

Armed Insurrection in El Salvador, 1932

by Miguel Marmol

The heroic struggle of the people of El Salvador against a US-supported military Junta commands the attention of anti-imperialists and revolutionaries everywhere. The US left press has given events in El Salvador extensive coverage, and the Democratic Revolutionary Front (FDR) has worked hard to communicate its position to progressive Americans.

Less well known is the long and bitter history of the revolutionary movement in this small Central American country, and in particular the most important event in that history: the revolutionary insurrection of 1932. The following article provides the first English translation of a first-hand account of that uprising by one of its leaders and organizers, the Salvadorean Communist Miguel Marmol.

Marmol, an activist in the workers' movement in El Salvador, became a communist in the 1920s and went on to help found the Communist Party of El Salvador. As an important leader of El Salvador's organized workers, he was a delegate to the 1930 Profintern Congress in Moscow, from which he returned to participate in the preparations for the insurrection of 1932. Captured by the government he was put before a firing squad and shot, only to miraculously survive and help to re-organize the Communist Party in which he has played a leading role ever since.

The following article begins with the discussions held by underground Communists attempting to re-organize the Party and sum up the lessons of the uprising's failure. Here Marmol provides a fascinating perspective on the events of 1932, the reasons which led the Communists to decide to pursue an armed insurrection, the differences in the party over this decision, and the military plan drawn up to carry it out. Equally vivid is his discussion of the weakness of the Party in its preparations for the uprising, the mistakes it made and the reasons for them. Finally he sketches the unfolding of the uprising and the terrible repression which followed its defeat.

This article is excerpted from one chapter of a book of memoirs, dictated by Marmol to the great Salvadorean revolutionary-poet, Roque Dalton in Prague, 1966. This

book, Miguel Marmol. Los Sucesos de 1932 en El Salvador, was published in Costa Rica in 1972. Translated and edited for publication in the Theoretical Review, we have supplied the title and subheadings, as well as several explanatory footnotes.

Reorganizing the Party after the Insurrection's Defeat

From the point of view of their content, our first organizational and propaganda meetings were characterized by the attempt to critically examine (based on the limited information we possessed in the clandestine underground in which we were operating) the correctness of the Party's insurrectionary line, the opportuneness of the insurrection, the form in which the line was practiced, its results and the reaction of the enemy against the masses, our military defeat and the national situation afterwards, and finally, the perspective for the revolutionary forces under the conditions of terror imposed by the iron dictatorship of General Martinez. As a result of the discussions held in these meetings in Usulután and its environs, we developed a thirty-five page document entitled "The Reasons for the Insurrection and its Defeat," one copy of which was sent thereafter to Mexico and another to the Soviet Union. I don't know which of these copies reached its destination, but one thing is certain, when I was captured in 1934, the police waived a copy of it in front of me.

In this document we came to the conclusion that, at the end of 1931 and the beginning of 1932, there existed the conditions for posing to the masses of the Salvadorean people the immediate seizure of power by means of an armed insurrection of the working masses of the city and countryside. The goal of the insurrection was to achieve a bourgeois democratic revolution which would improve the socio-economic conditions of the workingclass and favor its development. The revolution would surrender the land to

needy peasant and develop the industry of the nascent national bourgeoisie, which would see itself freed from imperialist restraints.

The conditions which established *the existence of a truly revolutionary situation* and which demanded the posing of the question of action by the Party to the masses were as follows: (1) The crisis of the world capitalist economy, initiated in 1929, arrived in El Salvador and took hold of the masses with particular cruelty. The price dropped out of the international coffee market. Hunger appeared throughout the country and the desperations of the working masses reached unprecedented levels. The bourgeoisie was totally helpless in the face of the economic crisis and the turn in the national political situation occasioned by the collapse of the Araujo regime and his fall.¹ Moreover, the economic crisis confronted the Salvadorean oligarchy, which viewed in terror the mobilization of the masses, with a crucial decision: its way out of the crisis and the possibilities of its development as a national political force in the new world conditions depended on the destruction of the popular revolutionary movement.

(2) A national political crisis. The contained fury of the radicalized masses by the fall of the Araujo government, a fall brought about by a civilian-military faction manipulated from behind the scenes by General Martinez, scarcely nine months after it had assumed power with great popular support and great ceremonial pomp. Unanimous repudiation of the coup and of the new government.

(3) International repudiation of the new government. In the months and days before the assault on state power, when the possibility of an insurrection was seriously posed on our part, the Martinez government had not yet received diplomatic recognition from a single world government.

