

## **Electoral law - Registration of new political parties - Other internal affairs - Foreign relations**

### Summary and key dates

*Promulgation of Law on Election of a Constituent Assembly (Jan. 20, 1984). Extension of amnesty (November 1983 to March 1984). New army law (Dec. 7, 1983). Alleged attempted coup (January 1984). New oil exploration law (late 1983). Cabinet appointments (late 1983). Creation of post of Deputy Head of State (February 1984). Abortive talks with Spain on proposed re-establishment of diplomatic relations (Jan. 4-8).*

The legal framework for holding elections to a National Constituent Assembly on July 1, 1984, as promised after the August 1983 coup [see page 32496], was established by the promulgation on Jan. 20 of a "Law on Election of a Constituent Assembly". The principal task of the 88 deputies (65 elected by districts and 23 elected from national lists) would be to draft a new constitution and a new electoral law. The political parties also advocated that the Assembly should nominate a provisional interim president, but Gen. Oscar Humberto Mejia Victores (who had been promoted from the rank of brigadier-general on Dec. 13) had announced on Jan. 13 that he himself would retain executive and legislative power until presidential elections scheduled for July 1, 1985.

The Jan. 20 law barred any holders of public office prior to the March 1982 coup [see 31605 A] from seeking election to the Assembly. Relatives of the Head of State, cabinet ministers and members of the Supreme Court of Justice and the Supreme Electoral Tribunal were also excluded. Voting in the election would be compulsory, except for reasons of infirmity, age, illiteracy or absence from the country. Political parties which won less than 4 per cent of the total vote would not be allowed to continue in existence after the poll. Gen. Mejia had said on Jan. 13 that the Guatemalan Labour Party (PGT) would not be permitted to contest the election because it was a member of the Guatemalan National Revolutionary Unity (URNG, the unified guerrilla military command). [For internal security developments to March 1983, see 32186 A.]

### **Registration of political parties**

By the end of February 1984 over 30 new political groups had come into existence since the lifting of the state of siege in March 1983 [ibid.], with each of them establishing a committee for the formation of a political party. Each committee and all established parties were required to present a list of at least 4,000 signatures in order to receive formal approval from the Supreme Electoral Tribunal.

The parties already in existence were the extreme right-wing National Liberation Movement (MLN) led by Sr Mario Sandoval Alarcon, who undertook to launch an anti-communist crusade if his party were victorious; the right-wing National Authentic Central (CAN), which formed an electoral alliance with the MLN in early 1984; the social democratic United Revolutionary Front (FUR), led by Sr Adrino Dieguez with Sr Cesar Augusto Toledo as secretary-general; the three parties which had formed the Popular Democratic Front in the March 1982 elections [see 31605 A], namely the centre-right Democratic Institutional Party (PID), the democratic Revolutionary Party (PR) and the Front of National Unity (FUN); the National Renewal Party (PNR); the Christian Democratic Party (PDCG) led by Sr Vinicio Cerezo; and the Democratic Revolutionary Union (URD).

The new groups seeking recognition as parties included the Anti-communist Unification Party (PUA), which was a splinter group of the MLN and was led by Sr Leonel Sisniega Otero, who had left the MLN in May 1983 [see page 32189]; the Union of the National Centre (UCN), whose secretary-general was Sr Ramiro de Leon Carpio; the Social Christian Party (PSC); the Civilian Democratic Front (FCD), a splinter group from the PDCG led by Sr Danilo Barillas; the Emerging Movement for Harmony (MEC); the Popular Democratic Force (FDP); the National Democratic Co-ordinating Board (formerly known as the National Guev-arist Co-ordinating Board); the Humanist Movement for Democratic Integration (MHID); the Organized Popular Force (FPO); the New Force (FN), which described itself as social democratic; and the Populist Party (PP).

A coalition group was formed on Feb. 21 called the Guatemalan Democratic Co-ordinating Board (CDG), incorporating the PDCG, the U.N. the PSC, the FCD and eight other left-wing and centre parties. The CDG demanded that the government and Army remain completely impartial in the forthcoming election; it also called for reform of the Jan. 20 electoral law, claiming that the system of electing deputies was too open to fraud, and denounced the current "climate of violence" and the political activity of the paramilitary groups [see below].

