PRECURSOR OF CHANGE:
FAILED REFORM AND THE GUATEMALAN COFFEE ELITE,
1918-1926

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by
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The intent of this thesis is to present a brief historical survey of the republic of Guatemala between 1918 and 1926. This study will focus on the internal dynamics of Guatemalan society beginning with the post-World War I rise of opposition to the presidency of Manuel Estrada Cabrera and concluding with the December 1926 presidential victory of General Lázaro Chacón.

The main purpose of this thesis is to examine the political, social, and economic forces that emerged in the wake of the overthrow of Cabrera. Special emphasis will be placed on the incipient student movement and the labour activity in the capital that called for a number of reforms following the dictator's removal. These urban forces coupled with the support of the traditional Conservative Party and the majority of Liberals were the major contributors to the Unionist movement that ousted the unpopular dictator.

However, this thesis will propose that the forces of reform were unable to achieve their objectives primarily because of their unwillingness to cultivate the support of the peasantry, the staunch resistance of the nation's agro-export elite and the increasingly autonomous nature of the military. Evidence shows that the moderate reforms advocated
by students and other urban politicians could not wrest control from the nation's social, economic, and political actors without the active support of labour and, more importantly, Guatemala's large, isolated peasantry. Reformers' unwillingness to forge a political alliance with urban labour and rural workers enabled the Guatemalan coffee elite and the military to re-assume control of the government. The presidential election of 1926, in which the traditional Liberal Party rallied under the leadership of Chacón to defeat a small group of disgruntled Liberals and university students, marked the end of attempted reforms in the 1920's.
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I am also indebted to friends, fellow graduate students, and faculty for all the hours they spent listening to and discussing the most minute details of Guatemalan history. Of course I am at fault if I have inadvertently missed someone.

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CHAPTER I

Introduction

We do not want blood to run. Calmly we have to arrange these things. Understand it well, we are strong and we have had enough so that, in one immense devastating wave and without weapons we will destroy the tyranny....The hour for you and the people has sounded. There is no other dilemma: the people will triumph.¹

The last two decades have been an extremely turbulent period for Central America. Repression, reaction, revolution, and civil war have encouraged many studies to be written on the five tiny republics. Most have focused on the region's relations with its large neighbour to the north, the United States. To many, the immense power and wealth of the United States in comparison to the widespread poverty of Central America suggests that the United States would dominate an area that totals less than one-hundredth of the Western Hemisphere's land and possesses less than one-fortieth of its population.² In light of the distinct military and economic potentials of each, it is not surprising that most studies have focused on an historical ability of the United States to


dictate, or at least, determine events in Central America.

Historians often cite the comments and opinions of United States representatives when they discuss the importance of American influence in the region. Presidents, Secretaries of State, Ministers in American Legations, and even vice-consuls have often assumed that they were the prime movers in Central American politics. President Theodore Roosevelt's address of May 20, 1904 offers an excellent example of how American politicians, Department officials, and military men perceived their ability and duty to intervene in and dictate Central American affairs. Roosevelt wrote that the United States only desired stable, orderly, and prosperous neighbours. But if, "brutal wrongdoings, or an impotence which results in a general loosening of the ties of civilized society [occurs], [it] may finally require the intervention by some civilized nation, and in the Western Hemisphere the United States cannot ignore this duty."³

In 1927, Robert Olds, an Under-Secretary of State, went beyond Roosevelt's warnings of intervention to declare that United States State Department officials exercised a power in Central America that was "accepted virtually as law". Olds believed that "we [the United States] do control the destinies of Central America and we do so for the simple reason that the

national interest absolutely dictates such a course." Furthermore, according to the Under-Secretary, Central American politicians had "always understood that governments which we recognize and support stay in power while those we do not recognize and support fail."

Several times in the first decades of this century the United States deemed it necessary to protect its various economic and strategic concerns in Central America. It used a variety of methods to achieve its objectives, the most common were withholding diplomatic recognition, gunboat diplomacy, recalling existing loans and preventing further ones. Between 1912 and 1920, a major tool of American diplomacy was President Woodrow Wilson's policy that only granted recognition to governments that came to power constitutionally. Conversely, governments that came to power by force or revolution would, in theory, be refused this

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privilege. The State Department hoped that this policy would foster the stability and prosperity it deemed necessary to secure its strategic concerns and lead to economic growth and democratic institutions in the region. Instead, however, the stability the United States so sincerely desired was rarely achieved. Support of the status quo seemed to imply a special bond with dictators and discourage democratic reforms. As a result despots perceived the United States' desire for stability as an endorsement of their actions and an interest in their continuity. Many times in Central America those who held political power promoted this impression to discourage national opposition movements in their own countries. Guatemala was not spared these extended terms of government, and from 1898 to 1920 it suffered under the brutal dictatorship of Manuel Estrada Cabrera.

A plethora of studies has examined the more recent history and politics of Guatemala. However, despite the importance of his regime and the decade of political realignment which followed his removal, few scholarly works examine the administration of Central America's longest

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reigning president, Manuel Estrada Cabrera. Furthermore, even fewer explore the nature of the Unionist and Orellana governments that governed the republic from 1920 to 1926.

Some historians have written excellent general historical surveys of Central America but these universally attribute the fall of Estrada Cabrera to the will of the United States. Jenny Pearce's *Under the Eagle: U.S. Intervention in Central America and the Caribbean*, paints a powerful image of American determinism throughout the early decades of the twentieth century. According to Pearce, United States economic interests went hand and hand with the influence of the State Department to such an extent that "in Guatemala...the banana companies [i.e. the United Fruit Company] played a key role in the election of every President." Even Jim Handy's *Gift of the Devil* is guilty of promoting this myth. Perhaps his boldest, and most controversial, statement is that U.S. representatives acted as "kingmakers" in Guatemalan politics for much of the first half of this century.

Ralph Lee Woodward Jr.'s *Central America: A Nation Divided* is another study that emphasizes the role of the United States in Central American affairs. Although Woodward spends very little time on the rise of political opposition

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8Pearce, *Eagle*, p. 16.

9Handy, *Gift*, p. 87.
or Estrada Cabrera's deposition, he reflects the commonly held view when he writes, "Woodrow Wilson abandoned his declaration to the preservation of constitutional governments...when it became apparent that the Estrada Cabrera government was no longer the best protector of United States' interests. The United States State Department intimation that it would not oppose the overthrow of Estrada [Cabrera] was a major factor in his ouster." Although David Dinwoodie's Ph.D. thesis, "Expedient Diplomacy: The United States and Guatemala 1898-1920", is a more extensive study of the Cabrera period, he, too, continues the emphasis upon State Department activities by placing the responsibility for the dictator's removal with American representatives. However, a review of the United States State Department's role in the overthrow of Estrada Cabrera in April, 1920 challenges many of these conclusions.

Throughout most of the dictator's time in office, relations between the Estrada Cabrera government and the United States were cordial. Cabrera had participated in the various conventions and signed most of the agreements that Washington had sponsored in the early years of the twentieth century. Usually the objectives of these conferences were to promote stability in Central America and to help secure the

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United States' dominant role in the region. During World War I, the United States continued its policies in the hope that they would foster peace and stability. The United States encouraged a display of Central American unity that it hoped would forestall German intrigue in its self-proclaimed American sphere of influence. Cabrera was prepared to accommodate the wishes of the State Department as long as it did not threaten his grasp on the presidency. Furthermore, Estrada Cabrera promoted the impression that the United States had a special interest in the continuance of his rule.

Studies such as those by Dinwoodie, Woodward, Handy and Pearce tend to emphasize the disenchantment of American corporations with the dictator during the First World War and point to this as a major function of his removal. These disagreements stemmed from Cabrera's indifference to State Department and business demands to restrict a powerful German


13Langley, The Banana Wars, pp. 20-1; Dinwoodie, "Democracy", p. 146; Munro, Intervention and Dollar Diplomacy, pp. 6-7.

14Dinwoodie, "Diplomacy", p. 195; Munro, Dollar Diplomacy, p. 144; United States National Archives-Department of State Records Relating to the Internal Affairs of Guatemala 1910-1929, herein after cited as U.S.N.A.-D.S., Hugh R. Wilson, U.S. Minister in Guatemala, to U.S. State Department, 13 June, 1914, 814.00\213; U.S.N.A.-D.S., McHague Leovell, U.S. Minister in Guatemala, to Secretary of State, 15 March, 1915, 814.00\222; U.S.N.A.-D.S., Richard D. Meader, Special Assistant to the Secretary of State, to Latin American Division, 3 July, 1919, 814.00\312.
population who controlled important utility and coffee interests in Guatemala. It is true that Estrada Cabrera did very little during the war years to satisfy the calls of American business to seize and sell German assets in Guatemala. Other than the German-owned Empresa Eléctrica, which was first leased and then sold to Henry W. Catlin's Electric Lighting Company, the President never disposed of any German interests. But nowhere in the political documents does one find the State Department seriously concerned with Estrada Cabrera's failure to bow to United States business interests.

Even more striking is the limited number of studies that thoroughly examine the post-Cabrera period. The dictator's removal by a unified coalition of university students, incipient urban labour organizations, a nascent middle-class, the landed elite and the officers of the military unleashed a flurry of political maneuvering that fostered an atmosphere of unprecedented political and social freedoms. These forces threatened to reform the traditional political structures, practices and institutions of the republic.

One of the few scholars who refers to this vibrant period of Guatemala's political, social and economic development is

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15 Dinwoodie, "Diplomacy", p. 188; Handy, Gift, p. 66; Pearce, Eagle, p. 16; Woodward, A Nation Divided, pp. 200-1.

16 U.S.N.A.-D.S., Meader, U.S. Consul in Guatemala, to Latin American Division, 3 July, 1919, 814.00\312; Dinwoodie, "Diplomacy", p. 158.
Kenneth Grieb. In his detailed study, *Guatemalan Caudillo: The Regime of Jorge Ubico Guatemala 1931-1944*, Grieb describes the 1920's as Guatemala's "periodic interlude between dictatorships."\(^{17}\) According to Grieb, Guatemalan history is dominated by instances in which long periods of dictatorship are briefly interrupted by eras of instability and political chaos. "When an incumbent strongman fell from power," he explains, "the lack of political experience by the younger generation and the rising new groups, such as the incipient middle class, promoted turmoil and discord once the restraining hand of the Caudillo was removed, leaving a fragmented and acrimonious political scene."\(^{18}\) Obviously such undesirable interludes of unrest were to be avoided. Thus, when political chaos threatened to overwhelm the nation, a new strongman would emerge to restore stability and, in this manner, "the endless cycle" continued.\(^{19}\)

To suggest that the 1920's was another example of Guatemala's historic tendency to revert to "political civil warfare" is simply ridiculous. Grieb may be correct when he claims that the period was plagued by political fragmentation, but the failure to address the various social, economic and political influences that contributed to the flurry of


\(^{18}\)Ibid., p. 1.

\(^{19}\)Ibid.
political activity is unfortunate. Furthermore, Grieb's allusion to the idea that the 1920's were like any other interregnum between ruthless Guatemalan autocrats is mistaken.

Among the more useful works on the period is Joseph Pitti's Ph.D. dissertation, "Jorge Ubico and Guatemalan Politics in the 1920's". Unlike Grieb, Pitti examines the decade as a progressive stage in Guatemala's social, political and economic evolution. Unfortunately, because the study is primarily concerned with the early political career of the Guatemalan president, Jorge Ubico (1931-1944), it dedicates considerably less attention to the republic's social and economic developments. Other valuable historical accounts include the memoirs of Guatemala's future president, Juan José Arévalo and Raphael Arévalo Martinez's dated, yet colorful description of Cabrera's ruthless regime. Nonetheless, both must be used with discretion especially when one considers the authors' loyalties and interests in the political and social struggle that erupted. Finally, numerous Latin and North American studies examine the workings of the United States State Department and the continued expansion of American business interests in the 1920's, but very few discuss these

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21 Arévalo Martinez, Ecce Pericles; Juan José Arévalo, La inquietud normalista, estampas de adolencia y juventud, 1921-1927 (San Salvador, 1970).
factors in relationship to the social, political, economic and cultural realities of Guatemala society.22

A major focus of this thesis is to examine the events leading up to the April, 1920 overthrow of the President of Guatemala, Manuel Estrada Cabrera. This study will suggest that the internal dynamics of Guatemalan society were much more important in the events leading to Cabrera's removal than pressure from the United States State Department. Indeed, this thesis will propose that the national political opposition that was nurtured by Estrada Cabrera's overwhelming unpopularity at home and the encouragement of other such democratically-inspired protests in many parts of Latin America were by far the most significant factors that facilitated the dictator's ouster.

Equally prominent will be a study of the vigorous political activity that surfaced in the aftermath of the Cabrera regime. Contrary to the commonly held belief that Guatemala, and for that matter, Latin America, is historically condemned to an inescapably ruthless cycle of dictatorship,

22Several studies have focused on the expansion and influence of U.S. capital and business interests in Central America in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. See Lester Langley, The United States and the Caribbean in the Twentieth Century (Athens, Ga., 1980); Stacy May and Galo Plaza, United Fruit in Latin America (Washington, 1958); Charles Wilson, Empire in Green and Gold, (New York, 1947); Alfonso Bauer Paiz, Como opera el capital yanqui en Centroamérica: el caso de Guatemala (Mexico, 1956); Charles David Kepner and Jay Henry Soothill, The Banana Empire: A Case Study in American Imperialism (New York, 1935); Luis Cardoza y Aragón, "Guatemala y el imperialismo bananero" Cuadernos americanos, Vol. 64, 1954, pp. 19-45.
repression, revolution and reaction, this thesis will suggest that several political, social and economic factors in the first quarter of this century contributed to a unique and productive period in the republic's development. An analysis of the nature, origins and socio-economic orientation of the Unionist (1920-1921) and Orellana (1922-1926) governments will outline the complex evolution of Guatemalan society during the period.

Social and political forces unleashed by the movement that fostered Cabrera's removal encouraged the active participation of an incipient urban middle class and the capital's embryonic labour organizations. However, the failure of emergent middle groups to challenge the exclusive nature of the republic's old political institutions seriously impeded the efforts by the more progressive sectors of Guatemalan society. But when the majority of the capital's urban professionals, students and journalists abandoned the coalition that toppled Cabrera the trend toward a more egalitarian or democratically-oriented Guatemala was suppressed. Despite the well-intentioned efforts of a politicized university student movement and a small group of urban professionals, the generation's final attempt to implement reform was soundly defeated in the 1926 presidential election. In many ways, the victory by forces committed to the continuance of the status quo signalled the end of an era in which a generation of students, workers and young urban
professionals nearly seized the reins of government from the nation's traditional elite.

Although it goes beyond the primary scope of this study, it must be noted that the unwillingness of students and urban professionals to encourage the political participation of the nation's peasantry undoubtedly contributed to the failure of their movement. Efforts that focused on conditions in the capital and were solely concerned with the interests of urban dwellers could not possibly solve the immense social, economic and political problems of a nation in which sixty-eight percent of its citizens resided in rural areas. Any solutions that failed to question the nature of Guatemala's agro-export economy and its relations with the large native population would not resolve the nation's serious socio-economic inequalities. Furthermore, until reformers were prepared to challenge an exploitative land holding system in which slightly more than two percent of the farming units possessed seventy-two percent of the agricultural land, significant

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24 In December 1892, 1,042,851 of Guatemala's 1,510,475 residents were Indian. In 1923, 1,300,000 of Guatemala's population of 2,005,000 were Indians. Censo de la república de Guatemala, 1893 (Guatemala, 1894), p. 6; U.S.N.A.-D.S., U.S. Consul in Guatemala, Phillip Holland, to Secretary of State, 14 November, 1925, 814.504\4.
reform was simply unattainable. Whether the generation's reformers feared peasant insurrection, a caste war, or Bolshevik revolution, their unwillingness to cultivate and mobilize the vast pool of potential rural allies rendered the urban-based, middle class-inspired efforts fruitless.

This thesis strives to analyze the political, social and economic struggle that characterized Guatemalan society in the 1920's. Although the reformers of the 1920's failed in their quest, the ideals, hopes, dreams and aspirations that emanated from the period between the overthrow of Estrada Cabrera to the 1926 election, would inspire another generation less than twenty years later. By incorporating the lessons from previous setbacks, Guatemalans were convinced that the "cycle" of dictatorship and political chaos could be destroyed.

Unlike some of the studies mentioned above, this thesis will focus on Guatemala's political, social, and economic evolution to explain the origins and the significance of the socially and politically turbulent 1920's. However, the underpinnings of the poverty, reaction, repression, and revolt that punctuate the history of Guatemala reach several decades into the republic's past. Hence, to grasp the significance and the origins of the political protests and social unrest that erupted in the period, a brief survey of post-independence Guatemala is necessary.

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The legacy bequeathed by almost three hundred years of Spanish colonial rule could not be discarded when the isthmus declared its independence in 1821. Hence, it was not surprising, that the colonial remnants of poverty, material backwardness and "a highly stratified class structure" continued to plague the region in the early decades of the post-independence era.\(^{26}\) Perhaps even more detrimental to the future of the embryonic nation, was the elite's colonial "fixation on the rapid accumulation of wealth".\(^{27}\) According to Handy, it was material greed that helped entrench a resilient and rapacious economic system in which Indian labour was forced "to create wealth for a racially-defined minority."\(^{28}\) As a consequence, what became rooted in the republic was a society based on exploitation, terror, and government-sanctioned repression.\(^{29}\)

Throughout much of the nineteenth century, Guatemalan politics was characterized by internecine struggles between Liberals and Conservatives. In 1839, however, a victory by Conservative and native forces led by the peasant or folk


\(^{27}\) Handy, *Gift*, p. 33.

\(^{28}\) Ibid.

caudillo, Raphael Carrera, initiated over thirty years of relative peace and Conservative rule.\textsuperscript{30} Allied with the capital's traditional elite, Carrera implemented a program to reinforce "colonial institutions" and "maintain traditional economic and social relations" in the countryside.\textsuperscript{31} In exchange for their support of the Carrera regime, members of the republic's exclusive merchants guild, the Consulado de Comercio, were permitted to exercise a monopoly in the marketing and financing of the republic's two major export crops, indigo and cochineal.\textsuperscript{32}

In the late 1850's, the introduction of synthetic dyes in the world market and a series of crop failures produced a dramatic decline in Guatemala's indigo and cochineal profits. To secure their dominant economic position in Guatemalan

\textsuperscript{30}Throughout this study I have chosen to use E. Bradford Burns' definition of caudillo. In the broad sense, caudillo refers to "A strong leader who wields complete power over his subordinates." However, at the same time, two major groups of caudillos emerged in the nineteenth century. Carrera represents the smaller of the two groups in which these leaders "championed the needs of the popular majority". The larger group, which includes the Guatemalan presidents, Justo Rufino Barrios and Manuel Estrada Cabrera, "faithfully represented the elites and thus at least paid lip service to the ideology of progress." E. Bradford Burns, Latin America: A Concise Interpretive History (Englewood Hills, New Jersey, 1986) pp. 120-32, 358.

\textsuperscript{31}David McCreery, Desarrollo económico y política nacional: el ministerio de fomento de Guatemala, 1871-1885 (Guatemala, 1981), p. 2.

society, Consulado merchants sought to manipulate credit and transport fees in the nation's rapidly expanding, yet incipient, coffee industry. "Frustrated by blatant exploitation and by the inability and unwillingness of an insolvent government to protect or promote their interests," Guatemalan coffee planters increasingly opposed the Carrera's Conservative urban-based allies.\textsuperscript{33} Unable to accommodate coffee growers' demands for better systems of communication, more credit at lesser interest rates, liberty from the monopoly of the Consulado and, most importantly, an end to legal impediments that restricted the abuse of Indian labour, radical rural-based Liberals led by Justo Rufino Barrios, a prosperous cafetalero from the Mexican border, ousted the Conservative government.\textsuperscript{34}

Barrios, who assumed the presidency in 1873, and the Liberal presidents who followed, built railroads, ports, and bridges, and immensely expanded agricultural production and exports.\textsuperscript{35} Swept to power by the tide of the republic's expanding coffee industry, the Liberal regimes of the 1880's and 1890's rested largely on their ability to induce the

\textsuperscript{33}McCreery, "Coffee and Class", p. 440.

\textsuperscript{34}Ibid.; McCreery, Desarrollo económico, p. 4.

nation's Indian majority to labour on large coffee fincas. Since the 1860's coffee planters had complained that the development of the nation was restricted by its chronic labour shortage. Frequently blamed for the republic's backwardness and lack of progress, Indians' reluctance to work on the coffee fincas was cited as the major obstacle to national growth. Hence, Liberals concluded that for the welfare of the nation, Indians should be forced to offer their labour cheaply. When Indians refused their request, these governments, with the aid of the military, resorted to a number of forced labour schemes that included the mandamiento, debt bondage, and a vagrancy law.  

However, E. Bradford Burns' *The Poverty of Progress: Latin America in the Nineteenth Century* suggests that the Liberal-sanctioned schemes of modernization and Europeanization produced far more unfavourable than favourable results in Latin America. Burns concedes that minimal progress may have occasionally occurred in restricted areas. Nonetheless, when growth did occur, its profits benefitted only a small portion of the population; notably, the elite and

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the nascent middle class.\textsuperscript{37} Instead of promoting development, writes Burns, the legacy of Latin American Liberalism proved to be increased concentration of land in the hands of ever fewer owners, falling per capita food production..., greater impoverishment, less to eat, more vulnerability to the whims of an impersonal international market, uneven growth, increased unemployment and underemployment, social, economic, and political marginalization, and greater power in the hands of the privileged few.\textsuperscript{38}

The presidency of Guatemala's Manuel Estrada Cabrera was perhaps the most famous and ruthless of Latin America's liberal presidents. But the Liberal society that was entrenched during Cabrera's reign, fostered the emergence of a movement in the second decade of the twentieth century that sought, in some important ways, to transform many elements of this Liberal legacy.


\textsuperscript{38}Ibid., p. 150.
CHAPTER II

The Fall of a Guatemalan Dictator:
U.S. Pressures or National Opposition?

GO, DON MANUEL GO! No advice more noble, more disinterested, more frank, more beneficial, more rational and more sincere can be given to a chief executive:

Go Don Manuel to where no Guatemalan can have the misfortune of meeting you.

The people have suffered your extreme government (desatentado obierno) with the patience of Job, but all patience has its end and when the brutal force of one individual succeeds, it rebounds with brute force.¹

During the presidency of Manuel Estrada Cabrera (1898-1920), the exploitative and exclusive nature of Guatemalan society became increasingly obvious. Instead of real development, what emerged was a landed oligarchy, engaged primarily in the production of coffee, who utilized their economic might to construct a state that protected their dominant social and political status. Although economic growth and modernization proceeded at a moderate pace throughout the first two decades of this century, political and social problems associated with increased economic activity, lack of development, and the altered fabric of Guatemalan society arose. Significant among these were the rapid growth of the capital's middle-class, the emergence of a significant labour element and a vocal and politically conscious student

¹A letter from Federico Hernández de León to President Manuel Estrada Cabrera in El Obrero Libre, March, 1920 cited in Arévalo Martinez, Pericles, pp. 579-80.
population; all of which were refused a forum for political expression, not to mention an equitable share in the profits of the republic's lucrative coffee industry. The cumulative effect of these forces, augmented by the extremely repressive nature of Estrada Cabrera's administration, presented the republic with a rare opportunity to implement real and significant reform.

Guatemala was not the only Latin American nation undergoing a dramatic social, political and economic transformation in the early decades of this century. During the first two decades of the twentieth century, Latin America was shaken by several new social and political movements. The Mexican and Russian Revolutions accelerated this process by presenting alternative ideologies for those who recognized the injustices and deficiencies in their societies. Many of these movements, and the political unrest which accompanied them, emanated from the universities. Originally, they called for a student role in university administration and greater university autonomy. But quite often student organizations went far beyond university issues and voiced their concern for

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everything from foreign ownership in their economies to the injustices of dictatorship.

It was not by coincidence that universities throughout Latin American became the focal point of criticism and discontent in the region. Universities were the only institutions that permitted the congregation of large groups of sometimes politically conscious individuals. The formulation and expression of new ideas and concepts from these institutions were to remain constant reminders for the entire decade that a growing percentage of Latin Americans were becoming aware that a restructuring of society was necessary. The result was that universities and, thus, an entire generation of educated Latin Americans, became politicized. It is important to note that in several Latin American countries many of those who participated in these early radical student movements formed the nucleus of opposition groups and embryonic political parties that challenged the status quo in the 1920's.

In Argentina, student dissatisfaction erupted in 1917 at the University of Córdoba and similar protests and calls for reform were repeated in several nations including Peru, El Salvador, and Guatemala. Student demonstrations in Argentine


universities coincided with the rise in popularity of the Unión Civica Radical under the leadership of Hipolito Yrigoyen. Although the Radicals, as they were called, were feared for their rebellious rhetoric, in reality they were largely moderate. Uncompromising commitment to popular democracy, government accountability, and honest administration formed the core of the party's doctrines. In 1916 Yrigoyen, with a coalition of support from a substantial proportion of the landed and commercial elites and the enfranchised urban and rural middle-class, succeeded in obtaining the presidency. Although Yrigoyen's first term in office was plagued by several problems, it marked the emergence of the middle-class as a significant political force in Argentine politics.6

In Peru, university students were strongly influenced by events in Argentina. At the University of San Marcos in Lima, Victor Raul Haya de la Torre and José Carlos Mariategui were active participants and organizers of the student movement. Haya de la Torre went on to form the Alianza Popular Revolucionaria Americana in 1924 and Mariategui the Partido

6Rock, Argentina, pp. 185-90.
Socialista Peruano in 1928. Both of these, but especially the former, were to have long-term effects on Peruvian politics. Likewise, in El Salvador moderate middle-class reforms were advocated in the hope that some of the country's more serious problems would be resolved. Alberto Masferrer, a professor and social reformer, proposed that government intervention designed to regulate the economy and the welfare state were the solutions. An increase in social spending and greater taxes on the wealthy, declared Masferrer, could avoid the more radical measures, such as land reform and revolution, that some militant Salvadoreans claimed immediately necessary.

A similar student-led political movement developed in Guatemala after the First World War. During the war years, Guatemala was torn by the contradictions caused by the region's economic growth, incipient trade union activity and the emergence of a nascent urban middle-class on the one hand, and the monopoly of political power in the hands of the coffee elite on the other. Nonetheless, few contemporary observers of Guatemalan affairs in the first two decades of this century believed the dictator could be seriously challenged by an

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7Kantor, Aprista Movement, pp. 7-9, 11-12; Pike, Politics of the Miraculous, pp. 33-4, 39-49; Alexander, Aprismo, pp. 4-23.

8Alberto Masferrer, El mínimo vitálico y otras obras de carácter sociológico (Guatemala, 1950), pp. 179-210; Anderson, Matanza, pp. 45-6.
indigenous political opposition.  

Estrada Cabrera had held the republic's presidency in an iron-fisted manner since the assassination of his protector and predecessor José María Reyna Barrios in 1898. A Quetzaltenango lawyer of limited ability, Cabrera has been described as one of "the strangest personalities who ever raised himself to great power." Although Cabrera was said to possess little political ambition, he served as a Cabinet Minister and the First Designate (Vice President) during the Reyna Barrios administration. On 8 February, 1898, Reyna Barrios was reportedly murdered by a "foreigner" and Cabrera, the undistinguished rural lawyer, assumed the presidency. The violence of Reyna Barrios' assassination would prove to be a fitting introduction to Cabrera's reign of terror that still ranks as the longest uninterrupted rule in Central American history. One recent study suggests that the President's renowned tendencies towards cruelty and corruption, combined with his legendary "super human resource and invulnerability" undoubtedly contributed to the longevity

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9U.S.N.A.-D.S., Wilson to Sec. of St., 13 June, 1914, 814.00\213; U.S.N.A.-D.S., Leovell to Sec. of St., 16 April, 1915, 814.00\223; U.S.N.A.-D.S., Antonio Valenzuela-Moreno, a Guatemalan citizen, to President of U.S., 14 January, 1918, 814.00\278; Dinwoodie, "Democracy", pp. 4-5.


11Jones, Guatemala: Past and Present, p. 64.

12Woodward, A Nation Divided, p. 298.
of his administration. 13

Like his predecessor, the revered Barrios, Cabrera was a typical Latin American caudillo. Careful to cultivate the support of the coffee elite and dedicated to the positivist watchwords of "Order and Progress", the dictator guided Guatemala on a course common in Latin America in the latter half of the last century typified by large landed estates, forced labour, an export-oriented economy and highly centralized political power. 14 Latin American caudillos rarely delegated political authority to subordinates and Cabrera was no exception to this rule. 15 According to Dana Munro, a State Department representative in the first quarter of this century, the dictator "had no friends or personal followers except the army officers and government officials who supported his regime" and these only "for the sake of the license and graft" that he permitted. 16 As long as the President continued his cruel, yet highly successful methods,

13Dinwoodie, "Democracy", p. 5; H.R.H. Williams, a British traveler, cited in Rafael Arévalo Martínez, Ecce Pericles: la tiranía de Manuel Estrada Cabrera en Guatemala (Guatemala, 1983), pp. 623–4; Jones, Guatemala: Past and Present, pp. 64–5. There has yet been done a thorough investigation of Estrada Cabrera's presidency. Especially obvious is the lack of study in the pre–World War I period of his government.


15Burns, Latin America, pp. 120–1.

