

## THE GUATEMALAN MILITARY AND THE REVOLUTION OF 1944

**R**EVOLUTION in Latin America has become a sufficiently frequent occurrence to be subject to stereotypes which can cause misinterpretation. All too often an uprising is discussed in general terms, without assiduous scrutiny of the particulars, resulting in unconscious assumptions based upon stereotyped notions regarding similar movements elsewhere. The result is that important factors can be overlooked, as general principles obscure the facts and the peculiarities of the local situation. The idea that social revolution involves a confrontation between civilian reformers and military dictators has become one of the standard bromides applied to such events.

The 1944 revolution in Guatemala which launched the era of social reform in that country, reveals the degree to which the application of such stereotypes can lead to the misunderstanding of such a movement. Examination of the documentary evidence and tracing the specifics of this tumultuous period indicates that the confrontation was far more complex than a simple civilian-military clash, and in fact consisted of two distinct parts, with a considerable reshaping during the interim. Although the initial uprising in July was predominantly a civilian-middle class protest, this effort failed to unseat the military oligarchy, which proved skillful and imaginative in parrying this thrust with apparent concessions and a changing of the guard. Despite ousting the longtime dictator from office, the July rebellion did not result in a significant realignment of the power structure, and the military elite remained in control. That the second stage of the movement, the October uprising, was vastly different in character from the original thrust has escaped the attention of scholars. This transformation requires close scrutiny if the course of the revolution is to be understood, for the October clash was a confrontation between different elements of the military rather than a civilian-military showdown. The old guard was ousted only by armed force, with the movement's success resulting from a split within the army officer class, and an alliance between the junior officers and the middle class youth against the traditional elite and the old guard senior officers. Consequently, the military remained firmly entrenched as the pivotal political element despite the revolution.

Under the watchwords honesty, efficiency, and progress, General Jorge Ubico held Guatemala in the firm grip of a highly personalista, progressive-military dictatorship for thirteen years. The platform of his Liberal

Progressive Party emphasized development, and the stern caudillo devoted much of his attention to public works projects, particularly a vast expansion of the transportation and communications facilities.<sup>1</sup> A highly successful road construction program gradually helped create an essential element of the economic infrastructure, opening new areas to settlement and cultivation while encompassing a greater portion of the population in the money economy. These efforts resulted in a considerable expansion and transformation of the economy during Ubico's thirteen year rule, with the effects increasing during the later portion of his tenure.<sup>2</sup> This upsurge of commerce naturally brought attendant opportunities for small industry and the service professions, and resulted in the expansion of the government bureaucracy. These factors led to the establishment of a considerable number of middle level managerial, sales, clerical, and other white collar positions, which vastly expanded the middle class. The impact of this phenomena was greatest in the capital, where industry, commerce, and governmental offices were concentrated. Economic development thus greatly enlarged the middle class in the capital, creating a potentially new political force. Since Guatemala was run by and for a tiny oligarchy composed of the military officer caste and the owners of the estates that produced the country's export crops, the regime ignored the newly emergent middle class. Although the economic expansion brought undeniable benefits, the expanding middle class became increasingly frustrated with its systematic exclusion from positions of political power.<sup>3</sup>

Since the army has traditionally constituted one of the principal elements of the power structure throughout Guatemalan history, it is scarcely surprising that General Ubico's regime was military in character. The economic progress he fostered had its price in an immense security apparatus which maintained careful surveillance over all activities. Press cen-

<sup>1</sup> For more detailed explanations of Ubico's platform and policies, see Kenneth J. Grieb, "American Involvement in the Rise of Jorge Ubico," *Caribbean Studies*, X, 1 (April, 1970), pp. 12-13, and 14-19, and Kenneth J. Grieb, "The United States and General Jorge Ubico's Retention of Power," *Revista de Historia de América*, 71 (January to June, 1971), pp. 119-126.

<sup>2</sup> The cumulative effects of these programs, and their extent, are evident in the annual reports of the pertinent Ministries and the newspapers of the period. For example, *El Imparcial* extensively reported the construction and road building efforts, and also noted the development of new industry, particularly during the 1936 to 1941 period. The reports are far too numerous to cite specifically. The annual *Memorias* of the Ministries of Hacienda y Crédito Público, Fomento, and Agricultura indicate the scope of the government's activities and the development of the economy.

<sup>3</sup> Ronald M. Schneider, *Communism in Guatemala, 1944-1954* (New York, 1959), pp. 2-3, and Robert J. Alexander, *Communism in Latin America*, (New Brunswick, New Jersey, 1957), p. 353.

sorship stifled criticism, while political opponents were exiled or harassed, and election control assured a subservient Congress.<sup>4</sup> Perceiving that support of the officer caste was essential to maintaining himself in power and as a product of this caste himself a partisan of its predominance, Ubico judiciously cultivated this group to such an extent that his government became increasingly militarized during its protracted tenure. Gradually officers replaced civilian governors in the provinces, and eventually the posts of *Jefe Político* and governor became synonymous. This process became more evident during the latter portion of his rule, since the effect was cumulative, as supporters rose to higher rank. By 1944, the Guatemalan army boasted 80 generals to command its 15,000 men.<sup>5</sup> Inevitably these promotions fell to old line, politically appointed officers, but like other benefits of the Ubico regime, these rewards had their price. Since generals considerably outnumbered commands it became customary for the “surplus” generals who did not occupy active command positions to assemble daily at the National Palace, in the President’s outer office, where they awaited the Chief Executive’s pleasure.<sup>6</sup> Many of the generals thus became virtual “errand boys,” whom Ubico employed to handle any situations that arose during the course of the day. Ubico required complete subservience from his officials, and placed the entire security apparatus under his personal control. The police reported directly to the Chief Executive rather than to the Minister of Gobernación, and the President conferred daily with his Minister of War, an aged officer selected primarily for his loyalty.<sup>7</sup> While promotions and decorations were frequent, Ubico applied his austerity program to the army, with the result

<sup>4</sup> Numerous reports of government regulation of political activity, control of the countryside, and efficiency in suppressing revolts can be found throughout the regime’s incumbency in the pertinent decimal files of the United States State Department Papers, National Archives, RG 59. See also Schneider, *Communism in Guatemala*, p. 8. Hereinafter State Department Papers are cited by number only.