(4) El Salvador was one of the weakest links of imperialism in this part of the world. Even more: El Salvador was a battlefield of various inter-imperialist contradictions, but all the imperialist powers were relatively weak with respect to this country. Neither yankee imperialism nor English imperialism could be said to fully hold the Salvadorean frying pan by the handle in those years. General Martinez himself clearly showed his sympathy for Germany and his Nazi-fascist inclinations. Thereafter yankee imperialism prepared its assault on the country, and immediately displaced the other imperialisms, first after the massacre of 1932, when it played the card of General Martinez, and then, definitely, after the victorious conclusion of the Second World War. It is interesting to see in history the numerous examples in which the weakest link of imperialism in a zone is fortified by means of violence: massacres against the people, local wars, frontier conflicts, etc. If a people does not take up the use of revolutionary violence to dominate the situation in a favorable moment, or if they fail to use it correctly, as we did, sooner or later imperialism will impose reactionary violence upon them and fortify its system of local domination.

(5) There was extreme discontent within the state bureaucracy and among state workers and civil servants in general on account of the radical reduction of their salaries (fixed reduction of 30%) imposed by the Martinez government.

(6) There was great indignation among the peasant masses on account of the growth of exploitation and extreme violence which the landowners and the repressive

governmental forces were developing throughout the countryside: treated like slaves in fincas and haciendas, starvation wages, arbitrary and immediate reductions in wages, massive unjustified layoffs, systematic evictions of renters from their land, deterioration of the conditions of work for sharecroppers, destruction of the crops of unsuspecting peasants by burning their fields or driving their cattle from pastures, closing the roads through fincas and haciendas, direct repression by the national guard in the form of imprisonment, expulsions from the land, the burnings of homes, rape of women, torture and assassination against anyone who dared to protest. All this, aggravated by hunger and unemployment and all the other extreme miseries which accompanied the economic crisis, and by the negation of the electoral victory of the Communists and other progressive sectors² in which the peasants and peons had placed their last hopes. All this compelled the rural masses to adopt a sharp insurrectional attitude. The urban masses in the center and west of the country fundamentally supported the cry of the countryside. The popular masses no longer desired to live according to the old ways.

(7) Intense political-ideological agitation and social propaganda of different extremists, such as the anarcho-syndicalists, electoral demagogues, the supporters of Araujo (who had made the promise of land distribution—later unfulfilled—the basis of their presidential campaign propaganda), etc.

(8) We were counting on a Communist Party that, although barely tested and with great ideological and theoretical deficiencies, had a great deal of discipline and enjoyed an enormous degree of popularity and authority. Its leadership was accepted by the organized workers movement, by the peasant movement (in the sense that its line was unopposed) and it was dominant in the student movement and among the petty-bourgeois intellectuals. Also our Party could count on a significant nucleus of Communist soldiers and even on groups of officers situated in key positions in the military organization of the bourgeoisie, as we will see further on. In this respect I believe that we can say that we counted on sufficient force within the army to initiate a massive insurrection, helped in this effort by a devastating first strike of surprise, from within the bourgeois repressive apparatus. The PCS, already had, only two years after its birth, the characteristics of a nucleus of a vanguard, which, under the conditions of the country at that time, could place itself at the head of the masses and lead the revolution. In this sense we had covered all the pre-requisites which had been indicated in informal meetings between communists at the Conference of the Red International of Labor Unions in Moscow for the launching of an insurrection. We had left out none of the criteria then accepted by the international Communist movement of those years. At the same time we hoped that, if our insurrection would be crowned with success, and before the taking of power by the people would produce an imperialist-inspired foreign counter-revolutionary intervention, we would receive the material and moral support of all the communist parties of the world, the international worker's movement and the Soviet Union.

(9) We were also counting on a broad program of a bourgeois democratic revolution from which we hoped to gain a considerable field for maneuvering in the face of

imperialism and the power to incorporate in the revolution the middle strata, neutralizing, if only temporarily, the land owning oligarchy. This program contained a systematic elaboration of the immediate problems of a new government in the first phase of the revolution. These included the designation of a Negro, Farabundo Marti, to take responsibility for coordinating and integrating forces in a new broad and democratic government, with the participation of professionals linked to the people, etc. The taking of power on the part of the working class and peasantry to make a bourgeois democratic revolution was not a sectarian approach. The organized workers movement, although not of an advanced composition since the development of capitalism in our country was restricted, had enormous prestige at the national level and was a truly decisive force. At that time there did not yet exist professional organizations, united democratic fronts, etc. Popular political problems were discussed basically in terms of the workers' movement. And of the rural population I scarcely have to stress its importance. They were (poor peasants, and peons or rural proletarians) the vast majority of the population (more than 75%) and were as a whole taking the most radical positions and tending, or beginning to tend toward a spontaneous insurrection.

(10) All legal methods had been exhausted. In the first place the broad masses no longer believed in either the bourgeois political parties or the bourgeois electoral game. The demagogy of Araujo's Labor Party took away their faith in the traditional parties and the electoral fraud against us opened the eyes of the masses to the nature of the electoral system. The peasant and Indian masses, for example, had believed that a change of authorities would resolve their problems, that is, a change of authorities which would bring to the Congress and local government bodies Indian and peasant deputies, representatives drawn from the super-exploited masses themselves. This need was felt very strongly by the population and this is why our candidates, drawn from within the masses, obtained such respect. The electoral fraud put an end to their illusions and the masses, cheated and angry, saw that only the road of armed struggle was left to them.