16Munro, Dollar Diplomacy, p. 144.
it appeared he could continue in office indefinitely. His third unopposed re-election on January 18, 1916 suggested that Estrada Cabrera had the situation well-in-hand heading into the second half of the decade. 17

Shortly after Estrada Cabrera's 1916 re-election, however, a ground-swell of discontent began to emerge. In 1917 and 1918 vocal opposition to the brutality and lack of respect for human liberties in Guatemala increased significantly. 18 Some critics claimed Cabrera was "a robber and a murderer and his administration to blame for keeping the Indians in peonage, debauching the national treasury, for starving the army and for pocketing wholesale the public revenues." 19 In 1918 student leaders began to call for reforms in all aspects of Guatemalan society as Cabrera continued to turn a deaf ear to their demands. 20 According to Guatemalan novelist Miguel Angel Asturias, a future Nobel prize recipient for literature, the President's apathetic response to the earthquakes of 1917 and

17Jones, Guatemala: Past and Present, pp. 64-5; U.S.N.A.-D.S., Leovell to Sec. of St., 18 January, 1916, 814.00\255; U.S.N.A.-D.S., Leovell to Sec. of St., 18 January, 1916, 814.00\256; U.S.N.A.-D.S., Leovell to Sec. of St., 7 March, 1916, 814.00\261.

18U.S.N.A.-D.S., Valenzuela-Morena to President of U.S., 14 January, 1918, 814.00\278; Charles C. Eberhardt's Memorandum, 12 December, 1918, 814.00\295.

19Jones, Guatemala, p. 65.

20U.S.N.A.-D.S., Thurston to Sec. of St., 28 August, 1919, 814.00\319; Thurston to Sec. of St., 5 September, 1919, 814.00\320; Geissler to Sec. of St., 30 April, 1924, 814.42\5.
1918 further fueled dissatisfaction among the general populace. Asturias writes that the earthquakes "not only shook the earth but also jolted our consciences." Guatemalans appeared ready to bring about reform with or without the consent of the President.

One American traveller described these pronounced feelings of dissatisfaction and unrest as "deeper rooted and more bitter than the usual attitude of the 'outs' against the 'ins' so common in [Latin] American countries." The most notable abuses identified by many of the "better and more educated" citizens of Guatemala included complaints of taxes and levies applied by the President and his officials beyond the fees recognized by law; the fact that there was not one family from the "better classes" that had not had some men flogged, imprisoned, or killed by or under the orders of the President; and the rigid restrictions placed on those who wished to sell property and leave the country. Although, reports the American, these gentlemen were willing to voice their dissatisfaction with the presidency of Cabrera, they were not about to take action of their own to facilitate his overthrow. Instead, they called on the United States to make Guatemala, like Cuba, "safe for democracy." The State

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Department, however, declined.\textsuperscript{22}

By March, 1919 the situation had intensified and elements of the opposition were beginning to advocate more active forms of protest against the dictator. Indeed, a State Department dispatch from Guatemala City on March 13, 1919 identified "a group of Guatemalans who it would seem intend overthrowing the Cabrera government in the near future."\textsuperscript{23} It informed the Department that the leaders of the embryonic movement, said to be Bishop Pimol y Batres, Luis Pedro Aguirre, Eduardo Camacho and Henrique Arzuroma, did not desire to accomplish Estrada Cabrera's overthrow by force, but would do so if this became necessary.\textsuperscript{24} In response to this report and others that spoke of the President's deteriorating health, the Department inquired to its Legation in Guatemala about possible successors to Estrada Cabrera. Although the Minister, Walter Thurston, expressed concern over the President's unwillingness to step down from his office peacefully, the Department did nothing of significance to secure a smooth transition.\textsuperscript{25}

\textsuperscript{22}U.S.N.A.-D.S., Charles C. Eberhardt's Memorandum, 12 December, 1918, 814.00\textsuperscript{295}.

\textsuperscript{23}U.S.N.A.-D.S., E.G.G. to Latin American Division, 19 March, 1919, 814.00\textsuperscript{298}.

\textsuperscript{24}Ibid.

\textsuperscript{25}U.S.N.A.-D.S., Thurston to Sec. of St., 7 April, 1919, 814.00\textsuperscript{300}; Thurston to Sec. of St., 21 January, 1918, 814.00\textsuperscript{1ca\textsuperscript{2}}, Acting Sec. of St., William Phillips, to Thurston, 14 February, 1919, 814.00\textsuperscript{295a}. 
On May 12, 1919 Bishop José Pimol y Batres delivered the first of nine sermons to a large church audience in the capital's Templo de San Francisco. In his speech he alluded to the similarities between the "evils of tyranny" the United States had strove to destroy in World War I and the situation his nation faced. Throughout the week, the Bishop consistently denounced the government until it was reported on May 17 that Pimol had been arrested. Although the motives for Pimol's actions remain unclear, it must be noted that for several decades Latin American Liberals and devout, prosperous members of the Roman Catholic Church, traditionally staunch allies of the Conservatives, had fought a bitter struggle for political power. Although the tensions between liberal governments and the Church were considerably less in the 1920's than they had been in the 1870's and 1880's, Guatemalan clerics remained stalwart opponents of the Cabrera regime through much of his rule.

Once again the State Department and the American Minister in Guatemala chose to remain uncommitted in the brewing conflict. Thurston recommended that the United States should

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26 U.S.N.A.-D.S., Thurston to Sec. of St., 22 May, 1919, 814.00\301.

27 U.S.N.A.-D.S., Thurston to Sec. of St., Thurston to Sec. of St., 17 May, 1919, 814.00\303; Thurston to Sec. of St., 22 May, 1919, 814.00\301; Arévalo Martinez, Ecce Pericles, pp. 407-414.

follow a policy of disinterest in the affair. He justified this course by his belief that Cabrera would deport the Bishop and avoid a volatile incident. If the President did this, wrote Thurston, "I anticipate no further agitation." On August 20 Bishop Pinól was released and three weeks later he was permitted to leave Guatemala for the United States and Rome.

Thurston was correct in his prediction that Pinól would be freed unharmed, but his assessment of the future proved to be less visionary. Instead, the period throughout Pinól's incarceration was filled with protests against the President's actions and pleas from all sectors of Guatemalan society for the United States to mediate the dispute and secure the cleric's release. The role of the Roman Catholic Church must not be overlooked in this episode, since over ninety-nine percent of Guatemalans were members of the Church. Indeed, it was a drastic step for the highest ranking churchman in the

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29U.S.N.A.-D.S., Thurston to Sec. of St., 17 May, 1919, 814.00\303.

30U.S.N.A.-D.S., Thurston to Sec. of St., 21 August, 1919, 814.00\317; Thurston to Sec. of St., 11 September, 1919, 814.00\321.

31U.S.N.A.-D.S., Thurston to Sec. of St., 17 May, 1919, 814.00\303; Thurston to Sec. of St., 22 May, 1919, 814.00\304; Thurston to Sec. of St., 30 May, 1919, 814.00\307.

32In 1893, 1,356,105 of Guatemala's 1,364,678 inhabitants were Catholic. Censo general de la república de Guatemala, 1893, p. 9.
country to denounce the President. Thus, the Bishop's criticism and imprisonment were a rallying point for a substantial portion of Guatemalan society that, as a result, helped sustain an atmosphere of tension throughout the remainder of 1919.

Among those immediately inspired by the Bishop's sermons were the increasingly large numbers of workers, labourers and trade unionists in the capital. Like the capital's nascent middle-class, the emergence of a significant working class was related to the republic's increased economic activity in the latter half of the nineteenth century.\textsuperscript{33} The rapid growth of Guatemala City in this period (71,527 inhabitants in 1893 to 120,707 in 1923) accelerated this process and the number of labourers employed in the capital grew correspondingly.\textsuperscript{34} In 1894 the first workers' society was formed in Guatemala and by the end of the First World War a number of incipient labour organizations emerged.\textsuperscript{35} One of these, the Unificación Obrera, which later became the Guatemalan Communist Party, was organized by a group of government employees, students and


\textsuperscript{34}Censo general de la república de Guatemala, 1893, p. 12; Censo general de la república de Guatemala, 1921, p. 26.

disgruntled Liberals.\textsuperscript{36}

However, much more important in the ensuing conflict was another labour movement that appeared in 1919. Inspired by Pimol y Batres, a group of tailors, carpenters, barbers, clerks, bakers, blacksmiths, masons and railroad workers met throughout the summer of 1919, to discuss the Bishop's speeches. Awakened by the Bishop's calls for "truth, justice and liberty",\textsuperscript{37} urban workers gathered in June to express their discontent with the inequalities and deficiencies of the Cabrera regime's Liberal policies. In the wake of Pimol's sermons, wrote one labourer,

\begin{quote}
The workers began to realize the high views of the illustrious prelate and saw already the voices of protest against the ruling regime of Manuel Estrada Cabrera....For the first time we realized that we are citizens, that in addition to obligations we have rights; he [Pimol y Batres] spoke to us of a great and happy and true democracy that we have a right to according to our Political Constitution.\textsuperscript{38}
\end{quote}

To hasten the realization of this objective, the first meeting of the \textit{Liga Obrera} (Workers League) was convened in September, 1919 and its members elected a tailor, Silverio Ortiz, president, Damian Caniz, a tinsmith, vice-president and Saturnino González, a carpenter, and Matias Arana, a tailor,

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\textsuperscript{37}Bishop Jose Pimol y Batres cited in Arévalo Martinez, \textit{Ecce Pericles}, p. 409.

\textsuperscript{38}Silverio Ortiz, future president of \textit{La Liga Obrera}, cited in Ibid., pp. 422-3.
\end{flushright}
secretaries.\textsuperscript{39} In the fall of 1919, evidence indicates that labour disaffection with the Cabrera regime rapidly spread. By November a meeting of the Workers League in Guatemala City recorded that similar organizations were established in the cities of Antigua and Mixco and in the departments of Quetzaltenango, Zacapa, Escuintla, and Amatitlán all with the intention of opposing the dictator.\textsuperscript{40}

At the same time, reports increasingly suggested that a new political movement would soon be formed to oppose the Cabrera government in the upcoming elections for the National Legislative Assembly.\textsuperscript{41} Candidates other than those previously authorized by the President had rarely presented themselves for election during the dictator's reign; thus any show of defiance to the will of the Cabrera was immediately interpreted as hostile. On December 25, 1919, thirty-one prominent citizens of the republic gathered with eighteen representatives of the Capital's organized labourers, to found the Unionist Party.\textsuperscript{42} The party was created under the banner

\textsuperscript{39}Ibid., pp. 427-8, 438-442, 470-1.

\textsuperscript{40}Matias Arana, member of Liga Obrera, cited in Ibid., p. 451.

\textsuperscript{41}U.S.N.A.-D.S., Thurston to Sec. of St., 13 October, 1919, 814.00\textbackslash 326.

\textsuperscript{42}U.S.N.A.-D.S., Scotten, Charge d'Affaires, to Sec. of St., 31 December, 1919, 814.00\textbackslash 327; Are'valo Martinez, Ecce Pericles, pp. 466-71, 473-78; Juan José Arevalo, La inquietud normalista, estampas de adolencia y juventud, 1921-1927 (San Salvador, 1970), p. 31.
of Central American unity and a desire to form a Central American republic.\(^4^3\) However, all Guatemalans were aware that the real purpose of the organization was to oppose the outdated and repressive Cabrera government.\(^4^4\) The active participation in the establishment of the Unionist Party of prominent labour activists such as Silverio Ortiz, Damian Canniz, Teodulo Vega, and Saturnino González indicates the broad range of opposition that almost a half a decade of Liberal positivism had fostered.\(^4^5\)

On January 1, pamphlets were distributed by workers and students throughout the city and evidence demonstrates that support for the Unionist Party grew rapidly and soon became extremely widespread.\(^4^6\) On January 20, 1920, the new American Minister, Benton McMillin, feared that if harsh measures were implemented to disband the newly firmed opposition movement,


\(^{4^4}\)Arevalo, La inquietud normalista, p. 31.


\(^{4^6}\) U.S.N.A.-D.S., Benton McMillin, U.S. Minister in Guatemala, to Sec. of St. 17 January, 1920, 814.00\335; McMillin to Sec. of St., 19 January, 1920, 814.00\336; McMillin to Sec. of St., 26 January, 1920, 814.00\339.
trouble would ensue. Obviously, the state of political affairs was reaching a critical stage.

January and February were months of consolidation and organization for the Unionists. McMillin described the situation in the city as "grave" several times. On 15 January, the first anti-government newspaper, *El Unionista* (The Unionist), appeared and within the next month three others, *El Estudiante* (The Student), and *El Obrero Libre* (The Free Worker) were established to harass and criticize the Cabrera dictatorship. Among all the anti-government literature that was distributed throughout the months of January and February, a letter published in *The Free Worker* merits special consideration. Addressed to Cabrera, the president of the recently reorganized Unionist Workers League, Silverio Ortiz, declared that

we are sixty thousand workers that belong...to the Unionist Workers League; we are poor but conscious of the fact that...what you are doing is barbarous and that your obligation is to comply strictly with the law.

Many times you speak of liberties but your actions fall short of the truth. You deceive us, you have us subject to your will having us believe we are slaves, forgetting that we are citizens as Guatemalan as you.

Because we are poor and complacent you treat us worse than beasts, demanding our labour on behalf of your and

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47 U.S.N.A.-D.S., McMillin to Sec. of St., 26 January, 1920, 814.00\339.

48 U.S.N.A.-D.S., McMillin to Sec. of St., 3 February, 1920, 814.00/342; McMillin to Sec. of St., 21 February, 1920, 814.00/349.

your worthy servants insatiable greed.

Now we are united and therefore strong. Now neither the money, nor the henchmen, nor the cannons you threaten us with, will permit you, like your worthy colleagues, the tyrants and the paid assassins of other people, to partake in a-thousand-and-one-nights orgy (orgias miliananochescas) from the wealth of the people.\textsuperscript{50}

As the month of February proceeded, an incipient Unionist coalition of students, labourers and wealthy urban Conservatives and merchants, continued to hold peaceful meetings and issue vehement press attacks against Cabrera's presidency.\textsuperscript{51} Pro-Unionist papers leveled a barrage of criticism at the President and helped maintain the atmosphere of tension despite Cabrera's efforts to censor his most vocal critics.\textsuperscript{52} On February 21, McMillin wrote that the failure of the President to suppress these actions was interpreted by his opposition as "a sign of governmental weakness and [, therefore,] increases their attacks."\textsuperscript{53}

By March 9, the government had imprisoned over four hundred people in connection with activities related to the


\textsuperscript{51}U.S.N.A.-D.S., McMillin to Sec. of St., 21 February, 1920, 814.00\textbackslash349; Commanding Officer of U.S.S. Sinclair to State Department, 23 February, 1920, 814.00\textbackslash354.

\textsuperscript{52}U.S.N.A.-D.S., Scotten, Charge d'Affaires, to Sec. of St., 2 January, 1920, 814.00\textbackslash329.

\textsuperscript{53}U.S.N.A.-D.S., McMillin to Sec. of St., 21 February, 1920, 814.00\textbackslash349.
Unionist movement. In response to the growing unrest, and based on the United States' fears of bloody revolution, the State Department instructed McMillin to inform Cabrera that, "He fully realizes the unfortunate position which would be created...by action designed to suppress normal political activities in any American republic." At the same time, the Department asked McMillin to inform the leaders of the Unionists that "any attempt on their part to overthrow by violence the existing constitutional order would create a most unfortunate impression in the United States." But Cabrera's close relationship with the United States was not sufficient to impede the development of a unified opposition of students, urban workers, military officers and a large proportion of the disgruntled elite under the Unionist banner. Indeed, even though the State Department repeatedly cautioned the Unionists to avoid a violent overthrow of the constitutional order, they continued to organize and insist on Estrada Cabrera's removal.

Events in Guatemala in March, 1920 remained on a steady course of confrontation. On March 11, a Unionist parade of more than ten thousand men, women, and children was organized. As the orderly procession passed the military academy, secret

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54U.S.N.A.-D.S., McMillin to Sec. of St., 9 March, 1920, 814.00\355.

55U.S.N.A.-D.S., Sec. of St. Frank Polk to McMillin, 10 March, 1920, 814.00\356a.

56Ibid..
agents and soldiers instigated a general disturbance in which at least two were killed and several injured. Even the American Minister reported that "the disorder was absolutely provoked by the authorities" in an attempt to manufacture an incident that could provide an excuse to crush the Unionist movement. 57

Soon after the incident both the Unionist Party and President Cabrera requested the diplomatic corps to act as a mediator in an attempt to avert a major conflict. A committee composed of three members appointed by Cabrera and three representatives of the Unionists held meetings to reach a negotiated settlement. 58 By March 21, the representatives from both sides had tentatively agreed on all outstanding issues. 59 Yet, the Unionists still entertained very strong doubts as to whether Estrada Cabrera was willing to implement and hold to the terms of the agreement. The atmosphere surrounding the negotiations was so pessimistic that even McMillin suffered a serious loss of confidence in Cabrera's willingness to abide

57 U.S.N.A.-D.S., McMillin to Sec. of St., 12 March, 1920, 814.00\357. There appears to be some disagreement as to the exact number of individuals that participated in the March 11 protest. Areválo Martinez claims that thirty-two thousand people marched in the parade. Areválo Martinez, Ecce Pericles, p. 550-555.

58 U.S.N.A.-D.S., McMillin to Sec. of St., 16 March, 1920, 814.00\362.

59 U.S.N.A.-D.S., McMillin to Sec. of St., 21 March, 1920, 814.00\366.
by the terms of any settlement.  

The week of March 26 marked the beginning of the end for the Cabrera presidency. On this day the committee designated by the President and that of the Unionists reached an agreement on all their outstanding differences. The following day negotiations were officially concluded and the document was signed. However, no one believed that the settlement would bring an end to hostilities, since distrust of the President was extremely widespread. A day later, March 28, the President's private secretary tendered his resignation. The reasons he cited for his actions proved to discredit the President even more than the resignation itself. The secretary claimed Estrada Cabrera was in a very precarious state, was showing signs of insanity, and had made threats upon his life. To most, it appeared that Estrada Cabrera's inner circle of support was crumbling.

On April 1, the Unionists warned of revolution if the President did not resign, but this was interrupted on April

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60 Ibid.

61 U.S.N.A.-D.S., McMillin to Sec. of St., 26 March, 1920, 814.00\370.

62 U.S.N.A.-D.S., McMillin to Sec. of St., 29 March, 1920, 814.00\372.

63 U.S.N.A.-D.S., McMillin to Sec. of St., 30 March, 1920, 814.00\373.

64 U.S.N.A.-D.S., McMillin to Sec. of St., 1 April, 1920, 814.00\378.
by a strange turn of events. That morning Cabrera issued a proclamation that included all the points recommended earlier by Acting Secretary of State Frank Polk. The President agreed to implement the following Department suggestions:

1. That the presiding government will recognize and respect all the rights guaranteed by the Constitution;

2. That, for that very reason, it will not restrict the normal political activities of the people;

3. That it will not make subsequent arrests for political reasons;

4. That the presiding government guarantees complete freedom in the presidential elections in 1922.

The confusion of the State Department and its representatives in Guatemala was reflected in the events leading to Cabrera's declaration. On March 17 Polk had instructed McMillin to impress upon the President the United States' concern over recent events in Guatemala. McMillin was told to suggest to Cabrera that he abide by the constitution of the republic, that he not repress normal political activities, that no further political arrests occur, and that under no circumstances should torture be employed.

At the same time, McMillin had insisted that the terms of the

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65 U.S.N.A.-D.S., McMillin to Sec. of St., 6 April, 1920, 814.00\381.


67 U.S.N.A.-D.S., Polk to McMillin, 17 March, 1920, 814.00\357.
March 27 Unionist-government agreement be included in the President's proclamation before the United States declared its support for the government. 68

Confused by Washington's instructions and unsure whether his actions were satisfactory, on April 5 the Minister issued the Department's statement without Cabrera's recognition of the other Unionist grievances. 69 In accordance with the Department's terms, the corresponding declaration stated that the government of the United States regarded President Estrada Cabrera's proclamation with "great pleasure" and in view of the President's constitutional guarantees "there is no excuse for the starting of a revolutionary movement in Guatemala." Furthermore, if such actions occurred, "the gravest responsibility would rest with any man or group of men who ventured to start such a movement." 70 In other words, the State Department unequivocally announced its support for the President.

On the same day, April 5, Cabrera's soldiers arrested twenty-seven men described as Unionists. 71 The exhibition of

68 U.S.N.A.-D.S., McMillin to Sec. of St., 21 March, 1920, 814.00\366.

69 U.S.N.A.-D.S., McMillin to Sec. of St., 6 April, 1920, 814.00\381.

70 U.S.N.A.-D.S., Polk to McMillin, 18 March, 1920, 814.00\362.

71 U.S.N.A.-D.S., McMillin to Sec. of St., 6 April, 1920, 814.00\381.
bad faith was clearly understood by the citizens of Guatemala and the Unionist party. In the previous weeks, the movement's leadership had been preparing for such a move and they responded according to plan. The Unionists had suggested three possible courses of action in recent discussions with the American Minister. First, they had been considering the appointment of a committee to place the situation and their demands for his resignation personally before the President asking him to step down with the security of life and property. Failing this, the Unionists would attempt to introduce impeachment proceedings before the National Assembly. Even though this body was "hand-picked" by Cabrera, it was believed the Assembly would react favourably to this suggestion since the President's unpopularity had permeated even his most loyal followers. Finally, if impeachment failed, revolt would be the only alternative.\footnote{U.S.N.A.-D.S., McMillin to Sec. of St., 29 March, 1920, 814.00\372.}\footnote{Ibid.}

Obviously, the final alternative is the most significant point when the importance of the Department's policies is addressed. Time and time again the Unionists proclaimed that failing all other peaceful courses of action, they would
depose the President in a violent, revolutionary manner.\textsuperscript{74}

Even though the Unionist leadership was reminded numerous times of the American disaffection for revolutionary acts, they were still committed to the dictator's removal at any cost. If impeachment had failed or if the Assembly had refused to declare the President unable to proceed in office, the Unionists would have exercised any and all possible means, both violent and non-violent, to achieve their objective.

It is fortunate, however, that the outcome of the conflict was somewhat more peaceful. As a result of the government's arrests on April 5, the Unionists chose to attempt the removal of Cabrera with the support of the National Assembly. The immediate and decisive response of that body on April 8 was to declare President Estrada Cabrera insane and elect Carlos Herrera as the new President.\textsuperscript{75}

It is important to note that for the State Department this course

\textsuperscript{74}U.S.N.A.-D.S., McMillin to Sec. of St., 12 March, 1920, 814.00\,358; McMillin to Sec. of St., 29 March, 1920, 814.00\,372; McMillin to Sec. of St., 1 April, 1920, 814.00\,378.

\textsuperscript{75}For several different descriptions of Cabrera's removal and the operations of the National Assembly see U.S.N.A.-D.S., McMillin to Sec. of St., 8 April, 1920, 814.00\,386; McMillin to Sec. of St., 14 April, 1920, 814.00\,423; U.S.N.A.-D.S., Minister of Foreign Affairs Luis P. Aguirre's letter to American Legation in Guatemala, 14 April, 1920, 814.00\,425; U.S.N.A.-D.S., Memorandum from Virgilio Rodri'guez Beteta, Delegate for Guatemala to the Pan American Financial Conference, 23 April, 1920, 814.00\,454; U.S.N.A.-D.S., Report by Marsical G. Salas, Ernesto Zelaya, and Manuel Valladares, three prominent Unionists, presented to the Diplomatic Corps in Guatemala, 21 April, 1920, 814.00\,463.
of action was significantly different from a revolution, since those opposed to Cabrera obtained their goal through a constitutionally recognized body.

Fighting broke out the following morning between the supporters of Cabrera and the new Government. However, hostilities only lasted until April 14 and on this date Estrada Cabrera unconditionally surrendered with the guarantee of his life. The victory of the Unionists was complete. In spite of several weeks of indecision on the part of the State Department, the Unionist government that followed was finally granted United States recognition 12 June, 1920.

It is worth examining more closely the State Department's role in Cabrera's removal. The American Minister in Guatemala, Benton McMillin, was in a very difficult situation in which he most likely had very little influence. The President appeared willing to negotiate, yet unwilling to hold to any agreements. The Unionists, on the other hand, agreed to talks with the government, but truly believed negotiations would solve nothing. Furthermore, McMillin had to satisfy the demands of the Department at home, which never

76 U.S.N.A.-D.S., McMillin to Sec. of St., 8 April, 1920, 814.00\394.

77 U.S.N.A.-D.S., McMillin to Sec. of St., 30 April, 1920, 814.00\423.

78 U.S.N.A.-D.S., McMillin to Sec. of St., 30 April, 1920, 814.00\471; U.S.N.A.-D.S., Sec. of St. Colby to President Wilson, 12 June, 1920, 814.00\485; U.S.N.A.-D.S., Colby to McMillin, 12 June, 1920, 814.00\487a.
permitted him to abandon a President that had become totally unacceptable to the people of Guatemala. The swiftness with which the Unionists rallied their supporters and the overwhelming consensus that was rapidly achieved and directed against the President are proof of the strength of the national opposition and Cabrera's immense unpopularity. The tide of anti-Cabrera sentiment in the republic simply overwhelmed the unpopular President and rendered all efforts by governemnt officials, loyal Cabrera military officers, and the diplomatic corps ineffective.

It is obvious from his instructions that Polk and the State Department were committed to the Cabrera government. Evidence tells us that Department policy never changed, although McMillin probably wished that it had. The rigidity of the Department's policy made it impossible for its officials in Washington to recognize the tone of McMillin's dispatches after March 11. Several times he tried to inform the Department of Cabrera's untrustworthiness and his unpopularity, yet his appeals for a change of policy went unanswered. Neither was the State Department prepared to assist in securing the peaceful remedy McMillin implied by suggesting Estrada Cabrera resign. Washington had wholeheartedly committed itself to the dictator and all McMillin's suggestions were rejected.

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79 U.S.N.A.-D.S., McMillin to Sec. of St., 30 March, 1920, 814.00\373.
Contrary to assertions by Dinwoodie, Woodward and Handy, the origins of the opposition did not spring from American State Department dissatisfaction with the policies of the Cabrera Government. Rather it was a popular and nationalist movement against an aging, out-dated and increasingly unacceptable tyrant. A more logical explanation for the Unionists' success lies in a dispatch by an American vice-consul, Henry S. Waterman, who stated that the headquarters of the Unionist Party "is continually filled with an enthusiastic mass of the artisan class, the carpenter, plumber, mechanic, clerk, small merchant, etc., and even a goodly sprinkling of the barefoot mozo, in other words, the backbone of the people." It was to this fact that Waterman correctly attributed the strength of the Unionist movement, not to State Department disfavor for Cabrera or a sudden affection for more popular-oriented governments. Indeed, the Unionist movement was much more than an opposition toward a specific individual or dictator. It reflected a change in the composition of Guatemalan society.

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CHAPTER III
The Unionist Government
and the Disintegration of Consensus

It is only a few months ago that the gag was removed from the collective Guatemalan mouth which had been shut tight for twenty-two years. When the gag was first removed, the Guatemalan mouth and tongue functioned but slowly; they were weak from mere long continued non-use. But the velocity of their movement has been steady until now they, together with the Guatemalan pen, have acquired a tremendous momentum, and they criticize every act of every member of the government from the president to the village policeman with extreme acidity and without the slightest regard for truth, accuracy or fairness.¹

Carlos Herrera was inaugurated as President of the Republic on September 15, 1920. The new Executive pledged to strive toward the creation of a united Central American nation and the enhancement of constitutional liberties and government. Unfortunately, Herrera was to fail on both these counts as an economic crisis and traditional political animosities first weakened, and ultimately, destroyed his fragile presidency. Herrera's inability or unwillingness to heed the advice of his Ministers and govern with authority and vigour when irresponsible journalism, labour unrest or peasant discontent arose, was a major factor in his removal. However, most significant were the fears expressed by members of Guatemala's military and the coffee elite, who accused the President and the Unionists of promoting unrest, failing to quell labour radicalism, and permitting outbreaks of peasant

¹U.S.N.A.-D.S., Herbert S. Gould, Charge d'Affaires, to Sec. of St., 28 December, 1920, 814.00\517.
insurrections. It was Herrera's failure to satisfy the demands of the republic's coffee elite for stability and profitability that condemned his administration.

At the same time, the removal of Cabrera unleashed several new political forces that had not traditionally participated in political decision-making. Student activists and labour leaders played a prominent role in the Unionist Party and in the April events that led to Cabrera's overthrow. Never before had such a wide range of Guatemalan society determined who would rule. As a reward for their efforts, these relatively new political actors demanded a voice in the future government. Hence, Herrera was not only expected to protect the interests of the nation's economically and politically powerful coffee elite, he was also under extreme pressure to fulfill the inflated social, economic and political expectations of university students and urban workers; a task which perhaps no politician could accomplish.

A member of the wealthiest family in Guatemala, Herrera did not have strong political ambitions, but presented with the opportunity to assume the presidency, he was not about to refuse the honourable post. The Unionists and those who supported the act to remove Cabrera, however, were not a unified political body. The opposition movement, that included many members of the capital's incipient middle-class, university students, Liberals, Conservatives, the coffee elite, army officers, urban labourers, and devote members of
the Roman Catholic Church and its hierarchy, represented a broad coalition of several factions and interests of Guatemalan society. Although as a group each of the movement's sectors agreed that the aging and sickly dictator needed to be replaced, after this was accomplished its distinct components had little in common.

The first weeks following Cabrera's removal and surrender appeared to bode well for Herrera and the Unionists. Estrada Cabrera and the forces loyal to him agreed to cease all hostilities on the evening of April 14. With the security of his life, the ex-President was placed under arrest and held in the military academy until a decision was made as to his future. Life returned to normal very soon after the capitulation as repairs to the damaged sections of the city began a few days later.²

On April 24 Herrera demonstrated his commitment to the constitution when he announced that presidential elections would be held the week beginning August 23, 1920.³ Soon after, Herrera was named the presidential candidate for both the

²U.S.N.A.-D.S., McMillin to Sec. of St., 15 April, 1920, 814.00/420; McMillin to Sec. of St., 14 April, 1920, 814.00/423; McMillin to Sec. of St., 16 April, 1920, 814.00/425; McMillin to Sec. of St., 15 April, 1920, 814.00/427.