<sup>5</sup> This summary of the military role in the Ubico government was gleaned from the pertinent reports of the Ministry of War and the Annual Presidential Messages to Congress, particularly those of the regime’s final year in office, *Mensaje que el Presidente de la República General Jorge Ubico dirige a la Asamblea Nacional Legislativa al abrir su periodo de sesiones ordinarias en 1944*, (Guatemala, 1944), *passim.*, and *Memoria de las labores del Ejecutivo en el Ramo de Guerra durante el año administrativo de 1944*, (Guatemala, 1944), *passim.* For the specific total of Generals, see United States Ambassador in Guatemala (Boaz Long) to Secretary of State, July 7, 1944, 814.00/7-744. The cumulative effect of promotions to loyal supporters mounted during the latter years of the regime, increasing the senior officers. For example, fifteen officers were promoted to the rank of Brigadier General during 1940 alone, and thus the surplus of Generals was a characteristic only of the 1940’s, *Memoria, Guerra, 1940*, p. 9.

<sup>6</sup> Lic. Ernesto Rivas, Private Secretary of President Ubico, explained this procedure in an interview with the author, Guatemala City, August 23, 1969.

<sup>7</sup> Lic. Guillermo Sáenz de Tejada, Minister of Gobernación in the Ubico government, to author in a personal interview, Guatemala City, July 15, 1969.

that the average conscript was paid a mere \$3 per month, and even the generals had to settle for a modest salary of \$125, far below the standards of other Latin American armies.<sup>8</sup>

Just as with the economy, part of Ubico's program to strengthen the military sowed the seeds of dissent. In the case of the army, this stemmed from the President's efforts to increase professionalism among the officers through upgrading the Escuela Politécnica, the Guatemalan military academy. At Ubico's personal request a United States Army officer assumed command of the school, and in accordance with Ubico's directive to "make the Escuela Politécnica as near like West Point as was possible under conditions here" stiffened requirements and discipline, introducing a system based on merit.<sup>9</sup> The academy was thus drastically reformed during Ubico's tenure, with a modernized curriculum, a merit system, and a considerable expansion in size.<sup>10</sup> These reforms gradually produced an expanding corps of well trained, professionalized junior officers. Since they owed their graduation solely to merit they included some individuals of middle class origin, thus introducing a new element into the officer corps.

The events of 1944 become understandable only when viewed in this perspective. In both the civilian and the military spheres the government failed to recognize the situation created by its own programs, and attempted to continue administering the nation as if no changes had occurred. The result was the disaffection of the young professionals in civilian and military life, which increased as the regime clung to office, gradually producing an explosive situation.

A revolt in Salvador, which unseated another long-standing dictatorship during May, 1944, increased the tension in Guatemala. The winds of change had swept into a neighboring country, and the parallel between

<sup>8</sup> Ambassador in Guatemala (Boaz Long) to Secretary of State, July 7, 1944, 814.00/7-744, and December 16, 1944, 814.00/12-1644.

<sup>9</sup> For diplomatic exchanges regarding the detailing of American officers to command the military academy, see a Latin American Division Memorandum by R. M. de Lambert, April 11, 1933, 814.00/111, Secretary of State (Cordell Hull) to the Guatemalan Minister of Foreign Relations (Alfredo Skinner Klée), February 5, 1934, 814.20/107, Skinner Klée to Hull, February 6, 1934, 814.20/108, and Guatemalan Minister in Washington (Adrian Recinos) to Hull, December 27, 1934, 814.20/113. Ubico's directive was quoted by the First American Officer assigned to command the academy, Major John Considine, in a report to the Secretary of War, May 2, 1931, 814.20/83.

<sup>10</sup> Ubico's efforts to professionalize the army also included an updated military code, issued October 8, 1935, in the government gazette, *Diario de Centro América*, pp. 561-575. In an interview with a Mexican newsman during the same year, he cited improving the discipline and efficiency of the army as one of his major objectives, *El Liberal Progresista*, December 21, 1935. In continuation of these efforts, a School of Applied Tactics was inaugurated during 1941, *El Imparcial*, May 6, 1941.

the regime of General Maximiliano Hernández Martínez in Salvador and that of Ubico was obvious. United States Ambassador Boaz Long reported that Ubico was disturbed by the Salvadoran turn of events. Significantly, the Guatemalan President was extremely critical of Martínez' attempts to suppress the rebellion, condemning the resulting bloodbath. Ubico stated that such a situation "would not happen" in Guatemala.<sup>11</sup> The success of the Salvadoran uprising emboldened the Guatemalan opposition, and provided exiles with a base of operations on the border. Student leaders promptly announced plans to boycott the June 30 celebration commemorating the founding of the official Liberal Party.<sup>12</sup> In an effort to counteract the discontent Ubico decreed a fifteen percent increase in all salaries to alleviate the pressures caused by wartime inflation, but this token came far too late.<sup>13</sup>

Protests by university students regarding internal campus grievances provided the spark that ignited the volatile situation. A small coterie of Law School students had begun meeting several years earlier, and in 1942 had revived the defunct Law Students Association. The Medical Students Association was resurrected at the same time, and other campus elements followed suit. By late 1943, the groups had coalesced to form the University Students Association to coordinate their activities.<sup>14</sup> In June, 1944, Medical and Law students petitioned for the removal of their Deans. To the surprise of all, the government yielded. This unusual gesture was interpreted as a sign of weakness, and campus leaders immediately determined to press for further concessions to gain political leverage.<sup>15</sup> As one of the few organized sectors of the populace, the students constituted almost the only group capable of initiating a challenge to the administration. The fact that a considerable number of the students came from middle class families denied political power increased their frustration with the regime's rigid control of intellectual activity. With the normal rashness of youth, they were more willing to risk political activity to redress the grievances their parents were content to decry in private. Upon receiving word of the government concession, the University Students As-

<sup>11</sup> Ambassador in Guatemala to Secretary of State, June 21, 1944, 814.00/1464, June 23, 1944, 814.00/6-2344, and July 5, 1944, 814.00/7-544.

<sup>12</sup> Ambassador in Guatemala to Secretary of State, June 21, 1944, *Papers Relating to the Foreign Relations of the United States, 1944 VII, The American Republics*, (Washington, D.C., 1967), p. 1132, and "Heat on a Tyrant," *Time*, (June 26, 1944) p. 45. Hereinafter, the *Foreign Relations* volume will be cited as *FR 1944*.

<sup>13</sup> *New York Times*, June 21, 1944.