I don't think one has to be a professor or academic to see that these aspects of the then existing Salvadorean reality were sufficient to confirm that we were entering into a typical revolutionary situation and it was necessary to pass into action. I do not believe that we should attribute that decision to petty-bourgeois adventurism. If anything, we made the decision too late, we made it after the enemy had begun the repression and we had sustained devastating blows to the apparatus of our leadership, to our basic military nuclei, putting us completely on the defensive. I believe that our errors were of a rightist and not of a leftist character. Our errors were due, on the one hand, to vacillation in the application of a line which was fundamentally correct, which did not allow us to fully take advantage of the suitable opportunity, surprise, and the maintenance of the initiative, etc. Our errors were also the result of a tremendous underestimation of the material requirements for the insurrection: arms, transportation, economic means, communications, etc. And finally, our fundamental and principle errors were of a military and organizational type, as I will attempt to explain later on.

The Role of the Salvadorean Communist Party

We believed that we had a party sufficiently qualified to lead the insurrection. This is perhaps one of the aspects that can be discussed in accordance with the results, but after the fact, that is to say, now. What I want to say is that I believe that we were at the level of what was understood at that time in the international communist movement as a party capable of directing the masses in action toward the seizure of state power. In our organizational form and our activity we followed fundamental Leninist norms, trying to adapt them to our own conditions. Are you going to say to me that we should not have assumed that a classical Leninist party was an organism capable of proposing the seizure of state power if it has not solved the military problem? But we knew that. We were not children. As I have said, we believed that the forces which we counted on within the military were sufficient to begin the insurrection and we had sufficient cadre under command to place at the head of the insurrectionary masses in accordance with an elaborate operative plan of which I will speak soon.

I would like to stop here for a moment to discuss a parenthetical matter. That is, I want to say once and for all that we did not receive "orders" or "directives" from the Communist International to "make" the insurrection. The participation of our party in that historical event in our country is the exclusive responsibility of the Salvadorean Communists. There can be no doubt that within the Communist International in that epoch there predominated a sectarian tendency which undoubtedly had an important influence on our way of thinking. But the decision, the prior analysis and the form in which we undertook the actions were exclusively ours, based on the local information in our country, in accordance with our point of view. In this sense the Communist International bears no other responsibility for the events of 1932 in El Salvador except that it was the world-historical proletarian framework within which our party moved.

I say this because the bourgeois publicists and the Salvadorean press have incessantly slandered and lied about the events of 1932, saying that they were the application of specific orders sent by Moscow, by the Communist International, by Stalin himself. This is nothing more than the stupidity and banditry of the class enemy. It is certain that neither the USSR nor the Communist International provided us with the economic means with which to start the insurrection. The only very limited financial aid we received from abroad during this time was through the International Red Aid,³ and from them we received only \$50 a month, aid destined for the families of the victims of repressions, for the defense of prisoners, etc. If we had received from abroad large quantities of money, weapons, etc., we would have certainly been able to hold out longer against the government of General Martinez and we would not have been so badly defeated by the reactionary offensive. It is also necessary to say here loudly and clearly something which we would never deny: the Salvadorean Communists in 1932 understood that with our revolutionary labor we were also contributing to strengthening the positions of communism in the world and concretely our labor was directly helping to consolidate and develop the Soviet Union, the only country

at that time in which the workingclass had taken power. Communists have always been essentially internationalist and precisely for this reason we are the best patriots: because our highest international duty consists in making revolution in each of our own countries. I wanted to clarify this point because it is important and because it is just, and because it is true.

The Leninist Character of the Communist Party in El Salvador

It is also convenient here to situate, for various reasons and in order to structure the discussion which will unfold some day about these events, the Leninist character of the activity of the Communist Party in El Salvador from its birth until the massacre of 1932. I believe that the following facts are fundamental:

—Our activity was directed principally toward the working masses in the city and the countryside (artisans and urban workers, employees; poor peasants, semi-proletarians and agricultural proletarians), that is to say, the basic exploited section of the country;

—Our activity was linked as a mass struggle to all the social strata susceptible to being incorporated into it: middle peasants, small proprietors, fishermen, small vendors and street-sellers, tenants, students, and professionals, progressive elements of the bourgeoisie, etc. For each sector our party developed programs of specific demands upon which to base their integration into the struggle. The unemployed were organized to demand bread and work;

—We won over the leadership of the Regional Federation of Salvadorean Workers, the principal organization of the masses, wresting it from the hands of the reformists and anarcho-sindicalists. As much as this was a concrete necessity in our country for the development of the revolutionary movement, it was also a problem posed at the world level for the entire communist movement;

—We prominently proclaimed our international links with all the revolutionaries of the world and with all the exploited. We proclaimed among the masses our support of the anti-imperialist struggle of General Sandino in Nicaragua, of revolutionary China, etc., and our solidarity with the international movement of organized workers and peasants and with the Soviet Union;

—We organized and directed broad and numerous economic strikes in the city and the countryside and we arranged uncountable broad mass actions (marches, peasant meetings—public and clandestine—political and trade union demonstrations, agitation and propaganda, etc.) against social injustice and imperialism, against the repressive policies of the regime, which were raising the consciousness of the masses and contributing to the deepening of the national political crisis;

—We had at the same time a concrete policy (the bourgeois democratic revolution in the sense we have just explained) and a detailed program. Unfortunately all the copies of this program have disappeared and we have not been able to locate one since that time.