³U.S.N.A.-D.S., McMillin to Sec. of St., 24 April, 1920, 814.00/445.
Partido Unionista and the Partido Democrática. A candidate that represented both the Unionist and the Democratic parties reflected a new attitude in Guatemalan politics that emerged in the wake of twenty-two years of dictatorship. Even before the removal of Cabrera, Guatemalans claimed that the Unionist Party was nothing other than the old members of the Conservative party while Democrats were said to represent the interests of their traditional foes, the Liberals. Although significant differences in policies between Conservatives and Liberals had lessened since the 1860's, longstanding political animosities remained. Thus, what was surprising about Herrera's candidacy was that Liberals and Conservatives appeared willing to set aside their previous disagreements and old rivalries in the interests of leading the country out of dictatorship and into a new era of political freedom.

This process of reconciliation began long before the political parties declared their bipartisan support for

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4Arévalo Martínez, Ecce Pericles, pp. 768-9; U.S.N.A.-D.S., McMillin to Sec. of St., 21 July, 1920, 814.00/497.

5Arévalo Martínez, Ecce Pericles, pp. 601-8; U.S.N.A.-D.S., a letter by Max Schaumburger, chief of secret police in Guatemala to U.S. Legation in Guatemala, cited in McMillin to Sec. of St., 12 August, 1920, 814.00/501; Herbert S. Gould, Charge d'Affaires, to Sec. of St., 3 November, 1920, 814.00/512; John Curtis, Charge d'Affaires, to Sec. of St., 27 December, 1921, 814.00/620; Curtis to Sec. of St., 3 January, 1922, 814.00/624; Curtis to Sec. of St., 8 February, 1922, 814.00/650.

Herrera's candidacy. In the spring of 1920 several meetings were held between influential Conservatives, such as Eduardo Camacho, Manuel Cobos Batres, Julio Bianchi, Emilio Escamilla and Luis P. Aguirre, and prominent Liberal Assembly members, Adria'n Vidaurre, Alberto Mencos, Mariano Cruz, and Jose' Antonio Villacorta, to agree on a suitable transitional president (hombre puente). Since most of the republic's experienced politicians were affiliated with either one or the other of the two major parties, the search for a mutually acceptable provisional president was difficult. Vidaurre proposed that Cruz would be an ideal interim replacement. The Conservatives, unanimously rejected his nomination, however, since Cruz was known to be a free mason and was distrusted by the staunchly Catholic Conservatives. The Conservatives, on the hand, preferred Guillermo Aguirre, the cousin of Luis P. Aguirre, although the Liberals understandably objected. In the end, both parties accepted the nomination of Carlos Herrera. 7

In many ways, Herrera was the ideal candidate to reconcile the political differences that a century of Conservative-Liberal conflict had forged. Unlike Cabrera, Herrera was a cultured, learned and extremely wealthy gentleman. Of distinguished seventeenth century Spanish heritage, Herrera was widely respected for his qualities of honesty, incorruptibility, and administrative prowess. A

member of Guatemala's wealthiest family, Herrera was the republic's largest sugar producer and one of its most important coffee growers. As a coffee and sugar producer, some Conservatives were concerned with Herrera's links to the Liberal party. However, in the end they agreed to overlook his alleged tendency towards "liberalismo".\(^8\) Definitely the most important consideration for both Liberals and Conservatives was to ensure that the interim president would not threaten their vested economic interests. Obviously they believed that Herrera's aristocratic nature and affluence would sufficiently compensate for any ideological preferences.

Although the Liberal coffee elite and Conservative urban merchants agreed that Herrera would represent their respective parties, labour leaders questioned the wisdom of a coalition with the Liberals. Undeniably, labour was alarmed by the participation of former Cabrera Ministers, like Vidaurre and José Beteta, in the negotiations that approved Herrera's candidacy. Furthermore, labour leaders doubted Herrera's commitment to significant reform. Saturnino González, secretary of the Liga Obrera Unionista in the capital, was convinced that Herrera, a gentleman "who has been on his knees

\(^8\)Emilio Escamilla, cited in Arévalo Martinez, Ecce Pericles, pp. 607-8, 625; Memoirs of Silverio Ortiz president of the Liga Obrera Unionista, n.d., cited in Are'valo Martinez, Ecce Pericles, p. 751; J. J. Arévalo, La inquietud normalista, p. 27; U.S.N.A.-D.S., McMillin to Sec. of St., 12 April, 1920, 814.00/408; McMillin to Sec. of St., 23 April, 1920, 814.00/454.
for twenty-two years before Cabrera", would not rule in the interests of the people.⁹ According to González, the opportunity to replace the unpopular government officials with others who conformed with the desires of the people, was lost on the day the Unionists pledged their support for Herrera. As one Unionist so ominously stated, "Liberty died in Guatemala today".¹⁰

Despite predictions of doom and labour's apprehensions, Herrera's election platform provides proof that an atmosphere of cooperation and optimism characterized the months immediately following Cabrera's overthrow. Herrera proclaimed that, if elected, the constitution would be his guide and that individual guarantees would be "strictly respected and fulfilled." "The press", he stated, "will be respected" and public opinion would be reflected in his policies. Furthermore, Herrera promised to reform the constitution, "to perfect its liberal principles", and to pass an amendment that would limit a presidential term to four years.¹¹ Throughout Herrera's term in office no one questioned his dedication to democratic principles.

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⁹González cited in Arévalo Martínez, Ecce Pericles, p. 737.

¹⁰Tacito Molina, a prominent Unionist, cited in Ibid., p. 769.

Herrera, with the support of the Conservative-Liberal coalition, faced little political opposition in the election of 1920. Only two other persons, José León Castillo of the Partido Republicana and General Francisco Fuentes of the Partido Federal Constitucionalista, announced their candidacy and Herrera was the front runner from the outset.¹² Thus, it was no surprise when Herrera was declared the winner on August 29. The strength of the Unionist-Democratic coalition is obvious from the vote totals for each of the three candidates. Herrera scored an overwhelming victory as he received over 225,000 votes against 6,800 for Castillo and 5,300 for Fuentes. From all accounts the election was held fairly, peacefully and without incident.¹³

Although Herrera's wide-spread popularity throughout the campaign is undeniable, a rift between labour and the more traditional political actors developed shortly after Cabrera's removal. Disagreement stemmed from the manner in which the Guatemalan judiciary chose to punish those members of the military who had committed crimes during Cabrera's rule. On May 28 a military court found seven members of the army,  

¹²Ibid.; U.S.N.A.-D.S., McMillin to Sec. of St., 7 July, 1920, 814.00/494; McMillin to Sec. of St., 5 August, 1920, 814.00/500; a letter by Max Schaunburger, chief of secret police in Guatemala cited in McMillin to Sec. of St., 12 August, 1920, 814.00/501.

¹³U.S.N.A.-D.S., McMillin to Sec. of St., 29 August, 1920, 814.00/503.
including three Generals, guilty of sedition and treason. By July, however, the sentence still had not been carried out. The defendants had appealed their cases to the Supreme Court and, as a result, a verdict had yet to be administered.

Organized labour in the capital, especially the Liga Obrera Unionista and the Unión Obrera Socialista, became increasingly vocal in their calls for justice as their impatience with the legal system mounted. On July 4, a large committee visited the Supreme Court and the Minister of Justice to impress upon them the need for swift and determined action. As the demonstration grew, the crowd decided it would march to the house of the President to make their concerns known. On route to Herrera's residence, troops prevented the march from continuing. Labour was able to exert its influence on the government, however, when two days later one of Herrera's chief Ministers and perhaps the most powerful Liberal in the Cabinet, Adrián Vidaurre, was forced to resign. The military was so concerned with this labour unrest that the principal officers of the army promptly called on the President to assure him of their and the military's loyalty to the government. Although Herrera was able to weather this

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14U.S.N.A.-D.S., McMillin to Sec. of St., 28 May, 1920, 814.00/482.

15U.S.N.A.-D.S., McMillin to Sec., of St., 7 July, 1920, 814.00/494.

16U.S.N.A.-D.S., McMillin to Sec., of St., 7 July, 1920, 814.00/494.
first relatively minor challenge to his government's authority, a greater threat soon arose that handicapped his administration for the remainder of its term.

In September 1920, a considerable decline in the world price of coffee brought a serious economic crisis to the nation. To understand the impact of this economic downturn, the state of the Guatemalan economy and its relationship to the coffee industry merits considerable discussion. Coffee, grown in Guatemala for consumption since the 1740's, was not always the nation's most profitable export. In the early colonial period, cacao was the major source of income in Guatemala. However, in the seventeenth century, the cultivation of indigo replaced cacao as the nation's leading export. Dwindling profits attributed to competition from other producing regions, attacks on Spanish shipping and several consecutive poor harvests caused by locusts, convinced colonial and post-colonial officials that diversification in agricultural production was necessary.

In the 1820's, cochineal, a dye produced from insects that feed from the nopal plant, displaced indigo as the


nation's largest export. From the 1820's until the 1860's cochineal was Guatemala's primary and practically sole revenue-producing export crop. However, a series of poor crops and the introduction of synthetic dyes on the world market in the mid-1850's combined to decrease the profits of Guatemalan cochineal producers tremendously and convince the Carrera government to diversify the nation's agricultural base.

During the same period, however, Guatemalans became increasingly aware of a dramatic agricultural revolution that was occurring in Central America's southern most state, Costa Rica. In a memorandum published by a member of Guatemala's Consulado de Comercio, or merchant guild, Manuel Aguilar exclaimed that

[coffee] has so transformed the state of Costa Rica that, in 15 years, from being poor and miserable, [it] has become rich and prosperous, enjoying commerce, civilization, population, income, etc. in such rapid progress that, without fear of error, one may say that in relation to the other states of the [Central American] Republic, it is the one that offers more to the foreign markets and, consequently, the richest.

In the decades that followed, the Guatemalan elite strove to emulate Costa Rica's outstanding achievements in the

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19 Macleod, Spanish Central America, pp. 170-5; Handy, Gift, p. 58; Cambranes, Coffee and Peasants, pp. 25-6; Jones, Guatemala, pp. 200-3.


expansion of the coffee industry. In the 1850's and 1860's, government-sponsored publications, subsidies, tax exemptions and the prospect of large profits encouraged planters to expand their coffee producing lands. Throughout this period, the cultivation of coffee expanded rapidly and by 1871, coffee was Guatemala's most profitable export. For the next six decades, coffee production for export to European and American markets was the most dynamic segment of the Guatemalan economy. Guatemalan Liberals heralded coffee as the crop that would secure for their nation the same rapid social, economic and political advances as those that had occurred in the United States and Europe in the nineteenth century. In the 1880's, advocates of Liberalism frequently referred to the benefits that accrued to the republic as world demand for coffee sky-rocketed, prices tripled and production more than doubled. By the outbreak of the First World War coffee accounted for 84.8 percent of Guatemalan exports. For the

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21 Ibid. pp. 7-20; Woodward, A Nation Divided, pp. 157-8; Handy, Gift, p. 59-60; Cambranes, Coffee and Peasants in Guatemala, pp. 61-4, 67-71, 79-85; Jones, Guatemala, p. 204.  

22 McCreery, Desarrollo económico, pp. 42-3.  

23 McCreery, Desarrollo económico, pp. 8-9; McCreery "Coffee and Class" p. 438-9; Burns, Poverty of Progress, pp. 8-9.  


first three decades of this century, coffee and Guatemalan cafelateros were undoubtedly the dominant sector in all aspects of economic and political life.\textsuperscript{26}

Hence, it is not surprising that a dramatic fall in coffee prices in the latter half of 1920 had serious economic and political repercussions for the entire nation. World market coffee prices in 1919 and 1920 of 19.5 cents U.S. per pound were the highest they had been since 1890.\textsuperscript{27} These were considerably higher than the pre-War prices that had ranged from 7.9 to 13.8 cents in the five years prior to 1914.\textsuperscript{28} In 1921, when Herrera was threatened by severe political turmoil, Guatemala simultaneously faced a serious economic crisis. Coffee prices were less than half of what they had been two years earlier and as a result exports and government revenues decreased considerably. In 1919 Guatemala's exports valued $22,419,134 U.S., an all-time high. Two years later, after the disastrous fall in coffee prices, Guatemalan exports declined 45.9 percent to only $12,130,890. There are

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{26}For a detailed description of the Central American economies and their reliance on export agricultural in the 1920's see Bulmer-Thomas, \textit{Central America Since 1920}, pp. 1-48; Castillo, \textit{Growth and Integration}, pp. 38-41, 45-6.}


\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{28}Cardoso de Mello and Tavares, " Export Economy in Brazil", p. 128.
two explanations for the dramatic price leap of 1919 and 1920. Severe frost damage reduced the Brazilian coffee harvests of 1918-1919 and 1919-1920 and commodity speculators replenished their depleted stocks in the aftermath of the war. However, a sudden downturn in the North American economy, Guatemala's largest coffee consumer\textsuperscript{29}, and predictions of a large harvest for the 1920-1921 crop year prompted a 45.1 percent decline in the international price from 19.5 to 10.7 cents U.S. per pound.\textsuperscript{30} By November reports emanating from Guatemala indicated that many finca owners had difficulty financing the harvest of their crops. Herbert S. Gould expressed the severity of the situation and its effect on the entire Guatemalan society when he wrote, "Market conditions are quickly reflected here and the pinch of poverty is felt over a widespread area."\textsuperscript{31}

The decline in coffee prices coincided with a large increase in the rate of exchange for the Guatemalan peso. The serious problems that arose in 1921 with respect to the depreciation of the peso originated during the Cabrera regime. Directly related to the extensive issuance of paper currency


\textsuperscript{30}Cardoso de Mello and Tavares, "Export Economy in Brazil", p. 93; Bulmer-Thomas, \textit{Central America Since 1920}, 26-8.

\textsuperscript{31}U.S.N.A.-D.S., Herbert S. Gould, Charge d'Affaires, to Sec. of St., 3 November, 1920, 814.00/512.
without sufficient gold reserves, the number of pesos in circulation increased almost four fold from 10,711,000 in 1897 to 42,353,000 in 1923. The fall of the peso from 33 to 1 U.S. dollar in September, 1920, to 64 to 1 in August, 1921 had a destabilizing effect on the Guatemalan political situation.

As the purchasing power of all Guatemalans, from the rural worker to the finca owner, declined, the position of the government became increasingly precarious. Numerous labour demonstrations in the capital threatened the government. The capital's poorer inhabitants became impatient with the government's inability or unwillingness to satisfy the high material and social expectations the overthrow of Cabrera had spawned. It was reported that some of the most radical labour leaders were so disillusioned, they were willing to "lend themselves to any movement, pacific or otherwise, which would

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32 Pitti, "Ubico", p. 128.

33 U.S.N.A.-D.S., "British Report on the Financial and Economic Conditions of Guatemala, November 1922", cited in Geissler to Sec. of St., 27 December, 1922, 814.51/414; Francisco Sánchez Latour, Guatemalan Minister in Washington, to Francis White, Chief of Latin American Divisions, 13 September, 1922; McMillin to Sec. of St., 25 August, 1921, 814.00/556.

34 U.S.N.A.-D.S., McMillin to Sec., of St., 31 May, 1920, 814.00/484; McMillin to Sec., of St., 7 July, 1920, 814.00/494; McMillin to Sec. of St., March 30, 1921, 814.00/536; McMillin to Sec. of St., 7 April, 1921, 814.00/537; McMillin to Sec. of St., 28 April, 1921, 814.00/540; McMillin to Sec. of St., 25 August, 1921, 814.00/557.
force him [Herrera] from the Presidency". The increasing unpopularity of the President, at least as far as labour was concerned, was closely linked to the decline of the peso. As long as the Guatemalan exchange rate weakened the purchasing power of working class elements in the capital, labour unrest would continue to threaten political stability. The President's refusal to permit labour's participation in the decision-making of the nation increased its disenchantment with Herrera's government even further.

On the other hand, in times of crisis, Guatemalan coffee finqueros expected their presidents to provide stability, security and strong executive leadership to protect their interests. Although the Cabrera government was brutal and reactionary, large landowners had enjoyed prosperity during his rule. Since the 1871 revolution, the Liberal party had relied on its ties to the coffee economy and the military for its support. In contrast, Conservatives continued to draw their strength from the wealthier merchants in the capital and their ties to the Catholic Church. Partly as a consequence of its links to agro-export economy, Liberals consistently demanded a government that exerted its authority over the rural labour force and suppressed all forms of popular

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35U.S.N.A.-D.S., McMillin to Sec. of St., 8 September, 1921, 814.00/550.

36Cambranes, Coffee and Peasants, p. 35; U.S.N.A.-D.S., John Curtis, Charge d'Affaires, to Sec. of St., 8 February, 1922, 814.00/650.
expression.

As labour leaders became disillusioned with the Herrera government and the economic crisis intensified, more and more Guatemalan Liberals opposed the Unionists' ineffective administrative methods. In the winter of 1920, the press frequently attacked the President and the Unionists for their indifference to popular discontent and the economic crisis. In November, opposition newspapers charged that jefes políticos (department governors) interfered in the election process to secure the victory of several Unionists to the National Legislative Assembly. Others alleged that the government committed a number of human rights violations and routinely harassed its critics. The vast majority of these allegations were totally "unsubstantiated by proof". The President, however, burdened by the threat of labour unrest on the one hand and the fear of alienating the support of the elite on the other, refused to take any affirmative action. Hence, the vehement assault on "every member of the government from the president to the village policeman" was permitted to continue. 38

Several of the Ministers closest to Herrera, including the powerful Minister of War, Emilio Escamilla, the Minister

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37 U.S.N.A.-D.S., Gould to Sec. of St., 3 November, 1920, 814.00/512.

38 U.S.N.A.-D.S., Gould to Sec. of St., 28 December, 1920, 814.00/517.
of Foreign Affairs, Luis P. Aguirre, and the Vice-President, Jose' Ernesto Zelaya, encouraged the President to take action against the newspapers most critical of the government. All feared that if such unwarranted attacks were permitted to "run wild...a powerful and dangerous sentiment against the Government" would be created.39

Newspapers from the period provide an interesting perspective into the developing crisis. The nationalist, anti-Unionist Diario Nuevo claimed that the inability or unwillingness of the government to act was more a consequence of its very nature than it was of "bad intentions". "Its uncertainty and vascillations, its apparent fear of going to the heart of things and reforming them, this zigzaging", which it claimed was typical of the administration, was not an indication of weakness, but an "unfortunate characteristic of every coalition."40 Diario Nuevo argued that because Herrera was a candidate chosen to represent both the Unionist and Democratic parties, his government was condemned to the unstable and ineffective path of compromise.

The official newspaper of the Democratic (Liberal) Party, Demócrata, was much bolder in its attacks on the government. In one issue, Demócrata cited a number of alleged

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39U.S.N.A.-D.S., Gould to Sec. of St., 3 November, 1920, 814.00/512; McMillin to Sec. of St., 28 April, 1921, 814.00/540.

40Diario Nuevo, cited in U.S.N.A.-D.S., Gould to Sec. of St., 28 December, 1920, 814.00/517.
similarities between the methods of Cabrera and the Unionists and thus concluded that Herrera's administration should be labelled "the Conservative Tyranny". Outraged by the censure of an anti-Unionist newspaper, Demócrata called on its readers to compare Herrera to the revolutionary president of Mexico, Francisco Madero, who was murdered in office only a few years earlier. Both men, it suggested were honourable and laboured for the benefit of all, but those who surrounded them possessed a villainous ambition. Undoubtedly, the article implied that evil and corrupt men, like those who were responsible for Madero's death, were at the helm of the nation and for this reason it cautioned the naive Herrera to beware of a similar fate.

In February 1921, elections were held for the members of Guatemala's National Legislative Assembly. Of the sixty-nine representatives elected, fifty claimed to be supporters of the Herrera administration. The President hoped that such a favourable balance in the republic's legislative body would allow the government to implement its agenda in a peaceful and orderly fashion when its first session met on March 1. All agreed that the most pressing issues that needed immediate

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41 U.S.N.A.-D.S., Demócrata cited in Gould to Sec. of St., 28 December, 1920, 814.00/517.
42 Ibid.
43 U.S.N.A.-D.S., McMillin to Sec. of St., 23 February, 1921, 814.00/528.5.
solutions were the currency decline and insufficient government revenues. However, the future of the government would depend on the President's ability to convince both his opponents and his supporters that all sectors of Guatemalan society could benefit from his enlightened rule. Whether Herrera possessed the will and the stamina to exert his influence over the contending factions in the Unionist government would ultimately determine its fate.

However, relations between the Herrera administration and the National Assembly soon turned sour. By the middle of March the Assembly began to attack the Cabinet. One of the first Ministers to be questioned by the Assembly was Herrera's Army Chief of Staff, General Jorge Ubico. The appointment of Ubico, once the Minister of Foreign Affairs for Estrada Cabrera and also the jefe politico in the Guatemalan Department of Retahluleu, led to a petition signed by thousands of citizens protesting his selection. Eventually the matter was solved by Ubico himself when he resigned from the post. Ubico expressed his discomfort with the position especially because he felt the office brought with it very little power yet a great deal of responsibility. Thus, rather than occupy "a position dangerous to himself and useless to

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44 Ibid.; U.S.N.A.-D.S., McMillin to Sec. of St., 9 March, 1921, 814.00/534.
the Government", he refused to serve.\footnote{U.S.N.A.-D.S., McMillin to Sec. of St., 17 March, 1921, 814.00/535.} 

A much greater political crisis arose at the end of April when the Vice-President, José Ernesto Zelaya, tendered his resignation. Zelaya was one of the first and most important people to participate in the early stages of opposition to Estrada Cabrera and was regarded as "a wise and safe official."\footnote{U.S.N.A.-D.S., McMillin to Sec. of St., 28 April, 1921, 814.00/540.} Since Herrera had taken office, Zelaya had been the President's personal advisor. On April 27, however, Zelaya submitted his resignation as First Designate and Counsellor. It was reported that Zelaya was increasingly concerned with the President's ineffective administration and reluctance to govern with authority. Zelaya suggested that Herrera act in a sterner fashion to suppress the activities of those who threatened the government. Because the President was unwilling to implement his recommendations, Zelaya resigned. He, like Ubico, felt he was charged with responsibility without power and resolved to step down.\footnote{Ibid.}

The uncertainty of the political situation coupled with the increasingly desperate financial state placed the government in an almost untenable position. In May, a matter that had been the subject of disagreement for over a decade,
became the most important political issue the Herrera government had yet faced. The debate, which was to split the Cabinet and seriously weaken Herrera's ability to govern effectively, concerned the longstanding railroad controversy.

An inexpensive, rapid, transportation network had always been a major concern for Guatemala's coffee growers. Since the completion in 1908 of a railroad from Puerto Barrios to the capital, the country shipped the vast majority of its coffee exports through its eastern terminal at Puerto Barrios. Although the bulk of Guatemalan coffee was grown nearer the Pacific coast port of San José, over seventy percent of its exports were channelled through Puerto Barrios. To a large extent, this can be explained by the involvement of one of Central America's most successful entrepreneurs, Minor Cooper Keith, and what has been described as the "Unholy Trinity": the International Railways of Central America (IRCA), the United Fruit Company (UFCO) and the United Fruit Steamship Company.48

Keith, the president of IRCA and vice-president of UFCO, and the triumvirate exercised a tremendous amount of economic influence within the republic in the first three decades of this century. The focus of numerous studies, IRCA's and the UFCO's economic leverage stemmed from its virtual monopoly of rail transportation within the country and a similar advantage

48 Cardoza, "Guatemala y el imperio bananero" Cuadernos americanos, Vol. 64., 1954, p. 19; Handy, Gift, pp. 77-85.
held by UFCO's "Great White Fleet" in the movement of goods into and out of the republic. Of course Keith and the fruit company favoured the use of their shipping lines over their competitors on the Pacific coast. This was reflected in the much higher rates IRCA charged for transporting coffee to the Pacific port of San Jose' than it did to Puerto Barrios on the Caribbean where UFCO ships reaped enormous profits. Although Guatemalans had persistently complained of exorbitant carrying fees and poor service, there was little incentive for IRCA to respond.49

It was because of this unfavourable predicament that a large group of coffee growers and merchants petitioned the Herrera government for action. Landowners from the Pacific coast region argued that measures were immediately needed if

49. For the history of the United Fruit Company, Minor Cooper Keith, the International Railways of Central America, the United Fruit Steamship Company, their monopoly in Central America, and their effects on the economy and politics of Guatemala see Charles David Kepner and Jay Soothill, The Banana Empire (New York, 1935), pp. 155-8, 159-63, 183-7; Handy, Gift, pp. 77-85; Alfonso Bauer Paiz, Co'mo opera el capital yanqui en Centroamérica: el caso de Guatemala (Editora Ibero-Mexicana, M'e'xico, 1956), pp. 112-93, 206-9, 220; Luis Cardoza y Aragón, "Guatemala y el imperio bananero" Cuadernos americanos, (March, 1954), p. 19-21; Woodward, A Nation Divided, pp. 179-82; For accounts of the National Legislative Assembly, the debate that surrounded the nullification of IRCA's concession, and discriminatory freight rates see U.S.D.A.-D.S., Gould to Sec. of St., 3 November, 1920, 814.00\512; Gould to Sec. of St., 22 November, 1920, 814.00\513; Gould to Sec. of St., 28 December, 1920, 814.00/517; McMillin to Sec. of St., 17 May, 1921, 814.00/542; McMillin to Sec. of St., 17 May, 1921, 814.00/ 543; McMillin to Sec. of St., 25 May, 1921, 814.00/544; McMillin to Sec. of St., 28 May, 1921, 814.77\66; McMillin to Sec. of St., 13 May, 1921, 814.77\69.
the handicap of IRCA's unfair freight rates was to be resolved. In May, the Cabinet, under intense pressures from a large proportion of the coffee-producing elite, proposed to nullify a concession dating from 1912 that had granted IRCA a complete monopoly on rail transit in the republic. Originally sold in 1908 by the Cabrera government to a Mr. Williams, the concession to build the Zacapa-Salvadoran Railroad that would compete with the IRCA line was purchased in the same year by Minor Cooper Keith of the UFCO and IRCA. To most Guatemalans it was obvious that Keith had no intention of completing the railroad.

Most damaging to the government was the ensuing split that occurred in the Cabinet as a consequence of the heated debate. The two most powerful men in the Cabinet, the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Luis P. Aguirre, and the Minister of War, Emilio Escamilla, took opposing sides on the issue. Aguirre, another of the original opponents of Cabrera and one of the founders of the Unionist Party, was the most outspoken defender of United States interests in the Cabinet. Aguirre argued that the government had no legal right to cancel the

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50U.S.N.A.-D.S., Gould to Sec. of St., 22 November, 1920, 814.00/513.

51Kepner and Soothill, The Banana Empire, pp. 156-7; Handy, Gift, p. 80; Bauer Paiz, Capital yanqui en Centroamérica, p. 149; McMllin to Sec. of St., 28 April, 1921, 814.00/540; McMllin to Sec. of St., 17 May, 1921, 814.00/542; McMllin to Sec. of St., 17 May, 1921, 814.00/543; McMllin to Sec. of St., 25 May, 1921, 814.00/544.
concession because IRCA had dutifully paid the monthly penalty cited in the agreement if the railroad was not completed by the specified date. Escamilla and the majority in the Legislative Assembly opposed to the monopoly clause advocated that the agreement be nullified and the concession re-sold.52

The motives of the players in the dispute are interesting to note, especially those intent on ruling the contract void. If IRCA was to lose the concession, the most immediate winner would have been the Pacific Mail Steamship Company of Great Britain. Pacific Mail, like the United Steamship Company in the Atlantic, dominated the shipping business on the Pacific coast of Central America. Pacific Mail had already secured the right to build the one-quarter of the proposed railroad in El Salvador and hoped to be granted the Guatemalan section.53

In a series of letters to the United States State Department, Ernest Forbes, an American citizen engaged in the production of coffee on the Pacific coast of Guatemala, painted a detailed picture of the behind the scenes intrigue that accompanied the conflict.54 Forbes made two very interesting claims with regard to the controversy. First, he

52 U.S.N.A.-D.S., McMillin to Sec. of St., 17 May, 1921, 814.00\543.
53 Ibid.
54 U.S.N.A.-D.S., Ernest Forbes, an American businessman in Guatemala, to Wilbur J. Carr, Assistant Sec. of St. in Washington, 15 December, 1920, 814.00\522; Forbes to Carr, 22 December, 1920, 814.00\523; Forbes to Carr, 18 January, 1921, 814.00\526; Forbes to Carr, 21 February, 1921, 814.00\563.
suggested that the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Aguirre, was a partner of Rafael Rodenzo. Rodenzo, an American, was part owner with Keith of the contract to build the Guatemalan section of the new railroad. The partnership between Aguirre and Rodenzo, asserted Forbes, was the reason that the Minister of Foreign Affairs consistently opposed efforts to nullify the existing agreement. Second, the American was convinced that IRCA and UFCO were determined to destroy all shipping and commerce on the Pacific coast. Forbes called the Department's attention to IRCA's freight rates which insured it cost more to ship a sack of coffee twenty-eight miles from Escuintla to Guatemala's Pacific port of San José than it cost to transport the same amount over four hundred miles to Puerto Barrios.\(^{55}\)

Not surprisingly, the State Department's representative in Guatemala, McMillin, defended IRCA's right to retain the contract and questioned the motives for Forbes' and Escamilla's opposition. Obsessed by his duty to protect American interests from the conspiracies of their enemies, McMillin cited Escamilla's German heritage and his extensive travel in Europe as proof that the Minister of War was opposed to all that was American and determined to promote all that was German. As for Forbes, McMillin was unable to rationalize

\(^{55}\text{Ibid.; For a detailed discussion of IRCA's discriminatory freights see Bauer Paiz, Capital vanqui en Centroamérica, pp. 144-5; Cardoza y Aragón, "El imperio bananero," p. 19; Kepner and Soothill, The Banana Empire, pp. 160-3.}\)
his fellow American's lack of patriotism. Perhaps a more neutral evaluation was presented by Herbert S. Gould, McMillin's interim replacement. Gould, relatively unaware of the discriminatory freight rates traditionally practiced by IRCA, was appalled by the avaricious behavior of the company. To the young diplomat, it was obvious. Either the government must take significant steps to overcome the burden of IRCA's unfair rates or "the Pacific borne commerce of Guatemala will be ruined."57

On May 17 the battle in Cabinet over the railroad controversy reached a critical stage. Although Escamilla and Aguirre were college mates, old friends and co-workers in the movement that removed Cabrera, the relationship was severely strained. Aguirre threatened that if the President and the Cabinet agreed to nullify the existing agreement, he would resign. However, an absolute rupture in the Cabinet was avoided, at least temporarily, when the President chose not to insist that all members of the Cabinet approve the legislation to extinguish the contract. Instead, Herrera ended the dissension in Cabinet when he announced that the bill only

56 U.S.N.A.-D.S., McMillin to Sec. of St., 17 May, 1921, 814.00/542; McMillin to Sec. of St., 17 May, 1921, 814.00/543; Herndon A. Goforth, vice consul in Guatemala to Sec. of St., 12 July, 1921, 814.002/23.