### **Increased political violence - Reports on human rights violations**

The president of the Supreme Electoral Tribunal, Sr Arturo Herbruger, said on Feb. 13 that the election process was being threatened by violence, adding that in the past 48 hours alone 12 people in Guatemala City had been abducted and then murdered apparently on political grounds. The FN president, Sr Jorge Galvez Loaica, was found dead on Feb. 10 after he had been kidnapped, tortured and murdered by a paramilitary group; he was carrying FN registration lists containing 1,200 signatures. Sr Cerezo (the PDCG leader) said in February that he had received death threats and later in the month the party reported that 25 of its officials had been abducted in recent weeks. By March 13 some 300 people had "disappeared".

The guerrillas, meanwhile, continued their practice of kidnapping figures associated with the government. The director general of the conservative daily paper *Prensa Libre*, Sr Pedro Julio Garcia, was abducted on Oct. 9, 1983, and released on Oct. 23 after

newspapers in Guatemala, other Central American countries and the United States agreed to publish a PGT communique. Sra Marta Elena Rios Montt de Rivas, the sister of former President Efra'n Rios Montt (overthrown by Gen. Mejia in August 1983), and Sra Celeste Aida Mejia Victores de Velasco, the sister of the President, who had been kidnapped on June 29 and Sept. 10 respectively, were set free on Oct. 25 after publication in the press of a statement by the Rebel Armed Forces (FAR, also part of the URNG).

The Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (a division of the OAS) issued a report on Oct. 12 concerning conditions in Guatemala, which noted "recent information indicating that the violence in rural areas continues, the exodus of the peasant population [to Mexico] goes on ... and the violence in urban centres is tending to increase, with signs of the reappearance of death squads". The report concluded that "while the Commission has no doubt that the guerrillas have committed grave and shameful deeds in those areas of conflict, it also considers the Guatemalan Army directly responsible for the violations of the right to life that have occurred in these zones". In November the US embassy in Guatemala expressed concern over the rising level of violence, reporting that 220 people had been killed in October in politically motivated incidents, compared with 98 in August and 163 in September. At the end of January 1984 the Americas Watch Committee likewise claimed that killings and kidnappings had increased since August 1983, and protested against the forcible enrolment of up to 700,000 people into civil defence patrols (PACs-see 32186 A) and the placing of "tens of thousands" of people in "re-education camps", i.e. the resettlement villages established by the government from early 1983 [ibid.].

### **Church-state relations**

In spite of the overthrow of President Rios Montt (who was an adherent of an extreme Protestant sect), relations between the government and the Roman Catholic Church did not improve after the August 1983 coup. Gen. Mejia made a speech attacking the political activity of both lay and clerical members of the Catholic Church in early November, and shortly afterwards the head of the religious community at the city of Antigua, Fr Augusto Ramirez Monasterio, was assassinated. The Church claimed that he was the 13th priest to have been murdered by the Army, and also that the Army had detained over 500 lay church workers. [For deterioration in Church-state relations in early 1983, see 32429 A.]

Mgr Prospero Penados del Barrio, the Bishop of San Marcos, was on Dec. 4 named by the Vatican as the new Archbishop of Guatemala, to replace Cardinal Casariego, who had died in June [see page 32495].

### **Continued presence of Guatemalan refugees in Mexico**

In the first such incident for several months, an armed group crossed into Mexico from Guatemala on April 30, 1984, and attacked a refugee camp, killing six of the refugees. The Mexican government requested that the Guatemalan authorities should investigate the attack, but the Guatemalan government refused to do so, denied that its Army was involved in any way and suggested that guerrilla groups had been responsible.

In response to the attack the Mexican government announced on May 2 that it would move some 46,000 refugees to sites further from the border; the Ministry of the Interior issued a statement declaring that as the Guatemalans had fled from “conditions of violence”, Mexico would “maintain intact its principles and traditions” of asylum for political exiles, protection for refugees and “humanitarian solidarity”. [For previous incidents involving Guatemalan refugees in Mexico, see page 32188.] It was anticipated that the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) would assist with the cost of the relocation, in addition to its 1984 budget of US\$7,000,000 for food, medicine and shelter for the refugees.

### **Guerrilla activity - Extension of government amnesty - Passage of new army law - Coup rumours**

There was renewed fighting between the guerrillas and the armed forces in the departments of Alta Verapaz, Chimaltenango and Huehuetenango in mid-1983, and in the departments of Alta Verapaz, El Peten and El Quiche in early 1984.

The FAR began a campaign on Jan. 12, 1984, in El Peten, and it was reported on Feb. 11 that its forces had attacked an army detachment in La Libertad. In an attack at Xalbal in El Quiche on Feb. 25, members of the Guerrilla Army of the Poor (EGP, part of the URNG) killed three soldiers and wounded three more, and in incidents occurring in El Quiche and Alta Verapaz on March 24-26 the military authorities reported that six soldiers, one policeman and four “subversives” had been killed.

