



THE PROTECTION RACKET STATE

**Elite Politics, Military Extortion,
and Civil War in El Salvador**



William Stanley

HV
6433
S2
573
1996



Temple University Press
Philadelphia

Temple University Press, Philadelphia 19122

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Published 1996

Printed in the United States of America

⊗ The paper used in this book meets the requirements of
the American National Standard for Information Sciences—
Permanence of Paper for Printed Library Materials,
ANSI Z39.48-1984

Text design by Betty Palmer McDaniel

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Stanley, William Deane, 1958–

The protection racket state : elite politics, military extortion, and civil war in
El Salvador / William Stanley.

p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references (p.) and index.

ISBN 1-56639-391-4 (cl : alk. paper). — ISBN 1-56639-392-2 (pb : alk. paper)

1. State-sponsored terrorism—El Salvador—History—20th century. 2. Death squads—
El Salvador—History—20th century. 3. Political persecution—El Salvador—History—20th
century. 4. El Salvador—Politics and government—20th century. I. Title.

HV6433.S2S73 1996

972.8405—dc20

95-20998

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TWO



ANTECEDENTS: THE *MATANZA* AND THE ESTABLISHMENT OF MILITARY RULE

Late on the night of 22/23 January 1932, several thousand indigenous and mestizo peasants in the western part of El Salvador attacked towns, police posts, and military barracks. Armed primarily with machetes but in some areas having a significant number of rifles, the insurgents took over several towns, overwhelmed isolated police posts, and indulged in looting, arson, and, in a few places, rape and murder. Most of the violence was directed against symbols of local oppression—the wealthy and their homes, mayors, and municipal offices (Ching 1995, 31). The rebels killed about 35 civilians and local police. Five Customs Police were killed in the attack on Sonsonate, and the National Police lost a total of 10 in Sonsonate and Santa Tecla. Nine National Guardsmen were killed and 10 wounded, and the regular army lost between 20 and 40 soldiers (Anderson 1971, 136).¹

In response, National Guard and army forces from Ahuachapán, Sonsonate, Santa Ana, and San Salvador marched on the towns taken by the rebels and systematically defeated the insurgents. The better-armed government forces made quick work of the rebels, suppressing the last rebel band in Tacuba in just three days. With the military threat eliminated, government troops, with the National Guard playing the most prominent role, proceeded to massacre anyone in the western part of the country whom they suspected of having participated in the revolt. In practice, suspects included anyone who looked “Indian,” dressed like a peasant, or carried a machete (as almost all rural workers do). Suspects were executed en masse by firing squads and truck-mounted machine guns. In many cases, people in the rebellious zones were told to report to neighboring National Guard barracks to receive safe-conduct passes. When they arrived, they were seized and executed. According to the account of Miguel Mármol (a Salvadoran communist who survived four bullet wounds from a firing squad):

From the barracks at Ahuachapán a stream of blood flowed, as if it were water, or the urine of horses. [Later] a lieutenant who was in service there would recall, crying, that the peasants who were being shot in groups in the patio would sing “Corazón Santo, Tú Reinarás” (Sacred Heart, You Will Reign, a Catholic hymn) and that in the pools of blood he and the soldiers in the firing squad had seen, clear as can be, the image of Christ and had refused to go on killing and protested to their superiors. The protest was made in such adamant terms that the Commander of the garrison ordered a temporary halt to the massacre. (McClintock 1985a, 114)

Corpses were piled in mass graves, in sulphur pits, and in the drainage ditches along the roads. Pigs fed on the human remains. In one case a church wall collapsed from having absorbed so many volleys from firing squads and machine guns (McClintock 1985a, 112–13). Though the exact extent of the carnage is unknown, in part because the government destroyed virtually all documents that could provide clues, at least eight to ten thousand were killed (Anderson 1971, 135). Other observers who conducted interviews in the area of the massacres put the number at around twenty-five thousand (Montes 1987, 191). The higher estimates would be equivalent to 2 percent of El Salvador’s population at the time, and in the communities where the rebellions took place, up to two-thirds of the local population was eliminated (Paige 1994, 2). Whatever the number, the *matanza* (“slaughter”) created enough fear that it effectively eliminated distinctive indigenous dress, languages, and other cultural expressions from western El Salvador. People were still afraid to talk about it 40 years later when investigators attempted to conduct interviews in the area, and the population of the western region has proven reluctant to participate in opposition politics to the present day (Paige 1994, 2).