<sup>14</sup> Manuel Galich, *Del pánico al ataque*, (Guatemala, 1949), pp. 173-174, 180-182, 191, and 225.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 261-265, and Ambassador in Guatemala to Secretary of State, June 23, 1944, 814.00/6-2344.

sociation endorsed sweeping demands for educational reforms and dismissals throughout the entire university and called for a general university strike. Attempting to placate the dissidents, the President's private secretary, Lic. Ernesto Rivas, summoned protest leaders to the palace and offered concessions in return for a pledge to terminate the demonstrations. Sensing their newfound political power, the students refused.<sup>16</sup> Their ultimatum caused Ubico to convene the first cabinet meeting of his thirteen year regime. The ministers concluded that further concessions would encourage demands by other sectors, and decided to suppress the student factions.<sup>17</sup>

A presidential decree suspending constitutional guarantees, issued in accordance with the cabinet decision, converted the internal campus problem into a national political issue. Despite the government's announcement that the measures were directed exclusively at campus dissidents and its pledge to rescind the decree as rapidly as possible, lawyers and other professional men interpreted the suspension of constitutional guarantees as a general threat.<sup>18</sup> Although student demonstrators surging through the capital were quickly dispersed by troops and police, driving the leaders to asylum in the Mexican Embassy, several small, clandestine associations of lawyers emerged, and promptly marshalled widespread support.<sup>19</sup> By June 24 a student sponsored general strike, endorsed by some labor groups and a substantial portion of the middle class, brought the capital to a standstill. A group of 311 professional men petitioned the government for restoration of constitutional rights and a general liberalization of restrictions.<sup>20</sup> The demonstrations and the broad support they elicited, caught the administration completely by surprise. Responding instinctively with harsh measures, the government decreed martial law, sealed the nation's borders, and rushed reinforcements to

<sup>16</sup> Galich, *Del pánico al ataque*, pp. 265-301.

<sup>17</sup> Ambassador in Guatemala to Secretary of State, June 22, 1944, 814.00/1444, and June 23, 1944, 814.00/6-2344. Reports that this was the first cabinet meeting of the regime were confirmed by Lic. Guillermo Sáenz de Tejada, Minister of Gobernación in the Ubico government, in an interview with the author in Guatemala City on June 15, 1969, and also by Lic. José González Campo, Minister of Hacienda in the Ubico government, in an interview with the author in Guatemala City on July 17, 1969.

<sup>18</sup> The decree and the government's explanation appeared in *El Imparcial*, June 22 and 23, 1944. See also Schneider, *Communism in Guatemala*, p.11.

<sup>19</sup> Galich, *Del pánico al ataque*, pp. 317-321, Baltasar Morales, *Derrocamiento de una tiranía*, 3d Ed., (Guatemala, 1966), pp. 43-48, and Ambassador in Guatemala to Secretary of State, June 23, 1944, 814.00/6-2344.

<sup>20</sup> Panama *American*, June 25, 1944, New York *Times*, June 24 and 27, 1944, *El Imparcial*, July 2, 1944, Ambassador in Guatemala to Secretary of State, June 26, 1944, 814.00/1474, and Schneider, *Communism in Guatemala*, pp. 11-12.



the capital, stationing troops at strategic points throughout the city.<sup>21</sup> The regime also adopted the novel expedient of announcing immediate payment of the entire foreign debt, totaling \$8 million, to empty the treasury and remove what officials considered a “temptation to the opposition.”<sup>22</sup> Even these desperate measures failed to alleviate the situation. While the security forces effectively dispersed large demonstrations, they proved unable to cope with the new tactics that moved small groups of people to the Central Plaza, where they suddenly combined. Army units ringing the Palace eventually fired on these mobs, furnishing the movement with martyrs. Passive resistance became the order of the day in view of the government’s preponderance of force, and demonstrations were abandoned in preference for a general strike supported by the capital’s businessmen, which paralyzed the city. Militarization of the railroad and transportation workers failed to break the strike.<sup>23</sup>

As tension mounted, the government made several attempts to negotiate with the opposition. A delegation composed of members of the Social Democratic Party, student leaders, and lawyers, conferred with cabinet members and ultimately with the President, on June 25 and 26, but both sides remained intransigent.<sup>24</sup> Ubico requested the diplomatic corps to appoint a “mediation commission” of prominent Guatemalans. The envoys assembled a seven man panel of distinguished citizens of the capital, but negotiations collapsed within a day.<sup>25</sup> The United States ambassador characterized the situation as “not quite hopeless.”<sup>26</sup>

With the collapse of the negotiations and the evident deterioration of the situation, Ubico abruptly decided to resign. He had repeatedly stated that he would relinquish power if he considered further efforts futile, and he apparently reached that conclusion on June 30. Summoning the United States ambassador, the chief executive informed him that he would tender his resignation. The envoy reported that Ubico appeared “calm but deeply disillusioned and hurt with the realization that the majority of the country was against him.” The General stated, “I have had enough,” noting that he “did not want to leave the country with blood

<sup>21</sup> Ambassador in Guatemala to Secretary of State, June 25, 1944, 814.00/1472, and *New York Times*, June 27, 1944.

<sup>22</sup> Ambassador in Guatemala to Secretary of State, June 28, 1944, 814.00/6-2844, and *New York Times*, June 29 and July 1, 1944.

<sup>23</sup> Ambassador in Guatemala to Secretary of State, June 25, 1944, 814.00/1472, and /1469, and June 26, 1944, 814.00/1474; *El Nacional* (Mexico), June 27 and 28, 1944; and *New York Times*, June 27, 1944.

<sup>24</sup> Morales, *Derrocamiento de una tiranía*, pp. 82-92.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 92-93, and Ambassador in Guatemala to Secretary of State, June 27, 1944, 814.00/6-2344.

<sup>26</sup> Ambassador in Guatemala to Secretary of State, June 25, 1944, *FR 1944*, VII, p. 1133.

on his hands."<sup>27</sup> Perceiving that his own continuance in office was impossible, Ubico opted for preserving military control by stepping aside. In accordance with his normal practice, he had reached this conclusion himself, without consulting his advisers, cabinet, or military commanders, all of whom were still urging him to continue in office. Early on the following morning the President summoned several of his cabinet ministers and his private secretary by phone. When Rivas arrived at the Palace, the President requested the draft resignation letter which he had directed Rivas to prepare several days earlier, and rapidly approved and signed the statement.<sup>28</sup>