Arguments Against the Insurrection

Now then, in order to give a complete panorama, the pros and cons, I want to say that those in the Party who

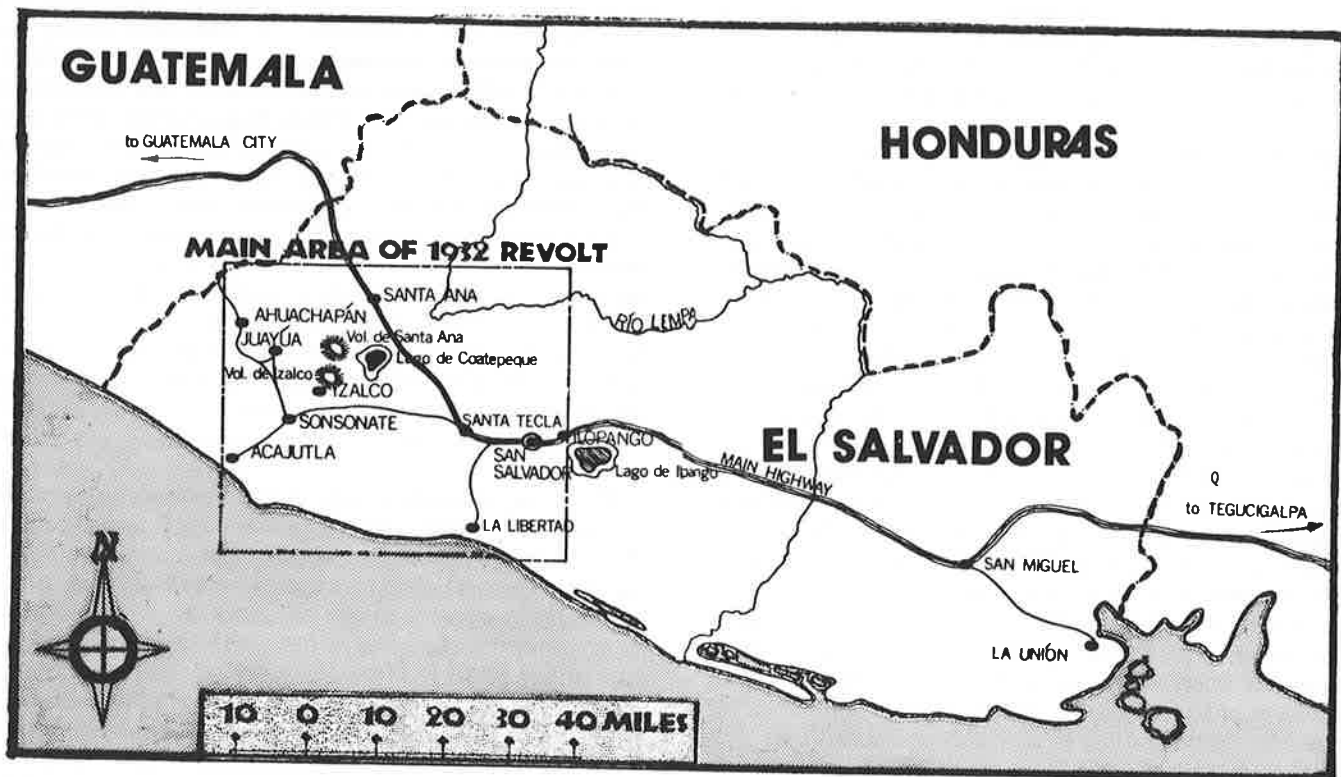
completely opposed the insurrection, gave, as the basis of their opinion, the following reasons:

(1) That we only had a partial influence in the country and that we could not count on the support of the Eastern zone of the Republic. This was false. We had as much military support in the Eastern zone as elsewhere and the work of agitation, organization and propaganda was broad, although less than in the center and west. Still we were counting that once having taken over the presses and newspapers, we would be able to flood the East with our propaganda, send in teams of special agitators, etc.