The *matanza* was not confined to the rural west, though certainly it was most intense there. Large numbers of executions are reported to have been carried out in San Salvador and other cities, as government forces rounded up virtually anyone they suspected of being a leftist. The urban executions were so numerous that “the chief of the department of sanitation feared a major epidemic would result from the slowly decomposing bodies. By the end of January the number of deaths had risen to the point where burial became impractical, and the chief of operations ordered the incineration of bodies. Night after night San Salvador was disturbed by the rumble of military trucks carrying the captured into the city, and bursts of machine-gun fire as ‘justice’ was hurriedly rendered.”² According to Salvadoran military historian Colonel Gregorio Bustamente Maceo, “Every night trucks went full of victims from the Dirección General de Policía to the banks of the Río Acelhuate where the victims were shot out of hand and buried anonymously in great ditches” (McClintock 1985a, 114). McClintock reports that “sometimes the killings in the

cities were entirely arbitrary. Several accounts tell the story of a group of about 100 anti-Communist craftsmen who presented themselves at the garrison in San Salvador to offer their services as volunteers. They were invited in and then shot dead in the courtyard of the barracks" (1985a, 114). Such broadly random killing was hardly necessary to break the back of the communist movement, since the government had a nearly complete list of Communist Party members, who had registered by party affiliation (many against their own better judgment) in order to vote in the early January municipal and legislative elections (Ching 1995). Nonetheless, the killing went on for several weeks, until essentially all plausible targets had been exhausted.

The *Matanza* and the Consolidation of Military Rule

The rebellion and government massacre of 1932 took place in the broader context of what Everett Alan Wilson (1970) has called the "crisis of national integration" in El Salvador. The post-World War I period had seen rapid socioeconomic transformations. The coffee industry expanded vigorously during these years, displacing thousands of peasants from what little land had remained available, and finishing the work of the Liberal land reforms of the 1880s. These abolished the community lands (*ejidos*) generally used for subsistence crops in favor of the private ownership more conducive to export crop production. In fact, the extreme concentration of land ownership that is generally associated with El Salvador mostly came into being after the First World War. Whereas much of El Salvador's coffee had been produced by relatively small farmers prior to that war, by the 1930s 60 percent of coffee production was controlled by 500 of the country's 10,000 producers (Paige 1994, 4).

One of the primary mechanisms for land consolidation in El Salvador, as elsewhere, was the control by a relatively few powerful families of production financing and mortgages. Small producers faced usurious interest rates and needed only one bad year to lose their properties. As growing numbers of peasants lost their lands and had to seek wage labor, rural wages fell precipitously. In the mid-1920s, El Salvador's wages were among the highest in Central America; by decade's end, they were among the lowest. Thousands migrated out of the coffee zones to other parts of the country and, particularly, to the larger towns, where they swelled the ranks of artisans and construction and domestic workers. At the same time, the wealthiest of the coffee growers were achieving extraordinary fortunes. The reformist newspaper *Patria* editorialized that "El Salvador is becoming a monster with the head of a lion and the tail of a mouse" (Wilson 1970, 130).

Despite the growing wealth of the coffee sector, it is questionable to characterize El Salvador as having a national "oligarchy" during this period. The upper classes as a whole were a very diverse group, including established

landed families from the 1800s, immigrants, and urban professionals, merchants, and bankers. Not all of the prominent families were involved in coffee production, as some very large holdings continued to produce indigo and other crops. The coffee sector itself was divided between producers and processors. During the 1920s, coffee processing and exporting had become increasingly concentrated in a few hands, resulting in a growing schism even within the coffee industry (Wilson 1970, 132–34). Non-coffee elites, members of the older landed families, tended to predominate within the state (Wilson 1970, 62).

Before the late 1920s, members of El Salvador's agrarian elite tended to be regionalized. Even the very wealthy remained on their properties, seldom traveled to the national capital (a difficult journey at best and nearly impossible from some locales during the six-month rainy season), and focused their social and limited political activities at the local level. Only a relatively small proportion of the national coffee elite belonged to the highest-status social club in the capital, the Casino Salvadoreño; the rest belonged to local clubs in their own provinces (Wilson 1970, 56–65, 135–36). This geographic fragmentation began to change once government investments in an east–west railroad link, combined with asphalted roads in some parts of the country, improved transportation and contributed to the formation of a national elite. Increasing numbers of prominent coffee producers found they could live in the capital city, San Salvador, and still control their plantations. They built ever more opulent homes in the capital, began to take a serious interest in national affairs, and in 1929 formed the *Asociación Cafetalera* (Coffee Growers' Association) to institutionalize and defend their interests (Wilson 1970, 139).