Only after affixing his signature to the letter of resignation did Ubico turn to the question of his successor. According to the Guatemalan Constitution, the presidency normally passes to three "designates," in order of their election by Congress. This normal apparatus that should have determined the succession proved inoperative, since transferring power to one of the existing designates, all loyal Ubiquistas, would have failed to placate the aroused populace. In addition, the first designate was ill, and the others refused to serve.<sup>29</sup> As a consequence, there was no constitutional way for Ubico to hand over the office until the Legislature assembled and elected new designates. Ubico, however, was determined to resign immediately, and any other course would have been impolitic. If he summoned Congress it would be his duty to nominate new designates, and obviously any individual he selected would be unacceptable to the opposition, as the General was far too intransigent to name anyone suggested by the rebels. The situation was entirely to his liking, as he desired to leave a "strong military officer" in charge, thus preserving army dominance.<sup>30</sup> Ubico preferred General Roderico Anzueta, the former Director of Police in the Capital then serving as Minister of Agriculture, as his heir.<sup>31</sup> Although Anzueta had been removed from the police post because of opposition to his methods, Ubico had appointed him Commander of the Plaza of Guatemala during the disturbances, and for practical purposes General Anzueta was again in charge of security. If the President was to relinquish his post, however, his successor must be someone whose selection would placate public opinion, and this consideration eliminated Anzueta. Consequently, Ubico decided to form a military

<sup>27</sup> Ambassador in Guatemala to Secretary of State, June 30, 1944, 814.00/6-3044, and July 1, 1944, 814.00/7-144.

<sup>28</sup> Lic. Ernesto Rivas, Private Secretary to General Ubico, to author in a personal interview, Guatemala City, August 23, 1969.

<sup>29</sup> Ambassador in Guatemala to Secretary of State, June 30, 1944, 814.00/6-3044.

<sup>30</sup> Ambassador in Guatemala to Secretary of State, June 30, 1944, 814.00/6-3044 (two dispatches with the same number.)

<sup>31</sup> Ambassador in Guatemala to Secretary of State, June 30, 1944, 814.00/6-3044.



junta, which would assume custody of the presidency as a temporary expedient designed to allow Ubico to relinquish office at once and leave the selection of his successor entirely in the hands of the Congress. The concession was more apparent than real, for the Legislature was composed of hand-picked Ubiquistas. In effect, naming a junta left the generals to work the matter out themselves.

Hasty selection of the junta indicated that all concerned considered military control the only important aspect. Having signed his resignation, Ubico directed Anzueta to form a junta. The selection process was starkly simple. Since all generals stationed in the capital who did not hold regular commands customarily assembled at the Palace daily to await instructions, Anzueta simply stepped into the President's outer office, where he found that because of the early hour, only three generals were present—Federico Ponce Vaides, Eduardo Villagarán Ariza, and Buenaventura Pineda. Without further consideration, Anzueta constituted them into a junta.<sup>32</sup> None of the three were confidants of Ubico, or had played a pivotal role in his regime. They certainly were not the key generals in the army, as the most important and trusted officers held commands in the capital. The three were simply available—and that was all that was considered necessary. The generals, collectively, constituted the real repository of the presidency, with the junta officers as figureheads.

Ubico's resignation produced widespread jubilation, but the resulting turmoil, coupled with the relaxation of government controls, merely exacerbated the political crisis.<sup>33</sup> While waiting for Congress to assemble, the junta acted to remove the principal legal irritants by terminating the stringent measures imposed during the outbreak. The decree suspending constitutional guarantees was immediately revoked, along with various other measures generally blamed for the burgeoning inflation, such as restrictions on the sale of agricultural products and the slaughter of cattle.<sup>34</sup> To complete the evidence of change, the military commanders withdrew the troops to fixed positions around the Palace and other governmental installations, terminating patrols within the city and abandoning efforts to prevent street demonstrations. These policies were designed to emphasize the end of the Ubico era and create an appearance of revolutionary victory, while masking the army's continued dominance. Much of

<sup>32</sup> The entire narrative of the resignation was provided by Lic. Ernesto Rivas, Ubico's Private Secretary, in a personal interview with the author, Guatemala City, August 23, 1969.

<sup>33</sup> Ambassador in Guatemala to Secretary of State, July 1, 1944, 814.00/7-144; *El Nacional* (Mexico), July 2, 1944, and *Panama American*, July 1 and 2, 1944.

<sup>34</sup> Ambassador in Guatemala to Secretary of State, July 1, 1944, 814.00/7-144, July 3, 1944, 814.00/7-344, and July 4, 1944, *FR 1944*, VII, pp. 1134-1136; *La Estrella de Panamá*, July 2, 1944, and *New York Times*, July 3, 1944.

the populace poured into the streets to celebrate after years of rigid restriction, and the joyous outbursts produced a chaotic situation that increased the political tension despite the festive air. Newspapers hailed the new liberty and the youth who launched the protest.<sup>35</sup>

The tumultuous crowds introduced a new complexity when the National Assembly convened on July 4. The galleries were crowded with people from all walks of life who came determined to participate. Congress accepted the resignations of Ubico and the three presidential designates, but before debate could proceed sufficiently to produce any consensus on the selection of new designates the situation became uncontrollable. Ambassador Long reported that the spectators became "interested and physically involved" in the debate, to the point that "no Congressman could say more than a few words before some person in the gallery would yell him down." Portions of the crowd surged onto the floor of the Assembly, disrupting the session. The presiding officer declared the session adjourned, and the legislators abandoned the hall while police and troops were summoned to clear the galleries.<sup>36</sup> The scene had thoroughly unnerved Congress, and convinced many of its members that only a military president could maintain order. Since most of the Congressmen were members of the oligarchy, they were naturally inclined to turn to a general in times of crisis. Hence although none of the original nominees for the provisional presidency were army officers, a substantial portion of the Legislators began searching for a military candidate in the aftermath of the debacle produced by the opening session. A delegation of Assemblymen visited the Palace, and inquired about the availability of the junta officers. The triumvirate members all properly demurred, but allowed themselves to be "persuaded" to reconsider, and informed the Congressmen that whichever of them was selected by the Legislature would "reluctantly" accept the post.<sup>37</sup> Reassembling in closed session with troops ringing the Congressional building, the Assembly elected General Federico Ponce, strong man of the junta, as provisional president.<sup>38</sup>

Installation of General Ponce as provisional president confirmed the military control, and indicated that the change in government was more

<sup>35</sup> *El Imparcial*, July 2, 3, and 4, 1944, and Ambassador in Guatemala to Secretary of State, July 5, 1944, 814.00/7-544.

<sup>36</sup> Ambassador in Guatemala to Secretary of State, July 4, 1944, 814.00/7-444, and July 5, 1944, 814.00/7-544, *El Imparcial*, July 4, 1944, and Medardo Mejía, *El movimiento obrero en la Revolución de Octubre*, (Guatemala, 1949), pp. 74-75.

<sup>37</sup> Lic. Ernesto Rivas to author in a personal interview, Guatemala City, August 23, 1969.