(2) That there were too many comrades who were prisoners and would be massacred by the government once we commenced operations. What they were proposing was some form of rescue of these comrades, but the results were that the government killed the prisoners it already held and many thousands more which were still "at liberty." When this was discussed within the leadership of the Party, the prisoners could be counted on the fingers of one hand; the Mojica de Sonsonate brothers, comrade Zafarrancho, Gabriel Mestica, comrade Erizabal, etc. And later Marti, Luna, Zapata.⁴

(3) That North American imperialism, for much less than what we were projecting for El Salvador, had invaded Nicaragua and they would not let twenty-four hours pass before launching a direct military invasion if we were to take power. Further, we did not have the capability of taking on their modernly equipped and well organized forces. This thesis was thrown in our faces before and after the insurrection, not only in El Salvador but also from within the Communist International. Comrades such as Panelon, from the Argentine Party and Siqueiros from the Mexican Party, brandished it against us. Nevertheless we did not believe (and still think there was a great deal of merit in our position) that the direct armed intervention of imperialism would necessarily be fatal to our cause. They were not so strong then that they could do whatever they liked. Even after the massacre, when they wanted to land troops, General Martinez did not permit them to disembark as they desired. But even in the face of the reality of a far-reaching yankee intervention, General Sandino showed us the road to follow from the jungles of Nicaragua: the guerrilla in the mountains, and national war against the invader. In the Salvadorean case (starting with the possibility of the triumph of the insurrection we were proposing) the yankees would be confronted with a mass struggle that was, while they were disembarking, already destroying the power of the local bourgeoisie. So you can see that the matter was not as simple as it first appeared. Besides, the program of the bourgeois democratic revolution gave us, as I have said, room to maneuver in the face of imperialism. Clearly, there were also comrades who held this view who went too far in the other direction, that is, who completely underestimated the imperialist danger and who believed that it was going to simply remain with crossed arms forever, or even come to our aid.

(4) That our party was not capable of leading the masses in the insurrection, either politically, organizationally, militarily or ideologically. In this respect it is necessary for me to make several points. I believe that our party would have been capable of leading the insurrection if it had been able to seize and maintain the initiative and the element of surprise. But the truth is that, due to vacillations and



retreats, due to gross violations of the most elementary security measures necessary in a conspiracy, the insurrection was initiated on our part, as I have said more than once, when the government had already murdered all the Communists officers and soldiers within the bourgeois army, and captured and liquidated, or was about to liquidate, most of the members of the party leadership and of the mass organizations. I believe that it is better to pass now to the details of the insurrection, in order to get down to specifics.

The Development of the Armed Insurrection

The beginning of the insurrection was planned for January 16, at a meeting held January 7th. It was already evident to all of us on January 14 that the government had a great deal of information about our plans. Instead of accelerating preparations and beginning the struggle early (since there was no possibility of abandoning it given the state of the masses who would have risen up spontaneously in the absence of the Party, and given the armed provocations of the government and the army against the peasant population), the Central Committee approved a postponement of the beginning of the action, now set for January 19th. On that day Farabundo Martí, the most respected and authoritative leader of the Party was captured, together with Comrades Luna and Zapata, important leaders of the student movement, of the urban masses and of the Party. After lengthy discussions, the insurrection was postponed again, and set for January 22nd.

At this juncture, large scale repression had already begun. On the 16th, for example, our soldier comrades of the Sixth Machinegun regiment had begun to clean their weapons to

prepare for the insurrection, since they were following the orders given on the 7th. The officers were greatly surprised by these events; however they obtained a direct confession from a sergeant to whom the comrades had revealed their plans in order to draw him over to our side. That same day, with troops from other quarters and the National Guard, which took the Sixth regiment by surprise: almost all the comrade soldiers and non-commissioned officers were killed and the few survivors were incarcerated in the Penitentiary until their death, including a comrade sergeant by the name of Merlos and others. For us this massive assassination campaign signified, in operational terms, the loss of two machinegun companies, which would have been determinant had we been able to fully act at the beginning of the insurrection. At the same time also killed, controlled or rendered helpless were our comrades in the Casamata barracks (First Cavalry Regiment, where we lost an entire company by physical liquidation); in the El Zapote barracks (First Infantry Regiment) and in the Air Force.

In addition to the widespread assassinations within the Barracks, the Army command arranged the mutual transference of officers and men from one barracks to another for the purpose of rendering impossible any coordination of an internal uprising within the armed forces. The most well known communists were killed in the course of these transfers, including entire platoons and companies which the army led into ambushes and totally destroyed. At the same time they organized an immediate and massive forced recruitment of troops in the eastern part of the country where our propaganda was weak, and sent them to repress the population in the west and the center. We were incapable, in these conditions, of coordinating our action with the nuclei which we had in the East, both in the army, and in the population of San Miguel and the Union, which had organized themselves into contingents for armed

struggle, including contingents of sappers, medical personnel, etc. This initial loss of the heart of our nuclei in the army was disastrous for us, in fact decisive, given our basic military plan, the outlines of which I will explain later on.