Although the coffee industry was beginning to produce a coherent national social elite, this group had not yet begun to consolidate itself as a political elite. Only a handful of families participated actively in national politics. The Meléndez-Quirón clan provided three consecutive presidents in the early part of the twentieth century, but the legitimacy of their elected regimes among the upper classes and the small emerging middle class (1913–1927) gradually eroded during the 1920s, just as Salvadoran society was becoming more stratified. As early as 1917, President Alfonso Quirón sought to broaden his political base by creating a labor organization called the *Liga Roja* (Red League). Subsequent governments sporadically opened greater space for trade guild organizing, which led to the formation of a series of labor federations, primarily among artisans. The governments' decision to permit such organizing was probably rooted in a corporatist impulse: they sought to recruit "auxiliary classes" to supplement their thin political bases, while keeping them from becoming a potential base of opposition (Guido Véjar 1980a, 68). The Meléndez-Quirón governments also sought to diversify the economic base of El Salvador through a variety of state initiatives to promote and subsidize new exports,

develop industrial products, and experiment with new crops, such as cotton. A substantial loan secured from U.S. sources in 1922 increased the liquidity of the state and the relative weight of public spending in the economy.

The successor of the Meléndez-Quirón line, President Pío Romero Bosque (1927–31), opened the political system significantly. He exiled his predecessor to gain greater autonomy from the established political families, carried out an anticorruption purge of the government, unmuzzled the press, canceled the 13-year state of siege, reinstated constitutional rights, restored university autonomy, and declared an amnesty that allowed most political exiles of the past administrations to return (Elam 1989, 136). He also tried to improve public administration and earned the support of teachers and civil servants by ending the practices of payment with vouchers (*agiatismo*) and forced “savings.” New laws favored the interests of clerical workers and professionals, both public and private, and increased the self-confidence and aspirations of these members of the small but growing middle class. In the municipal elections of 1929, political parties representing the emerging middle class did well (Wilson 1970, 197).

In the more tolerant atmosphere of Romero Bosque’s administration, the Communist Party made advances and managed to gain control of important labor federations. But Romero Bosque, like his predecessors, eventually cracked down on the popular movements. Between August and September 1930, the security forces rounded up over 600 peasants in Sonsonate alone (Anderson 1971, 40). In December 1930, the National Police killed eight people at a demonstration in Santa Ana (Parkman 1988, 18), and between November 1930 and February 1931 around 1,200 activists were jailed (Dunkerly 1985, 22). The repression, however, did not effectively counteract the cumulative effect of presidential efforts to secure political legitimacy through tolerance of lower-class mobilization. A broad popular movement had formed by the end of the 1920s. After the worldwide crash of 1929, this movement, though internally divided, became a challenge to the socioeconomic status quo—a challenge that the conservative upper classes were not organized politically to counteract.

When Romero Bosque decided to hold genuinely competitive municipal elections in 1929, followed by a free and fair presidential contest in 1931, the nation’s social elite was not well enough organized to take part. Despite a growing recognition that El Salvador needed a strong state and that it would matter who controlled that state, no single political party existed to represent upper-class interests (Astilla Carmelo 1976, 31). The several candidates who ran, supported by various hastily assembled parties, competed with one another for a relatively limited conservative electorate and lost. The victor in the 1931 presidential elections, Arturo Araujo, though himself a wealthy landowner, positioned himself politically as a social reformer whose Labor Party drew support from a broad cross-section of the increasingly organized

middle and lower classes. His campaign platform promised better economic conditions for the poor, and some of his campaigners promised land reform, pledges that garnered Araujo considerable support and that he made no effort to contradict. Araujo won 47 percent of the vote, against 29 percent for the candidate of the old official party and 15 percent for a traditional liberal candidate. Although Araujo had to repay opposition deputies' campaign debts before the legislature would confirm his election by plurality, his victory was nonetheless a clear signal that the private sector elite was, despite its wealth, ill-prepared for the political forces unleashed by the 1920s (Astilla Carmelo 1976, 35).

