

When peaceful change fails....

By Bill Tieleman and Tom Hawthorn
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He is both a reluctant and an unlikely looking revolutionary.

Sitting in the student council chambers at the University of B.C., wearing a tan safari suit, loafers and rectangular metal frame glasses, with a gold ring, gold pen and gold cigarette lighter highly visible, Guillermo Manuel Ungo, leader of El Salvador's Democratic Front (FDR), bears little resemblance to the stereotypical Che Guevara revolutionary commonly thought to populate Central America.

Given Ungo's background, however, this is not coincidence. His father, the late Guillermo Ungo, is well known in El Salvador as a founder of the Christian Democratic party movement in the 1960's. Ungo himself is also one of the best known politicians in the country. A professor of law at the University of San Salvador, he was one of three civilians appointed to a five-person government junta after a successful coup in 1979 by reformist army officers ended the dictatorship of General Carlos Humberto Romero. Ungo was also the vice-presidential running mate of Jose Napoleon Duarte in the ill-fated 1972 presidential elections that resulted in a military coup aimed at keeping Duarte and Ungo out of office. (Currently Duarte, a Christian Democrat, is president of the ruling junta.) Ungo, married with three children, is also leader of the social democratic National Revolutionary Movement (MNR), a vice-president in the Socialist International, to which Canada's NDP belongs, and a former director of the Jesuit Central American University's research institute.

In January of 1980, after serving on the government junta for three months, Ungo became a revolutionary leader by necessity, not by choice. In his letter of resignation from the junta Ungo said that because of the independent power of El Salvador's army and wealthy oligarchy the junta "has only minimal, and essentially formal, power. It lacks the capacity to lead the process of democratization and social change. Nor can it stop the development of the various mechanisms and activities which run contrary to the objectives of that process."

Throughout our interview, which took place in July in Vancouver, where Ungo was addressing the federal NDP convention, it was clear that the FDR leader is not a dogmatic ideologue but someone who has turned to armed insurrection as a final resort after attempting to change the government through non-violent means.

In El Salvador students have a long history of involvement in attempts to introduce social reforms and end the military dictatorships that, backed by the coffee and cotton plantation owners, have ruled the country for 50 years. In El Salvador's last major uprising, the 1932 revolt that saw 30,000 compositos (farm workers) massacred by the army, students at the University of San Salvador were responsible for publishing an anti-government newspaper. The editors of the paper and other student leaders were executed. On July 30, 1975, a student protest march from the University to the centre of town ended when the National Guard opened fire, killing at least 37 students. Two days later more than 50,000 Salvadorans walked in a procession honoring the dead students.

We asked Ungo about the role of students in the current attempts to overthrow the military government. He pointed out that it was not just students but all young people who are leading the guerilla fighting in the county-side and the other opposition actions.



Guillermo Manuel Ungo

An interview

"We don't believe we are going to reach just a military solution or just a political solution in pure terms. The main aspects are that we want to work out a democratic political solution, to put all factors to work in favor of a political solution, even the army factor...because you have to have power in order to have a solution that's going to be guaranteed."

"You need a political will to put all your political tools to work on that. That means the United States' will too."

"You have more than 60 per cent of the population under 25 old," he explained. "And these people suffer misery, hunger, lack of jobs, more than other people, and these people have more ideals, so every youngster is a suspect."

"Suspected of being a subversive, of belonging to the mass organizations (that support the opposition), of having sympathies towards them, of helping them. You see not only in the guerilla forces but in the mass organizations, the trade union, a lot of students, high school students, university students and young people."

"Most of the people killed, with their heads cut off, every day, are youngsters, because they're suspects. And to be a suspect," he concludes wearily, "is to be killed, to be dead."

In June the Wall Street Journal and the Washington Post published lengthy stories detailing how the Ronald Reagan administration's White Paper on El Salvador contains "factual errors, misleading statements and unresolved ambiguities that raise questions about the administration's interpretation of participation by communist countries in the Salvadoran civil war," as the Post described it. The White Paper, released in February claimed that, "over the past year, the insurgency in El Salvador has been progressively transformed into a textbook case of indirect armed aggression by Communist powers through Cuba". In the Journal's story U.S. State Department policy planner John Glassman, the man primarily responsible for the White Paper, acknowledged that there were "mistakes" and "guessing" by intelligence analysts, that parts of it are possibly "misleading" and "over-embellished" and that arms shipment figures supposedly drawn directly from allegedly captured guerilla documents were in fact extrapolated. The Post, which did its own analysis of the documents, which were handwritten in Spanish, concluded that many of the White Paper's translations into English were faulty.