<sup>38</sup> Ambassador in Guatemala to Secretary of State, July 4, 1944, 814.00/7-444, and July 7, 1944, 814.00/7-744 (two dispatches with the same number.)

apparent than real. The significance of the election of a career officer who was a loyal adherent of Ubico was unmistakable, despite the fact that Ponce was neither a leading member of the ousted regime nor one of the country's most prominent military officers. Critics contended that Ponce had intimidated Congress by encircling the building with troops, and that dispersal of the spectators the previous day constituted a coup d'état to prevent Congress from acting.<sup>39</sup> This argument overlooked the fact that the Congressmen were part of the old regime, and scarcely needed to be intimidated—the actions of the crowd frightened them more than any troop maneuvers. The generals were acting with a subtlety rarely duplicated in Latin America. For it was the chaos in the streets and the unruly multitude in the galleries that terrified the Congressmen, and they predictably stampeded in search of a military “strong man.” Relaxation of restrictions thus not only allowed the populace to vent their frustrations, but also “compelled” the civilian politicians to “thrust” the presidency into the hands of the military—which grasped it eagerly. To be sure the army could have conducted a coup if necessary, but it was far more prudent to allow a general to assume office at the request of the civilian congress.

It quickly became apparent that the military was still in control, and governmental transfer resembled a changing of the guard rather than a significant alteration of the power structure. Although a new general occupied the presidential chair, it was still firmly in the hands of a military “strong man.” Despite several new cabinet appointments, a substantial portion of the Ubiquista officials continued in office on a “temporary” basis, including such key individuals as Minister of Foreign Relations Carlos Salazar, Military Commander of the Plaza General Roderico Anzueta, and Private Secretary to the Presidency Ernesto Rivas. Although Ubico had refused to participate in the selection of the junta or the provisional president, once Ponce assumed office Ubico received a constant stream of visitors at his home, including several members of the government, causing speculation that the ex-president was still in control.<sup>40</sup>

<sup>39</sup> *El Imparcial*, July 4, 1944. Commenting on these charges, and the resultant counter charges, the ambassador opined: “Both of these points of view may be open to discussion,” Ambassador in Guatemala to Secretary of State, July 7, 1944, 814.00/7-744.

<sup>40</sup> The visitors to Ubico's residence were reported in Ambassador in Guatemala to Secretary of State, July 4, 1944, 814.00/7-444, July 5, 1944, 814.00/7-544, and July 14, 1944, 814.00/7-1444 (two dispatches with the same number). The story of Ubico's initial refusal to receive guests was related by Lic. Ernesto Rivas in a personal interview with the author, Guatemala City, August 23, 1969. Rivas explained that he and the other holdover members of the Ubico regime would have “preferred to resign,” and stayed on only on a “temporary basis” at Ponce's insistence.

While Ubico and Ponce were not on close personal terms, holdover administrators might well have turned to their old mentor for "advice." The former chief executive and his generals had shrewdly created the appearance of yielding to popular pressure while effectively maintaining power in the hope that this maneuver would placate the discontented masses.

Agitation continued, and although the opposition leaders initially refrained from condemning Ponce, they launched a major effort to organize the masses in preparation for the forthcoming elections. *El Imparcial* bristled with articles relating experiences of individuals imprisoned by Ubico and of students injured in clashes with police during the recent demonstrations, in an attempt to elicit support and sympathy from the populace by emphasizing the harshest aspects of the old regime.<sup>41</sup> Direct criticism of the provisional president was initially limited to editorials urging him to renounce any intention of becoming a candidate in the forthcoming elections, as rumors to this effect were already circulating. Ponce immediately obliged, declaring that he would not enter the elections under any circumstances.<sup>42</sup> The dissidents formed several peasant and labor unions, attempting to channel the widespread popular support into disciplined groups.<sup>43</sup> A plethora of minuscule political movements emerged, with new parties surfacing weekly. American embassy officials prefaced their reports with the comment that the rapid proliferation of parties rendered all analyses transmitted by mail obsolete by the time they reached Washington.<sup>44</sup>

The fluidity of the political situation was evident in United States diplomatic reports regarding the rapid emergence of Juan José Arévalo as the principal opposition leader. In mid-July, the ambassador noted the formation of "a Romantic Party" which launched the candidacy of Arévalo, "a teacher at some Argentinian University." The party, he continued, consisted primarily of writers, poets, and other "romantic" types. A month later reports from Argentina were flowing in, indicating that the State Department now considered Arévalo important enough to investigate his background. By August 21, the Embassy in Guatemala was characterizing Arévalo as the principal leader of the student movement, as the myriad of revolutionary factions coalesced around his candidacy,

<sup>41</sup> Throughout July, 1944, *El Imparcial* printed numerous such articles.

<sup>42</sup> Ambassador in Guatemala to Secretary of State, July 12, 1944, 814.00/7-1244.

<sup>43</sup> Ambassador in Guatemala to Secretary of State, July 21, 1944, 814.00/7-2144.

<sup>44</sup> Ambassador in Guatemala to Secretary of State, July 14, 1944, 814.00/7-1444, August 21, 1944, 814.00/8-2144, August 25, 1944, 814.00/8-2544, and September 1, 1944, 814.00/9-144.

and by September 1, the ambassador considered him the “strongest candidate not directly connected with the military.”<sup>45</sup> As the nominee of the “Popular Liberating Front,” Arévalo had begun issuing statements nearly a month before his return to Guatemala. He advocated “spiritual socialism” as against “materialistic socialism,” and condemned the Ubico regime as “Nazi-fascist.” The rest of his program consisted of broad references to the necessity for democracy, free expression, and protection of human dignity.<sup>46</sup>

The provisional government also endeavored to strengthen its position throughout the electoral campaign. Convoking elections for mid-December elicited favorable comment, since it allowed a campaign of sufficient duration to enable broad participation and permit exiles to return in time to take active part. The lengthy campaign also prolonged the term of the provisional regime, and hence extended its opportunity to consolidate its position. Attempting to develop a favorable public image, the Ponce regime was initially characterized by a tolerance of dissent that contrasted sharply with Ubico’s stern rule. Amnesty was extended to all political prisoners incarcerated during the waning days of the old regime, arrests were suspended, and government controls on the economy lifted. Noting the emergence of numerous embryonic newspapers and political groups the United States ambassador commented that the provisional government was “relatively liberal.” Such leniency evoked a favorable response, and by mid-July Long reported a distinct rise in Ponce’s popularity. An obscure figure prior to his elevation to office, the provisional president had made a favorable impression, despite the initial doubts. His practice of walking the streets of the capital accompanied only by a single aide caught the imagination of the populace, for this gesture appealed to Guatemalan bravado.<sup>47</sup>

Despite the rise in Ponce’s personal popularity, the government became alarmed by Arévalo’s emergence as a major presidential candidate, and began to take precautionary measures. The United States am-

<sup>45</sup> Ambassador in Guatemala to Secretary of State, July 14, 1944, 814.00/7-1444, United States chargé in Buenos Aires (Edward L. Reed) to Secretary of State, August 19, 1944, 814.00/8-1944; unsigned memorandum from Embassy in Guatemala in State Department files, August 21, 1944, 814.00/8-2344, Ambassador in Guatemala to Secretary of State, September 1, 1944, 814.00/9-144.