One source of division within the social elite, of course, was the impact of the depression. As world coffee prices fell, growers became increasingly dependent upon and vulnerable to the decisions of a handful of banks, while bankers became increasingly cautious in providing production credits and aggressive about foreclosing on delinquent mortgages. The handful of processors and exporters who controlled most of the trade insulated themselves to some extent from the consequences of falling prices, passing on lower prices to producers and maintaining a profit margin for themselves (Guido Véjar 1980a, 65–80). While the full effects of the depression on the coffee industry had not yet been felt by the election of 1931, it is likely that material disputes among the wealthy impeded their ability to organize politically against the popular forces and those members of the elite, like Araujo, willing to mobilize those forces for political ends.

The power of the popular forces became abruptly apparent during Araujo's first days in office, when a massive demonstration of peasants demanded that he fulfill his campaign promises of land redistribution. The Salvadoran Communist Party (PCS), which had gained considerable strength among workers, peasants, and students, saw Araujo's reformism as an obstacle to their revolutionary agenda (Paige 1994, 17–18), and the party exploited popular disappointment with his failures to deliver immediately on promised reforms. Having used the vocal and mobilized popular sectors to gain office, Araujo subsequently depended on the National Guard and National Police to keep him there.

It is difficult to gauge Araujo's sincerity. He had an unusual background for a Salvadoran landowner, having studied engineering in London and worked there as an engineer, during which time he roomed with a union shop steward who belonged to the Labour Party. Upon his return to El Salvador, he distinguished himself as an unusually generous employer and became publicly identified with pro-labor causes. He was friendly with Alberto Masferrer, a distinguished writer, publisher, and editorialist, whose philosophy of the "vital minimum" argued on normative and practical grounds against the impoverishment of workers and peasants that had taken place during the 1920s. Masferrer's newspaper, *Patria*, had gone so far as to call for a reversal of the liberal land policies of the late 1800s and a return to the *ejido* system, under which communal lands provided for the subsistence needs of the rural poor (Wilson

1970, 117–18). Masferrer endorsed Araujo's candidacy and was initially supportive of his administration, as were other members of the reformist elite.

Yet Araujo's ability to implement reforms was limited. The depression had reduced the value of exports and thus the amount of revenue available to the government. Moreover, the government's ability to administer what little money it had was crippled by the decision of technocrats from previous regimes to abandon Araujo in protest against his reformist intentions (Parkman 1988, 18). Araujo dismissed many of those who were still willing to serve in order to make room for political appointees, who then proceeded to treat the state like a treasure chest. The extensive corruption of his administration, and his lavish spending on parties at the Presidential Palace, led many observers to see Araujo as an opportunist and demagogue.

Government salaries were soon in arrears, and Araujo gave the military no priority over civilians in the government. It is a measure of either his remaining idealism or his political naiveté that Araujo refused to favor the army, even though he depended on the military to remain in office. His vice president was Maximiliano Hernández Martínez, an army general, who had briefly campaigned for president on a reformist/populist platform before throwing his support to Araujo. Martínez' presence on the ticket had helped to ensure the loyalty of the armed forces during the tumultuous election and the postelection haggling in the legislature.³ Martínez had considerable support within the armed forces and was able to deliver their support to Araujo, at least in the first few months of his administration. Perhaps in an effort to enhance Martínez' ability to deliver military loyalty, Araujo made him minister of war as well as vice president, creating a dangerous situation in which the commander of the armed forces was also the constitutional heir to the presidency.

According to McClintock (1985a, 103), Martínez was Araujo's "sole supporter in the Army high command." The U.S. military attaché said of Araujo in April 1931, "In most of the difficulties which have arisen he has relied on the Vice-President, General Maximilian [sic] Martínez" (McClintock 1985a, 106). Araujo's dependence on Martínez was exacerbated when his government announced its intention to seek a new foreign loan. Past loans had led to the regulation of Salvadoran national finances by a U.S. fiscal agent. The new foreign loan proposal triggered fears of more dramatic foreign intervention and anger over the expected misuse of the funds through corruption and extravagance.⁴ The state employees whose lot had improved under Romero Bosque were sure that new debt would lead to a return to the IOUs and de facto payroll taxes of the past. Opponents of the proposed loans organized demonstrations, which turned into riots in San Salvador and Santa Ana. These were put down with force (Parkman 1988, 18).

Many of Araujo's decisions seem surprising in light of his increasing dependence on the military. First, he refused a reasonable request that military

salaries be equalized across provinces of the country. Then he ordered all officers who were in professional schools or other nonmilitary educational programs either to withdraw from them or leave the military (Grieb 1971, 21–22). These actions sharpened the already intense dissatisfaction stemming from late pay, government corruption, and increasing disorder.