The development of the popular insurrection unfolded primarily in the western part of the country, as is well known. In Tacuba the National Guard was attacked and the city was seized for one or two days, during which time a local Soviet was installed. In Ahuachapan the masses surrounded the Departmental barracks and put up a fierce struggle, but were unable to dominate the situation. The greatest action was in Sonsonate where the peasants took over the Customs house and various other strategic points. The Departmental Regiment was attacked, but machinegun fire caused many casualties. Nevertheless seventeen of our fighters, armed only with machetes, managed to penetrate the barracks, but in the absence of adequate supporting firepower they were isolated from the rest and killed. Sonsonate is the third or fourth city in El Salvador in order of importance. In Juayua the local barracks were seized, a local Soviet was installed and for three days the red flag flew over it beside the flag of El Salvador. With the subsequent repression I don't think that any members of the Juayua Soviet survived. In Izalco a contingent of some two thousand comrades controlled the city for three days and nights, and only machinegun fire and aerial bombardment forced them to withdraw and disperse. Nahuizalco was also seized completely for an equal period of time. In Teotepeque the struggle was directed by Farabundo Martí's father, who began it by seizing the city hall at gunpoint. Our forces also briefly controlled Tacuba, Ataco (which was the home town of Comrades Max and Abel Cuenca, whose father and younger brothers were later hanged by the Army and the so-called Civil Guards), Salcoatitan, Colon, Sonzacate, Turin, San Julian (which was extensively machinegunned and bombed by the government airforce), and Armenia and Ateos were ready to fall into our hands.

The intense and highly organized repression unleashed by the regime dislodged us from all our positions, disorganized our columns and sent them fleeing in wild disorder. Thus our comrades and sympathizers were dispersed throughout the countryside and the mountains, thereby creating the conditions for the massive and practically unopposed annihilation of the population. The murder of thousands and thousands of Salvadoreans was coldly planned by the Martinez government, and the military high command with the total support of the most powerful sections of the Creole oligarchy and the nascent local bourgeoisie, and was carried out against the people generally, striking at the workers and peasants everywhere throughout the country, and not only in the zones where the insurrection had developed, although the killing was fiercest there. They tried to stamp out all vestiges of popular organization, physically eliminating the real or potential militants of the democratic and popular organizations, including even the less radical ones. And they always tried to do this by creating a desolation which would last for years to come.

The Aftermath of the Defeat

In the first few days they killed around two thousand persons daily, and thereafter continued the massacres at a

slower pace for two or three months throughout the Republic. Individual assassination continued during the thirteen years of the Martinez government. Those comrades who fled to other zones were located by lists provided to local post offices through letters they received. They were then turned over to be shot, while comrades who remained near their houses were shot as soon as they were identified. The extensive lists of communist voters used for the elections became the basis for the location and liquidation of thousands of persons. Committees of National Guards and the secret police in civilian dress went through the fincas on pay day and whomever they recognized or suspected of being a communist or a sympathizer was immediately pulled out of line and taken off to be shot. The other peasants heard the shots and the cries and they knew that another Communist had fallen. The terror was, therefore, tremendous.

Moreover, in each locale counter-revolutionary white guards were organized, the so-called "Civil Guards," formed by bourgeois elements, opportunists, or reactionary fanatics. They set about locating and turning over to the armed forces persons previously classified as Communists or progressives, at the same time that they were themselves committing all kinds of murders, robberies, rapes, tortures, etc., against the oppressed sections of the population. Even persons who have subsequently passed into the history of our country as democrats or even progressives, took part in these gangs of criminals and participated in the most horrible atrocities against the people.

I can't even begin to tell you all the details of the barbaric repression throughout the country committed by the bourgeois government of General Martinez. Many years have passed since then and in the minds of many Salvadoreans there still remain unshakable prejudices about the events of 1932. Equally unfortunate is the fact that the statistics themselves often leave us cold and don't communicate the true intensity of those events. And it is also certain that imperialism has continued committing crimes throughout the world, the enormity of which leaves behind even the terror of 1932 which we had thought could never be surpassed. But I believe that the drama of 1932 is for El Salvador what the Nazi barbarism was for Europe or the North American barbarism was for Vietnam, a phenomenon which totally changed, in a negative sense, the face of a nation. The loss to the Salvadorean people out of those events was more than 30 thousand deaths, which was more than two and a half per cent of the population at that time. We are not even counting the wounded, maimed, tortured, etc.; only the dead. We must try to remember that each one of these dead was not simply a number, but a person with hopes, desires, feelings, with a name, a face interests, opinions, family and friends. It is truly terrible to think about. And as I have said the survivors paid an enormous price: wounded, tortured, taken prisoner, the women raped, the children orphaned, whole families broken up, driven from their lands, dispossessed of what little they had, hungry and homeless, living the rest of their lives in fear of death and persecution. Not to mention the thousands and thousands of compatriots who, with only the clothes on their backs, fled to Guatemala, Honduras and Nicaragua. Since that cursed year we have all been different persons and El Salvador has been a different country. The style of government may have changed since then, but the basic way of thinking of the ruling class is still that of the murderers of

1932.

