

By David R. Dye

GUATEMALA CITY, GUATEMALA

WHEN OUTGOING PRESIDENT VINICIO Cerezo was elected in 1985 after 15 years of military rule, he promised to work to perfect democracy in this least democratic of Central American countries. Five years later, he is about to hand the sash over to an elected civilian successor, one of the few such transfers in Guatemala's history. Along with the clean vote count in both elections, this tidbit of democratic change is not to be sneered at.

ELECTIONS

The "democracy" inaugurated by Cerezo, however, suffers from grave defects. Military autonomy from the civilian president, entrenched by 30 years of nearly unbroken counterinsurgency, is the heart of the problem. The most abusive aspect is a set of frankly totalitarian controls over parts of the rural populace, exercised by "civilian self-defense patrols" and military-controlled "model villages" created in the early '80s to fight "subversion." Over the years, these features of Guatemalan democracy have spawned massive and grievous violations of human rights.

Judging from the first round of Guatemala's two-stage election process, held November 11, little is likely to change over the next five years, during which another "freely elected" civilian will govern at least part of the Guatemalan state.

The glaring problems of Guatemalan society—an alarming increase in absolute poverty, exploitation and cultural denigration of the Indian majority, constant violations of political rights—have so far been non-themes in "Elections 1990." In addition, the election process has highlighted enduring features of the Guatemalan power structure that, although subject to certain revisions, are powerfully resistant to change.

Brave new Guatemala: In an election-day editorial in the newspaper *Siglo 21*, lawyer-sociologist Gabriel Aguilera likened the content of this year's campaign to the "newspeak" of Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World*. "We Guatemalans learn that our real problems concern monetary and fiscal policy and the privatization of the state economic area," Aguilera said, commenting on the rhetoric of the candidates. Noting that "in our daily lives we perceive other urgencies," Aguilera concluded that the object of this issue-blitz is to substitute the "new Guatemala" for the real Guatemala in the minds of voters.

A cursory survey of the principal candidates' programs confirms the accuracy of Aguilera's judgment. The three main contenders, all right-wingers, espoused the neoliberal economic project the International Monetary Fund has made synonymous with "development" for Central America in the '80s: the recipe is privatization, small but efficient government and the promotion of non-traditional export products to foreign markets. This, plus careful avoidance of any tinkering with a horrendously unequal social structure through agrarian and tax reforms, made all acceptable to Guatemala's tiny, opulent oligarchy—but irrelevant to much of the remaining population.

No candidate won a majority in the first round of elections—only 40 percent of the voting-age population made it to the polls. Jorge Carpio Nicolle, publisher of the daily newspaper *El Gráfico* and candidate of the National Center Union, will face Jorge Ser-



The exploitation of Guatemala's Indian majority has so far been a non-theme in "Elections 1990."

In Guatemala, a tidbit of democratic change

rano Elías, an industrial engineer and head of the Solidarity Action Movement (MAS), in a January 6 runoff.

As a kind of garnish on his economic program, Carpio, 58, offers Guatemalans a thorough overhaul of their archaic and corrupt governmental structures, something few believe he or any other president can pull off. Though he is the leader after round one with 26 percent of the vote, Carpio is thought likely to lose in the end.

The favored Serrano, 45, is best known in Guatemala for his Christian fundamentalist beliefs and participation in the country's National Reconciliation Commission. The ill-defined ideology of his political movement, founded in 1985, is right-wing populist with religious undertones. Serrano rose meteorically in the polls during the last weeks of the campaign—calling to mind the Alberto Fujimori phenomenon in Peru—and is expected to pick up support from third- and fourth-place parties in the second round.

Why this dominance of right-wing candidates? With the violent repression of the left over the years, the "system" in Guatemala permits only a narrow range of options. "Our parties are mostly just political clubs from which the oligarchy chooses its candidates," says one Guatemalan journalist. "It is not an election but a selection." Another factor is popular disenchantment with Cerezo's Christian Democrats, who, corralled by the military and the elite, were forced to abandon early attempts at reforms and ended their administration in a sea of corruption and nepotism. In the end it again comes down to the ability of economic and military power to block any real alternatives.