<sup>46</sup> Arévalo’s “declaration of principles,” is enclosed in United States chargé in Buenos Aires to Secretary of State, August 19, 1944, 814.00/8-1944. His most important statements prior to assuming office are contained in Juan José Arévalo, *Escritos políticos*, 2d Ed., (Guatemala, 1946), *passim*, with the essay on “Nazismo europeo y nazismo criollo,” on pp. 75-78, and references to “spiritual socialism” on pp. 148-149, 162-164, and 186-188. See also Schneider, *Communism in Guatemala*, pp. 16-18.

<sup>47</sup> Ambassador in Guatemala to Secretary of State, July 14, 1944, 814.00/7-1444, and July 21, 1944, 814.00/7-2144, and Mejía, *El movimiento obrero*, p. 81.

bassador detected an “undertone of unrest” despite the surface calm. As early as July 25, the provisional government issued a statement condemning the activities of “agitators,” and by mid-August, Long was reporting that officials were taking a “pessimistic view of the immediate future.” With popular feeling continuing at a fever pitch, mobs began disrupting campaign rallies, and several Congressmen resigned after being menaced by demonstrators. When coupled with mounting press criticism, these incidents alarmed the government.<sup>48</sup> The military had initially indicated a willingness to install a civilian member of the oligarchy in the presidential chair, and consequently the official Ubiquista Liberal Party nominated Adrian Recinos, longtime Guatemalan Ambassador in Washington. It was soon apparent, however, that Recinos stood little chance of victory.<sup>49</sup>

In view of these developments, it became obvious to the generals that a mere change of presidents would not be sufficient to enable “business as usual,” and that the free rein granted to popular feeling was increasing discontent. The military leaders and the oligarchy had hoped that merely substituting another general for Ubico and then installing a civilian oligarch as a facade, would calm public sentiment and stifle the surge for social reform. They apparently calculated that removing restrictions would permit a brief orgy of popular enthusiasm which would exhaust itself and dissipate the energies of the opposition leaders. Instead of fading, however, the dissidents continued to gain strength.

With the emergence of an opposition that posed an effective electoral threat, the generals edged toward the familiar tactics of repression. The decision was apparently reached late in August, when American officials learned that a representative of the regime visited Salvador, to confer with military leaders who had regained control of that country after suppressing a similar outbreak.<sup>50</sup> Rumors that Ponce would enter the lists as a presidential aspirant increased, and by mid-September, many Guatemalans were convinced that the General intended to retain power.<sup>51</sup> Ponce began to sound out the Assembly regarding passage of a constitutional amendment permitting the provisional executive to become a candidate without resigning. Manuel Melgar, the new secretary to the President,

<sup>48</sup> Ambassador in Guatemala to Secretary of State, July 25, 1944, 814.00/7-2544, August 15, 1944, 814.00/8-1544, and August 21, 1944, 814.00/8-2144.

<sup>49</sup> Ambassador in Guatemala to Secretary of State, July 14, 1944, 814.00/7-1444, and August 15, 814.00/8-1544.

<sup>50</sup> Ambassador in Guatemala to Secretary of State, August 23, 1944, 814.00/8-2344.

<sup>51</sup> Newspapers began to comment on Ponce's apparent intentions during September, *Diario de Guatemala*, September 11, 12, 13, 16, and 18, 1944. Long filed similar reports, Ambassador in Guatemala to Secretary of State, September 12, 1944, 814.00/9-1244, September 19, 1944, 814.00/9-1944, and September 29, 1944, 814.00/9-2944.



summoned the Deputies in small groups, asking them to inscribe their names on lists supporting the constitutional amendment, but encountered considerable resistance.<sup>52</sup> The regime also prepared to employ the rural Indian masses to counter the agitation in the capital. This strategy became apparent when several hundred Indians, armed with machetes and clubs, were transported into the city in government trucks to participate in a national holiday on September 15. They paraded through the streets with photos of Ponce pinned to their clothes, and then were quartered at the government owned finca "La Auora" on the edge of the capital for several days. The presence of this group terrorized the entire city.<sup>53</sup> It was evident that the government intended the measure as a warning.

Following these preparations, the Ponce regime began to suppress its opposition ruthlessly. During the latter part of September a radio station and several newspapers were ordered closed, and attempts were made to persuade others to temporarily suspend operation "voluntarily." On October 1 Alejandro Córdova, the owner-editor of *El Imparcial*, the leading anti-administration periodical, was assassinated by "unknown individuals." The crime occurred a few days after the minister of war summoned him and warned him to cease his attacks on the regime, while offering him a substantial sum of money to close his paper and "take a vacation" until after the election.<sup>54</sup> A few days later Córdova's successor was compelled to jump out his office window to escape pursuing police, fleeing to the protection of the Mexican Embassy.<sup>55</sup> The same week, rural supporters of Adrian Recinos were "invited" to leave the country by local officials. A wave of terror followed, which virtually terminated the campaign.<sup>56</sup> Some thirty-six hours after the publisher's assassination, ex-president Ubico called at the United States Embassy to provide his personal analysis of the political situation. The former executive denounced Arévalo, criticized all the candidates, and stated that the situation rendered it essential that Ponce continue in office. The following day Ponce visited the ambassador, who noted that the provisional president's analysis of

<sup>52</sup> United States chargé in Guatemala to (William C. Affeld Jr.) to Secretary of State, October 13, 1944, 814.00/10-1344.

<sup>53</sup> Ambassador in Guatemala to Secretary of State, September 22, 1944, 814.00/9-2244, September 25, 1944, 814.00/9-2544, and September 29, 1944, 814.00/9-2944.

<sup>54</sup> Lic. David Vela, Editor of *El Imparcial* and Assistant to Córdova who assumed the editorship upon the death of his chief, to author in a personal interview, Guatemala City, July 14, 1969; Ambassador in Guatemala to Secretary of State, October 1, 1944, 814.00/10-144, and October 2, 1944, 814.00/10-244; *New York Times*, October 3, 1944; and Schneider, *Communism in Guatemala*, pp. 13-14.