I say all this because the truth is that I don't know where to begin to even partially explain the extent of the crimes committed by the rich and the Salvadorean army against the people in those years. I will only say that the chief collective massacres took place on Soyapango (where the greater part of the prisoners captured in San Salvador and in Oriente were shot), Ilopango, Asino, Playon (Cujuapa) where they shot a large contingent of comrades and sympathizers captured in different parts of the country, in Santiago Texacuangos, in Colon, Comasagua, Tacuba, Izalco, Juayua, Salcoatitan (where they machinegunned a large group congregated in the public plaza); Zaragoza, Teotepeque, Jayaque, and the vicinity of Santa Tecla and Ahuachapan. In Armenia a general by the name of Pinto personally shot 700 peasants after the soldiers had forced them to each dig their own grave, one by one.

The famous "hero" of the struggle against Martinez in 1944, Colonel Tito Tomas Calvo, was also the hangman of Izalco. In the Church of the Immaculate Conception in Izalco he had more than two hundred persons machinegunned at one time, most of them women and children. The Mojica brothers, who had been prisoners in Sonsonate before the uprising, were murdered after horrible tortures, even though they obviously had not been able to participate in the insurrection. Seven brothers by the name Alfaro were falsely accused of being Communists in the Finca San Jose together with their aged father. They were all shot immediately, without permitting the old man to go to his house nearby and change his clothes, even though his last request was that he be allowed to die dressed in white. Terrible scenes like these were repeated throughout the west and central zones of the country.

In Izalco, for the hanging of the respected Indian leader, Feliciano Ama, they brought out the school children to witness the spectacle "in order that they never forget what happens to communists who dare to rise up against their masters and the established authorities." The blood of all these thousands and thousands of dead and wounded still demands justice, in heaven or on earth, although as revolutionaries, we seek this justice here on earth. Vengeance no. We are not romantic revanchists, but we are trying to be scientific revolutionaries, working within the laws of history. To simply seek revenge would be to dishonor our dead. But we must seek revolutionary justice for the commission of this monstrous crime. And that cannot be anything other than the achievement of the ultimate aims which the Salvadorean masses sought when they rose up against social injustice: a change in the social order, the victory of the revolution.

Some of these aspects, although certainly not all of them, were introduced in that preliminary document that we developed in reorganization meetings of the Party held in Usulután and then sent abroad, as I have explained. I want to say that in actuality I am also expressing points of view which have developed due to the passage of time, the meditations of the last thirty or so years, and the limited increase in my own political understanding. In any case that document recognized what was essential, the urgent need to provide information to the international revolutionary movement of its time.

The Military Plan of the Insurrection

I would like now to say a few words on the strictly military aspects of our conception of the insurrection in 1932: concretely, on the military plan which the Party proposed to develop, the military plan which was going to be the backbone of the insurrection, of the activity directed toward the seizure of power. The plan was extremely simple, corresponding to those who drew it up: the members of a party leadership who had no knowledge of either military strategy or tactics, who had not read the classics on war, and who lacked, it must be remembered, the international experience we now have. At that time we didn't know who Mao Zedong was, and the Soviet marshalls who won the Second World War were in the academies or still Lieutenants, I should think. Che Guevara and Fidel Castro were still two little children. That is to say, the theory of armed anti-imperialist struggle on the part of the people in underdeveloped countries had not yet been elaborated, and our basic antecedent was the insurrection of the Russian workers headed by Lenin by means of which state power was seized and the USSR was born.

The plan of our Party was based on a central idea which was soon discovered by the enemy as I have said: the seizure of the principal headquarters of the army throughout the country with the objective of massively disrupting the essential forces of the enemy, the use of the factor of surprise, and with the power provided us by light and heavy weaponry, to draw the popular masses of the city and the countryside into the Red Army of El Salvador. Once armed these masses would set out to take power throughout the entire country, militarily, administratively and politically in accordance with the orientation and forms of organization indicated by the Communist Party and the mass organizations, etc. To normalize institutional life in the country after the insurrection, power would pass at the local level into the hands of Councils of Workers, Peasants and Soldiers (Soviets).

To take control of the barracks and possession of the arms, we proposed two distinct methods: (1) the taking of the barracks from within, which was to occur in areas in which we had sufficiently strong Communist organizations of soldiers, as was the case in the Sixth Machinegun Regiment, the Cavalry, etc., in San Salvador. These groups had received instructions to act before anyone else; they were to fire the first shots in the uprising. (2) The taking of the barracks from the outside, by means of the direct action of the masses. We also contemplated the possibility of an intermediate case: quarters which could be taken by the action of the masses but with the limited help from inside, when the internal force was not sufficient to decide the situation. Also we took into account some other variations, in accordance with the particularities of some special contingents in a particular wing of the bourgeois armed forces, the airforce, for example. In that case, it had been decided to capture all the flyers and imprison them, with the exception of the official pilot Canas Infante, who had shown himself to be by his actions an advanced and progressive individual. We were thinking of asking Canas Infante to bombard the government's positions which would resist the

uprising of the masses and the internal mutiny of the soldiers.