After examining the documents purporting to back up the administration's claims, along with other captured

papers held by the State Department, the Post concluded that "read together with the documents released originally, these others draw a picture that differs in significant ways from the one in the White Paper. These documents portray a guerilla movement that is chronically short of arms and scrounging for more of them."

During a press conference prior to our interview Ungo described the U.S. White Paper as "not so white". We asked him about the White Paper and what effect its release and subsequent statements by members of the Reagan administration have had on media coverage of the civil war.

"There is a total manipulation of the news regarding El Salvador," he replied. "For example, the White Paper is

the media against the opposition, an accurate story of the struggle in El Salvador will eventually come out.

"Well, I hope so," he answered, "I hope so. But I guess there is a trauma after Watergate. They don't want to discover more Watergates", he says, with a wry smile. "One is enough. But perhaps as time goes on and as this warmonger policy fails the truth will start to come out."

In 1972 there seemed to be signs that El Salvador's military and oligarchy were willing to loosen their grip on control of the country rather than face the protracted guerilla warfare that was going on in neighbouring Guatemala. Three of the country's legal opposition parties, the Christian Democrats (PCD) led by Duarte, the National Revolutionary Movement (MNR), of which Ungo was secretary-general, and the National Democratic Union (UDN), formed a coalition called the National Opposing Union (UNO) to contest the election against the military candidate of the official government party. In a close vote the opposition coalition lost amid allegations and strong evidence of electoral fraud on the part of the government

that there will be more Vietnams in Latin America. He doesn't want that but he's producing that."

"So, he (Duarte) changed. He played an important role in the struggle for democracy", Ungo says in a sad, resigned tone but apparently without bitterness. "He was considered a subversive, he was considered a communist. The oligarchy said that, against him, against me. Well, now he's doing just the opposite of that which he criticized", Ungo concluded, leaving a long pause afterwards in which he seemed to be wondering what lessons the betrayal of ideals held for him.

The constant toll the rebel forces extract from the Salvadoran military dooms the Duarte regime, creating a slow tide of victory even American aid cannot reverse, according to Ungo. The junta's ability to rule was even

eroded by the so-called defeat of the "final offensive" launched in January by the rebel militia, the Farabundo Marti Front for National Liberation, UNO said.

"It was a failure since it did not become a final offensive, the final steps towards a political-military solution, but the junta and the United States government say it was a victory for them. Well, they took a hell of a beating. If you receive a hundred blows you cannot say, 'Well, I won because you didn't knock me down', when you are bleeding all over the face. That was a propaganda deal."

They are giving a lot of arms, a lot of military equipment, economic aid to keep on strengthening the rightist sector of the army. Well, if you want to weaken that you have to do just the opposite. But we don't believe it is just in the hands of the United States. They by themselves don't want to do it — they cannot do it — so we have to work out also, among other factors, the balance of forces, to have a much better balance of forces — it's improving — international solidarity, international isolation of the junta, the fascist people, so we can search for a political solution that was not there at the beginning of the war, that is there at the end of the war."

A primer

by Bill Tieleman

Create a country about two-thirds the size of Vancouver Island, populate it with five million people, make sure 50 percent of the adults are illiterate, 80 percent of the workers earn less than \$225 a year and 70 percent of the children under six years old are malnourished, and you have El Salvador.

Add to that 50 years of brutal rule by military governments supported by a wealthy oligarchy determined to maintain the status quo of misery and you have a country ripe for revolution.

Bounded by Guatemala, Honduras and the Pacific Ocean, El Salvador is the smallest country in Central America but its most densely populated. Named after "the Savior" by Spanish conquistadors centuries ago, the country has never lived up to its name.

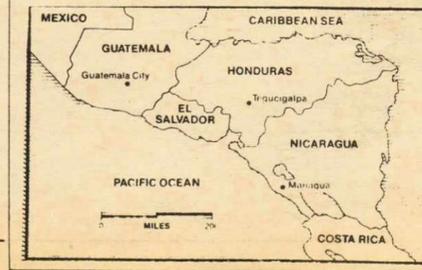
The current civil war in El Salvador is not the first time violence has erupted there. In 1932 a peasant uprising led by Augustin Farabundo Marti, a communist leader, ended with the massacre of 30,000 peasants and others. In the intervening 50 years military governments have ruled El Salvador, crushing any opposition forces that challenged their rule.

The military reign is supported financially by the Salvadoran oligarchy, often referred to as the "14 families", which own the major coffee, cotton and sugar plantations. Despite attempts by the ruling junta of Napoleon Duarte to implement land reform, opposition from the oligarchy and military has ensured that little land is taken from the rich and given to the campesinos, or farm workers: currently two percent of the people own about 60 percent of the land.