57 U.S.N.A.-D.S., Gould to Sec. of St., 3 November, 1920, 814.00/512; Gould to Sec. of St., 22 November, 1921, 814.00/513; Gould to Sec. of St., 28 December, 1920, 814.00/517.
needed the endorsement of himself and the Minister of Development. 58

The following week Herrera and the proper Minister signed the document and the legislation was sent to the National Assembly where the concession was declared null and void. The reasons cited included the unconstitutionallity of the contract as well as the company's refusal to carry out the terms of the agreement. Hence, the Assembly ruled the previous owners had forfeited their rights of possession. 59 However, the victory by the forces opposed to the concession was a hollow one. It must be stressed that the disagreement between the two most senior members of the Cabinet seriously impaired the government's ability to formulate policies needed during this crucial stage of transition from dictatorship to democracy. The Cabinet's failure to act as a unified body, able to implement the administration's agenda with the solidarity and authority so critically necessary, was tremendously important as attacks on the government intensified. Indeed, the President's inability to assert his will on the Cabinet convinced the government's most determined political foes to escalate their attacks.

58 U.S.N.A.-D.S., McMillin to Sec. of St., 17 May, 1921, 814.00\542; McMillin to Sec. of St., 17 May, 1921, 814.00/543.

59 U.S.N.A.-D.S., McMillin to Sec. of St., 25 May, 1921, 814.00\544; McMillin to Sec. of St., 28 May, 1921, 814.77\66; Presidential Decree by Carlos Herrera, cited in McMillin to Sec. of St., 13 May, 1921, 814.77\69.
Following the railroad controversy, the Herrera administration suffered another barrage of criticism. The rate of exchange continued to fall and it was increasingly obvious that the government had become split into Conservative and Liberal camps. Even university students and urban labour appeared willing to abandon the President. According to one student's account, tremendous errors were committed by the Unionists. Personal ambition, Cabinet insubordination, and allegations that Conservatives planned to replace Herrera with a more favourable president, he wrote, "irritated the liberals and distanced the conservative party from the people." In July university students were so disillusioned with Herrera's "conservative program", they declared, "The people and the students have been deceived...We are the Guardians (conculcadores) of the Law and Justice." Despised by Liberals, workers, and students, the Herrera presidency wallowed in a sea of indecision and uncertainty. As a consequence, rarely did a week pass without the assertion that one group planned to overthrow the President, that a certain element of the military intended to depose Herrera, or that another Minister had urged the President to suppress his

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60 J.J. Arévalo, *La inquietud normalista*, p. 38; U.S.N.A.-D.S., Gould to Sec. of St., 28 December, 1920, 814.00/517; John Curtis, Charge d'Affaires, to Sec. of St., 27 December, 1921, 814.00/620.

critics more vigorously.  

In May and June, Escamilla, the Minister of War, was repeatedly questioned about reports that suggested the military was less than loyal to the President. Although he categorically denied any such tendencies in the army, rumours of this nature were frequently reported. Since he assumed the office, Escamilla had devoted most of his efforts to promoting the efficiency of the military. He provided new uniforms, implemented better methods of sanitation and secured all the proper provisions requested by officers. The state of the military appeared to be better than it had been in recent memory. Perhaps the most important reason for this improvement was the extremely large military budgets in 1920 and 1921. Obviously, the Unionists believed that the best way to foster

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62 U.S.N.A.-D.S., McMillin to Sec. of St., 7 April, 1921, 814.00/537; McMillin to Sec. of St., 16 June, 1921, 814.00/547; McMillin to Sec. of St., 7 July, 1921, 814.00/550; McMillin to Sec. of St., 13 July, 1921, 814.00/551; McMillin to Sec. of St., 28 July, 1921, 814.00/552; McMillin to Sec. of St., 31 August, 1921, 814.00/554.

63 In 1920 Unionist expenditures for the Ministry of War totalled 48,871,766 Pesos ($1,631,930 U.S.) and accounted for almost 25% of the national budget (195,714,573 Pesos or $6,404,272 U.S.). In 1921 the government spent 77,050,878 Pesos ($1,543,487 U.S.) or 20% of its budget (387,365,234 Pesos or $7,759,720 U.S.) on the military. Although expenditures for individual Ministries are unavailable, it is interesting to note that the amount of money the Unionist government spent on the military in 1920 and 1921 was almost equal to Estrada Cabrera's total government budget in 1914 (1,865,842 U.S.) and in 1915 ($1,569,673 U.S.). U.S.N.A.-D.S., British Report on the Financial and Economic Conditions in Guatemala, November 1922, cited in Geissler to Sec. of St., 27 December, 1922, 814.51/414.
government loyalty among the army's senior officers was to provide them with the latest in military hardware.

However, not all sectors of society agreed with this supposition. In December 1920, Diario Nuevo expressed discomfort with the government's fiscal decisions and announced:

At the present time we can be sure that the military machine which is being created with great rapidity will be used to safeguard our institutions and maintain a regime of peace and order in which the activities of the citizens can be freely developed. But if tomorrow there should come into power a man having less respect for the law, or if there should come to the Ministry of War someone who did not possess the sense of responsibility of Mr. Ecamilla, are we not running the risk of [creating another] Don Manuel [Estrada Cabrera] because it is well organized, [the military] would convert itself into a continuous menace for liberty and right against the very life of the parties, including the Unionist Party? Is it not the tendency of every militarism, however instructed and conscientious it may be, to make use of the force which it has in its hands, to use the power which its force gives it?  

Escamilla, on the other hand, was convinced that he controlled the army and that its attachment to him assured the military's continued devotion and loyalty to the government. Unfortunately for the Unionists, the Minister failed to understand that military officers had concerns that went beyond making sure their men were equipped with the newest uniforms or rifles.

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64 U.S.N.A.-D.S., Diario Nuevo, cited in Gould to Sec. of St., 28 December, 1920, 814.00/517.

65 U.S.N.A.-D.S., McMillin to Sec. of St., 13 July, 1921, 814.00/551.
Events in July 1921 demonstrated how mistaken Escamilla had been. Four Generals, Lima, Monterroso, Orellana and Ubico, and several other officers of lesser rank, were accused of secretly plotting to overthrow the government. Escamilla, who had consistently denied any movement in the military in opposition to the government, immediately resigned. Herrera named Felipe Pereira as his replacement. A meeting of the Unionist leaders in early July urged the new Minister to declare martial law and to use its extensive powers to arrest, court-martial and shoot those found guilty of conspiring to overthrow the government. Partly as a consequence, Pereira ordered the arrest of the accused Generals. Fearful of alienating the entire body of the military, however, President Herrera decided to revoke the arrest order and simply dismissed those officers involved. Herrera's unwillingness to support the actions of his new Minister of War prompted Pereira's resignation shortly thereafter.  

The objectives of the Generals remain unclear, although it is undeniable that the military had become extremely concerned with the political and economic course that the Herrera government had pursued in recent months. Two different versions were set forth to account for the insubordinate action of the Generals. The Unionists contended that the Generals intended to overthrow the government. Democratic

66ibid.
leaders, on the other hand, insisted that the Generals' actions were designed to wrest Cabinet control from the Unionists and place it with the Liberal party. To further this argument, spokesman for the accused, General Jose' Mari'a Orellana, informed the President that the movement was never directed against him, but was designed to persuade him to reform his government. 67

General R.A. Mendoza accepted the post of the Minister of War on July 12, 1921. Mendoza, a graduate of Guatemala's military academy, the Escuela Politécnica, was a career soldier widely considered a man of honour and loyalty. One of the General's first acts after accepting the office was to stress to all commanding officers that the primary duty of the army was to abstain from meddling in the politics of the country unconditionally. Any act that violated this order, he informed them, would be dealt with harshly. 68 However well-intentioned, Mendoza's attempt to prevent the intervention of the military was ultimately unsuccessful as its officers became increasingly alarmed over the instability and unrest that characterized the latter half of 1921.

Events throughout the summer and fall continued to threaten the existence of the government on almost a daily basis. Two incidents in late August and early September

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67 Ibid.

68 U.S.N.A.-D.S., McMillin to Sec. of St., 4 August, 1921, 814.00\554.
reaffirmed many Guatemalans' belief that Herrera was losing control of the situation. On August 18, between four and five thousand peasants of San Augustin Acasaguastlán gathered to protest the appointment of Pedro Leonardo as jefe político in the district. Residents of the small community were enraged by Leonardo's selection as he had served in the same position for several years during the Cabrera regime. The demonstrators accused Leonardo of having forcibly expropriated large tracts of community-held lands for his own personal benefit. At the town meeting called to express the citizens' concern over his re-appointment, Leonardo and another soldier attempted to disperse the crowd. A riot occurred which resulted in the death of Leonardo and eight or nine soldiers. The government recognized the danger of the situation and quickly sent a train filled with soldiers to restore order. Upon the arrival of the troops, the uprising was suppressed and sixty to seventy citizens were arrested.  

Two weeks later, on September 4 another disturbance arose in the city of Antigua. This time it was reported that radical labour leaders had sought to encourage "the prejudices and passions" of the Indian population to oppose the government. Such reports were taken so seriously that the Ministers of War and the Development (Fomento) and a contingent of soldiers proceeded to Antigua to quell any violence that might occur.

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65 U.S.N.A.-D.S., McMillin to Sec. of St., 25 August, 1921, 814.00\556.
The general fear among members of the military and the government that "el pueblo inculto" (the uncultured people) were about to initiate an uprising that would entail killing, robbing, pillage and slaughter demonstrates the atmosphere of uncertainty that predominated in the last quarter of 1921.70

The reaction of the government to the incidents also helps to explain the administration's attitude toward more popular sectors in Guatemalan society and, more specifically, to the countryside. Herrera's decision to suppress the revolts swiftly and ruthlessly indicates that the President's policy toward Indian rural workers and peasants differed little from the Liberal administrations that had preceded him. Although Herrera pledged to foster liberty and freedom, he was not committed to extending these rights to the rural majority. Perhaps he was willing to grant a certain degree of political freedom to urban professionals or possibly even permit university students to criticize the government, but he never considered allowing peasants and Indians to influence the decisions of the nation. Like most members of Guatemala's landed elite, Herrera's attitude toward the Indian majority was one of fear, suspicion, and contempt. Hence, when threatened by unrest in the countryside, the President's Unionist government reacted with the same brutality as Barrios

70U.S.N.A.-D.S., Gould to Sec. of St., 22 November, 1921, 814.00\513; McMillin to Sec. of St., 8 September, 1921, 814.00\559.
or Cabrera.

Nonetheless, fear of unrest, protests, instability, labour demonstrations and the worsening economic situation had severely shaken the army's faith in the President's ability to resolve the problems of the republic. Furthermore, the political conflict in Cabinet and the Assembly between Unionists and Democrats appeared to be intensifying. On September 30 a large demonstration of 1,000 to 1,500 Liberals marched in the streets of the capital demanding that the President abolish the Legislative Assembly and assume a dictatorship. The protesters urged the President to dismiss the present Assembly since it had failed in its duties to represent the people. Herrera refused. Although there is no reference to the participation of any high-ranking members of the military, Liberal sentiment among the officers was unmistakable. 71

The struggle for influence over the President and control of the government reached a critical stage by the end of November. Yet no one could foresee which group, the Unionists or the Democrats, would prevail. This question was answered on the evening of December 5, when a group of army officers, headed by Generals José Maria Orellana, José Maria Lima, and Miguel Larrave, entered the residence of the President and demanded his resignation. The act was remarkably similar to

71U.S.N.A.-D.S., McMillin to Sec. of St., 12 October, 1921, 814.00\562.
the plot that had been uncovered in July. Obviously the Generals had not been convinced that Herrera could satisfy their concerns, nor could Mendoza, the Minister of War, placate their fears of unrest and instability.

The Generals requested that the President immediately address his letter of resignation to the National Assembly. He promptly complied with their request.\(^72\) Whether the President willingly stepped down from office, as the Generals claimed, or was forced under duress remains unclear. However, evidence indicates Herrera had little alternative especially since the entire army supported the actions of the officers. The only significant resistance originated from the police force of the capital. The act of toppling Herrera's fragile government was relatively bloodless as only twenty-five casualties were reported. The original plan was to force Herrera to appoint a new Cabinet, selected by ex-President Cabrera's "chief and ablest" advisor, Adrián Vidaurre.\(^73\) When the President refused to comply, however, the three Generals had no alternative but to proclaim a military junta.\(^74\)

\(^72\)U.S.N.A.-D.S., McMillin to Sec. of St., 6 December, 1921, 814.00\567; McMillin to Sec. of St., 7 December, 1921, 814.00\587.

\(^73\)U.S.N.A.-D.S., John S. Curtis, Charge d'Affaires, to Sec. of St., 26 December, 1921, 814.00\619; McMillin to Sec. of St., 28 December, 1921, 814.00\622.

\(^74\)U.S.N.A.-D.S., McMillin to Sec. of St., 6 December, 1921, 814.00\567; McMillin to Sec. of St, 7 December, 1921, 814.00\587.
On December 8 the junta, composed of Generals Orellana, Lima and Larrave, called the Assembly into session and the resignation of the President was accepted. The junta claimed that because Cabrera had been unduly removed from the presidency, the Assembly elected and all legislation passed during the Unionist government was unconstitutional. Thus, the current Assembly was dismissed and the junta re-called the members of the legislative body that existed at the time of Cabrera's overthrow. This new Assembly was then directed to accept the President's resignation. To replace him, the Assembly named Orellana the First Designate and he assumed the responsibilities of the executive on December 11.

Little debate occurred in the new Assembly when its members met to consider Herrera's resignation. One representative, Silva Pena, charged that it was not only the army that was guilty of treason, but so too was the President who had failed to display the fortitude and commitment that the office required. Rafael Ponciano argued that the movement to depose Herrera was absolutely necessary and that all Guatemalans should share the responsibility for the government's failure. He declared that the period of excessive

75 Ibid.

76 Ibid.; U.S.N.A.-D.S., McMillin to Sec. of St., 7 December, 1921, 814.00\570.

77 U.S.N.A.-D.S., Letter from General José María Ovellana, President of Guatemala, to Warren G. Harding, President of the U.S., 12 December, 1921, 814.00\585.
personal liberty demonstrated that many Guatemalans were not yet prepared to accept such a large degree of freedom and that the new government should be permitted to proceed unrestricted by such concerns.78

The economic problems, newspaper attacks, and the deteriorating political situation that the Herrera government was unable to solve were major factors that contributed to Herrera's removal. However, the question as to why the military chose to act and for whom is a serious one which must be examined at some length. The United States' representative in Guatemala City, Benton McMillin, "regarded the whole transaction as very unfortunate."79 He reported that under the Herrera administration the Guatemalan people enjoyed "a freedom of the press and citizenship greater than they have had under any President in generations." The only justification McMillin could suggest was that perhaps the government had been too lenient in the treatment of its critics. Its replacement, the American Legation sadly concluded, was "unquestionably" a military government headed by former officers of the Cabrera regime.80

However, McMillin's temporary replacement, John Curtis,

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78U.S.N.A.-D.S., McMillin to Sec. of St., 15 December, 1921, 814.00\596.

79U.S.N.A.-D.S., McMillin to Sec. of St., 7 December, 1921, 814.00\587.

80U.S.N.A.-D.S., Curtis to Sec. of St., 27 December, 1921, 814.00\594.
proclaimed less than three weeks later that the provisional
government was not purely military at all.81 To a large extent,
both descriptions are correct. When the military deemed
Herrera's removal necessary, it had no intention of
permanently assuming the reins of government. Hence, in the
days immediately following the military's action, its
political influence quickly dissipated. Although Generals Lima
and Larrave were original members of the junta, when the new
Cabinet was appointed on December 15, their influence in
governmental affairs had declined considerably.82 The
appointments of Jorge Ubico as the Minister of War, Alberto
Mencos as Minister of Development (Fomento), José Medrano as
Chief Justice of the Supreme Court, and Felipe R. Solares as
Minister of Finance testify to the strong Liberal tendencies
of the provisional government.83 Each of these men possessed
definite ties to the coffee economy, as finca owners,
businessmen or lawyers and, with the exception of Ubico, none

81 U.S.N.A.-D.S., Curtis to Sec. of St., 2 January, 1921,
814.00\608; David Ronfeldt argues that there is no such thing
as a purely "civilian" or a purely "military" government.
David Ronfeldt, "Patterns of Civil-Military Rule" in L.
Einaudi (ed.), Beyond Cuba: Latin America Takes Charge of its

82 U.S.N.A.-D.S., McMillin to Sec. of St., 26 December,
1921, 814.00\595.

83 U.S.N.A.-D.S., McMillin to Sec. of St., 15 December,
1921, 814.00\596; Curtis to Sec. of St., 3 January, 1922,
814.00\624; Curtis to Sec. of St., 6 February, 814.00\649.
was an officer. Thus, they assumed office with the intent of protecting and furthering their valuable economic investments in the country, not of installing a military dictatorship.

Early reports prior to and following the President's removal placed considerable emphasis on the officers' well-founded concern for Herrera's inability or unwillingness to silence his critics. However, the Minister failed to recognize the common class and social interests of the army officers and Guatemala's landed elite. Rather than emphasize the absolute military nature of the coup, perhaps it is more appropriate to suggest that the Generals and officers who initiated the movement did so as an act to protect and secure their own interests, which happened to be very similar to those of the landed, coffee elite. 

The military was obsessively concerned with stability. To uphold the interests of the governing class of coffee producers, urban professionals and merchants, military men deemed it necessary to restore order. The Guatemalan military was inseparably linked to the coffee economy and the Liberal-Positivist ideology that had introduced and sustained it.

84Ibid.; U.S.N.A.-D.S., Richard Southgate, Charge d'Affaires, to Sec. of St., 5 May, 1922, 814.00\689.

Officers of the period tended to be the educated sons of professionals, merchants and industrialists and as a consequence were generally committed to the Positivist ideals of order, progress and the rapid economic growth. The Guatemalan military was no exception to this trend in Latin America. It must be remembered that since Justo Rufino Barrios was elected to the Guatemalan presidency in 1873, Liberals and officers of the military had shared in the lucrative profits of government and the rapidly expanding coffee economy. During no period was this more evident than during Cabrera's twenty-two years in office. It was not uncommon during the Barrios and Cabrera periods for army officers to be rewarded for their loyal service to the President with wealth and property or at least permitted to enrich themselves by oppression, bribes, forced loans or land seizures. Herrera was less willing to allow such abuses to continue. Thus, it is not surprising that when officers of the military were approached by members of the Liberal Party to lend their support to the removal of a president who had become weak and ineffective, they were quite willing to agree.

The military's removal of the President in concert with

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87 U.S.N.A.-D.S., Curtis to Sec. of St., 26 December, 1921, 814.00\619; J. J. Are'valo, La inquietud normalista, pp. 38-9.
the Liberal Party and the political nature of the provisional
government offers an explanation for the Generals' actions.
The motivations of the officers were not simply a product of
their concern for the stability of the nation. The peace and
order they aspired to institute was not the ends which the
officers sought to achieve, but was simply the means by which
they, as Liberals, would further their common class interests.
Stability was a necessary prerequisite for all members of
Guatemalan society who relied on and benefitted from the
coffee economy. For the most part of his term in office,
Estrada Cabrera understood the needs of the coffee elite and,
by and large, provided that stable and productive atmosphere
it desired. When he failed to do this, Liberals along with
many elements of Guatemalan society found him expendable.

Carlos Herrera, although a member of the coffee elite
himself, chose to govern in a manner that often disregarded
the concerns of the dominant political and economic sector of
the country. Although willing to suppress peasant unrest as
severely as previous Liberal regimes, Herrera elected to
experiment with a number of constitutional liberties and
occasionally permitted more popular elements of Guatemalan
society to voice their concerns. Because he did, coffee
growers, merchants, army officers and some urban
professionals, were convinced his administration jeopardized
their interests. Furthermore, by December, students reformers
and labour leaders, were no more supportive of the Herrera
regime than they were of Cabrera less than two years earlier. The President could not appeal to students and workers to defend his administration any more than he could rely on the loyalty of the military or the coffee elite. His presidency had long been discredited on both extremes of the nation's political spectrum. Unlike Herrera, General José María Orellana was well-versed in the realities of Guatemalan politics and, as his term in office would prove, equally aware of whom he needed to satisfy if he hoped to become the next Guatemalan president. Undoubtedly Orellana would not commit the same errors as his predecessor.
CHAPTER IV

The Orellana Government:

Stability, Growth and the Coffee Elite

The bacillus of revolution is in the blood of these people, and will never be eradicated until some strong and is placed over them and the serum of hard work is injected into them by force. The lazy lives they lead is one cause of their constant political discontent. The poor Indian and peon is simply a pawn to be moved about in revolutionary emeutes by the lazy upper classes...They are utterly incapable of governing themselves in a civilized manner, despite their protests of culture and learning. In these modern days it does seem ridiculous that these comic opera representatives, none of them with a population of a great American city, should exist as political entities, with their farcical Cabinets and government able to disrupt the peace of a large part of the world at their leisure.

The overthrow of the Herrera government and the seizure of power by the military junta mark a significant point in Guatemala's political development. Although the Unionists brief period in office was plagued by instability and uncertainty, it was also an optimistic era that future generations of Guatemalans would praise for its liberty and equality. The Unionists came to office with the hope that they could initiate a prosperous and stable period so more of Guatemala's citizens would benefit from the republic's wealth. Unfortunately for most Guatemalans, the Unionists failed on all these counts.

The inability of Herrera and the Unionists to achieve their objectives set in motion a series of events that

1U.S.N.A.-D.S., A letter from Ernest Forbes to Asst. Sec. of St. Wilbur Carr, 18 January, 1921, 814.00/526.
permitted the Liberal party to reassume the republic's executive office. Unlike the Herrera government, the junta and the Orellana administration that followed did not owe its position to a broad coalition of urban workers, students or an incipient middle class. Rather than attempt to accommodate the various concerns of other sectors of Guatemalan society, the Orellana government's sole purpose was to solidify the coffee elite's grasp on the presidency and insure that its interests reigned supreme. Both the coffee elite and the officers of the military had vested interests in a stable and economically prosperous export economy and Herrera's inability to provide either of these prompted immediate action. To safeguard their privileged position from the perceived threats posed by labour radicals, an exploited Indian majority, a vocal and increasingly hostile university population, and a nascent urban middle class, Orellana was prepared to exercise his presidential powers and military might to their fullest.

Beginning in the summer of 1922, the government implemented the first stage of an extensive two-pronged campaign to eliminate opposition to the Liberal party. Unwilling to accept any form of resistance to its rule, the new government silenced critics, jailed traditional foes, and exiled most of the influential members of Herrera's government. Overwhelmingly successful, Orellana's assault on churchmen, Unionists, journalists, students and labour leaders, helped the Liberal party monopolize political power
and restrict political participation by other, perhaps more popular or reformist, organizations. Once convinced that the party was firmly in command of the domestic situation, Orellana purged the government of all those who posed a threat to the continuance of stability, order, and progress. Orellana's greatest concern within the party was the struggle between two of its senior officials, Jorge Ubico and Adrián Recinos. However, the President was free to confront this menace only after he disposed of all external challengers. Hence, as the end of Orellana's term in office neared, it appeared that the Liberal party's program of terror, repression, and censorship had successfully expelled all adversaries from the political arena and enabled it to reassert its firm grip on the nation.

The process of re-establishing the dominance of the land owning, agro-export elite began with the resignation of President Herrera and his replacement with the junta on December 5, 1921. On December 10, 1921 General José María Orellana was elected as First Designate of the republic of Guatemala to hold the powers of the executive. However, he was not granted these duties by the recognized National Legislative Assembly that had sat during the Unionists twenty

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2U.S.N.A.-D.S., McMillin to Sec. of St., 6 December, 1921, 814.00/567; A letter from General José María Orellana, Provisional President of Guatemala, to Warren G. Harding, President of the United States, 12 December, 1921, 814.00/585; McMillin to Sec. of St., 7 December, 1921, 814.00/587.
stormy months in office. It is important to note that when the junta seized power on the evening of December 5, the Generals announced that they planned to expel the National Legislative Assembly elected during the Unionist term in office and recall the Cabrera Assembly. No one questioned the authority, the representativeness, or the constitutionality of the Unionist Legislative Assembly. Yet, when the junta dissolved the Assembly, its members obeyed the junta's order and neglected their constitutional obligation to denounce the military's act. If the National Legislative Assembly had chosen to oppose the actions of the officers, the future of the junta may have been in serious doubt as its authority was anything but justified. Unfortunately, many members of the Assembly, like the officers of the army, were alarmed by the excessive abuses of the press, had lost faith in the experiment of liberty and feared the increasingly vocal and radical nature of organized labour. Hence, when Orellana and the officers of the military deemed intervention necessary, the Herrera government possessed few allies and offered little resistance.

On December 11, 1920, Orellana assumed the duties granted him according to the Constitution and communicated these

3Ibid., U.S.N.A.-D.S., McMillin to Sec. of St., 7 December, 1921, 814.00/570; McMillin to Sec. of St., 9 December, 1921, 814.00/578; McMillin to Sec. of St., 10 December, 1921, 814.00/582; McMillin to Sec. of St., 15 December, 1921, 814.00/596; Curtis to Sec. of St., 26 December, 1921, 814.00/619.
events to the President of the United States, Warren G. Harding. To most observers, Orellana's selection to head the new provisional government was no surprise. Of the three members of the military council, Orellana, or Don Chema as he was popularly known, was by far the most qualified officer to succeed Herrera.

Born in 1872 in El Jicaro, in the eastern Department of Zacapa, Orellana was a military man for most of his life. As a youth, the story went, Orellana had attracted President Cabrera's attention. Cabrera became the boy's mentor and Orellana was sent to Guatemala's military academy, the Escuela Politécnica. After he graduated as an officer and an engineer, he served his mentor in several military and political capacities. Although Don Chema remained close to Cabrera during his rule, he was still highly-respected for his honesty and fairness as an officer and a politician. As an officer, Orellana was said to be broad-minded, tolerant, hard-working and, above all, sincere. Once in command in one of the Departments, it was reported, Cabrera ordered Orellana to arrest a political opponent "dead or alive". Don Chema refused, however, and replied that he would take such orders

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4U.S.N.A.-D.S., Henry Fletcher, Under Sec. of St., to President Harding, 12 December, 1921, 814.00\580; McMillin to Sec. of St., 10 December, 1921, 814.00\582; A letter from Orellana to Harding, 12 December, 1921, 814.00\585.
from no one and tendered his resignation.\textsuperscript{5}

In 1920, at the time of the overthrow of Cabrera, Orellana was both a member of the Assembly and served the dictator as Minister of Public Instruction. As a Minister, Don Chema opposed many of Cabrera's actions, contributed to the momentum of the uprising and, thereby, was recognized as a friend and supporter of the Unionists.\textsuperscript{6}

Hence, when Don Chema assumed the office of provisional President on December 11, it was hoped he would bring his virtues as an officer and a gentleman to the post. Although the new government encountered little opposition in its early stages, Don Chema faced a very real threat posed by the question of recognition and his government's constitutionality. Orellana was well-aware that the United States claimed its relations with new governments in Central America were determined by the principles agreed to in the 1907 Treaty of Peace and Amity. According to the agreement, governments that came into existence in an unconstitutional manner would be refused recognition by the United States and

\textsuperscript{5}Pitti, "Ubico", p. 78; U.S.N.A.-D.S., McMillin to Sec. of St., 7 December, 1921, 814.00/587; Curtis to Sec. of St., 27 December, 1921, 814.00/594; McMillin to Sec. of St., 21 December, 1921, 814.00/601; Curtis to Sec. of St., 26 December, 1921, 814.00/619; Curtis to Sec. of St., 6 February, 1922, 814.00/649; R. M. Miller, American journalist, to Under Sec. of St. Fletcher, 22 February, 1922, 814.00/671.

\textsuperscript{6}Ibid..
the other Central American states.\textsuperscript{7}

Recognition was an immediate concern of the government especially in light of the uncertainty and instability associated with the republic's economic crisis.\textsuperscript{8} United States recognition would greatly assist the interim government as it would free over 1.4 million dollars of Guatemalan deposits in American banks.\textsuperscript{9} Furthermore, United States recognition would encourage and permit American and European banks to extend further credit and loans to the Orellana administration. In December, an indication of the importance of American recognition was offered by the provisional government's Minister of War, Jorge Ubico. Ubico, the second most influential member of the government, stated that if recognition was not granted soon, the future of the government


\textsuperscript{8}U.S.N.A.-D.S., Curtis to Sec. of St., 28 December, 1921, 814.00/617; McMillin to Sec. of St., 28 December, 1921, 814.00/622; Curtis to Sec. of St., 3 January, 1922, 814.00/624; Curtis to Sec. of St., February, 1922, 814.00/648; Curtis to Sec. of St., 24 February, 1922, 814.00/654; Richard Southgate, Charge d'Affaires, to Sec. of St., 7 March, 1922, 814.00/668; Bulmer-Thomas, \textit{Central America Since 1920}, pp. 25-38.

