

Hunger fuels Salvadorean guerillas, says FMLN-FDR rep

by Dean Bennett and John Watson

The people of El Salvador are fighting a revolution of hunger, not of ideologies, says Jose Cedillos, a representative of the Farabundo Marti National Liberation Front (FMLN), the umbrella group that organizes the five guerrilla factions opposing the regime of Christian Democrat leader Jose Napoleon Duarte.

Speaking through an interpreter at a forum in the Latitude 53 art gallery, Mr. Cedillos cited what he felt to be the major contributing factors for the economic and social disparity in his country and explained the aims of the FMLN in countering a "repressive regime controlled by an oligarchy."

"El Salvador is controlled by 14 families," he said. "The Christian Democrats are the ones who are supposed to run the government but these families have enough wealth, and therefore enough influence, to sway the armed forces and force coup-d'etats."

Cedillos says the government expects the families to raise the country's sad economy, but this is not happening.

"Besides owning 60 percent of the arable land in El Salvador, the families were given 222 million dollars from the government for the production of coffee," he said. "But instead, the oligarchy put the money in other places. So, despite this huge outlay, El Salvador will only produce 50 per cent of the quota set for them by the International Organization of Coffee."

In addition, the Salvadoran government has taken steps to further line the pockets of the rich while squeezing the middle income business man dry.

"Officially, the colon (the base unit of Salvadoran currency) is listed at \$2.50 U.S.," said Cedillos. "But the government, through the International Monetary Fund, has created a parallel market to make it worth \$4.50. They have even created offices for this kind of exchange. So now you have the middle business-man forced to buy his goods on the parallel market at \$4.50 while the oligarchy buys it at \$2.50."



Photo Bill St. John

El Salvador's economic woes are severe and worsening. "Unemployment has reached 48 percent; and the people are demanding reform," said Cedillos. "Last year there were 112 strikes. So far in 1985 there have been over 50. Most of these have ended in conflict with the government. The government has answered these strikes with oppression."

"This past year, 72 union leaders have been imprisoned. There is no statement of rights in El Salvador. The workers are not allowed to organize themselves, but they do anyway. "More than 50,000 people have died in this war, and more than 170,000 have demonstrated to demand salary increases, freedom for political prisoners and an end to the government's repressive measures."

The FMLN, currently in control of about 30 per cent of the country, wants, as its ultimate goal, democracy and social justice for Salvadorans.

"If we are successful we would like to see a national forum in which members representing all the people of El Salvador can put forth their opinions. We want to prepare conditions for free elections, with political parties from both the left and right participating without fear of the death squads," said Cedillos.

For now, however, the FMLN's aspirations for a free El Salvador seem remote. They number about 7000 members and are poorly

equipped. Stack this up against a government army of 50,000 supplied with U.S. A-37 fighter bombers and gunships and you have long odds. In fact, the government of El Salvador has received over one billion dollars in U.S. military aid since 1980. The guerillas have responded to this by returning to acts of urban terrorism; tactics which, according to Cedillos, are proving successful.

"We try to keep up a rhythm of 600 casualties a month," he said. "For every one man of ours that dies we get 25 of theirs. It is our surprise tactics, our non-conventional form of warfare, that allows us to keep this ratio."

Unfortunately, with one side content to use terrorist tactics and the other side randomly bombing targets that supposedly are under guerrilla control, the casualty rates among civilians is disturbingly high. Yet, says Cedillos, this is mostly due to the government forces. "According to figures released by the Salvadoran Archdiocese there were 3318 attempts against civilians last year. 3252 of these (98%) were by government forces," he said.

Cedillos says the FMLN does not view the American intervention in El Salvador as a gallant battle to stem the tide of Communism in Central America. He sees the U.S. interests as being more self-serving.

"The United States have two kinds of democracy: one for themselves and one for Central America," he said. "The U.S. supports

despotic and dictatorial governments in Central America. By doing this, they can exploit the resources and cheap labour of our countries, and guarantee for themselves use of our territorial waters for transport of their goods. Look at Honduras:

America supports them economically and militarily but they are poorest in the Americas next to Haiti."

"The Americans have forever been exploiting countries in Central and South America. When a country like Nicaragua or El Salvador rebels, the U.S. has to bring in this east-west ideological clash to justify stepping in. America wants to bring hegemony over the entire Central American region."

Cedillos states that the U.S. reports of the FMLN receiving military aid from the Soviets are untrue, but he still defends their right to deal with the Russians as they have a right to deal with all nations.

"Eventually the FMLN would even like to trade with the United States. We want to trade with all countries without worrying about ideologies," he said.

Mr. Cedillos' remarks on Soviet aid, run counter to information recently released by the Pentagon. The U.S. military says that both sides in the El Salvador civil war are using U.S. made M-16 rifles, but serial numbers from the rifles

taken from guerillas show that almost 70 per cent of the weapons were originally supplied to South Vietnam and probably came to Central America from the U.S.S.R. and Cuba.

"The FMLN is not supplied by Russia but we will use whatever means at our disposal, even if it is rocks and sticks, to attain our goals," said Cedillos. "We've developed ways of getting arms on our own. We have workshops to produce our own weapons, plus we have weapons stolen from government troops."

The intensified fighting in El Salvador, however, has not kept the FMLN from trying to reach a diplomatic solution with the Christian Democratic government.

"We've had two dialogues with the government, one in October of 1984 the other in November. At the November meeting we arranged a third discussion for January of this year, but to date the government hasn't kept its promise. They postponed the January meeting until after the March elections (for deputies and mayors). But it's September now and we're still waiting. I don't think they have any interest in finding a solution to this conflict. They want to break the revolutionary movement, but we will not give up in our attempts to encourage dialogue. If the meetings fail, it will not be due to apathy on our part."

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