The amnesty originally declared by the government on Aug. 12, 1983 [see page 32495], was extended for 60 days in November and again until March, when it was extended for a further 90-day period. It was reported on May 17 that 10 members of the EGP had surrendered to the Army in El Peten under the continued amnesty.

The new Minister of the Interior, Sr Gustavo Lopez Sandoval [see below], said on April 1 that the government “could be open to a dialogue with the guerrillas” with the aim of encouraging “the people who had been misled and had joined the guerrillas to return to the fold with the good Guatemalans”.

A new law came into effect on Dec. 7, 1983, defining the role of the Army as “apolitical, essentially subordinate and non-deliberating”, banning the organization of “paramilitary or militia forces outside the institution” and requiring the retirement of all members of the forces who had served for 33 years or had reached retirement age.

A security official claimed on Jan. 27 that the authorities had discovered a coup plot by several senior officers whose retirement was required under this law. There had been persistent rumours in December of incipient coups planned by the former President, Gen. Carlos Arafia Osorio (1970-74), and the former Army Chief of Staff, Gen. Hector Lopez Fuentes (who had been dismissed in October-see page 32496).

### **New law on oil exploration**

A new law on oil exploration was introduced in late 1983 which aimed to encourage foreign oil companies to initiate new projects in the jungle areas of the country by increasing their share of the profit. The new law brought a protest from the French company Elf Aquitaine (currently the only producer in the country) on the grounds that it was prejudicial to existing contracts.

The law, details of which were given by the *Financial Times* of Nov. 16, 1983, allowed a foreign company to cover its financial outlay for exploration, development and production before the Guatemalan government could take its minimum share of 30 per cent of turnover (adjustable upwards in line with the level of production); previously the government's share of 55 per cent had been deductible from the date on which production started. In addition (i) the government's base royalty would be 20 per cent, variable according to the specific gravity of the crude oil; (ii) contract terms would be for up to 25 years on the basis of blocks of 50,000 hectares, and no company would be permitted more than six blocks; and (iii) the contractor would be required to drill at least one well in the first three years and at least two more in the second three years.

### **Government appointments**

It was reported on Nov. 1 that Sr Otto Palma Figueroa had resigned as Minister of Labour, having held the post since March 1982 [see page 31606]; he was replaced by Sr Carlos Padilla Natareno. Sr Adolfo Gonzalez Rodas, who had been appointed Minister of the Interior in August 1983 [see page 32496], was replaced by Sr Gustavo Lopez Sandoval in late 1983. [For previous cabinet change, see 32667 B.]

The government issued a decree at the end of February 1984 creating the post of Deputy Head of State and appointing to it Col. Rodolfo Lobos Zamora, who had been appointed Chief of Army General Staff in October 1983 [see page 32496], and who retained his military office.

### **Relations with United States and Spain**

The US State Department announced on Jan. 27 that Guatemala would be allowed to purchase \$2,000,000 worth of spare helicopter parts. The US administration had announced its intention of resuming arms sales to Guatemala after President Reagan's visit to Central America in December 1982 [see 31952 A], but Guatemala had not requested the helicopter parts until November 1983 because of a lack of sufficient finance.

There had, however, been some difficulties with earlier US financial assistance, and on Nov. 18 the administration had temporarily suspended aid to Guatemala by refusing a credit for \$35,000,000 from the US Agency for International Development (USAID) after two USAID workers, Sr Felipe Ralac Xiloj and Sra Julieta Sanchez Castillo, were found dead near the Mexican border; they had disappeared on Oct. 18 but their captors were not identified. At the same time under a stopgap appropriations bill approved by Congress the USA suspended aid to Guatemala budgeted for 1984, comprising \$10,250,000 in military

aid, \$13,000,000 in economic development assistance and \$40,000,000 in economic grants.

Talks between Guatemalan and Spanish officials opened in Bogota (the Colombian capital) on Jan. 4 in an attempt to re establish diplomatic relations between the two countries, which had been broken in February 1980 after a group of Guatemalan peasants had seized the Spanish embassy in Guatemala City [see 30320 A]. The talks broke down on Jan. 8, as the Guatemalan government refused to meet the Spanish demand for indemnification for the attack.-(Salvadorean Embassy, London - Guatemalan Embassy, Paris - Times - Guardian - International Herald Tribune - New York Times - El Pats, Madrid - La Vanguardia, Barcelona - Neue Ziircher Zeitung - Le Monde - BBC Summary of World Broadcasts) (*Prev. rep. 32667 B*)

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