Attempts at reform through the electoral process have been consistently thwarted by the military/oligarchy rulers. In 1972 Napoleon Duarte, a Christian Democrat, and Guillermo Ungo, a Social Democrat, ran in the presidential elections as a united opposition to the military candidate. After losing in a close vote subverted by electoral fraud, Duarte and Ungo were stopped from challenging the election by a military coup. Duarte is now president, but only through appointment by the military junta. Ungo is now leader of the Democratic Revolutionary Front (FDR), the political wing of the opposition forces fighting in El Salvador.

The United States has been militarily supporting the governments of El Salvador ever since World War II. Between 1950 and 1979 the U.S. spent \$17 million on Salvadoran equipment and training. In 1980 El Salvador received \$10 million in military aid from the U.S. and in 1981 it will get \$35.4 million for military equipment and \$126.5 million for economic aid. More than 50 American military advisors are currently stationed in El Salvador, with another 20 in neighbouring Honduras.

Since the outbreak of full-scale civil war in late 1979, more than 20,000 people have been killed in El Salvador, and more than a quarter-million Salvadorans have become refugees.



good evidence of that. We think that most governments understand that it was just an excuse to justify American intervention. It's not the first White Paper the Americans have produced."

Every time they want to intervene in a country, they produce a White Paper. They did that in the Dominican Republic (American troops invaded in 1965), they did that in Guatemala (the Central Intelligence Agency financed and aided a successful coup by right wing exiles in 1954).

"After the lie is demonstrated, nobody, (in the press) comments on that. So that's when you see the manipulation. They (the U.S.) wanted to see our tiny small country become the first confrontation between East and West. So, nobody believed that (the White Paper)."

"There have been some articles written about the White Paper (the Post and Journal stories) besides the manipulation, the half-truths, the lies and the falsifications but the most important part is what is not said: What kind of a struggle is going on, who is responsible for that, what are the main causes of that, why the people have chosen the right to insurrection, which is a constitutional right, why we are not "freedom fighters" (in the media), why there are training camps for Somoza's people (former Nicaraguan dictator Anastasio Somoza's National Guard) in the United States, which has been proven. It's a big manipulation and everyone understands that."

We asked if Ungo felt, given U.S. efforts to influence

and army. While the opposition parties began a challenge to the entire election, some sympathetic army officers attempted a coup to overthrow the government. The coup, backed by Duarte, was abortive and led to his arrest and subsequent seven year exile, as well as the exile of many other opposition leaders.

In 1980, after Ungo had left the new junta because of its inability to control the army or oligarchy, Duarte returned to El Salvador to join the Junta, subsequently becoming its president. We asked Ungo how he felt to be fighting someone who was once a close friend and his running mate in the 1972 attempt to democratize El Salvador.

"I don't look to the past", he began hesitantly, "just to learn, or not to. Not to have emotionalism... That happens in history. Mr. Reagan was a Democrat many years ago wasn't he? General Petain was a hero of the First World War and was judged by the French people to have been a traitor in the Second World War, no matter how much good will he had or not. It's not a matter of good will in politics, it's not a matter of if you're a good guy or a bad guy. It's just what you do, what role you play in politics, what interests you serve."

"The problem with Duarte is that he always was a primitive anti-communist and anti-communism has caused hundreds of thousands of deaths in Latin America for decades and has just more polarized the situation. Mr. Reagan is trying to make true Che Guevara's statement



Today, there are virtually two El Salvadors. The vast majority of the country, including the capital city, is still under the junta's military command by day. The rest is without constant borders, as the rebels consolidate their control over mostly mountainous lands on the border with Honduras. It is in these areas, Ungo said, that the Front has established its own local government, while an immense network of supporters in the junta-controlled areas aid the armed rebels.

"If you have several thousand people armed and fighting on a full-time basis you need a big infrastructure and big aid from the civilian population. People that feed them, clothe them, keep them, guard them, watch the enemy, so that means tens of thousands of people in those areas. The civilian population, that's the 'water' the 'fish' need and that's why the government is fighting to dry off the water in order to kill the fish. That's why you have almost 10 percent of the population displaced or refugees through compulsory measures, by force, because they want to dry off the water."

"They are having more than refugee camps. They are becoming concentration camps because that's the population helping with political activity, economic activity and military activity (for) the regular popular forces (guerrillas)."

Several of Ungo's colleagues have been assassinated since he left his home for Mexico City, where he now heads the FDR. We asked Ungo if he fears for his and his family's lives, and whether he worried that the junta would send someone to Mexico City to kill him.

Ungo grinned shyly. "Well, there are always risks. For example, the Pope was shot and Reagan, so it's not a luxury just for us. We cannot work just thinking of it all the time. And I believe that the agencies are not fools. I don't believe they want (eliminated) alternatives that would help for a democratic solution."

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viva la democraCIA