The debacle of the Christian Democrats has had dramatic consequences. According to some statistics, the proportion of Guatemalans who live in absolute poverty has

risen from one-third in 1980 to two-thirds or more today. As Cerezo leaves office, only one-half of the country's primary school-aged children actually attend public schools, while more than 60 percent of Guatemalans remain illiterate. With figures like these, it's small wonder that many Guatemalans living in refugee camps in Mexico reportedly believe their lives will worsen if they return home.

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As in El Salvador, then, centrist reformism in Guatemala has failed, paving the way for a resurgence of the right—the "new" Central American right of the '90s. Guatemala's elites may continue to thwart reform, but they now reject politicians tainted by excessive violence in favor of figures who, like El Salvador's Alfredo Cristiani, can be sold to the public. For this reason, say the country's political commentators, the 1990 elections have at least eclipsed the insanely anti-Communist remnants of the 1954 counterrevolution. The Guatemalan army, though sovereign in its own domain and immune from prosecution for its abuses, also seems firmly under the control of officers who swear fealty to the "democratic" system.

One dark figure from the past who was passed over this year bears mentioning. Gen. Efraín Ríos Montt, the evangelist dictator

who designed Guatemala's model villages in 1982-83, made a determined bid to establish himself as a legal candidate and was briefly the contender most favored by Guatemalans who spoke with pollsters. Though Ríos' campaign caused coup jitters to reverberate around the country, his candidacy was eventually denied on the grounds that he had once come to power by force, which logically enough is "unconstitutional" in Brave New Guatemala.

What rights humans? Definitely not eclipsed is the legacy of disrespect for life left behind by decades of military rule. Shortly before the election, Americas Watch issued a statement warning that Guatemala is "in the grip of its worst human-rights crisis" since the onset of the Christian Democratic government. As in the past, the election claimed victims of politically inspired violence. Among them were anthropologist Mirna Mack, who was studying refugee problems, and journalist Héctor González, gunned down for motives that remain shrouded in the secrecy of the Guatemalan military state.

As always, the structural violence of the system continues to fall most heavily on the Indian peoples of Guatemala's highlands, who largely abstained from voting as this year's crop of candidates offered them nothing concrete. "In every election, the parties take advantage of the occasion to say, 'I'm going to end the violence,'" said Rosalina Tuyuc, leader of Guatemala's association of widows, "but a lot of people end up dead." Tuyuc knows about this brand of death: a Cakchiquel Indian, she lost her father, her husband and two brothers during the '80s.

Though potentially less brutal than its predecessor, the new Guatemalan right offers neither a better life nor basic security to people like Tuyuc. As a result, it will have to deal with a continuing low-level insurgency. Almost crushed in 1983, the guerrillas of the United Guatemalan National Resistance have made a slow comeback in recent years as the economic status of the majority has worsened. Though its call for vote abstention went largely unheeded, the resistance proved through propaganda and small-scale attacks, including one against a farm owned by Cerezo, that it was a force Elections 1990 could not ignore.

Over the course of the year, the guerrillas have held talks with Guatemala's political parties, unions, popular organizations and even the elite business sector, proposing a program for peace and democracy. Though the insurgents command only uncertain support from Guatemala's small civilian left, their demand speaks to the country's real political needs—the dismantling of Montt's model villages, guarantees for human rights and freedom of organization and respect for the integrity of the Indian majority. It is now up to the government and the army to decide if the talks will go further.

Perhaps Serrano, likely the next president, will prove skillful enough to keep his promise to negotiate peace with the insurgents in 1991. Such an accord would require a long, arduous process to overcome intense resistance from a military command over which Serrano will exercise only tenuous control. One thing is clear: only through the combined pressure of the guerrillas and the country's popular organizations will real democratic progress come to Guatemala. Only then will Elections 1990 end up contributing to the "democratic transition" Cerezo insists is his legacy. □

David R. Dye writes regularly from Central America for *In These Times*.

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Brazil

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the industrialized south have brought a steady stream of newcomers to the area in recent months, fueling land disputes.

Most environmentalists are also suspicious of Collor, who claims to be a staunch defender of the rainforest but is closely allied with Amazon conservatives. While his administration's policies are generally considered to be an improvement over those of past governments, many believe he is more interested in public-relations coups than in bringing about substantive environmental changes.

In April and May, Collor ordered federal police officials to dynamite clandestine landing strips used by miners on Yanomami land in heavily hyped media events covered by numerous TV crews. When the cameras disappeared, the miners returned and rebuilt many of the bombed strips. "This government is good at pro-ecological rhetoric and

has even accepted that the protection of the Amazon is a legitimate global concern," Fabio Feldman, a representative of the Brazilian Social Democracy Party, was recently quoted as saying. "But in real terms, Collor has done nothing. ... He's all talk and no action."

