

Somoza) are also present in Guatemala. They read like symptoms of an infectious disease. Over sixty percent of the seven million people live in an inefficient rural economy. To complicate this backward indicator, about seventy-five percent of the land is controlled by two percent of the people while ninety percent of the remaining landowners hold less than twenty percent of the arable land. Many of the latter own less than two acres of inferior land which they are forced to sell when they can't make ends meet. This situation creates a pool of discontented transient workers (now numbering over 500,000) who move from one of the 1500 coffee-producing haciendas to the next, selling their labors for less than four dollars day. After suffering through this severe poverty in the countryside they head for Guatemala City where they confront fifty-six percent unemployment, prostitution, drugs, disease and rampant crime.

### Sad economy

Some studies have pointed out that the nutritional level during the Mayan period was far superior to today's. The most productive land in the country is used either for recreation or to grow export crops such as coffee, sugar and cotton. Ironically, the basic food of the people, corn, which was introduced to the modern western world by the Mayans (on that same land) must be imported from other countries. The underpaid peasants who work the soil for the large plantations depend on imported corn to feed their own families.

The average annual per capita income is only \$900. This reflects the unequal distribution of income in the country. The top twenty-five percent of the population takes sixty-six percent of the gross national product, whereas the bottom twenty-five percent receive only seven percent. One result of this income disparity is that three-quarters of the children under the age of five are malnourished. Only half of the children who start school finish primary grades and infant mortality is eighty-one per thousand live births.

These indicators are symptomatic of a generally weak economy. Since 1980 Guatemala has been dependent upon foreign grants and loans in order to meet its \$100 million annual trade deficit. Without the support of the World Bank, the Inter-America Development Bank, special aid programs from the United States and Canada and private lenders the economy is certain to stagnate and perhaps crumble. Given the limited size of the manufacturing, tourist and commercial agricultural sectors of the economy, the recent slump in export trade and the reduction in foreign investment are destabilizing the political and social system.

For the most part the National Economic Development Plan which promised to provide more housing, transportation, energy and municipal services to the people has failed to achieve its goals. No growth is expected in the economy for 1982 owing to uncertainties in coffee prices and the dramatic rise in the rate of inflation. International reserves are diminishing rapidly. The government is relying heavily upon recent discoveries of petroleum to guarantee the stability of its currency, the quetzal. But compared with most of its sister republics in Central America, Guatemala has managed to maintain the lowest foreign debt ratio as well as an untainted history of meeting its financial obligations. This is cold comfort to the millions of Guatemalans

who feel alienated from the economy and who see little hope for the future.

### Los Descamisados

These harsh realities of economic life weigh heavily upon the country's indigenous population. There are two distinct ethnic groups which inhabit Guatemala — the Ladino and the Indian. Within this racial framework the Indians comprise fifty-five percent of the population and occupy the inferior social position. Like many of the Indians in Canada and the United States, they are the "descamisados" (shirtless ones), the neglected people who carry the burden of severe poverty. Wherever the Indians settle they must learn to live with inadequate roads, hospitals and schools. Subsisting on the steep eroded slopes of the Western highlands their lands are not fertile and do not provide year-round work. Most of the country's seasonal workers often must leave their families for two or three months each year to work on coastal plantations, without electricity, running water or adequate sanitation. After the harvest they often return home with malaria, exposure to spraying of harmful pesticides and herbicides.

Indians who have asserted their rights as Guatemalans to live and farm the land are often considered by plantation owners to be criminals. The landowners enlist the military and right wing vigilante groups to enforce their values on the Indian people. Such a situation resulted in the now famous massacre at Panzos in 1978. More than 100 Kekchi Indians (including women and children) were killed by Guatemalan soldiers in the little town of Panzos in the Province of Alta Verapaz. They were attacked because of a land dispute with local landowners. Soldiers fired at the Indians who had gone into Panzos to meet with local officials. Later it became known that large graves had been dug days before the incident. According to a Catholic priest who witnessed the atrocity "the peasants insisted on their right to live and were answered by death." Extreme polarization quickly followed!

Since the Panzos massacre the Committee of Peasant Unity (CUC) was formed to protect the rights of peasants — landless and landed, non-Indian and Indian. Not surprisingly, the CUC was not considered a legal organization by the government. This caused it to seek the protection of other groups. And the emergence of the Democratic Front Against Repression — the Frente — in 1980 showed a groundswell of public awareness by the broadest sectors of Guatemalan society that violence is institutional and governmental. Because of the violent response to the government and right wing groups such as the Secret Anti-Communist Army, many Indians have joined the four revolutionary groups which now form part of a new Frente, the National Patriotic Unity Front (NPUF). The NPUF has called for a "popular revolutionary war" to overthrow the regime.

### Khaki-coated politicians

With the exception of the brief revolutionary period of 1944-1954 all major political decisions in Guatemala have required the army's approval. The Guatemalan military, although highly technically trained, has always been motivated towards an active interventionist role in the country's politics. Its generals have integrated with conservative civilian elites who hold views and values identical to their own. Close ties are maintained with civilian bankers, edu-