\textsuperscript{9}U.S.N.A.-D.S., Curtis to Sec. of St., 28 December, 1921, 814.00/617.
could be in doubt.\footnote{Ibid.}

In the first few weeks following Herrera's resignation, the government focused its efforts on securing recognition and returning the nation to normality. Orellana hoped his announcement on December 15 that the presidential election would be held the week beginning May 21, 1922 would hasten much needed United States aid.\footnote{U.S.N.A.-D.S., McMillin to Sec. of St., 17 December, 1921, 814.00\591.} However, the State Department decided that recognition and any financial assistance would be granted only after the new president was duly elected according to the constitution.\footnote{U.S.N.A.-D.S., Charles H. Hughes, United States Secretary of State, to the President, Warren G. Harding, 13 March, 1922, 814.00\667a; Dana G. Munro, Acting Chief of Latin American Division, to Fletcher, 11 January, 1922, 814.00\674; Sumner Welles, Chief of Latin American Division, to Fletcher, 1 February, 1922, 814.00\675.} In response to such American concerns and the need to solve the country's economic problems as quickly as possible, Orellana announced that the presidential election would be moved forward to be held between February 15 and February 21, 1922.\footnote{U.S.N.A.-D.S., Curtis to Sec. of St., 17 January, 1922, 814.00\638.}

Although the State Department's representative in Guatemala, John Curtis, consistently praised the stable and representative nature of the Orellana government, the character of the new administration was markedly different
from the Unionist-Liberal coalition that had preceded it. It is true that the military junta and the Unionist government that replaced Cabrera were both established in a coercive manner. Nonetheless, the Unionists came to power only after the Cabrera Assembly removed the President in a constitutional fashion. Furthermore, when they were successful, they pursued a course of cooperation and compromise rather than confrontation. In contrast, Orellana and the junta ousted Herrera with force. Moreover, in the weeks prior to the 1922 presidential election, the provisional government was more concerned with enforcing order and consolidating its hold on the government than recognizing its opponents' personal liberties.

From most reports it appears the Liberals had the electoral situation well in hand. On January 25 the Partido Liberal Federalista, or Liberal Federalist Party, met to nominate their candidate for the upcoming election. Jorge Ubico was the only challenger to Orellana's candidacy. The possibility of a split within the party was a serious concern, but was avoided when both Orellana and Ubico agreed that the successful candidate would abide by the Liberal party's platform to solve the country's problems and accept its principle of no re-election. At the nominating convention, Orellana secured the endorsement of sixteen of Guatemala's

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14Pitti, "Ubico", p. 75.
twenty-two Departments and was, thereby, chosen as the party’s candidate. It is important to note that implicit in Ubico’s agreement not to oppose Orellana in the election was the understanding that Ubico would be the party’s candidate in 1927.

Throughout December, January and February, the government was occupied with the task of suppressing Guatemala’s traditional foes of Liberalism. In early December, most of the senior Cabinet Ministers from Herrera’s government, including Luis Aguirre and Emilio Escamilla, were arrested. Aguirre was released on December 16, but Escamilla remained under arrest indefinitely. To counter the government’s harsh methods, the Unionist press made Don Chema and the Liberals the target of a series of vehement press attacks. Alarmed by the political activities of their labour, student and Conservative adversaries, Liberals claimed that the government’s leniency fostered abuses of liberty that had in

15U.S.N.A.-D.S., Curtis to Sec. of St., 25 January, 1922, 814.00\642.

16J. J. Arévalo, La inquietud normalista, p. 143.

17U.S.N.A.-D.S., McMillin to Sec. of St., 7 December, 1921, 814.00\587.

18The State Department Records do not indicate when Escamilla was released. However, it is likely he was among those granted general amnesty on April 11, 1922. U.S.N.A.-D.S., McMillin to Sec. of St., 16 December, 1921, 814.00/588; McMillin to Sec. of St., 21 December, 1921, 814.00/606; Southgate to Sec. of St., 11 April, 1922, 814.00/677; Southgate to Sec. of St., 12 April, 1922, 814.00/690.
turn led to a number of minor disturbances. As a result, Orellana responded to the barrage of criticism on January 28 by implementing a policy of "greater strictness". This program included measures that muzzled several opposition newspapers and jailed a number of radical labour activists. 19

Orellana's reactionary efforts were not enough to silence the opposition, however, as the weeks prior to the election were filled with worker and peasant protests. In December it was reported that in the capital the Gremio de Obreros, or Workers Trade Union, whose membership totalled approximately fifteen thousand was "almost unanimously opposed to the present [Orellana] government". 20 By February, workers in the capital were so disenchanted with both the Liberals and the Conservatives that Curtis noted the "Labour element apparently [is] no longer controlled by the party leaders". Even prominent Unionists admitted that "they were no longer able to control the "Liga de Obrero" [Workers League]...and that they were not responsible in any way" for workers' protests.

19 Ibid., Alexander, *Communism in Latin America*, pp. 350-1; U.S.N.A.-D.S., Curtis to Sec. of St., 11 January, 1922, 814.00/633; Curtis to Sec. of St., 28 January, 1922, 814.00/636; Curtis to Sec. of St., 31 January, 1922, 814.00/647; Curtis to Sec. of St., 17 February, 1922, 814.00/648; Curtis to Sec. of St., 8 February, 1922, 814.00/650.

20 U.S.N.A.-D.S., Curtis to Sec. of St., 26 December, 1921, 814.00/619.
and demonstrations.  

Refused a party, a political platform or a vehicle from which they could express their opposition to the Liberals, worker and peasant revolts spread throughout the republic in the week of the election. On February 14 and 15, labour leaders in the capital organized a "general uprising" but government precautions prevented a serious incident from developing. For their participation in the disturbance at least seven Unionists and labour leaders were arrested. In the village of Palencia, sixty-eight persons, mostly Indians, were taken into custody for their role in an uprising against the government. The authorities claimed that two prominent Unionists, one of whom was a former Justice on the Supreme Court, were responsible for inciting the protest. Unfortunately, apologized the government, both were killed while attempting to escape. A similar revolt was crushed in Escuintla on February 18 when its residents were prevented from seizing the town's military barracks. In the same week, a number of Unionists were arrested for their alleged association with the unrest and at least fifteen former

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21 U.S.N.A.-D.S., Curtis to Sec. of St., 16 February, 1922, 814.00/657.

22 U.S.N.A.-D.S., Curtis to Sec. of St., 17 February, 1922, 814.00/648.

23 U.S.N.A.-D.S., Curtis to Sec. of St., 16 February 1922, 814.00/657; Curtis to Sec. of St., 22 February, 1922, 814.00/659.
members of the government, ex-Cabinet Ministers, and other prominent Unionists took refuge in the British and Spanish Legations or the Archbishop's palace for fear of government repression.²⁴

Although Liberals accused prominent Unionists of encouraging "ignorant Indians and poor workingmen to create trouble for the Government", Conservatives feared a popular uprising as much as the Liberals did.²⁵ Whether Orellana was aware of such Conservative apprehensions or not, it did not discourage the President from using the revolts as an excuse to suppress a number of constitutional liberties and to arrest over two hundred Unionists, labourers, and peasants.²⁶ Not surprisingly, one workers' organization that was repressed with extreme vigour was the Communist Unificacióén Obrera Socialista. According to one member's account, Orellana intensified the assault on urban workers that was initiated by the Herrera regime.²⁷ The President's swift and decisive actions were clear signals to his opponents that the

²⁴Ibid.

²⁵U.S.N.A.-D.S., Curtis to Sec. of St., 8 February, 1922, 814.00/650.

²⁶U.S.N.A.-D.S., Curtis to Sec. of St., 28 February, 1922, 814.00/665.

government would not tolerate any threat, whether rural-
labour-oriented or Unionist-inspired, to its control of the presidency.

Perhaps slightly swayed by his ties to the previous administration, the executive secretary of the Unionist Party, Eduardo Camacho, described the first three months of Liberal rule as "a reign of terror." Orellana, he proclaimed, had conducted "a campaign of cruelty and terrorism that will go down as one of the bleakest pages in the history of the Republic of Guatemala." To support his claim, Camacho wrote that in San Pedro Pinula in the Department of Jalapa more than one hundred people, including women and children, were "massacred". Women were violated, some less than ten years old, homes burned, and cattle and property destroyed. Furthermore, this was not an isolated incident. Similar crimes against the people of Guatemala, he insisted, were committed in Cantel, Zacapa, San Agustín, Acasaguastlán, and Huehuetenango.28

Few others condemned Don Chema's methods with such bitterness and vigour. However, the Unionists and most other opposition movements continued to claim that the government had committed horrible crimes to discourage political

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28U.S.N.A.-D.S., A letter from Mr. Eduardo Camacho, Executive Secretary of the Unionist Party, to Dr. Julio Bianchi, Minister of the Republic of Guatemala to the United States, 15 February, 1922, 814.00\683.
opposition. The Unionist party refused to nominate anyone for the February elections arguing the government's blatant abuse of its authority rendered the election both unfair and, more importantly, illegal.\(^{29}\) As a consequence of the Unionist boycott, General José Maria Orellana was the only candidate on the ballot. When the polls closed Don Chema was declared the winner as he received over 149,000 votes of a total of less than 150,000 cast.\(^{30}\) A few weeks later, on April 17, the United States' representative in Guatemala City, Richard Southgate, complied with the Department's instructions and extended U.S. recognition to the Orellana Government.\(^{31}\) Although the State Department was aware that the new government was "far from perfect,\(^{32}\) it was willing to recognize its legality if it continued to promote peace and order while at the same time offered favourable concessions.

\(^{29}\)Ibid.; U.S.N.A.-D.S., Curtis to Sec. of St., 15 February, 1922, 814.00\655.

\(^{30}\)There appears to be some disagreement as to the official vote received by Orellana in the election. One State Department dispatch credits Orellana with over 168,000 votes, another puts the total at 149,277. U.S.N.A.-D.S., Curtis to Sec. of St., Curtis to Sec. of St., 22 February, 1922, 814.00\653; Curtis to Sec. of St., 22 February, 1922, 814.00\659.

\(^{31}\)U.S.N.A.-D.S., Charles E. Hughes, Secretary of State, to American Legation, Guatemala City, 15 April, 1922, 814.00\666; Southgate to Sec. of St., 17 April, 1922, 814.00\682.

\(^{32}\)U.S.N.A.-D.S., Curtis to Sec. of St., 24 February, 1922, 814.00\654.
to American investors.³³

The date that the Orellana government was recognized by the United States marks a significant watershed in the political affairs of Guatemala in the 1920's. Previous to this event the provisional government had demonstrated a measure of restraint when confronted with political opposition to the President or the Liberal party. To a large extent, this can be attributed to the government's awareness of its unconstitutionality and its desire to impress upon the United States its popular character. With the assistance of John Curtis' glowing accounts of the government's merits and the President's efforts to discourage unrest, the new administration successfully convinced the State Department to grant recognition in April, 1922.

The Department's decision to recognize the Orellana government reflects the United States' attitude toward the republic in the 1920's. In the post-War period, the State Department's major policy objectives in Guatemala focused on two main concerns: stability and the expansion of American

³³U.S.N.A.-D.S., Hughes to President Harding, 13 March, 1922, 814.00\667a; Welles to Fletcher, 1 February, 1922, 814.00\675.
business. The Herrera government's concern with some lucrative American business concessions, convinced the Department to promote United States interests in a more active manner. The Herrera administration's alleged disaffection for the United States, led the Department to believe that without diplomatic intervention the United States would be unable to secure its vital interests in Central America. Hence, a commitment by the Orellana administration to respect and uphold the interests of American business was perceived to be a significant step toward solidifying the United States' privileged status in the region. Of course many Guatemalans were aware that the encouragement and protection of American business usually resulted in the sacrifice of foreign, primarily German, or long-term national interests.

In May, 1922, the first real challenge to the government's authority arose in connection to Orellana's alleged commitment to two important contracts with American corporations. Once again the Zacapa-Salvadorean railroad issue fostered intense opposition in the National Legislative Assembly and the Cabinet. It should be recalled that Minor

34 Joseph S. Tulchin, The Aftermath of the War: World War I and U.S. Policy Toward Latin America (New York: 1971), pp. 3-5, 7-8; Langley, Struggle for the American Mediterranean, pp. 192-3; Munro, Intervention and Dollar Diplomacy, pp. 7, 15-6, 65-6, 146, 160-4; Dinwoodie, "Expedient Diplomacy", pp. 179-86; Munro, The United States and the Caribbean Republics, 1921-1933, pp. 3-4.

Cooper Keith's 1908 railroad concession was nullified by the Guatemalan National Legislative Assembly in May of the previous year by the Unionist government. However, one of the first acts of the military junta following Herrera's resignation was to dissolve the National Legislative Assembly that sat during the Unionist government, declare all legislation it passed unconstitutional, and reinstate the Assembly that existed at the time of Cabrera's overthrow. Hence, according to the new government, Keith's contract remained in force. Subsequently, when the issue of the concession was raised in the new National Legislative Assembly, a disagreement arose. Throughout most of April and May, opponents of the contract bitterly contested its legality and questioned its material benefits to the nation. Criticism by Conservatives, Unionists, labour, and the press intensified as the government attempted to pass a series of bills favourable to United States business interests. Important among these were the railroad concession and the proposed sale of the Empresa Eléctrica to General Electric's American subsidiary, the Electric Bond and Share Company.

The sale of the German-owned Empresa Eléctrica de

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36 U.S.N.A.-D.S., McMillin to Sec. of St., 25 May, 1921, 814.00/544; A presidential decree issued by Carlos Herrera, 13 May, 1921, 814.77\69; Bauer Paiz, capital yanqui en Centroamérica, pp. 149-50; Kepner and Soothill, The Banana Empire, pp. 156-7.

37 U.S.N.A.-D.S., McMillin to Sec. of St., 7 December, 1921, 814.00\587.
Guatemala to the New York-based Electric Bond and Share Company (EBSC) had troubled State Department-Guatemalan relations for a number of years. During the war period, the United States government was deeply concerned with Guatemala's numerically small, but economically powerful, German population. In no segment of Guatemalan society was the German element more influential than in the coffee industry. In 1913, Germans controlled only 170 of Guatemala's 2,076 coffee fincas. However, German-owned coffee fincas accounted for 358,000 quintals of the 1913 crop as compared to the 525,000 quintals produced on 1,657 fincas owned by Guatemalans.\footnote{Note: 1 quintal= 100 pounds. The remaining 249 growers in Guatemala were non-German foreigners who accounted for 162,500 quintals. Jones, Guatemala, p. 207. Mosk, Sanford A., "The Coffee Economy of Guatemala, 1850-1918: Development and Signs of Instability" in Inter-American Economic Affairs, Vol. 9, Winter 1956, p. 13; Handy, Gift, p. 66.}

The importance of the German growers and their degree of economic clout in the Guatemalan economy is obvious when one considers that coffee accounted for 84.8 per cent of nation's exports at the outbreak of the First World War.\footnote{In 1913, Guatemalan exports totaled $14,449,926 U.S.. Coffee exports accounted for $12,254,724 U.S.. Bulmer-Thomas, Central America Since 1920, p. 8.} In the pre-War period, German profits from the lucrative coffee trade were invested into other sectors of the economy, most notably the banking and utility sectors.\footnote{Bauer Paiz, Capital yanqui en Centroamérica, p. 60.}

One of the most successful German enterprises was the
Empresa Eléctrica de Guatemala. During the war, State Department officials repeatedly expressed their discomfort with Guatemala's reliance on German investors and capital. To ensure that Germans did not regain control of their business interests after the war, the United States took steps to curb their influence. In April 1917, the Department convinced Cabrera to expel German diplomats and in August he appointed Daniel B. Hodgson, a prominent American, to oversee the Alien Property Custodian. American Custodian officials and the Department encouraged Cabrera to seize enemy (German) landholdings and assets in the country, but the President refused "to move any more rapidly than he believes is prudent". In October, 1918, however, the dictator seized Guatemala's largest utility company, Empresa Eléctrica, leased it to the Electric Bond and Share Company (EBSC) of New York, and in March, 1920, sold the utility company to the EBSC for $495,000.00.

The sale of the Empresa Eléctrica remained an issue of contention during the Herrera administration as the National Legislative Assembly had not approved the transaction before

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41 Ibid., pp. 60-1; Dinwoodie, "Expedient Diplomacy", pp. 154-5; Tulchin, The Aftermath of the War, p. 25.

42 Bauer Paiz, Capital vanqui en Centroamérica, pp. 60-70; Dinwoodie, "Expedient Diplomacy", pp. 154-6; U.S.N.A.-D.S., A letter from John Foster Dulles, counsel for Electric Bond and Share Company, to Sec. of St., 2 July, 1920, 814.6463 Em 7\25; McMillin to Sec. of St., 8 September, 1920, 814.6463 Em 7\33; A letter from B. Mitchell, President of E.B.S.C., to Dulles, 5 October, 1920, 814.6463 Em 7\36.
Cabrera was removed. The Unionists were ousted before they could discuss or introduce legislation with regard to the transfer.\footnote{Bauer Paiz, \textit{capital yanqui en Centroamérica}, p. 69; U.S.N.A.-D.S., Southgate to Sec. of St., 31 March, 1922, 814.6463 Em 7\textbackslash{}51.} Thus, it was not until the spring of 1922 that the Orellana government and the National Legislative Assembly met to ratify the sale of the German company. Unprepared for the political battle that ensued, Orellana and his government faced a serious crisis when the subject arose in April, 1922.

Orellana's friendly attitude toward American business interests was not entirely acceptable to many Guatemalans. Decisively opposed to further American concessions, the National Legislative Assembly that met in March was often in disagreement with the government. Large numbers of organized labourers frequently attended sessions of the National Legislative Assembly as spectators to demonstrate their dissatisfaction with the government and its legislation. Encouraged by the boisterous inhabitants of the gallery, the administration's political foes persistently attacked the government and its policies in the Assembly's first session. Most of the government's critics charged that the new administration was forced to honour the railroad and the EBSC concessions because the President had traded these promises to "the Filibusterer of capital", the United States, in
exchange for recognition. After several weeks of strained negotiations between the Cabinet, the EBSC's lawyer and State Department officials, the sale of the Empresa Eléctrica, with some revisions, was approved on May 23 by the National Legislative Assembly. However, a committee appointed by the President to arbitrate an agreement for the Zacapa railroad was unsuccessful and its solution was reserved for the next session of the Assembly. The President, increasingly alarmed at the ferocity of criticism, took action on May 19 and suppressed four newspapers and indefinitely suspended constitutional guarantees.

Although Orellana had expressed his pro-American sentiments several times to the United States' representative in Guatemala, the President preferred to avoid a major confrontation with the Assembly or provoke a rupture in his

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44U.S.N.A.-D.S., Southgate to Sec. of St., 5 May, 1922, 814.00/689; Southgate to Sec. of St., 19 May, 1922, 814.00/690; Southgate to Sec. of St., 18 May, 1922, 814.00/691; Southgate to Sec. of St., 26 May, 1922, 814.00/694; Arthur H. Geissler, Minister, to Sec. of St., 29 September, 1922, 814.51/405.

45Bauer Paiz, capital yanqui en Centroamérica, pp. 69-79; Bulmer-Thomas, Central America Since 1920, p. 40; U.S.N.A.-D.S., Southgate to Sec. of St., 27 April, 1922, 814.6463 Em 7\53; Southgate to Sec. of St., 19 May, 1922, 814.6463 Em 7\62; Southgate to Sec. of St., 22 May, 1922, 814.6463 Em 7\63; Southgate to Sec. of St., 24 May, 1922, 814.6463 Em 7\64.

46U.S.N.A.-D.S., Southgate to Sec. of St., 19 May, 1922, 814.00/690; Southgate to Sec. of St., 31 May, 1922, 814.00/695; Southgate to Sec. of St., 29 June, 1922, 814.00/698; Southgate to Sec. of St., 24 May, 1922, 814.6463 Em 7\64.
party. Richard Southgate, the American Charge d'Affaires, attributed the bitter opposition to the proposed concessions to the political aspirations of the Conservative party, the Roman Catholic Church and Guatemala's German colony. Convinced that Germans were usually responsible for the opposition to the expansion of American business interests, Southgate was unable to understand the legitimate political opposition the Liberals encountered.

Repeated State Department inquiries as to the future of American interests and pressures from the National Legislative Assembly and the Cabinet to reconsider the proposed concessions, placed the President in a very precarious position. Aware that he would encounter significant political opposition within his own party if he supported further American interests, and at the same time reluctant to offend the State Department, the President decided to appoint a committee to study the railroad and utility issues and make recommendations.\(^{47}\) None of the parties involved, government supporters, their opponents, or American corporations, was satisfied with the compromise, but the President, at least temporarily, avoided a serious split in Cabinet and the Assembly.

Although Orellana's government weathered the first

\(^{47}\text{U.S.N.A.-D.S., Southgate to Sec. of St., 31 March, 1922, 814.77}\text{102; Southgate to Sec. of St., 5 May, 1922, 814.00}\text{689; Southgate to Sec. of St., 6 April, 1922, 814.6463 Em 7}\text{52.}
assault against IRCA's railroad monopoly and the sale of the German-owned utility company, Empresa Eléctrica, it was unable to prevent two distinct factions from developing in the National Legislative Assembly and the Cabinet. By mid-July, serious differences of opinion arose between the two most influential members of Cabinet, the Minister of War, Jorge Ubico, and, the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Adrián Recinos. Described as a man of "high character and aims", Recinos was to be the political foe of Ubico for most of the next two decades. One of the principal leaders of the Liberal party and probably its most prominent politician, Recinos was appointed to the Cabinet in March, 1922.\footnote{U.S.N.A.-D.S., Curtis to Sec. of St., 17 February, 1922, 814.00/648; unidentified member of U.S. Legation in Guatemala to Sec. of St., 17 March, 1922, 814.002/27; McMillin to Sec. of St., 16 March, 1922, 814.002/28; Southgate to Sec. of St., 17 April, 1922, 814.00/682; Southgate to Sec. of St., 5 May, 1922, 814.00/689; Southgate to Sec. of St., 14 July, 1922, 814.00/699.}

The July disagreement originated with Ubico's insistence that a large budget for the army be retained and a plan of systematized military service be implemented. Undoubtedly, the animosity between Ubico and Recinos stemmed from their political rivalry and the question of who would succeed Orellana as the candidate for the Liberal party in the next presidential election. However, there are also indications that the Ubico-Recinos animosity was related to the regional nature of Guatemalan politics. Recinos' political links to the
Liga Oriental (Eastern League) and Ubico's reported affiliation to the Liga Occidental (Western League) most likely intensified the struggle. Indeed, reports that the Liga Occidental and its leader, Hector Aparicio, were extremely critical of Recinos and his "friends" of the Liga Oriental suggest that the struggle in the Assembly and the Cabinet reflected a regional political preference.49

The two Ministers' mutual animosity was so intense that they submitted their resignations to protest the actions of the other. Aware that Ubico commanded the respect of a group of younger officers in the military and Recinos was considered the party's most prominent civilian,50 the President consistently avoided issues that could upset the Cabinet's fragile balance. Unable to resolve their differences, Recinos and Ubico frequently threatened to resign if the President did not agree to their respective demands. Orellana's concern for the survival of his government, however, made it imperative for him to cultivate the support of both gentlemen, at least until his grasp on the presidency was more secure. As a result, Orellana refused the pair's frequent resignations in

49U.S.N.A.-D.S., Geissler to Sec. of St., 25 January, 1923, 814.00/724; See Chapter 5 for further discussion of Guatemala's regional and personal political orientations.

50J. J. Arévalo, La inquietud normalista, pp. 143-6, 149; Handy, "Resurgent Democracy", pp. 384-5.
the hope that conciliation would benefit all.\textsuperscript{51}

In August the power struggle in Cabinet was interrupted by a series of revolts, uprisings, and demonstrations that Orellana utilized as an excuse to crush all opposition to the Liberal's claim to power. On August 20 members of the Catholic Church, labour, and disgruntled Liberals and Conservatives participated in revolts in seven cities and towns in the republic. The following day, the government declared martial law and suspended all constitutional liberties. In the next few weeks approximately two hundred men outside the capital were executed for their role in the disturbances. According to the United States' new Minister in Guatemala, Arthur H. Geissler, a coalition of organized urban labourers, members of the Church hierarchy and a so-called "intellectual" element were responsible for the "seditious and treasonous" behavior. The government acted swiftly to crush the uprisings and at the same time used the insurrections as an excuse to eliminate all significant opposition.\textsuperscript{52}

\textsuperscript{51}U.S.N.A.-D.S., Southgate to Sec. of St., 14 July, 1922, 814.00/699; Geissler to Sec. of St., 4 August, 1922, 814.00/701; Geissler to Sec. of St., 11 August, 1922, 814.00/704; Geissler to Sec. of St., 25 January, 1923, 814.00/724.

\textsuperscript{52}U.S.N.A.-D.S., Geissler to Sec. of St., 22 August, 1922, 814.00/703; Geissler to Sec. of St., 23 August, 1922, 814.00/705; Geissler to Sec. of St., 24 August, 1922, 814.00/706; Geissler to Sec. of St., 31 August, 1922, 814.00/708; Geissler to Sec. of St., 11 September, 1922, 814.00/711; Geissler to Sec. of St., 19 September, 1922, 814.00/712; Geissler to Sec. of St., 12 October, 1922, 814.00/713; Geissler to Sec. of St., 14 October, 1922, 814.00/715; Geissler to Sec. of St., 9 November, 1922.
By early September the revolts were completely suppressed, yet the government continued to purge the nation of those it accused of inciting the uprisings. On September 6, the government moved to destroy its most formidable political opponent, the Catholic Church. On that day, the President issued a statement declaring that "certain Catholic priests" had "converted the pulpit into tribunes of political propaganda" and that in places of worship clerics had distributed "printed leaflets of seditious character". Especially vehement was Orellana's attack on Guatemala's highest ranking churchman, Archbishop Luis Javier Munoz y Capurón. Incensed by the Archbishop's refusal "to prevent the noxious intervention of the priests", Orellana accused Munoz y Capurón of encouraging his subordinates to commit illegal acts even after the government had requested he punish the agitators. The following day, September 7, soldiers forcibly entered the palace of the Archbishop, escorted him to a train bound for the Guatemalan west coast, and, when he arrived, placed him on a steamer enroute to San Salvador. The government continued its campaign against its clerical critics for the next several weeks and sent numerous other Catholic

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53 U.S.N.A.-D.S., Geissler to Sec. of St., 11 September, 1922, 814.00/711.

54 Ibid.
clergymen into exile.\textsuperscript{55}

Labour organizations and its leadership suffered even greater punishments for their role in the insurrections. Of the over two hundred Guatemalans executed for "inciting revolution," the vast majority were reported to have been from "the laboring class". With the exception of Francisco Lorenzana, an influential resident of the capital, scarcely any of those shot were wealthy Conservatives or Liberals.\textsuperscript{56}

On November 7, four of the most prominent representatives of the labour movement were tried on the charges of sedition and rebellion and were sentenced to death. Geissler noted that there appeared to be no evidence to link the men, Javier Ramirez, a bill collector and President of the Liga Obrera Unionista (L.O.U.), Anselmo Orantes Villegas, a musician and secretary of the L.O.U., Benjamin Toledo, a carpenter, and Isidro Pineda, a barber, to any general conspiracy. Nonetheless, he continued, the government genuinely believed the men were connected to the August killings and revolts.\textsuperscript{57}

Geissler's reports refer to a coalition of Conservatives, disaffected large land owners, upper and lower clergy and radical urban labour organizations as the main components of

\textsuperscript{55}U.S.N.A.-D.S., Geissler to Sec. of St., 19 Septemeber, 1922, 814.00\textbackslash712.

\textsuperscript{56}U.S.N.A.-D.S., Geissler to Sec. of St., 12 October, 1922, 814.00\textbackslash713.

\textsuperscript{57}U.S.N.A.-D.S., Geissler to Sec. of St., 9 November, 1922, 814.00\textbackslash718.
the August 1922 revolts. Rumour claimed that influential Unionists, like Marcial García Salas and José Ernesto Zelaya, inspired the unrest. However, there was no evidence to substantiate this claim and, furthermore, both Zelaya and García Salas publicly denounced the uprisings. Geissler also suggested that a group of "intellectuals" were the real instigators of the plot. According to this account, its leaders lost control of the movement and "bolshevistic" types sought, but failed, in their attempt to replace Orellana.58

Both explanations, however, overlook the obviously popular nature of the revolts. No evidence exists to indicate that influential Conservatives encouraged urban labourers and peasants to challenge the authority of the government. To the contrary, several Unionists publicly denounced the actions of the agitators and advocated harsh measures to discourage others radicals from similar attempts.59 Instead, the uprisings should be interpreted as a reaction by labour and peasants to the repressive methods of government employed by Liberal politicians, the military and the coffee elite. Finally aware that Orellana was not prepared to grant the more popular sectors of society a voice in the affairs of the

58 U.S.N.A.-D.S., Geissler to Sec. of St., 19 September, 1922, 814.00\712; Geissler to Sec. of St., 12 October, 1922, 814.00\713.