The major electoral bright spot is in the remote state of Acre, home to thousands of rubber tappers, where PT candidate Jorge Vianna won a spot on the second round of elections. His strength is largely attributed to the legacy of rubber tapper union leader Chico Mendes, murdered by large landowners in 1986. Mendes' alleged killers are finally set to go on trial December 12, and the case has become a major campaign issue.

While Vianna's victory would be great news for the rubber tappers, it—along with results elsewhere in the region—is not much on which to pin hopes for the preservation of the Amazon.

Ken Silverstein is a journalist based in Rio de Janeiro.

Pakistan

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written testimony submitted to Solarz, Feldman demonstrates an inability even to calculate 10 percent of the 206 seats contested, describing it variously as 5, 14 and 29. For those still clinging to the old math, 10 percent of 206 seats would properly be described as 20 or 21 seats.

Elections Marcos-style: A powerful indictment of the elections—and, by inference, the NDI statement—has come from a group of graduate students from the department of statistics at the University of Manila.

According to a letter in the *Frontier Post*, the students made independent contact with polling officials in 14 districts. On election day, they gathered data on turnout and election returns and conducted a statistical analysis. The students' analysis indicated that turnout was down 7 to 9 percent from the 1988 elections, in contrast to the official

figures of a 3.2 percent increase. They also discovered a discrepancy of 76,320 votes between their projections of the turnout and the actual figures across the 14 districts.

The students said they conducted their study for "purely academic" reasons, adding that they had no intention of making their results public. But they said they felt compelled to report their conclusions because virtually all of the discrepancy was accounted for by IJI votes.

They said they found good correlation between the actual vote announced for the PDA and the statistical estimate. When it came to the IJI and other parties, however, "correlation between actual votes obtained [announced] ... vis-à-vis estimates based on [the] number of people who obtained voting slips from their camps is not good. Votes obtained are 16 to 23 percent higher than statistical estimates." The students provided a data table for seven seats, six won by parties other than the PDA. In three of the seats, the PDA vote was higher than the statistical estimates of the IJI but the announced totals of the IJI gave them the seat.

The students said they published their findings because, "as citizens of another fledgling democracy, interested in seeing democratic values flourish in the Third World, this is our duty." They concluded, "It is, of course, up to the people of Pakistan to draw their own conclusions. For our part, sadly enough, we see many similarities between the results of these elections and those conducted in the Philippines by the last President Marcos."

The election story continues to unravel in both Washington and Pakistan. In Pakistan, the election commission is refusing to reopen the ballot boxes and give recounts, despite Pakistani law requiring them to do so in the presence of any complaining candidate or his or her designated agent.

According to PDA sources, the election commission allowed a recount only in the race between Bhutto's husband and the son of the caretaker prime minister. But in that case, after only three ballot boxes had been opened, Asif Zardari had picked up 1,200 votes and the recount was stopped. The winning margin has officially been adjusted from 4,800 to 3,600 votes.

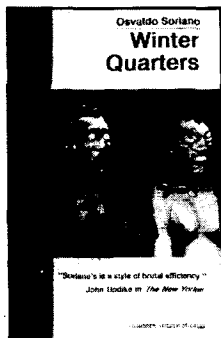
It can safely be said that most Pakistani voters were able to cast votes for the candidate of their choice. The only problem seems to be that certain people were able to cast many ballots for their chosen candidates. But what the heck—isn't voting what makes a democracy? Surely the U.S. won't hold the IJI's enthusiasm for democracy against it when the time comes to renew U.S. assistance to Pakistan.

John P. Canham-Clyne is a Washington, D.C.-based freelance journalist.