From there each barracks as a concrete objective had its own plan for the assault or uprising, which took into account its unique characteristics. At the same time this plan included various maneuvers to surprise the enemy, reduce the effectivity of his forces, and neutralize the counter-attack.

For the events of the insurrection within the barracks the Communist soldiers were to act in small units, corresponding to the cells of the Party organization, under the direction of Red Commanders, elected secretly but democratically. Once the quarters were in the hands of the revolutionary forces and they were beginning to arm the masses; each soldier, communist and sympathizer, was to become, by general rule, the Red Commander of a group of five civilians, which remained under the Military cell and its Commander. For its part, the Party had already named civilian Red Commanders which were to direct small groups for operations in the Departments of Sonsonate, La Libertad, Ahuachapan and Santa Ana. Even when it was a matter of large scale operations (for example the assault on a large military headquarters such as the Regiment at Sonsonate), our forces were divided up into small groups with great autonomy of action.

The repression was unleashed before we had finished coordinating this plan at the national level and before we had developed the minimum corresponding organization. For this reason, once the leadership of the Party was captured, and the communist forces within the army were liquidated, the broad masses which we were counting on to take power throughout the country, remained dispersed, disoriented and subject to contradictory instructions, not knowing what to do. Of course the lack of organization at the national level was not only caused by the repressive avalanche of 1932, but also in general by the conditions of the climate of fascist terror imposed against any type of popular and democratic organization during 1931. I want to be clear: yes, we maintained, with great difficulty, a national organization, but it was exclusively for mass mobilizations of open, unarmed activities, strikes, demonstrations, etc. These conditions and the broad character of the mass movement in El Salvador had resulted in a situation whereby we had reached a pre-insurrectional stage, at the same time that there was a high degree of enemy infiltration in our ranks, which permitted the government to be informed of our essential plans. The truth is that we were not sufficiently vigilant in this regard, since many times we left in peace traitors against which we had overwhelming proof, and who we should have isolated or even shot.

The lack of coordination, the disappearance of the National Leadership of the Party at the critical moment, the carelessness in the methods of security, the lack of organization on a national level for the strictly military tasks of the insurrection, were, I believe, the principal causes of the military defeat, the basis of our overall defeat.

We could discuss, of course, whether the military plan itself was adequate or not, if it provided a sufficient margin of flexibility in the face of a possible change of circumstances, etc. Some people think that the military plan was not effectively a plan at all but only a very general scheme lacking in details. At this point I myself am inclined to believe them, but in any case it is a matter for specialists in

the military affairs of the Revolution. I don't think it is appropriate for me to enter into a profound analysis and a total critique of this aspect. I only wanted to outline a series of facts generally unknown to Salvadoreans, which can be examined and analyzed with profit by our younger comrades. I don't have the capabilities to do so myself. I believe that this can not be the task of any one person, no matter how capable, no matter how developed theoretically, he or she is. The result of an individual analysis of a problem as complex and confusing as this one, could only be partial. This is the task for a revolutionary organization, a Party, which the Salvadorean Communists, have not yet undertaken. The basic reason? There are many: lazyness, overwork, differing opinions among the comrades in party leadership, fear of the immediate political consequences which can result from a work which reveals many serious truths in a situation still dominated by the class enemy, fear that history will ultimately reject our findings, a lack of mastery of the instruments of Marxist analysis, an erroneous approach which turns us away from the study of historical problems and anything else which isn't connected to the elaboration of a political line and next week's mass action, etc. Nevertheless I insist that this is an indispensable revolutionary undertaking. For my part, I am not afraid for the outcome. On the contrary, I believe that I will only die in peace if my party and my people show that they have learned the fundamental lessons of the events of 1932.

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¹ Dr. Arturo Araujo was elected President of El Salvador in 1930 as candidate of the Labor Party. In December, 1931, he was overthrown in a military coup led by First Vice President, General Maximiliano Hernandez Martinez.

² The Communist Party ran candidates under its own name in the municipal and congressional elections of January, 1932. Although the Party won these elections, the Martinez government refused to count their votes.

³ The International Red Aid, known in El Salvador as the Liga

Pro-Luchadores Perseguidos (League for the Defense of Persecuted Fighters) was an international organization associated with the Communist International to raise money and do political work in defense of victims of white terror throughout the world.

⁴ Augustin Farabundo Marti was a founder and the foremost leader of the Communist Party of El Salvador. Before that time he had served with General Sandino in Nicaragua. He was captured by the El Salvador government on the eve of the insurrection and together with two other Party leaders, Alfonso Luna and Mario Zapata, was executed after the uprising was crushed.