<sup>55</sup> Lic. David Vela to author in a personal interview, Guatemala City, July 14, 1969.

<sup>56</sup> *New York Times*, October 11, 1944, and Unsigned memorandum in State Department files, October 13, 1944, 814.00/10-1344.

the situation was identical with Ubico's.<sup>57</sup> Results of the October 13 elections to fill vacancies in Congress confirmed Ponce's determination to retain power. In the words of the American chargé, the official returns indicated that the government supported slate "won by a handsome, not to say fantastic, margin, garnering 48,530 votes out of a total of 44,571" ballots cast. Invigorated by its "success," the regime ordered the arrest and deportation of Arévalo.<sup>58</sup>

The generals were not the only component of the military, however, and the revolutionaries found a fertile field for their propaganda among the disgruntled, professionalized junior officers. The student and middle class leaders had learned from painful experience that although passive tactics could compel the resignation of the executive, their effects were purely negative. Working outside the power structure they could exert no influence over the choice of a successor. It was evident to the dissident leaders that the revolution had been aborted by the generals, and that only possession of sufficient force to counteract the army could bring a change in the power structure. Given the realities of Guatemala this force could come from only one source—inside the very military the revolutionaries sought to overthrow. Consequently, during the weeks following Ponce's installation, the revolutionaries launched a new strategy—seeking to subvert the army from within. They quickly discovered that ample opportunity to split the military existed. Expansion of the polytechnic school had produced a substantial corps of well trained, professionalized, junior officers, who considered themselves better prepared than their commanders, many of whom had begun their careers prior to the establishment of the military academy, and owed their rank to political maneuvering. The rigidity of the regime and the social system denied the younger officers opportunities they felt they deserved. Since Ubico stressed austerity, military wages were extremely modest. If a general's salary of \$125 a month looked meager to the senior commanders when compared to those in other countries, it appeared absolutely princely to the subalterns. The newly commissioned lieutenant found upon completing the arduous course at the academy that his stipend was a mere \$24 a month. Naturally the junior officers chaffed at such scales. In addition, Ubico was extremely reluctant to send officers abroad for advanced training, thus barring a potential "fringe benefit."<sup>59</sup> Approaching the junior

<sup>57</sup> Ambassador in Guatemala to Secretary of State, October 6, 1944, 814.00/10-644.

<sup>58</sup> Chargé in Guatemala to Secretary of State, October 17, 1944, *FR 1944*, VII, pp. 1140-1141; and Carlos Samayoa Chinchilla, *El quetzal no es rojo*, (Guatemala, 1956), pp. 86-87.

<sup>59</sup> Mejía, *El movimiento obrero*, p. 86, and Ambassador in Guatemala to Secretary of State, December 16, 1944, 814.00/12-1644.

officers coincided with the civilian emphasis on a youth movement. Revolutionary propaganda also stressed the superior training of the junior officers, and the political origins of the generals. Junior officers were informed that Ubico, Ponce, and their cohorts, had besmirched the name of the army by corrupt practices, thus reducing its standing within the nation. Finally, the revolutionaries found it necessary to produce a counter-argument to military loyalty, which had been instilled in the young officers. In doing so, the rebel leaders ironically were compelled to espouse the theory that the army had a duty not merely to defend the government, but also to uphold the constitution. The concept of the army as the custodian of the constitution was the only possible rationale to counter the military loyalty, as it appealed to the officers' sense of duty.<sup>60</sup> To overthrow a military regime, it proved necessary to propagate the notion that the military was above the government, and had a duty to oust corrupt, unrepresentative, and unconstitutional regimes.

The resulting split in the military ranks proved to be the key to the overthrow of the Ponce regime, which became possible only after the revolutionaries had secured the support of a substantial portion of the army. By October, 1944, the American chargé reported that only six of the officers who had graduated from the military academy during recent years were on duty in the capital, and those six included the President's sons. Even with such stringent dispersal of recent academy graduates, the chargé noted "decided mistrust" between those junior officers stationed in the capital, and the senior commanders.<sup>61</sup>

On October 20, a few days after Arévalo and several of his key supporters had issued a manifesto calling for revolt, the Ponce regime fell abruptly when the presidential guard rebelled under the leadership of junior officers. While all other garrisons in the capital initially remained loyal, the government's previous decision to concentrate heavy armaments in the hands of the *guardia de honor* proved decisive, for in addition to being well supplied with artillery and machine guns, the guard had control of the country's twelve tanks. The revolt was essentially military in character, led by Major Francisco Javier Arana, commander of the tank battalion, and Captain Jacobo Árbenz, who had recently been dismissed from the service. Both Árbenz and Arana had long been considered leaders of

<sup>60</sup> Mejía, *El movimiento obrero*, pp. 86-88, quoting an article "Por que actuó el Ejército?" from the *Revista Militar*, originally published in February, 1945. See also Arévalo, *Escritos políticos*, indicating various statements by Arévalo on the military and its role in the government, indicating his appeal to the younger officers, *eg.* pp. 21, 82, 86-87, 154-155, and 183-184.

<sup>61</sup> Chargé in Guatemala to Secretary of State, October 17, 1944, 814.00/10-1744, and October 18, 1944, 814.00/10-1844.

the junior officers, and Árbenz had been particularly popular with the cadets while serving as a professor at the military academy. A fierce battle ensued, but government forces were hopelessly outgunned, and the tank battalion enabled the rebel troops to seize most of the capital.<sup>62</sup> Ponce's efforts to borrow weapons and ammunition from neighboring countries proved futile, and a lucky hit by an artillery shell on the magazine of one of the loyal forts completed the debacle. Negotiations were initiated shortly after the fighting began, culminating in the surrender of the government forces.<sup>63</sup> The departure of numerous leaders of the oligarchy for exile, including cabinet members and senior army officers, indicated the scope of the turnover. Unlike the resignation of Ubico, this transition produced a sharp break.