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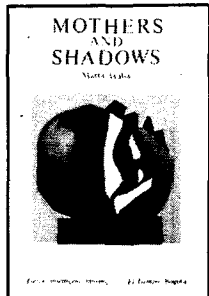
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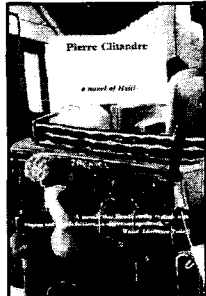
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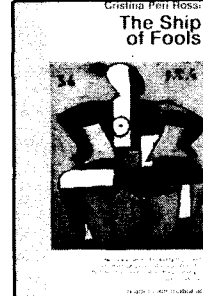
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By Paul Hockenos

BUDAPEST, HUNGARY

WHILE DEMONSTRATORS CLOGGED THE streets of Eastern Europe's capitals last year, Hungary plodded patiently along with its piece-by-piece dismantlement of the single-party state. At the forefront of East bloc reform for decades, the country suddenly seemed out of step with its radicalized neighbors. The ostensible calm snapped overnight here on October 25, when a three-day taxi and truck-driver strike shut down the country in protest against liberalized gasoline prices. The protest was the first full-scale popular action against the conditions of privatization in

EAST EUROPE

Eastern Europe. On the front line again, the Hungarian workers set an ominous precedent for the region's growing frustration with the free-market transition.

The strike fired a warning shot heard from Prague to Moscow. "We want capitalism—but not at any price," summed up one cabbie on the Erzsébet bridge barricade. "It seems the government has forgotten about its people." Popular euphoria over the communist regime's overthrow has dissipated. As the reality of the liberal economic policies sets in, the myths of the market are growing ever more transparent.

The strike also exposes the inherent instability of the new democracies. Their economic plights drastically aggravated by the Persian Gulf crisis, the fragile governments find themselves trapped between Scylla and Charybdis. Exports and production have plummeted throughout the former communist countries as industry attempts to adjust to world competition. Soaring prices and unemployment have dashed popular expectations of Western living standards. And above all, the new states see themselves fully at the mercy of Western financial institutions. Any relaxation in full-speed-ahead market reform or prompt debt servicing will mean cuts in loans, assistance and investment.

Popular revolt: Beneath the economic quagmire lies a vast political vacuum. Throughout Eastern Europe, people and parties, workers and unions, citizens and civil society have yet to connect. When the ruling right-nationalist Hungarian Democratic Forum (HDF) upped gasoline prices 65 percent without warning, taxi and truck drivers had nowhere to go but the streets. Hours after the strike erupted, traffic over borders and in every city was stopped cold. The first major worker-oriented action here since the 1956 revolution rallied popular support at once. Teachers, office employees, students and factory workers joined the revolt, demanding reduced energy prices, anti-inflationary economic policies and compensatory social measures.

The shutdown wasn't just about gasoline prices, said Thomas Krausz of the Left Alternative faction of the Hungarian Socialist Party (HSP). "A lot of Hungarians began to understand that the change in power meant very little. They are being cheated. They are the losers. The strike was finally their chance to say, 'We understand what's happening.'"

But the social dissatisfaction finds its political representatives stubbornly united on the country's economic prescription. Government and opposition alike nervously underlined their commitment to the economic program drafted by the International Monetary Fund and embarked upon

Hungary sees through free-market myth



'IT WON'T WORK. FIRST WE'LL GET A DEFICIT, A RECESSION, INFLATION AND UNEMPLOYMENT, THEN EVERYONE WILL START QUIBBLING ABOUT THE CAPITAL GAINS TAX.'

by communist reformers two years ago. Now, however, provincial dilettantes—rather than professional politicians—run the show. Inflation this year has jumped to 30 percent, and unemployment is steadily climbing. The social fallout—homelessness, poverty and crime—is evident on the streets.

The strike brought to a head the looming crisis in the HDF-led coalition. For months the government has been paralyzed by bickering within the coalition. Since the March election, the shaky coalition's credibility has plunged, its backers reduced to a core of Christian nationalists and ex-communist petit bourgeoisie. In October's municipal elections, HDF was stung badly by losses to the liberal opposition Free Democrats and like-minded Young Democrats. But the under 40 percent turnout in two rounds of voting revealed the larger crisis within Hungarian political society. None of the young parties has a broad social basis. Outside of Budapest, 80 percent of the officials elected were unaffiliated, locally known bureaucrats.

The usually sharp-tongued Free Democrats kept a suspiciously low profile during the strike. "Whether the crisis was the first sign of social fragmentation or the onset of consolidation depends upon whether society understands that it must bear some very heavy burdens," said party leader Janós Kis in a rare show of solidarity with the government. With a Thatcherist economic program to the right of their rivals, Kis and company know well that the same fate awaits them should the coalition fall.