59 U.S.N.A.-D.S., Curtis to Sec. of St., 16 February, 1922, 814.00/657; Geissler to Sec. of St., 19 September, 1922, 814.00/712.
republic, peasant and labour discontent erupted in a spontaneous, wide-spread, popular revolt. This time, however, unlike the coalition that toppled Cabrera, the military and the coffee elite remained staunchly committed to the government. Furthermore, even Conservatives and the capital's middle class refused to support the popular uprisings. As a consequence, for the remainder of the decade the government had little difficulty suppressing the unorganized pockets of opposition and isolating further outbreaks of peasant and labour radicalism.

By the end of 1922 Orellana's government was able to exclude the more incendiary opposition elements from the political process and proceed with the Liberal program of growth, order, and progress. The State Department played an important, although not crucial, part in its success. Recognition in the first half of the year and its unwavering moral support provided the Orellana government with a measure of political legitimacy. The revolts of the latter half of 1922 enabled the coffee elite and its middle class supporters in the capital to re-establish its dominance in government. Although Ubico and Recinos were not political allies, threatened by the prospect of popular insurrection and alleged conservative opposition, these Liberal adversaries were willing to put aside their personal differences to deal with the crisis at hand. Thereafter, the Church, Conservatives and labour offered little resistance to Orellana's administration.
The Church and Conservative politicians were largely silenced. Guatemalan labour, on the other hand, frustrated in its attempts to secure a voice in the nation's affairs, began to look to the Communist Party, Socialist groups or anarcho-syndicalist organizations, for its leadership and increasingly less to the republic's traditional political parties.  

After the autumn of 1922 the Liberal Party in Guatemala reigned supreme for more than two decades. Although the August revolts permitted Liberals to eliminate all external opponents, Orellana was still threatened by intra-party rivalries and factionalism. No sooner had Orellana, with Ubico's cruel and highly effective support, suppressed the unrest of 1922, before the old animosities between Recinos and the Minister of War reappeared. Accusations by Recinos that Ubico was about to remove the President by "a military stroke" were countered with threats from Ubico that he would resign if the Minister for Foreign Affairs did not stop his libelous attacks. By March, the dispute in Cabinet between the two senior Ministers had become so disruptive that when both Recinos and Ubico submitted their resignations again,


61 U.S.N.A.-D.S., Geissler to Sec. of St., 1 February, 1922, 814.002\35; Geissler to Sec. of St., 25 January, 1923, 814.00\724; Geissler to Sec. of St., 17 February, 1923, 814.00\725; Geissler to Sec. of St., 20 February, 1923, 814.00\727.
the President accepted their requests. It must be stressed, however, that Don Chema was free to dismiss the cantankerous men from his Cabinet only after the Liberal party had extinguished the possibility of further Conservative, labour and peasant unrest. Convinced that the party was firmly in control of the nation's political situation, Orellana acted to consolidate his own position in the government.62

However, the struggle within the Liberal Party did not terminate with the exit of Ubicco and Recinos from the Cabinet, nor was the task of government any easier with their departure. In February, negotiations between IRCA's lawyer, John Bayard Pruyn, and the Ministers of Foreign Affairs and Development (Fomento), Recinos and Ponciano, resumed in an attempt to reach a settlement in the Zacapa railroad dispute. On February 8, the parties' representatives agreed to a contract that obligated the government to pay IRCA $1,475,000 to build a railroad fifty-seven miles in length from the Guatemalan town of Zacapa to Concepcion on the Salvadorean border. A subvention of $7,500 per kilometer of line would be paid by the government, IRCA would be exempt from export duties for thirty-five years and the railroad company was obliged to comply with the terms of the agreement within four

62U.S.N.A.-D.S., Geissler to Sec. of St., 21 March, 1923, 814.002\36.
years or the contract would expire.63 One month later, on March 8, Pruyn and the Ministers of Development and Foreign Affairs, with the President's consent, signed the Zacapa settlement.64

In April, 1923, Orellana submitted the newest Zacapa railroad contract to the National Legislative Assembly for approval. As in the previous spring, opposition flared as newspapers attacked the legislation, university students protested, and large crowds attended debates in the Assembly. Students, reportedly incited by Ubico and his followers, circulated leaflets that accused those who supported the legislation of being traitors ("vende patrias") to the country.65 Ubico denied all responsibility for the actions of the students and argued that it was quite impossible for him to influence any of his friends either in or out of the Assembly.66

Perhaps the most effective opponents of the contract was

63 Bauer Paiz, capital yanqui en Centroamérica, pp. 149-53; U.S.N.A.-D.S., Geissler to Sec. of St., 8 February, 1923, 814.77\195; Geissler to Sec. of St., 17 February, 1923, 814.77\198; Geissler to Sec. of St., 11 March, 1923, 814.77\199; Geissler to Sec. of St., 8 March, 1923, 814.77\202.

64 Bauer Paiz, capital yanqui en Centroamérica, pp. 149-53; Tulchin, The Aftermath of the War, pp. 192-3; U.S.N.A.-D.S., Geissler to Sec. of St., 8 March, 1923, 814.77\198; Geissler to Sec. of St., 11 March, 1923, 814.77\199; Geissler to Sec. of St., 8 March, 1923, 814.77\202.

65 U.S.N.A.-D.S., Geissler to Sec. of St., 27 April, 1923, 814.00/732; Geissler to Sec. of St., 1 June, 1923, 814.00\734.

66 Ibid..
a large group of city dwellers, labourers and tradesmen. Urged by anti-government newspapers, urban labourers occupied the spectator section of the Assembly and heckled all those who spoke in favour of the contract. According to Geissler, the crowd, or barra, was permitted to demonstrate "vociferously and without restriction" as the Assembly discussed the legality of the concession. When police attempted to eject the barra for its disruptive behavior, members of the legislative body objected and the mob was allowed to remain. Geissler was obviously disappointed that the President had permitted this unruly group to sway the Assembly. Equally effective, claimed the American Minister, were the President's opponents in the Assembly, such as Manuel Franco, Miguel T. Alvarado, Carlos Pacheco Marroquin and Carlos Enrique Larraondo, who offered relentless opposition to the unpopular contract. 67

On April 4, Minister of Development Ponciano addressed the National Legislative Assembly to argue that the settlement "is equitable and the most advantageous obtainable" and urged that body to reconsider the agreement. 68 Despite this desperate

67 Two years later, these gentlemen were founding members of the Partido Progresista and were members of the 1926 Progressive party directorate. U.S.N.A.-D.S., Geissler to Sec. of St., 27 April, 1923, 814.00\732; Geissler to Sec. of St., 4 May, 1923, 814.00\733; "Programa del Partido Progresista" 20 October, 1926 in Leon Ellis, Charge d'Affaires, to Sec. of St., 21 October, 1926, 814.00\868; Pitti, "Ubico", pp. 154-61, 200-1; Also see Chapter 5 of this thesis.

68 U.S.D.A.-D.S., Geissler to Sec. of St., 4 April, 1923, 814.77\217.
appeal for support, the settlement was dealt a major blow when the non-partisan Committee of Development recommended that the Assembly withhold its approval until a number of issues were clarified. Efforts to secure the passage of the settlement continued to be vehemently opposed by non-government Assembly members and the barra until on April 24 the contract was referred back to the Executive for revision. Cabinet reconvened to interpret various clauses of the agreement and on May 4, the government's and IRCA's representatives accepted five amendments. Important among these were Article 3, which stated that petroleum and its products would not be exempt from taxation, and Articles 4 and 5, in which IRCA agreed not to impose discriminatory freight rates. On May 18, the Committee of Development announced that its concerns had been answered and it recommended the Assembly's acceptance of the revised contract. Although university students, a vehemently anti-government newspaper, El Cuarto Poder, and urban labour

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69U.S.N.A.-D.S., Geissler to Sec. of St., 25 April, 1923, 814.77\221; Geissler to Sec. of St., 27 April, 1923, 814.77\226.

70Bauer Paiz, capital yanqui en Centroamérica, pp. 149-53, U.S.N.A.-D.S., Geissler to Sec. of St., 4 May, 1923, 814.77\235; Geissler to Sec. of St., 10 May, 1923, 814.77\247; Geissler to Sec. of St., 4 June, 1923, 814.77\255.

71U.S.N.A.-D.S., Geissler to Sec. of St., 18 May, 1923, 814.77\248.

72The editor of El Cuarto Poder was Assembly member José A. Quínomez. Quínomez, like the other opponents to the concession, i.e. Pacheco Marroquin, Larraondo, Alvarado and Franco, was one of the founders of the Partido Progresista. U.S.N.A.-D.S., Geissler to Sec. of St., 27 April, 1923,
continued to oppose the settlement, on May 21, the National Legislative Assembly approved IRCA's exclusive right to the Zacapa-Salvadorean railroad concession by a vote of thirty-five to nineteen.\(^73\)

In spite of the resistance his administration encountered to the concessions to American corporations, Orellana was able to secure a major victory for the Liberal government. The student, labour and middle sector efforts were defeated by the Assembly's urban professionals and agro-export elite who banded together to reinforce their privileged position. With business ties to the export industry or as employees of foreign-owned enterprises, the alliance of the elite, the military and urban professionals successfully reestablished its control of the National Legislative Assembly.\(^74\) Following the stormy concession debates of 1923,

814.00\732; Geissler to Sec. of St., 4 May, 1923, 814.00\733; Clarence B. Hewes, Charge d'Affaires, to Sec. of St., 6 September, 1923, 814.00/746; Hewes, to Sec. of St., 13 September, 1923, 814.00/747; "Programa del Partido Progresista" 20 October, 1926 in Ellis to Sec. of St., 21 October, 1926, 814.00/868; Pitti, "Ubico", pp. 154-61, 200-1; Also see Chapter 5 of this thesis.

\(^73\)Tulchin, *The Aftermath of the War*, pp. 192-3; U.S.N.A.-D.S., Geissler to Sec. of St., 23 May, 1923, 814.77\249.

\(^74\)José Nun argues that the Latin American middle class cannot successfully challenge the elite because it was "members of the oligarchy, not of the middle class, who were responsible for the first industrial expansion of any importance, and it was they who organized the new industrial and commercial enterprises, in which the middle class participated only as a second-rate but acquiescent partner." Hence when Latin American governments granted lucrative concessions to foreign companies, the middle class rarely
little opposition to the government arose from that body. When Liberal candidates won all of the thirty-four Assembly seats up for election in December 1925, opposition to the President was all but excluded a voice in the republic's political forum. 75

Students and labour, however, continued to express their dissatisfaction with Orellana's government. Universitarios were one of the few sectors of Guatemalan society willing to risk censorship, arrest, or exile to criticize Liberals for their disaffection for significant reform. Especially unpopular among students was a bill passed by the National Legislative Assembly on April 26, 1924, that considerably altered the method by which the National University was administrated. Student pressure in 1918 had forced ex-president Cabrera to grant the university and its respective colleges a certain degree of autonomy. Between 1918 and 1924 students elected the rector of the University and the Deans of each of the four Departments. However, the new legislation introduced in 1924 ended this practice. The government claimed that because universitarios abused the privilege of autonomy, protested and was even less often successful in efforts to oppose them. Nun, "The Middle Class Military Coup," pp. 80-1; Paul A. Baran, The Longer View: Essays Toward a Critique Of Political Economy (New York and London, 1969), pp. 252-5; Paul A. Baran, The Political Economy of Growth (New York, 1957), pp. 195-6.

75See Chapter 5 for a more detailed description of the 1925 Assembly elections. U.S.N.A.-D.S., Geissler to Sec. of St., 15 December, 1925, 814.00\818.
indulged in "pernicious political activity" and sought to influence the Assembly, action to restrict student protest was necessary. A student strike at which pamphlets filled with "political jibes" and "inuendos of a vulgar character" were directed toward the government further convinced Orellana to suppress student organizations.\textsuperscript{76} Despite vigorous student protest and persistent opposition by three youthful Ubico supporters in the Assembly, José A. Quimonez, Carlos Enrique Larraondo and Carlos Pacheco Marroquin, the government succeeded in passing legislation designed to discourage university activists.\textsuperscript{77} In January 1925 the Assembly passed another bill that required all students of the School of Law to refrain from political agitation before they would be permitted to graduate.\textsuperscript{78} Nonetheless, the National University remained one of the republic's few institutions that consistently advocated reform and was occasionally permitted to challenge the authority of the government. Undaunted by the government's restrictive measures, students and an incipient group of idealistic \textit{ubiquistas} were Orellana's only critics after 1923.

The latter half of Orellana's term in office was

\textsuperscript{76}\textit{U.S.N.A.-D.S.}, Geissler to Sec. of St., 30 April, 1924, 814.42\textbackslash5.

\textsuperscript{77}\textit{Pitti}, "Ubico," pp. 200-1.

\textsuperscript{78}\textit{U.S.N.A.-D.S.}, Geissler to Sec. of St., 14 January, 1925, 814.42\textbackslash6.
primarily dedicated to the consolidation of his grasp on the presidency and the continuance of the Liberal party's supremacy. Frequent suppression of opposition newspapers, legislation restricting labour's right to strike and suspensions of constitutional guarantees strengthened Orellana's firm grip on the government.\textsuperscript{79} Political opposition from any group, either Church-sponsored, labour-oriented or middle class-inspired, was attacked and criticized as Bolshevistic, anti-government, pro-Mexican, and anti-American.\textsuperscript{80}

The political opportunity that began with the overthrow of Cabrera and opened with such hope and optimism was squandered by reformers, Conservatives, and popular organizations and ended by the Liberals. The military acted, the coffee elite were supportive and the middle class obediently assumed its traditionally passive posture. Never an expression of popular will, the Orellana government

\textsuperscript{79} Alexander, Communism in Latin America, pp. 350-52; U.S.N.A.-D.S., Clarence B. Hewes, Charge d'Affaires, to Sec. of St., 6 September, 1923, 814.00\textbackslash 746; Hewes to Sec. of St., 13 September, 1923, 814.00\textbackslash 747; Hewes to Sec. of St., 11 October, 1923, 814.00\textbackslash 754; Geissler to Sec. of St., 24 July, 1924, 814.00\textbackslash 777; Geissler to Sec. of St., 25 May, 1926, 814.00\textbackslash 833; Geissler to Sec. of St., 27 May, 1926, 814.00\textbackslash 838; Geissler to Sec. of St., 1 June, 1926, 814.00\textbackslash 841; Geissler to Sec. of St., 16 June, 1926, 814.00\textbackslash 844.

\textsuperscript{80} U.S.N.A.-D.S., Geissler to Sec. of St., 28 June, 1923, 814.00\textbackslash 737; Geissler to Sec. of St., 30 July, 1925, 814.00\textbackslash 801; Geissler to Sec. of St., 31 May, 1926, 814.00\textbackslash 837; Geissler to Sec. of St., 27 May, 1926, 814.00\textbackslash 838.
proceeded to administer policies that provided the stability and order to which the coffee elite and the officers of the military were accustomed. Orellana's frequent exercise of censorship, force, brutality, and imprisonment to suppress labour unrest and peasant insurrection enabled the Liberal party to exclude all its opponents from the political arena. Hence, by the end of Orellana's presidency, Liberalism was the only permissible expression of political will in the republic.

It is true that, for the moment, Orellana and the Liberals had the situation well-in-hand, but this was so only because the republic had reverted to the traditional form of government by the few, the military, and the wealthy. A trend toward democratization that originated with the overthrow of a ruthless and brutal dictator was temporarily stifled. However, labour, peasants, a handful of university students and a small group of army officers still retained the desire to alter the traditional methods of Guatemalan government. Under Orellana's stifling regime, they quietly gathered their strength for the upcoming presidential election scheduled for 1927.
CHAPTER V

The 1926 Presidential Election

and the Restoration of the Status Quo

Our forefathers had the mistaken idea of planting a democracy, here where the ground had had three hundred years of preparation for a native Indian monarchy.¹

As Orellana's presidency entered 1926, rumours circulated that the President intended to seek a second term in office. For Guatemalans this was no great surprise. After all, the country was in a relative state of stability and prosperity and Orellana had muzzled, exiled, or eliminated most of his political opponents. To many it appeared that Orellana was prepared to become the latest in a long line of Guatemalan caudillos who had imposed themselves on the nation for extended periods of time (e.g. Rafael Carrera, 1838-1865; Justo Rufino Barrios, 1873-1885; Manuel Estrada Cabrera, 1898-1920).² Although Orellana frequently implied that he opposed the idea of re-election, few believed the President was sincere. Undoubtedly, as long as Orellana ruthlessly suppressed his opponents and cultivated the support of the military and the coffee elite, his presidency was secure.

However, it is impossible to determine whether the President was intent on continuing in office because in

¹*El Imparcial*, 14 December, 1925 cited in U.S.N.A.-D.S., Geissler to Sec. of St., 15 December, 1925, 814.00\818.

September 1926, Orellana suffered a fatal heart attack. Unprepared for this dramatic turn of events, Liberal politicians quickly mobilized their supporters to contend for the republic's presidency. Guatemalans presumed that the presidential race would be a contest between two former Cabinet Ministers, Adrián Recinos and Jorge Ubico. Recinos refused to seek the Liberal party's leadership, however, and instead declared his support for the provisional president, General Lázaro Chacón.

Recinos' withdrawal from the presidential race significantly altered the complexion of Guatemalan politics and fostered a discernible split in the Liberal party. Admired for "his modesty, talent, vast culture and chivalry", Recinos was idolized by students and young professionals as the embodiment of civilian liberalismo. Extremely disappointed in their mentor's actions, progressive minded Liberals flocked to the Ubico camp. Renowned for efficiency, honesty, and regarded somewhat as a reformer, Ubico represented a diverse urban-based movement that expressed a desire to alter the traditional methods of Liberal government. Although it is unlikely that Ubico was committed to the mélange of radical ideologies enthusiastically espoused by his fervent supporters, his campaign could not avoid alarming a large segment of the traditional Liberal party.

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3J.J. Arévalo, La inquietud normalista, p. 143.
As a consequence, the 1926 presidential election rapidly became a struggle between the forces of change, reform, and youth represented by Ubico and the interests of wealth, power, reaction and the status quo championed by Chacón. Disillusioned by almost six years of Liberal repression and disrespect for constitutional liberties, a small group of idealistic university students, young urban professionals, and reformist army officers, attempted to challenge the Liberal party's exclusive domain, the republic's executive office. Ultimately, they failed to achieve their objective and with their defeat, the spirit of reform that had originated almost a decade earlier was suppressed. Since the end of the First World War, a generation of Guatemalans from diverse social, political and economic backgrounds had banded together to improve Guatemalan society. Although they often differed in their vision of the future and how they would achieve their goals, this group had one thing in common: all were convinced a restructuring of the republic's social, political and/or economic institutions was necessary. The 1926 presidential election marked the generation's final political opportunity of the decade to alter the repressive, reactionary, and exploitative fabric of Guatemalan society.

The General Treaty of Peace and Amity of 1923 and the Washington Treaty of 1907, both of which Guatemala had signed,
forbade immediate reelection for Guatemalan presidents.⁴ Therefore, Orellana's six-year presidency was due to terminate in March 1928, and an election to determine his successor was scheduled for December 1927.

In 1925, Orellana repeatedly assured the nation that his intentions were honourable and that he had absolutely no desire to seek another term in office. On November 1, Orellana issued a public statement that categorically denied any personal ambition to continue in the presidency.

My greatest glory [, proclaimed the President,] would be to establish in my country, in a practical way, the principle of presidential non-reelection. You may rest assured that I shall keep my word which was given to the Liberal party at the time I entered upon the duties of the presidential office; and on different occasions to my fellow countrymen in the press. I shall surrender the presidency at the termination of my term of office to the person designated by popular vote to succeed me.⁵

Despite such declarations, as the President entered the second half of his term, Guatemalans increasingly speculated as to whether Orellana would voluntarily resign in March, 1928. Most Guatemalans were convinced that the possibility of Orellana conceding the office was extremely slight. This

⁴U.S.N.A.-D.S., Geissler to Sec. of St., 2 July, 1925, 814.00\797; Curtis to Sec. of St., 22 February, 1922; 814.00\653; Curtis to Sec. of St., 22 February, 1922, 814.00/659; Munro, The United States and the Caribbean Republics, 1921-1933, pp. 124-5; Langley, The Banana Wars, pp. 175-7.

⁵Statement issued by President Orellana, 4 November, 1925 in U.S.N.A.-D.S., Leon G. Ellis, Charge d'Affaires, to Sec. of St., 4 November, 1925, 814.00\814.
pessimism was, in part, a function of the fact that in the half century prior to Orellana's presidential inauguration, every change in the Guatemalan executive was characterized by turmoil, intrigue, violence, and fraud. Thus, it is not surprising that Guatemalans were skeptical when Don Chema announced he would not pursue the Latin American tendency of continuismo. Among those most concerned with the President's intentions was Orellana's ex-Secretary of War, Jorge Ubico.

Ubico's illustrious political and military career was well-known in Guatemala. Born in Guatemala City in December 1878, Jorge Ubico y Castaneda was the son of Arturo Ubico y Ursuela and Matilde Castaneda y Castaneda. A member of one of Guatemala's most prominent Liberal families, Jorge Ubico attended the nation's most prestigious schools and, at the age of sixteen, entered Guatemala's military academy, the Escuela Politécnica. Although Ubico never graduated from the military college, in 1897, his father was able to secure his son a commission as a second lieutenant in the infantry.

In 1906, during the war against Guatemalan rebels in Salvador and Honduras, Ubico served as an adjutant to one of Guatemala's most distinguished generals, Manuel Maria Aguilar. 

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6 U.S.N.A.-D.S, G-2 United States Naval Intelligence Report, 10 December, 1925, 814.00\824; J.J. Arévalo, La inquietud normalista, p. 147; Handy, Gift, pp. 58-92.

7 Jones, Guatemala, p. 70; Pitti, "Ubico", pp. 1-5; Grieb, Guatemalan Caudillo, p. 6; For a slightly less flattering description of Ubico and his early life, Krehm, Democracies and Tyrannies, pp. 32-4.
Santa Maria. Subsequently, Ubico received a medal of honour for "his valor, his boldness and his precision in carrying out orders" and was promoted to colonel on the General Staff.\(^8\) Ubico quickly drew the attention of President Cabrera and in 1907, after only one year as a member of the General Staff, Ubico was appointed jefe político and commandante de armas of Guatemala's most important coffee-producing department, Alta Verapaz.\(^9\)

Soon after the young colonel assumed the duties of the government's most senior public servant in the department, Ubico began to alienate the region's influential and economically powerful German coffee producers.\(^10\) Guatemala's 1894 Labour Code, designed to "stimulate work" and "discourage vagrancy", had granted finca owners extensive authority to exploit native labourers.\(^11\) Hence, it was understandable that Ubico's efforts to expand the state's control over the


\(^9\)Jones, Guatemala, p. 70; Pitti, "Ubico", p. 7; Grieb, Guatemalan Caudillo, p. 6.

\(^10\)There are no statistics available for the earlier periods, but in 1921 foreign planters in Alta Verapaz (the vast majority Germans) owned 303,934 manzanas of the Department's coffee-producing land. Guatemalan growers, on the other hand possessed only 112,991 manzanas. Note: 1 manzana = 1.7 acres. Jones, Guatemala, p. 207.

department's Indian labourers were vehemently opposed by the coffee growers of the region. In 1909, after two years of failed attempts to bribe the uncorruptible jepe politico, the German planters of Alta Verapaz convinced Cabrera to remove Ubico.\(^\text{12}\)

Ubico returned to public office in 1911 as the jepe politico of Guatemala's north-western department, Retalhuleu. It was in this position that the colonel became renowned for his efficiency, honesty, cruelty, and dedication to progress. After eight years of service in Retalhuleu, Ubico was summoned by the President to direct a national commission to combat an outbreak of yellow fever in the republic. In concert with the efforts of the International Health Board, Ubico's 1919 campaign successfully cleansed the nation of the pestilence in less than one year.\(^\text{13}\) Impressed by the colonel's organizational talents and his unrelenting energy, one member of the International Health Board exclaimed, "What a great President General Ubico would make."\(^\text{14}\) Ubico's accomplishments were also noted by the United States State Department. In 1919 when the Department inquired whether the colonel would succeed

\(^{12}\)Pitti, "Ubico", pp. 7-8; Handy, Gift, p. 90.

\(^{13}\)El Di$\text{a}$, 20 October, 1926 included in U.S.N.A.-D.S., Leon Ellis, Charge d'Affaires, to Sec. of St., 21 October, 1926, 814.00/867; Pitti, "Ubico", pp. 9-15; Grieb, Guatemalan Caudillo, p. 6; Grieb, "American Involvement in the Rise of Jorge Ubico", p. 12.

\(^{14}\)El Di$\text{a}$, 20 October, 1926 in U.S.D.A.-D.S., Ellis, to Sec. of St., 21 October, 1926, 814.00/867.
Cabrera, the American Minister replied, Ubico "is without fear of contradiction, the best of all the Jefes politicos in Guatemala and a man of extraordinary ability; and he is of presidential timber." 15

Following the overthrow of Estrada Cabrera, Herrera selected Ubico to occupy the post of Chief of Staff for the Army. Opposition to his appointment and Ubico's own misgivings as to the authority he would possess convinced him to decline the position. 16 For the duration of the Herrera administration, the recently promoted General decided that it was most expedient to avoid political commitments. Ubico's patience paid dividends in January 1922, when the junta chose him to assume the duties of Secretary of War and in March he was named First Designate to the presidency. Although Ubico did not actively participate in the actions that facilitated the resignation of Herrera, Ubico's appointment to the Orellana Cabinet reflects the young General's rapid rise to prominence. His impeccable reputation coupled with the Cabinet's most important office, elevated Ubico to the highest echelons of Guatemalan politics. In 1922 and 1923, Jorge Ubico was at the zenith of his political career with perhaps only the President

15 U.S.N.A.-D.S., William Phillips, Acting Sec. of St., to United States Legation in Guatemala, 14 February, 1919, 814.00\295a; Thurston to Sec. of St., 1 April, 1919, 814.00\299.

16 U.S.N.A.-D.S., McMillin to Sec. of St., 17 March, 1921, 814.00\535.
possessing more influence in the government.¹⁷

Despite Don Jorge's adept skills as an administrator and the loyalty he demonstrated to the government during the revolts of 1922, Ubico became expendable in the spring of 1923. After Ubico helped extinguish the administration's external threats, Orellana was less dependent on the support of the contending factions in the Liberal party and able to impose his will more freely on the government. Consequently, on 21 March, 1923, the President resolved the protracted Cabinet dispute between Ubico and the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Recinos, when Orellana accepted each gentleman's resignation.¹⁸

Recinos, who had served ex-President Cabrera as Undersecretary for Foreign Affairs, was considered to be the most prominent of the civilian Liberals when he assumed the office of the Minister of Foreign Affairs in March 1922. Described as a man of "some wealth.... sincerely pro-American.... of high character and aims, but an idealist of little practical [political] experience", Recinos struggled

¹⁷For a more complete discussion of Ubico's activities during the Orellana presidency see Chapter IV of this thesis; Pitti, "Ubico", pp. 72-78; Grieb, Guatemalan Caudillo, pp. 6-7, Krehm, Guatemala, p. 34.

¹⁸U.S.N.A.-D.S., Geissler to Sec. of St., 21 May, 1923, 814.002/36.
with Ubico to assert his political will on the Cabinet. 19 Even after Recinos and Ubico resigned from the Cabinet and returned to civilian life, they continued to exert considerable influence on the government. However, in October political tensions between the supporters of Ubico and Recinos declined, at least temporarily, when Orellana appointed Recinos Guatemala's Minister to France. 20

To a large degree, Ubico's and Recinos' mutual animosity can be explained by their desires to succeed Orellana in the presidency. Elections were slated for December 1927 and when the topic of possible successors to the President was raised, invariably Ubico's name was among those most frequently mentioned. Ubico's family ties to the Liberal Revolution of 1871 and the close relationship between Barrios, El Reformador, and Ubico's father were definite assets to Don Jorge's desire to assume the presidency. His family's recognized status as a member of the nation's coffee elite and his considerable wealth provided Ubico with the necessary social, economic and political attributes to vie for the country's executive. Furthermore, as a member of the Guatemalan military, Ubico expected to receive the unquestioned support of the exclusively Liberal institution.


20 U.S.D.A.-D.S., Clarence B. Hewes, Charge d'Affaires, to Sec. of St., 25 October, 1923, 814.00\757.
Don Jorge's illustrious military career, his impressive administrative and organizational skills, and the commitment to stability that he demonstrated by ruthlessly suppressing the revolts in August 1922, reaffirmed Ubico's status as the most likely successor to Orellana.

However, not all Guatemalans were willing to concede the presidency to Ubico. Although Ubico was highly respected within the military, he often alienated potential supporters by his tendency "to arrive at snap judgements...without a thorough or proper knowledge of the situation...[and to] oppose suggestions which do not agree with his preconceived ideas." Furthermore, Ubico's opponents claimed that during his term as jefe politico in Retalhuleu, Don Jorge frequently employed excessively cruel and ruthless measures to achieve his objectives. Indeed, some claimed that if Ubico assumed the executive, his presidency "would be worse than Estrada Cabrera's."22

After his retirement from public life in 1923, Liberal politicians suspected that Ubico and his supporters were fostering opposition to government legislation.23 In July, 24

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21U.S.N.A.-D.S., Southgate to Sec. of St., 14 July, 1922, 814.00\699.

22Vicente Martinez, a Chacón supporter from western Guatemala, cited in J.J. Are'valo, La inquietud normalista, p. 145.

23See Chapter IV; U.S.N.A.-D.S., Geissler to Sec. of St., 16 March, 1923, 814.00\729; Geissler to Sec. of St., 27 April, 1923, 814.00\732; Geissler to Sec. of St., 4 May, 1923, 814.00\733; Geissler to Sec. of St., 1 June, 1923, 814.00\734;
Ubico encouraged these rumours when he refused to attend a banquet held by Generals of the army to honour the President. Noticeably absent from the function, Ubico was the only General not to attend the affair. It is unclear if Don Jorge consciously cultivated the appearance of discord to distance himself from the policies of Orellana. Such a plan might have secured the ubiquistas considerable political rewards if the Orellana government failed to satisfy the interests of the landed coffee elite.

