, one cannot be a Christian without being a revolutionary." Fidel Castro himself made overtures to Christian militants in his 1971 proposals in Chile for "strategic alliances between Christians and Marxists" and on other occasions. (U)





Despite the advances of Indian merchants, the marketing system keeps most Indians in an inferior position by vesting control of native commerce largely in Ladino hands. For example, the bulk of the agricultural lands in the Western Highlands—the area where indigenous involvement in guerrilla groups has been most pronounced—are owned and farmed in small parcels by Indians. The produce, however, is bought and distributed in the Ladino-dominated market towns, thus rendering the Indians largely dependent on that segment of the population generally opposed to any form of change. (U)


For the Indians, the problem of the marketing system is exacerbated by the *minifundia* or small parcels of land, which traditionally have supported the indigenous population. Now, however, increasing overpopulation, further subdivisions through inheritance, and the poor quality and meager productivity of the land have rendered the *minifundia* inadequate. (U)

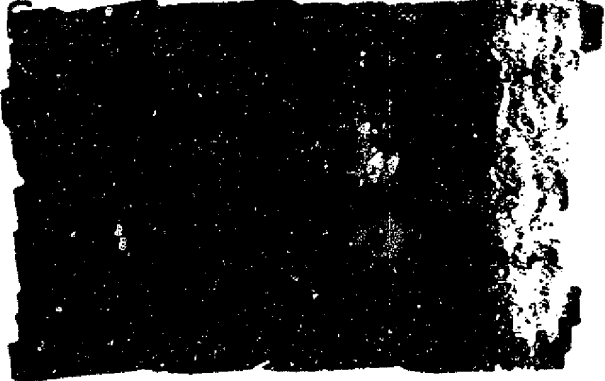
Faced with the erosion of their traditional economic base and unable to secure employment near home, an estimated half-million Indians from the Western Highlands migrate each year to the Plantation Zone for seasonal work.



Guatemala's export economy—primarily sugar, cotton, and coffee—largely hinges on indigenous migrant workers, but high inflation is eroding the earnings from plantation labor. The extent of Indian dissatisfaction is illustrated by the massive work stoppages that swept across plantations in the Escuintla and Suchitepéquez departments in February and March of 1980, resulting in government decrees nearly tripling the minimum

Recognizing the potential for widespread unrest implicit in the economic plight of the Indians, the Guatemalan Government is conducting a large-scale program to resettle Indians in the jungles of the Northern Transversal Zone. Plans to expand the work begun by Maryknoll missionaries at Ixcán by creating cooperative units with access to schools, health clinics, technical assistance, and outside markets may founder, however, on the administrative inadequacies of the bureaucracy. (U)

Another serious problem is the dramatic rise in value of formerly worthless jungle land because of the discovery of oil in the zone and the building of the Transversal Road connecting newly opened lands with the Caribbean coast and the national road network. Ladino speculators and developers——have acquired large tracts of land in the area.



IN ANCIENT TIMES Moses gathered together the leaders of the people to lead them out of Egypt.

Biblical Citation: Exodus 3, 16

Our mission is to deliver the people from slavery.

TODAY the poor must unite and work together to attain the kingdom.

They are taking Jacinto. WE MUST HELP HIM!

Translated excerpts from *Comrade Christ (Cristo Compañero)* a series of Christian revolutionary pamphlets using Biblical references to raise the consciousness of the people, particularly Protestant converts, and foster agitation for social justice.

Unclassified.



Comrade Christ compares the suffering of the people of Israel under Egyptian bondage with the exploitation of Guatemalan peasants by referring to the Panzós massacre:

IN ANCIENT TIMES God wanted, through Moses, to free His people from slavery.

We cannot bear this hard work any longer.

United we shall change this situation.

TODAY God does not want slavery and death for our brothers.

They killed more than 100 peasants in Panzós.

In the face of this, what must we do as Christians?

Now therefore, behold, the cry of the children of Israel is come unto me; and I have also seen the oppression wherewith the Egyptians oppress them. Come now therefore, and I will send thee unto Pharaoh, that thou mayest bring forth my people the children of Israel out of Egypt.

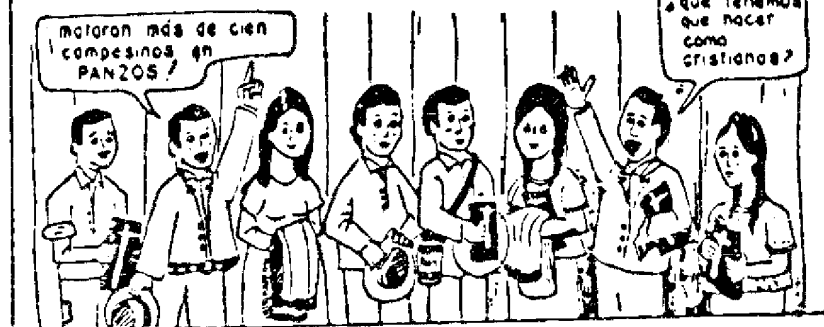
Exodus 3, 9-10

Unclassified.

ANTES Dios quiso, por medio de Moisés, sacar a su pueblo de la esclavitud



AHORA Dios no quiere la esclavitud y la muerte de nuestros hermanos.



cita  
biblica  
EXODO  
3, 9-10.

El clamor de los hijos de Israel ha llegado hasta mí y he visto la opresión a que los egipcios los someten. Ve, pues, yo te envío a Faraón para que saques de Egipto a mi pueblo, los hijos de Israel.

5