Even Krausz' party, now in opposition, failed to offer an alternative. "The people don't believe in the parties—and with good reason," said the historian and leading left critic of his own party. "The people and the workers realized that they have to organize themselves for their own economic self-defense." Finally they realized that they had power too, he added.

While it caught them off guard, the strike healed splits in the trade unions. The unions, all in favor of some form of privatization, had drifted meekly over the past year. Debate was confined to infighting between the old state-run organizations and the new independent unions. When the drivers appealed for assistance, the unions stepped in united at negotiations with the government and transport companies. Face to face with its

demise, the government backed down.

A deal was struck to cut back gas prices by 30 percent. The timetable for the shift to world market prices will now be determined in parliament.

True colors: The strike also signaled the first real solidarity in a post-communist state of the people with working-class demands. On the graceful Hapsburg bridges that straddle the Danube, neighbors supplied the strikers with sweet tea, ham sandwiches and blankets. In the crisp, Trabant exhaust-free air, whole offices met with picnic lunches to back the action. But in the city center, fist-fights and nasty exchanges showed where the lines were drawn. Frantic runs on grocery stores had the miffed lower-middle class bracing for the next revolution.

Thug-like HDF supporters fueled the hysteria, confronting demonstrators with the government's arguments. "Don't you want to have it like Austria?" demanded a contingent of barrel-chested HDFers. Quiet for a moment, most demonstrators nodded affirmatively. "Then you have to do what the government says," said the men. "But you've had six months, and things are worse! We had it better in [1956-88 Communist leader János] Kadar's day," responded one man, breaking an unspoken taboo.

At a loss, the provocateurs countered with the sentiment that its leaders thinly veil: "That's because all the foreign capital is going to Israel." The crowd scoffed and turned away.

During its moment of emergency, the government's true colors came to the fore. Three days after national holidays commemorating the 1956 uprising and its crushing at Soviet hands, the interior ministry ordered police to move against demonstrators. The police chief balked, offering his resignation instead. "If we're sent in against the cabbies, I'll rip off my badge and quit," said one young officer. "I'll never go against the people again."

The HDF's authoritarianism surfaces time and again in its modus operandi. Like a pedantic schoolteacher, Prime Minister Jozsef Antall flies into rages at critical press reports and legitimate opposition in parliament. While the government has pushed through drastic steps to control the media, one spokesperson claimed that the strike could have been averted had the government only had its own media channels. At a press conference, Foreign Mini-

ster Geza Jeszenszky threatened to use full force if such "unlawful" actions happened again. "The people here are still tainted with the experience of communism," he explained. "They don't understand that in democracies, like in Britain, it's acceptable to use force against industrial actions."

In another move reminiscent of the past, HDF mobilized an angry 5,000-strong counterdemonstration in front of parliament. The tenor of the overwhelmingly male rally was aggressive and anti-Semitic. Placards such as "No to a proletarian dictatorship" attempted to associate the stanuchly anti-leftist strikers with the discredited communists.

Other forms of demagoguery were also audible: "The cabbies didn't organize this. It was the Jews," shouted one man. "Jews out of the media!" responded another. Observers held their breath as the demonstration approached the Margit bridge, but, remarkably, violence was averted. "We're just lucky the HDF doesn't have miners," remarked one woman, referring to the Romanian government's June crackdown on protesters.

Vacuum cleaner? As Hungary awakens from the malaise of Kadarism, the social and political vacuum remains unbreached. While racking up a \$20 billion debt, Hungarians lived with relative comfort for three decades in the East bloc's "cheeriest barracks." The price was passive obedience to the ruling power. The incentive is now gone, but the legacy of well-paid apathy continues to haunt the political culture. The bonds forged during the strike offer one form of civil society that could fill the void. But if it is left unnurtured, another power, less timid than the political parties, could well step in.

For the ruling parties throughout Eastern Europe, the winter's chief objective is the preservation of power. As of Jan. 1, 1991, all Soviet oil exports will be calculated at world prices. Sporadic strikes have already hit Romania, where industrial output has dropped 75 percent and exports and investment are down 60 percent from before the revolution. In oil-starved Bulgaria, the economy teeters on the brink of total collapse. The situation of the Czechs and Slovaks is only marginally better.

The dynamic of post-communist Eastern Europe has entered a new phase. The signs bode ill for the new elites—and still worse for the people under them.

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