Between 1921 and 1927, however, the Guatemalan economy expanded rapidly as the decline in coffee prices halted and rebounded from 10.7 cents U.S. per pound in 1921 to 25 cents per pound U.S. in 1927. Simultaneously, an equally dramatic turnaround occurred in almost every sector of the Guatemalan economy. In 1921 Guatemalan exports valued $12,130,890. Six years later, exports had sky-rocketed to $28,568,560; an increase of over 133 per cent. As a result of the

Geissler to Sec. of St., 7 June, 1923, 814.00\735; Geissler to Sec. of St., 17 July, 1923, 814.00\742; Hewes to Sec. of St., 13 December, 1923, 814.00\769.

24U.S.N.A.-D.S., Geissler to Sec. of St., 17 July, 1923, 814.00/742.

25U.S.N.A.-D.S., Geissler to Sec. of St., 30 July, 1925, 814.00/801.

agricultural export boom, Guatemala possessed Central America's highest growth rate in the first half of the decade.\(^\text{27}\)

In the same period, Guatemala's financial situation experienced a remarkable recovery. The Unionist government, burdened by debt, high interest rates and a general economic recession, produced national deficits in 1920 and 1921 of $893,075 and $2,626,269 U.S. respectively.\(^\text{28}\) By 1924, however, the Orellana government balanced the national budget and even recorded a small surplus. In 1925 and 1926, the Orellana administration registered substantial budgetary surpluses of $505,905 and $152,115.\(^\text{29}\)

Partly as a consequence of the general prosperity of the Guatemalan economy and, in particular, the dramatic economic recovery in the coffee industry, the Orellana government reached new levels of popularity in the country. This was especially true among the landed coffee elite and the urban middle class who reaped the bulk of the benefits from economic prosperity. Undoubtedly, they hoped that the policies of


\(^{28}\)U.S.N.A.-D.S., British Report on the Financial and Economic Conditions in Guatemala, November 1922, Geissler to Sec. of St., 27 December, 1922, 814.51\414.

\(^{29}\)Grieb, *Caudillo*, p. 54; U.S.N.A.-D.S., Geissler to Sec. of St., 26 March, 1926, 814.51\523.
orellanismo would be extended into the second half of the decade.\textsuperscript{30}

The economic and financial successes of Orellana were not encouraging for Jorge Ubico's presidential aspirations. Increasingly impatient with the President's ban on all forms of non-governmental political activity, Ubico embarked on a campaign to discredit his opponents in the Liberal party.\textsuperscript{31} Although Ubico and his circle of supporters did not sever their ties completely with the traditional Liberals, *ubiquistas* warned that if the party supported some other Liberal's presidential nomination in 1927, Ubico would be forced to declare himself an independent candidate. Consequently, throughout 1924, Liberal's speculated whether the President would prefer Ubico or Recinos. Many believed that Orellana had secretly decided to reward Recinos' unwavering display of party loyalty by supporting his presidential bid. At the same, it was rumoured that Don Jorge's alleged opposition to the President had prompted Don Chema to oppose Ubico.\textsuperscript{32} Increasingly convinced that the Liberal party would not support his candidacy in 1927, Ubico

\textsuperscript{30}U.S.N.A.-D.S., Geissler to Sec. of St., 30 July, 1925, 814.00/801.

\textsuperscript{31}U.S.N.A.-D.S., Geissler to Sec. of St., 2 June, 1925, 814.00/795; Geissler to Sec. of St., 30 July, 1925, 814.00/801.

\textsuperscript{32}U.S.N.A.-D.S., Geissler to Sec. of St., 30 July, 1925, 814.00/801.
began to search for other disgruntled Liberals.

Not surprisingly, Don Jorge was not the only member of Guatemala's coffee elite who was unhappy with Orellana's administration. Sectional animosity that pitted politicians of the west (occidentales) against their opponents in the east (orientes) had always characterized the republic's political struggles. During the reign of Estrada Cabrera, a native of Quetzaltenango, government officials from the west tended to dominate political affairs. However, during the Orellana regime, the President, a zacapaneco, preferred to choose citizens from the eastern region of the republic.33

Partly due to Orellana's affinity for eastern Liberal officials, 304 prominent Guatemala merchants, industrialists and agricultores, petitioned the President in the autumn of 1923 to govern according to the Constitution and assure western coffee planters a sufficient rural labour force. Disturbed by Orellana's unwillingness to permit political opposition, western fingueros and merchants threatened to revolt if they were not allowed to form their own political party, the Nationalist party. According to a Manifesto issued in October, the principal object of the party would be "to aid capital and drive the plague of Bolshevism from Guatemala."34

33U.S.N.A.-D.S., Ellis to Sec. of St., 1 April, 1925, 814.00/792.

34U.S.N.A.-D.S., Hewes to Sec. of St., 27 September, 1923, 814.00/750; Hewes to Sec. of St., 27 September, 1923, 814.00/751; Hewes to Sec. of St., 2 October, 1923, 814.00/752; Hewes to Sec. of St., 22 October, 1923, 814.00/758; Hewes to
The planters' major grievance was related to the actions of several jefes políticos and military commanders in western departments. Cafelateros claimed that government officials used their arbitrary powers to conscript labourers in the countryside to punish finca owners who did not support the Liberal party or who refused to pay bribes. Military commanders, they complained, frequently drafted the labourers of property owners who refused to comply with the commissioners' monetary demands and exempted the workers on the fincas of his friends. Furthermore, they reported, jefes políticos "have even taken...the peons from one agriculturalist and turned them over to another." 35

On October 22, the President and the Nationalists temporarily settled their differences in a tentative accord. 36 However, military commanders continued to harass labourers and finqueros and, consequently, a spokesman for the Nationalists announced in December that "the people of the occidental provinces unanimously desire to secede from Guatemala." 37 Less than a week later, it was reported that the

Sec. of St., 6 December, 1923, 814.00/767.

35U.S.N.A.-D.S., Hewes to Sec. of St., 22 October, 1923, 814.00/758; Hewes to Sec. of St., 30 November, 1923, 814.00/765; Casey, "Indigenismo", p. 93.

36Ibid.

37U.S.N.A.-D.S., Hewes to Sec. of St., 27 September, 1923, 814.00/750; Hewes to Sec. of St., 27 September, 1923, 814.00/751; Hewes to Sec. of St., 2 October, 1923, 814.00/752; Hewes to Sec. of St., 22 October, 1923, 814.00/758; General John Drummond, spokesman for the Nationalist party, cited in
Nationalists invited Don Jorge to lead their party. An owner of several coffee fincas himself, Ubico was the obvious choice to represent their party. Ubico sympathized with their concerns and described Orellana as "incompetent and vacillating", but nonetheless, declined their request. Unfortunately, Ubico informed the Nationalists, he was unable to accept the position because he "had promised the President, on his retirement from the Cabinet, that he would not participate in any movement against him."\(^{38}\)

It is doubtful that Ubico's pledge to the President dissuaded him from assuming the leadership of the Nationalists. Perhaps Ubico still believed Orellana would honour his commitment to step down at the end of his term and support him as the party's 1927 candidate. However, the discontent expressed by western finqueros in 1923-24 might have signalled to Ubico that it was possible to defeat the traditional Liberals with the support of dissident western Liberals and coffee finqueros. Hence, it was plausible that Orellana's association with the eastern wing of the party coupled with Ubico's popularity as a member of the military and the coffee elite, could catapult an independent, ubiquista Liberal party to power.

\(^{38}\)U.S.N.A.-D.S., Hewes to Sec. of St., 13 December, 1923, 814.00/769.
Frustrated by Orellana's refusal to select a successor and aware that a portion of the western Liberal party was disaffected by Orellana's administration, a small group of Ubico supporters began to discuss the possibility of founding a new political party. On May 10, 1925 six men, Carlos Pacheco Marroquin, Carlos Enrique Larraondo, José A. Quimenez, J. Mariano Trabinino, Federico Alvarado Fajardo and Manuel Franco met in Guatemala City to found the Partido Progresista (PP). Larraondo, Pacheco Marroquin, Franco and Quimenez were prominent members of the National Legislative Assembly. Each had frequently opposed the government's legislation to restrict the political activities of students, and the lucrative concessions to IRCA and EBSC. The new party was formed with three objectives in mind: "the immediate reform of the Constitution...the triumph of justice and...[the implementation] of administrative honesty." To emphasize the ideals of the organization, the members declared that the party was based upon principles rather than men. This claim is questionable, however, since all the founders had been associated with Ubico for several years and it was Don Jorge

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39 See Chapter IV.

40 "Programa del Partido Progresista", 20 October, 1926, included in U.S.N.A.-D.S., Ellis to Sec. of St., 21 October, 1926, 814.00/868.
who soon after the party's inception assumed its leadership.\textsuperscript{41}

In addition to the party's idealistic objectives, the PP was designed to achieve another more concrete goal. Elections were scheduled to be held in December for thirty-four of the National Legislative Assembly's sixty-nine seats. Although the Progresistas did not expect to secure a majority in the Assembly, it was hoped that disgruntled western Liberals and Nationalists would be persuaded by Ubico and his followers to abandon the traditional party.\textsuperscript{42} If marginally successful, Ubico and his disciples would secure a platform from which they could attack the government and oppose Orellana if he chose to continue in office. Hence, the party aimed at building a base of support for Ubico's presidential bid in December 1927.

Nonetheless, the new party was not founded with the purpose of opposing the ideals of Liberalism. The Partido Progresista was a faction of the Liberal party, dedicated to the principles of Liberalism and advocated no reforms that would significantly alter the structure of Guatemalan society. Basically, it reflected the political ambitions of Ubico and a group of disgruntled western Guatemalan Liberals who had

\textsuperscript{41}Pitti, "Ubico", p. 161; U.S.N.A.-D.S., Geissler to Sec. of St., 30 July, 1925, 814.00/801; Geissler to Sec. of St., 10 December, 1925, 814.00/817.

\textsuperscript{42}U.S.N.A.-D.S., Geissler to Sec. of St., 10 December, 1925, 814.00/817.
been denied political offices by the President. The Progressives hoped they could capitalize politically from the dissatisfaction expressed by some sectors of Guatemalan society. But this did not mean that the party was an advocate of radical change. Indeed, other than a slight degree of sectional animosity, the American representative could identify no significant difference between the Progresistas and the traditional Liberal party.43

To demonstrate the party's commitment to Guatemalan Liberalism, Ubico made an interesting gesture in the fall of 1925. In August, Leonardo Lara, a prominent Progressive, was instructed to inform the President that the PP "would not tolerate any disturbances the Conservatives might foment" in the upcoming Assembly elections. It must be stressed that even if it was politically expedient, the PP would not sacrifice its pledge to Liberalism. There was to be no misunderstandings; if confronted with Conservative or popular unrest, the President was assured of Progressive support. Although there was little likelihood of Conservative opposition, it is significant to note that the organization never contemplated incorporating other non-Liberal principles into the party's platform.44

43U.S.N.A.-D.S., Ellis to Sec. of St., 1 April, 1925, 814.00/792.

44U.S.N.A.-D.S., Ellis to Sec. of St., 26 August, 1925, 814.00/807.
Despite its commitment to Liberalism, the 1925 progressive campaign was a political disaster. Although the PP entered candidates in each of the thirty-four constituencies, not a single Progresista was elected. Even the American Minister admitted that the incredibly poor showing by the Progresistas was a surprise. Geissler attributed the PP's defeat to two important factors. First, he acknowledged that the government party was likely guilty of a number of electoral abuses and that claims by opposition candidates to this effect were, to a large extent, justified. However, voter turnout was abnormally low and Geissler attributed this to the Liberal's widespread popularity in the republic. Hence, he concluded, voter apathy reflected the desire of Guatemalans to free the Orellana administration "from such systematic and, at times, obstructive opposition as it has had in the Assembly during the past four years."45

The resounding defeat of the Progresistas in the 1925 National Legislative Assembly elections was a serious blow to the presidential aspirations of Ubico. Unwilling to permit Don Chema to dictate his political future, Ubico had been determined to create his own political opportunities. In the

45. Complete election returns are not available, however, the State Department records suggest that in only fifteen of the thirty-four constituencies did the Liberals encounter significant opposition. In these fifteen ridings the totals were: Liberals: 23,762; Progressive Liberals: 5,017. U.S.N.A.-D.S., Geissler to Sec. of St., 10 December, 1925, 814.00/817; Geissler to Sec. of St., 15 December, 1925, 814.00/818.
aftermath of his party's dismal showing in the elections, however, it now appeared Don Jorge would accept his fate as dictated by the President. Whether Orellana opted to seek another term or to reward Recinos' patience, Ubico was politically powerless to oppose him. However, a strange turn of events changed the complexion of the upcoming elections entirely. As a result, Orellana would neither complete his term and step down from office, nor pursue the presidency for a second time.

Early in the morning of September 26, 1926, President Orellana suffered a fatal heart attack. The same day, the First Designate, General Lázaro Chacón, with the authority of Executive Decree 927, proclaimed himself President of the republic. On September 27, Chacón's first act as president was to issue a manifesto in which he declared,

I shall carry on the same administrative political programs of the Government as my predecessor...I shall not diverge from it in any way, because it stands for order, peace, honor, work and progress; because following it, I am sure of contributing...as the illustrious General Orellana did with such brilliance, to the positive benefit of the country.

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47 U.S.N.A.-D.S., Ellis to Sec. of St., 15 October, 1926, 814.00\864; Ellis to Sec. of St., 26 September, 1926, 814.00 Or 3\4; Francisco Sa'nchez Latour, Guatemalan Minister in Washington, to Sec. of St., 27 September, 1926, 814.00 Or 3\5; Ellis to Sec. of St., 30 September, 1926, 814.00 Or 3\7.
48 U.S.N.A.-D.S., Ellis to Sec. of St., 15 October, 1926, 814.00\864.
49 U.S.N.A.-D.S., Manifesto of President Chacón, 27 September, 1926, in Ellis to Sec. of St., 30 September, 1926,
With the country in the midst of a remarkable economic boom, Chacón clearly indicated his intention to emulate the politics of Orellana and was equally determined to prevent unrest. The new President warned,

during the period of my administration all citizens shall enjoy the protection of the law, but...regardless of the cost, in no way nor for any reason, am I disposed to tolerate the least breach of public order which can be preserved by me in fulfilling my duties with the greatest and severest energy, and without exceptions of any kind. 50

The President's September 27 manifesto was enthusiastically received by the members of the Liberal party. Only three days after he vowed to commit himself to the ideals of peace, progress, and order, the party's Board of Directors recommended to all Liberal clubs in the republic to promote the candidacy of Chacón. The party's Directors urged its members to promote "our candidate", General Chacón, "as he has proven himself to be a true Liberal, a just and patriotic citizen; and stands...for the success and tranquility of the country". 51 Assured of the unified support of the Liberal executive, Chacón announced on October 2, 1926 that the

50 U.S.N.A.-D.S., Manifesto of President Chacón, 27 September, 1926, in Ellis to Sec. of St., 30 September, 1926, 814.001 Or 3/7.

51 J. J. Arévalo, La inquietud normalista, p. 144; U.S.N.A.-D.S., A circular telegram addressed to the presidents of the Liberal clubs in all parts of the republic, signed by Félix Castellanos, president, and Silverio Guerra, secretary of the Liberal party, 30 September, 1926, in Ellis to Sec. of St., 8 October, 1926, 814.00/857.
presidential elections that were originally slated for December 1927, would take place on December 3rd, 4th and 5th, 1926.52

Reports of Chacón's character vary. However, one description in particular deserves special attention. Shortly after Chac'n assumed the presidency, the Minister of the American legation in San Salvador, Jefferson Caffery, sent an interesting communique. In an informal conversation with Caffery, the President of El Salvador, Dr. Alfonso Quimonez, voiced his concern about the recent political developments in Guatemala. President Quimonez claimed that the forty-six year old Chacón "was a man of very little intelligence, less education and no experience in government affairs."53 Furthermore, continued the President, Chacón had been selected as the First Designate because he was a boyhood friend of General Orellana. Orellana chose Chacón, suggested Quimonez, because the ex-President never doubted Chacón's loyalty nor did he pose a political threat. The Salvadorean President warned, however, that if Chacón was successful in his bid for the presidency, "he would be completely dominated by a certain group of Liberals who...were a particularly bad lot."54

52U.S.N.A.-D.S., Presidential Decree No. 930 in Ellis to Sec. of St., 5 October, 1926, 814.00\856.

53U.S.N.A.-D.S., Jefferson Caffery, Minister of American Legation in El Salvador, to Sec. of St., 4 November, 1926, 814.00/880.

54Ibid.
Throughout October, the Minister of Guatemala in Washington, Francisco Sánchez Latour, expressed similar concerns and doubted whether Chacón possessed the necessary qualities to assume the presidency. In conversations with State Department officials, Sánchez described Chacón as "an excellent man of fine character" yet, one who "had neither the political experience nor the education to fill the difficult position". Latour, like Quimonez, suggested that Chacón "had fallen into the hands of a group of politicians who were using him for their own [political and economic] ends." The Guatemalan Minister informed the Department that when Orellana was alive his most likely successor was undoubtedly either Jorge Ubico or Adrián Recinos. Recinos, aware that Ubico would secure a much larger following in the military and possibly a greater portion of the land owning coffee elite, decided to withdraw his candidacy and support Chacón. Latour, like President Quimonez of El Salvador, was convinced that Chacón was a political lightweight who Recinos and other members of the Liberal Party intended to dominate.

55 U.S.N.A.-D.S., a conversation between Herbert Stabler, Chief of Latin American Division, and Sánchez Latour, recorded by Stokeley Morgan, Assistant Chief of Latin American Division, 19 October, 1926, 814.00/871.

56 Ibid.

57 Ibid.; U.S.N.A.-D.S., Caffery to Sec. of St., 4 November, 1926, 814.00/880; Caffery to Sec. of St., 6 November, 1926, 814.00/889; J.J. Arévalo, La inguietud normalista, p. 144.
A week of furious activity followed the death of President Orellana. Politically rejuvenated, Ubico and the Progresistas focused their efforts on the unconstitutionality of Chacón's nomination as a presidential candidate. Throughout 1925 and the spring of 1926, Progresistas and pro-Ubico supporters had consistently demanded that Orellana assemble a constitutional convention. The purpose of the convention would be to amend the constitution so that presidents would not be permitted to seek a second term in office. It should be noted that the National Assembly had already passed legislation to this effect, however, Progresistas pointed out that an amendment was necessary so that the constitution complied with the Treaty of Peace and Amity of 1923. Orellana was reluctant to do this, however, because he claimed a constitutional convention was not only inopportune, but would plunge the country into ten or twelve months of unnecessary political agitation.

Orellana's refusal to entrench an amendment that disallowed reelection had serious repercussions for the presidential candidates and the upcoming election. According to the General Treaty of Peace and Amity previously accepted

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58U.S.N.A.-D.S., Geissler to Sec. of St., 27 April, 1923, 814.00/732; Geissler to Sec. St., 2 July, 1925, 814.00/797; Geissler to Sec. of St., 27 May, 1926, 814.00/838; Munro, The United States and the Caribbean Republics, pp. 124-5.

59U.S.N.A.-D.S., Geissler to Sec. of St., 27 May, 1926, 814.00/838; Geissler to Sec. of St., 16 June, 1926, 814.00/844.
by the National Legislative Assembly, all Central American presidents were prohibited from maintaining themselves in office from one presidential term to the next. In late September and early October 1926, ubiquistas frequently requested that the American Legation clarify a number of the agreement's clauses to determine whether Chacón's candidacy was contrary to the conference. As a party to the Treaty, it was understandable that the Department was asked to interpret the document. Nonetheless, the Department consistently refused to answer the Progresista concerns. Although the State Department recognized the illegality of Chacón's presidential candidacy as stipulated by the terms of the Treaty, it concluded that State Department opposition to his candidacy would produce few significant benefits and would only promote Guatemalan allegations of American interference. 60

As an experienced Guatemalan politician, Ubico was understandably concerned that Chacón was permitted to seek the presidency. In Guatemalan politics, presidential incumbents frequently employed questionable electoral techniques to secure their victories. Indeed, as the government, the advantage the Liberal party exercised in the electoral process could seriously jeopardize the Progressive's chances of a presidential victory. Hence, a brief discussion of the

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60 U.S.N.A.-D.S., Ellis to Sec. of St., 4 October, 1926, 814.00\851; Ellis to Sec. of St., 1 October, 1926, 814.00\852; Ellis to Sec. of St., 14 October, 1926, 814.00\853; Ellis to Sec. of St., 5 October, 1926, 814.00\855.
electoral process, its structure and its deficiencies is useful to understand the criticisms the Progresistas levied in the latter half of 1926.

The republic was divided into sixty-nine electoral districts. Presiding over each district was an electoral board that consisted of the largest town's alcalde, or mayor, three prominent citizens selected by the alcalde, and the municipal secretary. After the National Legislative Assembly determined the date for the election, individuals were required to present proof of citizenship to the electoral committee to be eligible to vote. On voting day, voters were to enter before the committee and "announce in a loud voice" the name of the candidate of their choice. They were then to sign their name opposite to their candidate's. Each day after voting was completed, the totals were announced, and at the end of the voting period, the ballots were tallied and sent to the victorious candidate and copies to the Minister of Government and Justice.

The electoral process rarely functioned fairly and even less often followed the guidelines prescribed by the law. According to a 1925 United States Naval Intelligence report,

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61 For Articles of the Guatemalan Constitution of 1879 that pertain to citizenship requirements see Articles 8 and 9 in U.S.D.A.-D.S., Curtis to Sec. of St., 25 January, 1922, 814.00/643; G-2, United States Naval Intelligence Report, 10 December, 1925, 814.00/824.

62 U.S.N.A.-D.S., G-2 United States Naval Intelligence Report, 10 December, 1925, 814.00\824.
the centralized nature of the national government was frequently responsible for the failure of Guatemala's electoral process to represent the popular will. The president's prerogative to appoint the jefes políticos of each department was the main instrument by which the government exercised undue influence on electoral bodies. Jefes políticos, who were invariably army officers especially chosen for their loyalty to the president, were empowered to remove alcaldes whenever they chose to do so. Hence, if alcaldes desired to remain in favour with the most influential public official in the department, it was obviously in their best interests to satisfy the electoral demands of the president and the department's governor. Moreover, jefes políticos were the sole distributors of national government funds in municipal regions. Thus, alcaldes were, without exception, extremely reliant on the appropriations of the central government. As a consequence, election results in Guatemala were often disputed and without exception suspect. The existence of a highly centralized presidency and a constitution that made it relatively easy for the executive to impose his political will on local electoral committees frequently enabled Guatemalan presidents to remain in office indefinitely.63

Almost immediately following Chacón's selection as the

63Ibid.; Casey, "Indigenismo", p. 90.
Liberal candidate for the December election, *ubiquistas* accused the President's supporters of unfair campaign practices. During the week preceding October 8, 1926, the American Legation in Guatemala received several letters that alleged military authorities in the departments actively discouraged the organization of regional Progressive Party clubs and promoted the candidacy of Chacón. According to one Progresista account, the military chief of Canales, in the Department of Amatitlán, prevented Ubico supporters from campaigning freely. Furthermore, the officer had threatened that if they continued to oppose Chacón's candidacy, all members of the movement in the region would be forced into military service. Other prominent *ubiquistas* claimed that a similar incident occurred in San Marcos. There it was reported that the Department's *jefe politico*, Colonel Salvador Bercian, publicly stated that he would do everything in his power to prevent the nomination of Ubico to the presidency.64 Another account complained that on October 2, Ignacio Rodríguez Medina, an Ubico sympathizer, verbally attacked the character and actions of Adrián Recinos, the president of the Liberal Party. A few days later, Rodríguez was severely beaten, apparently in retaliation for the criticisms. A third letter testified that government employees who expressed their support for Ubico were transferred to the most remote parts

64U.S.N.A.-D.S., Ellis to Sec. of St., 8 October, 1926, 814.00/857.
of the republic as punishment for their activities. 65

Such actions reaffirmed the fears of Ubico supporters who were convinced that it would be impossible for their candidate to secure the presidency if Chacón was permitted to seek election. Furthermore, the incidents demonstrate the overwhelming approval Chacón received from the jefes políticos and army officers in the departments. Enthusiastically supported by the military and the Liberal Party, chacónistas imposed their will on district electoral committees and the electorate.

Geissler’s interim replacement at the American Legation, Leon H. Ellis, claimed that Chacón was entirely committed to the practice of "complete freedom in the dissemination of political propaganda" in the republic. Nonetheless, he conceded, military commanders frequently interfered in the election process and, in some cases, "expelled Ubico supporters from their Departments and...threatened the organizers of the Progressive clubs with military service." Although Ellis viewed these activities as unfortunate, he explained that such irregularities were "inevitable" when the Chief of State and the Commander in Chief of the Army was a candidate in the election. 66

In his reports, Ellis minimized the importance of

65 Ibid.

66 S.N.A.-D.S., Ellis to Sec. of St., 14 October, 1926, 814.00/861.
government abuses. He contended that even if the elections were held with complete freedom, General Chacón would claim "an easy victory".  

Chacón's commitment to the continuation of the policies of Orellana secured the loyalty of the army and the support of the republic's most influential finqueros and merchants.  

Ubico, on the other hand, committed a series of political blunders that alienated the wealthier and more influential politicos to such an extent that his victory appeared practically impossible. Among Ubico's most vocal supporters during the 1926 campaign was a group of student reformers known as "the generation of 1920". Ubico's favourable relationship with the students of Guatemala's University of San Carlos dated back to the April 1924 presidential decree that reestablished government supervision over university affairs. Ubiquista opposition to the Orellana government's legislation to restrict university autonomy helped persuade many students and young urban professionals that Ubico was sensitive to their concerns. However, not until it was clear that Recinos, a scholar and civilian, would not seek the

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67 U.S.N.A.-D.S., Ellis to Sec. of St., 21 October, 1926, 814.00/868.

68 U.S.N.A.-D.S., Ellis to Sec. of St., 14 October, 1926, 814.00/861; U.S.N.A.-D.S., Ellis to Sec. of St., 21 October, 1926, 814.00/868.

69 See Chapter IV; U.S.N.A.-D.S., Geissler to Sec. of St., 30 April, 1924, 814.42/5; Geissler to Sec. of St., 15 January, 1925, 814.42/6; Pitti, "Ubico", pp. 200-201.
presidency did Ubico inherit the full support of the universitarios.\textsuperscript{70}

When it was announced that Chacón was to be the Liberal party's candidate, the vast majority of students pledged their support to the \textit{Progresistas}.\textsuperscript{71} In early October evidence of the Liberal Progressive Party's strong universitario orientation was reflected in a Manifesto that included the names of the Party's Directorate. Apparently the American Minister was not impressed with the contents of the document or the membership of the Party Directorate. Obviously dissappointed with the Manifesto, Ellis concluded, that it was of little consequence because it focused mainly on "generalities of an Utopian nature." Indeed, this was to be expected, reported the Minister, since the party's Manifesto "was signed by many politicians of poor reputation."\textsuperscript{72}

Among the twenty-four members who composed the Progressive Party's Provisional Directorate, eighteen were prominent students, journalists or young professionals. With the presence of highly respected student organizers on his party's directorate such as professor Mariano Trabanino, a

\textsuperscript{70}J.J. Arévalo, \textit{La inquietud normalista}, pp. 143-4; Pitti, "Ubico", p. 201.

\textsuperscript{71}J.J. Arévalo, \textit{La inquietud normalista}, pp. 144-9.

\textsuperscript{72}U.S.N.A.-D.S., "Progressive Party Program", 20 October, included in Ellis to Sec. of St., 21 October, 1926, 814.00/868; U.S.N.A.-D.S., "Manifesto of the Progressive Party's Provisional Directorate", October, 1926, included in Ellis to Sec. of St., 8 October, 1926, 814.00/857.
former activist jailed by Estrada Cabrera, and José González Campo, a professor of law and frequent contributor to the student newspaper, Studium, Ubico rapidly became the presidential choice of youth and seemed to champion social change. Furthermore, acknowledged student leaders, like Juan José Arévalo, the future president of the republic, Efrián Aguilar Fuentes, leader of the Occidente student club, and Adán Manrique Ríos, chief of their eastern counterparts, reinforced the perception that Ubico was a candidate for youth and reform. 73

Of the utmost concern for the military and the coffee elite, however, were the reformist ideals espoused by some of the more radical student spokesmen. Carlos Wyld Ospina (1891-1956), perhaps Guatemala's most vehement critic of Liberalism in the 1920's, frequently published articles that proposed radical reforms. Also a member of the Progressive's Provisional Directorate, Wyld Ospina exercised little restraint whether he alluded to the wicked dictatorship of Estrada Cabrera or Orellana's "iniquitous" regime of the 1920's. Even the father of Guatemala's glorious 1871 Liberal revolution, Justo Rufino Barrios, did not escape the brunt of Wyld Ospina's criticism. Don Rufino was not the savior of modern Guatemala as the popular myth alleged, challenged Wyld

73U.S.N.A.-D.S., Ellis to Sec. of St., 8 October, 1925, 814.00/857; J.J. Arévalo, La inquietud normalista, pp. 144-9; Pitti, "Ubico", pp. 200-202.
Ospina, but was "the most fierce tyrant in our history" who even surpassed the brutality of "el indio [Rafael] Carrera" and Estrada Cabrera.\textsuperscript{74} Indeed, it was the "Liberal idol" who "established a school of corruption and political violence that has caused immense and irreparable damage to our national identity.\textsuperscript{75} Finally, proclaimed Wyld Ospina, the time had come to restore the liberties that Barrios had exchanged for the price of modernization. Under the direction of the spirited generation of 1920 and with the implementation of their enlightened reforms, he pledged, "the political falsehoods" of the past would be exposed and the nation permitted to proceed once more on its sacred path.\textsuperscript{76}

Undoubtedly Wyld Ospina's writings outraged the elder Liberals who reserved the most honourable place in Guatemalan history for Barrios. However, for the wealthiest members of the landed elite, the most alarming comments were those expressed by young men like Gustavo Martinez Nolasco. A delegate to the 1921 Pan American Students' Conference and a Progresista, Martinez Nolasco condemned Guatemala's intelligentsia for its indifferent attitude toward the majority of the population. Although, he lamented, "like parrots intellectuals mention Trotsky,...there is no attempt

\textsuperscript{74}Carlos Wyld Ospina, \textit{El autócrata: ensayo político-social} (Guatemala, 1929), pp. 28, 46.