The successful revolt ousted the old military elite, and placed the younger officers in control. The new junta consisted of Major Arana, Captain Árbenz, and a civilian, Jorge Toriello Carrido. Despite the civilian representative, Arana and Árbenz held the effective power. The military regime had been ousted only by a military revolt, and it was replaced by a predominantly military junta, although the latter was pledged to install a civilian, Arévalo, as eventual president. The new junta promptly purged the bureaucracy and the senior army commands, to remove adherents of the old regime, thus completing the transfer of power. Of course, the purges also opened places for the young rebel leaders. Military pay was immediately increased substantially.<sup>64</sup> Although the new regime enjoyed considerable popularity, it found it necessary to proceed cautiously, and the junta ruled "with an iron hand in a silk glove."<sup>65</sup> Supporters of Arévalo swept the November Assembly elections, and a

<sup>62</sup> For accounts of the combat and leaders, Chargé in Guatemala to Secretary of State, October 20, 1944, 814.00/10-2044 (two dispatches with the same number); Memorandum of a telephone conversation between the Chargé and the Assistant Chief of the Division of American Republics (John M. Cabot), October 21, 1944, 814.00/10-2144; *Panama American*, October 21, 1944; and Mejía, *El movimiento obrero*, p. 88. Arbenz' standing with the cadets was described to the author by Rafael Castro Silva, the son of the Costa Rican Minister to Guatemala, who himself had been a cadet at the Guatemalan Escuela Politécnica, in an interview in San José, Costa Rica, August 14, 1969.

<sup>63</sup> United States Ambassador in Honduras (John D. Erwin) to Secretary of State, October 20, 1944, 814.00/10-2044, Chargé in Guatemala to Secretary of State, October 23, 1944, 814.00/10-2344, and "Revolution," *Time*, October 30, 1944, p. 38.

<sup>64</sup> Chargé in Guatemala to Secretary of State, October 26, 1944, 814.00/10-2644 (two dispatches with the same number); Ambassador in Guatemala to Secretary of State, November 3, 1944, 814.00/11-344, November 7, 1944, 814.00/11-744, and December 16, 1944, 814.00/12-1644; Schneider, *Communism in Guatemala*, p.15; and Alexander, *Communism in Latin America*, p. 354.

<sup>65</sup> *Panama American*, October 30, 1944. Several counterrevolutionary attempts were reported, principally occurring in rural Indian areas, Ambassador in Guatemala to Secretary of State, October 31, 1944, 814.00/10-3144.

presidential ballot was immediately scheduled for December. As expected Arévalo scored an overwhelming triumph.<sup>66</sup> His installation in office completed the transition begun by the junta.

There was, of course, a price for the support of the young officers, which had enabled Arévalo to take office. Despite the idealistic rhetoric, the leaders of the revolt received the traditional rewards. Arana rose from Major to full Colonel, and Arbenz from Captain to Lieutenant Colonel. Arana also became Minister of Defense, and hence effective commander of the armed forces. The officers and men who had supported the uprising had already received their share—higher salaries, an opportunity to study abroad, and promotions resulting from vacancies created by the purge of supporters of the old regime. More importantly, the new Constitution made the armed forces virtually independent of the government. This autonomy measure appeared on the agenda which the junta prepared for the Assembly in what the American ambassador described as “a Constitutional curiosity” attempting to “dictate by executive action the provisions of a new Constitution.”<sup>67</sup> The Assembly accepted the proposal, which was strongly endorsed by Arévalo.<sup>68</sup> Its avowed purpose was to divorce the army from politics by terminating political promotions based on loyalty and preventing manipulation of the army for political purposes. Hopefully it would cause the army to devote its concern to professional matters and remove itself from politics. But autonomy could also have the reverse effect, particularly when combined with the idea that the military was the guardian of the Constitution. Throughout his term of office, Arévalo was careful to praise the army effusively, and champion its autonomy.<sup>69</sup> This was the cost of military support, and granting favors and praise to the army differed little from the policy of previous regimes. There was little friction, because of the alliance between young officers and young intellectuals, who shared ideals about improving the country. But the implications for the future remained, and reform was dependent upon the commitment of the professionalized officer corps.

The year 1944 thus witnessed a power struggle in Guatemala in which the youthful reform-minded leaders of the middle class, in alliance with the junior military officers, challenged and defeated the traditional ruling elite. Jorge Ubico had been a skillful politician throughout his long ten-

<sup>66</sup> Ambassador in Guatemala to Secretary of State, November 7, 1944, 814.00/11-744, December 20, 1944, *FR 1944*, VII, p. 1152, and December 21, 1944, 814.00/12-2144.

<sup>67</sup> Ambassador in Guatemala to Secretary of State, November 29, 1944, 814.00/11-2944, and November 30, 1944, 814.00/11-3044.

<sup>68</sup> Ambassador in Guatemala to Secretary of State, December 14, 1944, 814.00/12-1444, and Luis Cardoza y Aragón, *La Revolución Guatemalteca*, (Mexico, 1955), p. 48.

<sup>69</sup> Juan José Arévalo, *Discursos en la Presidencia*, (Guatemala, 1947), contains numerous examples, such as pp. 19, 21-22, 25, 49-51, 78, 110, and 118-120.

ure, and his resourcefulness, and that of his fellow military officers, was evident in his response to this uprising. Unlike many other dictators he did not blindly resist the movement and cling to power. Instead, he endeavored to quiet the unrest by subtle methods, even surrendering his office. Ubico was attempting to preserve the old order rather than his personal position. The Ponce government thus represented an effort to appease the rising social discontent with minimal concessions, assuring continuance of military-oligarchic dominance. Attempting to deal with social unrest by merely replacing old generals with new ones and removing restrictions to permit dissidents to vent their frustrations constituted a novel and imaginative approach. Few dictators and military commands have been resourceful or realistic enough to risk such an experiment. The Ponce regime, therefore, constituted a new departure in the response of a military elite to social unrest. The Guatemalan high command's attempt to preserve the old order was far more subtle than that of most Latin military establishments, and it failed only because military unity was shattered by discontented younger elements.

The resourcefulness of the senior officers and the old elite compelled a change of tactics on the part of the revolutionaries, and produced a situation in which the army remained dominant under the new regime. It was, to be sure, a new army, with the younger elements in control. But it was nonetheless a military establishment and it remained the dominant element in the power structure, albeit granting a greater share to the civilian sector. For the revolutionaries found that in order to overcome the military it was necessary to secure support from within it, and bestow benefits upon it. The July revolution was essentially a civilian movement, which succeeded only negatively—it merely forced the President from office. The October revolution achieved the positive objectives of ousting the old oligarchy and placing the younger elements and the middle class in control of the government and the nation. This was possible only because the October revolution was essentially a military uprising representing a clash between rival elements of the army. The result did transform the nation and its social structure, but it did not affect the position of the military within the power structure. If the landowners were eliminated and the middle class elevated to the former position of the *finqueros*, their relationship with the military remained a subordinate one, just as had been that of the landowners. Each held power at the sufferance of the military, and was beholden to it.

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