\textsuperscript{75}Ibid., pp. 37-8.

\textsuperscript{76}Ibid., pp. 37-8.
to organize the campesino and workers on fincas." To Martínez Nolasco, the task was simple: the republic's intellectuals should implement immediately Marx's teachings by going to the fincas and the barrios to transform workers into a political proletariat force.\(^7\)

The prominence of so many of the government's most outspoken critics in the Progressive Party did not bode well for Ubico's presidential aspirations. The presence of Arévalo, Wyld Ospina, Martínez Nolasco, and other young ideologues undoubtedly convinced members of the Liberal party and the wealthy members of Guatemalan society that the Progressives were a body to be feared. Although Ubico always claimed to be committed to the legacy of his famous godfather, many of his disciples readily discarded all allegiances to what they described as the bankrupt and out-dated philosophies of Liberalism and Conservatism. Disillusioned by twenty-two years of Estrada Cabrera Liberalism, the generation of 1920 adapted the more progressive social and political philosophies that emanated from Mexico, Peru, and El Salvador to resolve the glaring deficiencies of Guatemalan society.\(^7\)

\(^7\)Pitti, "Ubico", pp. 207-208.

\(^7\)Ibid...

\(^7\)Ibid., p. 203; Masferrer, El mínimo vitalico, pp. 179-210; Anderson, Matanza, pp. 45-6; J.J. Arévalo, La inquietud normalista, pp. 144-7; Woodward, A Nation Divided, pp. 210-11; Kantor, The Aprista Movement, pp. 7-8; Pike, Politics of The Miraculous, pp. 39-41.
Even the practical Ubico seemed to be momentarily overwhelmed by the intoxicating air of change and reform. In a letter to Arévalo in October 1926, Ubico confided his belief that the Liberal Progressive Party was "at the present time, replacing the parties of the past, which have complied with their historic mission and are disappearing, principally because of their Conservative leaders, who are deaf to the loud and incessant voices of Evolution."\(^{80}\)

Unfortunately for the universitarios, Ubico's optimistic forecast for the future was premature. Although Don Jorge's apparent commitment to a radical restructuring of Guatemalan society convinced most of the republic's intellectuals to flock to the Progresista banner, it, more importantly, solidified the traditional military-elite political alliance. Most offended by Ubico's recent affections for reform were the more senior officers of the military. In light of the military's long association with the Liberal party, it was not surprising that only a few young officers endorsed Ubico's heretical challenge to Liberal supremacy.\(^{81}\)

Furthermore, throughout Orellana's presidency, the military was consistently allocated the largest portion of the national budget. In the fiscal years 1924 and 1925,

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\(^{80}\) A letter from Ubico to J.J. Arévalo, 19 October, 1926 cited in La inquietud normalista, pp. 146-7.

\(^{81}\) J.J. Arévalo, La inquietud normalista, p. 147; U.S.N.A.-D.S., Ellis to Sec. of St., 5 November, 1926, 814.00/877.
respectively, the Liberal government spent slightly less than twenty-one percent and almost nineteen percent of its total expenditures in the Ministry of War. Unlike Herrera before him, Orellana successfully cultivated the support of the army's officers by supporting larger military budgets, expanding and modernizing the army, providing officers with government positions, and ruthlessly eliminating threats to the stability of the nation. In no aspect of government affairs was the military's presence more obvious than in the countryside. Indeed, at the end of Orellana's presidential term, all jefes politicos in the departments were army officers.

At the same time, Orellana further encouraged the involvement of senior officers in the republic's political matters by selecting high-ranking members of the military to occupy the offices of First and Second Designate (First Vice-President and Second Vice-President). It is interesting to note that beginning with the appointment of Jorge Ubico as First Designate in April 1922, only Generals were chosen for

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82 In 1924, the Guatemalan national budget was $8,095,573 and the expenditures in the Ministry of War totalled $1,706,920 U.S.. In 1925, the budget was $9,719,859 and military spending accounted for $1,805,644 U.S.. U.S.N.A.-D.S., "Parte expositiva de la memoria del año de 1924", 4 May, 1924, in Geissler to Sec. of St., 8 May, 1925, 814.51/509; "Parte expositiva de la memoria del año de 1925", March 1925, in Geissler to Sec. of St., 26 March, 1926, 814.51/523.

83 U.S.N.A.-D.S., G-2 Naval Intelligence Report, 10 December, 1925, 814.00/824;
the offices of First and Second Designate for the remainder of the President's term. Increasingly accustomed to the economic and political benefits the President endowed upon his fellow officers, the military officers wanted to insure that subsequent governments recognized their privileged and professional status. Hence, alarmed by Ubico's association with Guatemala's most outspoken critics of Liberalism and assured by Chacón that he would continue the policies of Orellana, the military's senior officers had no desire to abandon their alliance with the traditional Liberals.

Ubico's 1926 presidential campaign fared no better with the other pillar of Guatemalan Liberalism: the coffee elite. Particularly alarming for the finqueros were reports that "the Soviet germ" had infected Ubico's younger supporters and that

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84U.S.N.A.-D.S., Geissler to Sec. of St., 25 January, 1923, 814.00/724; Geissler to Sec. of St., 28 April, 1923, 814.00/731; Geissler to Sec. of St., 6 May, 1924, 814.00/776; Geissler to Sec. of St., 30 April, 1925, 814.00/794; Geissler to Sec. of St., 14 May, 1926, 814.00/832.

85Unfortunately, the restricted nature of available resources does not permit a more complete analysis of the military's expansion during Orellana's presidency. However, there are indications that in this period the Guatemalan military began to assume some of the "institutional" characteristics that other historians suggest did not arise until the 1930's. It is plausible that the expansion of the military's budget, Orellana's preference to select officers for government administrative positions in the departments, and the regular practice of choosing only Generals as Presidential Designates, initiated the institutionalization process during the Orellana administration. Obviously, more study needs to be done. Needler, "Military Motivations in the Seizure of Power," pp. 63-76; Handy, "Resurgent Democracy and the Guatemalan Military," pp. 383-408. Grieb, Guatemalan Caudillo, pp. 45-7.
they were "incubating a movement against the great landowners." Furthermore, rumours rapidly spread that ubiquista extremists had informed the peasantry to ready itself for "the hour of bloody holocaust" in which the finca owners would "be flung into cauldrons of boiling molasses." Traditional Liberals were not the only wealthy sector of Guatemalan society alarmed by Ubico's outspoken disciples. Even prominent Conservatives and the Nationalists, who had offered Ubico the leadership of their party only two years earlier, opted to side with the Liberal assurances of order and progress. As a consequence, Ubico was even less successful in attracting the wealthy planters to the Progressive banner than he was with the officers of the military.

From most reports, the outcome of the 1926 presidential election was never in doubt. Most of Guatemala's traditionally powerful landed elite had little reason to oppose Chacón's promises of prosperity and stability. Furthermore, Ubico and his circle of young firebrands only offered fingueros and the

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87 Ibid.
88 U.S.N.A.-D.S., Ellis to Sec. of St., 8 October, 1926, 814.00/857; Ellis to Sec. of St., 14 October, 1926, 814.00/861; Geissler to Sec. of St., 2 December, 1926, 814.00/900.
89 U.S.N.A.-D.S., Ellis to Sec. of St., 21 October, 1926, 814.00/868; Geissler to Sec. of St., 2 December, 1926, 814.00/900.
officers of the military the prospect of unrest and uncertainty. Whether Ubico's youthful disciples were "apostles of the steppes of Siberia"\textsuperscript{90}, was irrelevant to the bulk of Guatemala's Liberal party. Chacón was obviously the choice for the continuation of the prosperity and stability of orellanismo.

Ubico appears to have mistakenly believed that with the support of Guatemala's student movement, the peasantry and the lower middle- and working-classes he could challenge the Liberal Party's grasp on the presidency. Rallies in the republic's capital on October 10 and October 24 clearly demonstrated the Progressive's student-lower-class orientation. On both occasions large demonstrations were held in which up to six thousand men, women and children of the artisan and labouring classes gathered to listen to political speeches by the Party's secretary, Carlos Pacheco Marroquin, Don Jorge, and several other prominent Progressives.\textsuperscript{91} Particularly disturbing to Guatemalan Liberals was the threat posed by Ubico's political mobilization of a relatively "intelligent and potentially dangerous element of the lower middle class".\textsuperscript{92} As the election neared, it was reported that

\textsuperscript{90}Pitti, "Ubico", p. 237.

\textsuperscript{91}U.S.N.A.-D.S., Ellis to Sec. of St., 14 October, 1926, 814.00/861; Ellis to Sec. of St., 29 October, 1926, 814.00/869.

\textsuperscript{92}U.S.N.A.-D.S., Ellis to Sec. of St., 29 October, 1926, 814.00/869.
property owners were becoming increasingly uncomfortable with the "radicalistic propaganda" expressed by several *ubiquistas*. So intense was the paranoia of labour and peasant insurrection that many claimed "illiterate Indian laborers regard their registration certificate, entitling them to vote, as a deed for a plot of ground and a house, in the event of the election of the Progresista candidate." 93

Although Liberals and the more privileged classes frequently expressed their fear that the *Progresistas* would encourage workers and peasants to revolt, there is little evidence to suggest that Ubico, the Progressive Directorate or even the *universitarios* made a conscious effort to mobilize the lower-classes. It is true that young Guatemalan ideologues like Martinez Nolasco, Federico Alvarado Pajardo, another member of the Progressive party's Directorate, and Miguel Angel Asturias frequently bemoaned the sorry state of the Indian and the rural labourer. 94 However, the Progressive campaign included no real attempts to foster rural participation in the electoral or decision-making process. Many of the Progressives were quite willing to declare what was wrong with Indian or rural society, but they were not prepared to allow Indians and rural labourers to take measures

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93 U.S.N.A.—D.S., Geissler to Sec. of St., 2 December, 1926, 814.00/900.

to rectify these deficiencies. Indeed, the vast majority of the Progressives, like their Liberal counterparts, attributed the problems in the countryside to the Indians' failure to adopt the characteristics of European civilization, rather than to inherent flaws in the republic's economic and political structure. 95

Whether Ubico was willing to implement the theories or recommendations that emanated from his radical coalition of students, journalists, young professionals, workers and peasants is difficult to determine. The prominence in the Progressive Party of young ideologues like Wyld Ospina, Martinez Nolasco, Alvarado Fajardo, and Arévalo should have resulted in a party platform that proposed extensive land reform, expropriation of foreign land holdings and possibly even an attack on capitalism.

Ubico, however, was not prepared to incorporate such preposterous reforms in his political agenda. On October 20, the Progressive leader's political platform was unveiled in the "The Program of the Progressive Party". Ubico's promises were anything but radical. They focused on three basic principles: "Constitutional reform; solution of the economic, financial, and industrialization problems of our sources of production and work; and, total renovation of the educative

95Pitti, "Ubico", p. 237; Handy, Gift, pp. 92-3; Asturias, El problema social del indio, pp. 42-54.
Visibly absent from the proposed Progressive agenda were references to the reforms consistently expressed by Ubico's radical disciples. Instead, the detailed "Progressive Party Program" committed an Ubico government to little more than the expansion of agricultural production, government accountability for all public spending, and improvement in the standard of education. None of which should have provoked the fears of bloody social revolution in the minds of Guatemala's large land owners or the military. Indeed, on November 12, less than four weeks before the election was to begin, Ubico reassured Arthur Geissler, the American Minister, that "he would strive hard and energetically to hold in check [his party's] social revolutionaries."

Yet, even assurances by the "honest, capable and absolutely fearless" Jorge Ubico could not persuade the republic's landed elite that his presidency would not threaten their economic and political interests. As the election neared, it became increasingly obvious that Ubico had made a serious political blunder. Although he attempted to dispel the oligarchy's fears by excluding from the Party's social and

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96 U.S.N.A.-D.S., "Programa del Partido Progresista", October 20, 1926, included in Ellis to Sec. of St., 21 October, 1926, 814.00/868.

97 U.S.N.A.-D.S., "Programa del Partido Progresista", October 20, 1926, included in Ellis to Sec. of St., 21 October, 1926, 814.00/868.

98 U.S.N.A.-D.S., Geissler to Sec. of St., 14 November, 1926, 814.00/878.
economic agenda the ideals of a large proportion of his followers, Don Jorge's presidential bid failed miserably. For more than two weeks prior to the election, chacónistas predicted that Ubico would receive no more than twenty percent of the eligible vote. 99 On December 7, one day after the five hundred voting stations closed, the victory of the Liberal Party was verified when it was officially reported that Chacón received 287,412 votes compared to Ubico's total of 36,940. 100 Although Ubico and his supporters vehemently disputed the legality of the elections, General Lázaro Chacón was publicly inaugurated president of the republic of Guatemala on December 18, 1926. 101

Ubico had surrounded himself with a vocal and moderately reformist group of idealistic individuals that the landed elite was unwilling to overlook. Whether Ubico approved of the generation's heretical behavior or he was unable to silence their blasphemous criticisms, the landed elite and the military were frightened. They were also convinced that Chacón would continue the well-proven practices of orellanismo. If this was not enough to defeat Don Jorge's aspirations, the

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99 U.S.N.A.-D.S., Geissler to Sec. of St., 19 November, 1926, 814.00/879.

100 U.S.N.A.-D.S., Sánchez Latour, Minister of Guatemala in Washington, to Sec. of St., 7 December, 1926, 814.00/898.

101 U.S.D.A.-D.S., Geissler to Sec. of St., 6 December, 1926, 814.00/897; Geissler to Sec. of St., 14 December, 1926, 814.00/902; Geissler to Sec. of St., 31 December, 1926, 814.00/911.
usual presidential advantages inherent in the electoral process made the possibility of a *Progresista* victory virtually impossible.

For Ubico, the generation of 1920, Indian peasants and urban labourers the presidential election of 1926 was an experience which few would soon forget. Don Jorge's rather lopsided electoral defeat taught the pragmatic Ubico a costly, yet invaluable, lesson. Unable to wrest the presidency from the firm control of the landed elite and the officers of the military, Ubico would abandon the politically unproductive reformist tendencies of the intelligentsia to cultivate support among the traditionally powerful sectors of Guatemalan society. Although Ubico had gambled heavily and lost in the 1926 election, Don Jorge had not ceased to be a shrewd judge of the republic's political character. If Ubico learned little else from his unsuccessful presidential bid, he was convinced that in Guatemala only those aspirants who possess the full support of the landed oligarchy and the military could hope to succeed.

Hence, for Ubico and an entire generation of Guatemalans, the election of 1926 marked a significant point in the republic's political and social development. Guatemala's naive political reformers were deeply disillusioned by the harsh realities they discovered in the aftermath of the electoral defeat. After almost a decade of struggle, the generation had achieved little.
Since 1918, students, young professionals, journalists and a host of middle-class dwellers in the capital had sought to move the republic toward a more democratic and egalitarian society in which they would be permitted to contribute to the nation's political, social and economic debate. Progresistas were the natural extension of this political struggle. Unfortunately, the landed elite and the military refused the demands of universitarios, the urban middle-class, and their rag-tag coalition of peasants and labour for reform.

However, in many ways, Ubico's spirited disciples had contributed to their own defeat. Although the landed elite may have feared the generation of 1920 to be a radical force that needed to be repressed, the vast majority of its members hoped to be granted little more than a voice in the political arena and a marginal increase in their share of the national wealth. Indeed, these moderate urban reformers did not possess the mentality nor the will to undertake the massive restructuring of society that the nation so desperately required. For the most part, they were no more willing to permit the unrestricted participation of peasants and urban labourers in the decision-making of the republic than were the military and the landed oligarchy. Only with the active participation and support of urban workers and rural peasants could they hope to challenge Guatemala's political elite. The generation's inability or unwillingness to forge an alliance with the peasantry or even with urban workers doomed the
moderate progresista challenge from the outset.
CHAPTER VI

The 1920's:
Precursor of Change?

While I am president, I will not grant liberty of the press nor of association, because the people of Guatemala are not prepared for democracy and need a strong hand.\footnote{Jorge Ubico, cited in Ronald M. Schneider, \textit{Communism in Guatemala: 1944-1954} (New York, 1958), p. 9.}

The defeat of Ubico and the \textit{Progresistas} in the 1926 presidential election marked the end of a dynamic era in Guatemala. Punctuated by instances of unprecedented freedom and uncensored political expression, the period between 1918 and 1926 was unlike any before. After almost a decade of vigorous political and social agitation, the fabric of Guatemalan society underwent a change that irreversibly altered the history of the republic.

Estrada Cabrera's apathetic response to the earthquakes of 1917 and 1918 coupled with the student protests of the same years aroused a heretofore unknown reaction in the capital. Awakened by the students' commitment to reform, other sectors of society, notably the Church, the incipient urban middle-class, organized labour, and eventually the military and the landed elite, pledged their support to a unified coalition that opposed the dictator. By April 1920, Cabrera's inability to adapt to the republic's changing political and social atmosphere and the coalition's commitment to the dictator's unconditional surrender, prompted the
Assembly to impeach the President.

The twenty months of Unionist government that followed demonstrated an unparalleled willingness on Herrera's part to permit some measure of freedom in political expression. However, economic recession and the failure of Guatemala's middle sectors to uphold the principles which they had struggled so tenaciously to attain, enabled the praetorian guard of Liberal-Positivism, the Guatemalan military, to halt the meagre steps toward a more democratically-oriented society.

Equally responsible for the Herrera government's failure was its tendency to treat popular sectors of society in the same manner as its Liberal predecessors. Even though Herrera announced that he was committed to the principles of liberty and democracy, he frequently suppressed labour organizations and employed repressive measures to quell unrest in the countryside. Despite coming to office as the representative of a broad spectrum of Guatemalan society, Herrera's administration, like traditional Guatemalan regimes, alienated students, jailed labour leaders and neglected the needs of the republic's Indian majority. Unwilling to cultivate the support of the more popular sectors of society and abandoned by Liberals and the military, Herrera's government was ousted in December 1921.

The fall of the Herrera administration halted the republic's progression from dictatorship to democracy. The
military junta that replaced the Unionists came to power with one major purpose in mind: to reassert the interests of the republic's coffee elite and the military. Unsympathetic to the concerns of labour, students and the rural Indian population, General Orellana acted swiftly and brutally to consolidate the reins of government in the hands of nation's traditional Liberal party and, increasingly, the military.

Elected to the presidency by a large majority in 1922, Orellana implemented a two-pronged assault that purged Guatemala's political system of all opponents to the government's authority. In August and September 1922, the President exiled clerics, jailed Conservatives and murdered workers and peasants in an effort to eliminate potential threats to the Liberal party. In the second stage, Orellana and his faction of the party expelled two of his government's most powerful individuals, Adrián Recinos and Jorge Ubico, and, thereby, cleared the way for the President to seek a second term in office. However, the President did not live to secure his re-election because in September 1926 Orellana suffered a fatal heart attack.

Unprepared for this turn of events, Guatemalans expected a bitter struggle between Ubico and Recinos for the vacant presidency. Some members of Guatemalan society considered Recinos the embodiment of Liberalism. On the other hand, Ubico was widely respected for his honesty and efficiency. But unsure of his strength among the officers of the military,
Recinos opted to support the candidacy of the Orellana's First Designate, General Lázaro Chacón.

Partly as a consequence of the Liberal party's political maneuvering, Ubico emerged as the candidate for reform and Chacón the advocate of orellanismo and the status quo. Disillusioned by almost five years of Orellana's restrictive government, a vocal group of prominent university students, journalists, and urban professionals endorsed the candidacy of Ubico and formed the foundation of his support. Although Ubico never officially adopted many of his proponents' radical slogans, Ubico's association with the youthful ideologues alienated the bulk of the republic's most influential políticos. Alarmed by the Progressive's vaguely reformist tendencies, an overwhelming majority of the nation's coffee elite and the officers of the military backed Chacón in the 1926 election.

The 1926 defeat of Ubico and the Liberal Progressives signalled both a beginning and an end in Guatemala. Able to secure only slightly more than ten percent of the official vote, Ubico retired to his finca to contemplate his next political venture. For Ubico, the miserable showing at the polls was an important lesson in his development as a politician. In 1926, Ubico gambled that his family, professional, and class ties to the military and the coffee elite would placate the fears fostered by his enthusiastic supporters. Obviously, he was mistaken. In 1931, when Don
Jorge was presented with another opportunity to vie for the presidency, he was sure not to offend the powerful interests of the elite and the military.\(^2\)

Uboico's youthful supporters were also deeply affected by their political experience. For many, the campaign of 1926 marked the high point of their political careers in Guatemala. Shortly afterward, a number of the most influential students left the republic to live and attend classes in Paris. Unfortunately, their voluntary exile permitted "less distinguished and more moderate" individuals to assume the republic's positions of power in the next decade. Furthermore, many of those who remained soon abandoned their radical ideologies and eventually adopted the posture of the elite and the republic's middle class. Displaced from the leadership of the universities by a new, younger, more radical group of students in the late 1930's and 1940's, the majority of "the generation of 1920" joined the reactionary ranks of the establishment.\(^3\)

Nonetheless, the social, political and economic events of the 1920's made a valuable contribution to the process of dismantling the exploitative structure that was inherited from Spanish colonialism and intensified by nineteenth and

\(^2\)Grieb, Guatemalan Caudillo, pp. 12, 32-5; Handy, Gift, pp. 89, 92-3; Patti, "Ubico", pp. 240-1.

\(^3\)Patti, "Ubico", pp. 241-2; Grieb, Guatemalan Caudillo, pp. 12, 25, 27-8, 271.
twentieth century Liberals. The period that was initiated with the end of the First World War, the earthquakes of 1917 and 1918, and the student and labour protests prior to Cabrera's removal, ushered in a new age in Guatemala. Never before had labour played such an important part in determining who would rule. And never before had a group of students influenced political affairs like "the generation of 1920."

Even though the coffee elite and the military triumphed over the popular efforts of these sectors, the student and labour movements of the 1920's would be the precursors of reform in the future.

Hence, the protests of students, the rallies of labour, and the periodic peasant and Indian unrest that erupted from the countryside must not be overlooked. In the 1920's, these three groups temporarily banded together to help topple a ruthless and autocratic despot. Nonetheless, in 1920, these forces were disorganized, untested, and immature. After only three years the traditional stalwarts of Liberalism re-consolidated their grip on the affairs of the nation. For the remainder of the decade, student leaders were muzzled and were unable to criticize the government. At the same time, labour was consistently harrassed, its members beaten and leadership

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"Castillo, Growth and Integration, pp. 1-43; Macleod, Spanish Central America, pp. 385-7, 389; Gibson, Spain in America, pp. 209-12, 215-6; Burns, Poverty of Progress; Handy, Gift; Cambranes, Coffee and Peasants; Casey, "Indigenismo", pp. 60, 90-5, 104-5."
jailed. Partly as a consequence, the popular sectors of Guatemalan society were unable to resurrect the powerful coalition of 1920 for the remainder of the decade.

After 1923 organized labour in the republic was convinced that the military and the elite would never permit their representatives to participate in the political decision-making of the nation. Disillusioned by the traditional parties, urban labourers increasingly forged links with Socialist and Communist movements. Although frequently suppressed, the labour movement maintained its radical orientation through the 1930's.

The struggle to destroy Guatemala's repressive and brutal socio-economic structure was checked in 1926. To a large extent this can be attributed to the failure of Unionists and urban Progressive reformers to cultivate the support of the nation's vast rural peasantry. Without recognizing the problems inherent in the agro-export economy and its impact on the nation, the reformers of the 1920's could not possibly solve Guatemala's immense social, economic and political obstacles to development. During the first half of the decade, the agricultural export sector of the economy accounted for almost fifty percent of the nation's agricultural output.\(^5\) Indeed, in a nation where over seventy percent of the cultivated land was possessed by slightly more than two

percent of the farming units and coffee accounted for almost eighty-five percent of the republic's exports, only immediate and extensive agrarian reform could rectify the republic's enormous socio-economic injustices.6

Guatemala was a rural country that was suffering from the political, social and economic effects of over fifty years of Liberal-Positivism. To break the "cycle" of dictatorship, repression, revolution and reaction Guatemalans needed to realize that urban-oriented, middle class reforms would not provide a permanent solution. In the 1920's, as had happened in the past, the resilient socio-economic structure of the countryside triumphed over the feeble reforms of the city.7

Many of the studies that examine Guatemala in the 1920's fail to recognize the significance of Estrada Cabrera's removal and the subsequent political maneuvering. Indeed, most simply describe the 1920's as a period between dictators that was mired in confusion and plagued by chaos. Furthermore, these works usually suggest that politics during the period between the rule of Estrada Cabrera and Ubico's successful presidential bid in 1931 was dominated by American business interests and dictated by the United States State Department. To a certain extent these studies are useful. However, without

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7Urban population: 534,459; Rural population: 1,470,441. Censo general de la república de Guatemala, 1921, p. 21.
exception they neglect the social, economic and political dynamics of Guatemalan society. An evaluation of the 1920's indicates that the decade was not simply a stage in the endless cycle between dictatorship and political anarchy. A broad-based, heterogeneous coalition struggled to implement a program of moderate reforms but failed because they did not understand the nature of the ruling elite nor the political and economic structure it depended upon. Unwilling to forge links with the nation's Indian majority, urban non-Indian reformers could only be successful if they mobilized the mass of rural labourers in their struggle to displace the landed elite.

After the 1920's, subsequent generations of Guatemalan reformers realized that significant change could not be implemented without an extensive restructuring of the relationship between rural labour and the factors of production (notably, land and capital). The inequitable system of land ownership and the exploitative and brutal mechanisms that induced Indians to labour on fincas for less than subsistence wages became future reformers' greatest concerns. The failed experiment with democracy during the Herrera administration and the return to traditional governments by the wealthy and the military convinced middle sector reformers that more radical solutions were needed to overcome Guatemala's grossly inequitable distribution of wealth and land. Hence, denied significant reform through the political
process in the 1920's, subsequent generations adopted radical and revolutionary ideologies to secure their objectives in the 1940's.8

However, the 1920's introduced another important factor to the complex socio-economic fabric of the nation that would tremendously affect its future. Since the Liberal Revolution of 1871, the Guatemalan military had defended and reflected the interests of the landowning coffee elite. For several decades, its social, economic and political links to the movement led by Barrios had secured the Liberal party the unquestioned loyalty of the army's senior officers. Nonetheless, Herrera's administration significantly altered the relationship that once existed between Guatemala's traditional Liberal governments and the military. Concerned with the threat posed by the military's historical ties to the Liberal party, the Unionists hoped that by increasing the government's yearly expenditures on the army, they could convince its officers to abandon the Liberals and support the Unionists. Unfortunately for Herrera and the Conservatives, they were unsuccessful and in 1921 a military junta temporarily assumed the presidency.

Although most of the Cabinet Ministers in Orellana's

8Handy's study of the Guatemalan Revolution (1944-54) and his research of the Agrarian Reform Law of 1952 provides a detailed description of the radical re-structuring that the countryside required. Jim Handy, "Revolution and Reaction: National Policy and Rural Politics in Guatemala, 1944-1954" (Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Toronto, 1985).
government were civilians, the President embarked on a program that fostered the emergence of a potent new entity in Guatemalan society. During the Orellana administration, military budgets were annually increased and the President frequently filled important public and administrative posts with officers. Between 1921 and 1926, jefes políticos and Presidential Designates were invariably chosen from among a select group of senior army officers.

Furthermore, when the Liberal party nominated its candidate for the 1926 presidential election, it overlooked its most prominent civilian politicians and selected a member of the military. The Liberal party's decision to opt for an army officer suggests that the military was becoming an even more important force in the republic's political affairs. Although civilian Liberals may have believed they could exercise substantial influence on the politically-inexperienced Chacón, in subsequent decades the Guatemalan coffee elite would become increasingly reliant on the support of the military. Moreover, during the 1920's, the military became accustomed to its large share of the national budget and the economic and occupational rewards that accompanied
their political responsibilities in the countryside.\footnote{It is interesting to note that one of Ubico's first official acts after he was elected in February 1931 was to visit the military garrisons in the capital and emphasize his commitment to the army. Possibly this indicates that the Guatemalan military already had interests that were distinct from those of the coffee elite. Further study is needed in this particular subject. Grieb, \textit{Guatemalan Caudillo}, p. 12.}

Consequently, this discussion of the vigorous political activity that was unleashed by Estrada Cabrera's removal is absolutely necessary to grasp the origins of the modern Guatemalan state. Although the embryonic forces of reform failed in the 1920's, the attempt to solve the republic's immense problems was a continuous process. The efforts of popular sectors were temporarily stifled, yet this did not imply that the struggle to implement significant changes in the nation's socio-economic structure was permanently abandoned. However, the emergence of the military as a potent political force marked the beginning of a new era in which the next generation of Guatemalan reformers would be required not only to overcome the opposition of the landed elite, but also the powerful and increasingly independent interests of the military. The modern struggle between the Guatemalan military, the nation's landowning elite and the republic's "popular" forces is inextricably linked to the overthrow of Cabrera, the decade's agro-export boom, and the political maneuvering that it fostered.
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