On 2 December 1931, revolt took place in several army barracks in and around the capital city. The conspirators were a heterogeneous group of younger officers who had organized their movement during the previous month. Army forces attacked the Presidential Palace, where they met tough resistance from the police on duty there. In the confusion, Araujo escaped to his private home, then on to the National Palace in the center of town, where he attempted to rally the forces that remained loyal. Unfortunately for him, the National Guard at that point cast its lot with the *golpistas*, leaving the loyal cavalry and police hopelessly outnumbered. Araujo then set out for the western part of the country, hoping to organize a counterattack with loyal soldiers there. Before leaving the city, he made a final telephone call to the Artillery barracks, the headquarters of the conspirators, and found himself talking with General Martínez, who claimed that he was a “prisoner.” Araujo left San Salvador still wondering why a “prisoner” was answering the phone (Anderson 1971, 60–61).

Martínez and the Military in 1931

The Salvadoran military at the time of the coup was not a particularly impressive institution. There had been some efforts at professionalization during the first three decades of the century, and Salvadoran forces were generally viewed as the best trained and organized in Central America. It was, nonetheless, a rudimentary force, comprising three main elements: the army, the National Guard, and the National Police. All together the three forces numbered only 3,500 men. Individual units were very small: for instance, the First Infantry regiment based in the capital city, which was an important player in the coup, included only 120 men. Of the three forces, the National Guard, modeled on the Spanish Civil Guard, was the most “elite” in the sense that its troopers were paid three times as much as army soldiers and were far more likely to reenlist, whereas army troops were generally conscripts who served only one tour. The National Police were also more likely to be careerists rather than conscripts, but they were more lightly armed than the National Guard. The differences between the army and the security forces would become clear during the course of the 1930 peasant rebellion, when army officers had to disarm their troops to prevent them from siding with the Communists.

Of the forces, the National Guard was the most closely aligned with major coffee growers. The Guard, formed in 1912, had served particularly to enforce the 1907 Agrarian Code (*Ley Agraria*), which prohibited trade union organi-

zation among rural workers. It also took on various administrative functions helpful to local landowners, such as keeping lists of names and descriptions of agricultural employees, as well as law enforcement tasks such as arresting people for gathering firewood, picking berries, or otherwise harvesting any food without the landowners' written permission. Local Guard units were often given supplemental salaries and other perquisites by landowners, making their relationship essentially a mercenary one.

Despite cordial relations with elites at the local level, it was by no means a foregone conclusion that Martínez and the military would remain in control of the state. Some elements of the private sector elite were "disconcerted" by Martínez' bid for power (Salazar Valiente 1981, 92), in part because of his posturing as a populist during the 1931 presidential campaign. Martínez was, in addition, from humble and mestizo origins, in contrast to the largely white, wealthy criollos who had governed El Salvador in the past. He was also known for holding unusual religious views, having published several books on theosophy and the occult prior to assuming the vice presidency in 1931.

Some of Martínez' nationalistic policies, though they later proved beneficial to the stability of the economy, were initially greeted with skepticism by wealthy coffee growers. In one case, "the president was forced to suffer through a rough meeting with representatives of the cafetalera, led by Francisco Dueñas, the greatest of the coffee barons. These men demanded repeal of Araujo's monetary decrees of October prohibiting the shipment of gold abroad, on the grounds that the bankers were using the tight money situation as an excuse for not making loans to the coffee growers. But Martínez refused" (Anderson 1971, 90). Martínez' policies ultimately favored coffee producers at the expense of bankers, as we shall see, but the concern of the Cafetalera is understandable insofar as the military had not yet established itself as a corporate political actor. (Although two military officers had run for the presidency in 1931, Martínez himself and Antonio Claramount, they were not "candidatos militares but rather militares candidatos" [Wilson 1970, 200]). The upper classes had little reason at the outset to have faith in Martínez' vision and policy-making skills.

Another question mark hovering over the future of a Martínez-led government was the extent of U.S. opposition to him. U.S. foreign policy at the time required denial of recognition to any individual taking power as the result of a coup d'état. Senior levels of the State Department intended to apply diplomatic pressures, in keeping with U.S. support for the 1923 Washington Treaties, under which Central American nations had agreed to discourage revolts by denying recognition to governments seizing power through force. Though not a signatory to the treaties, Washington had supported these terms to encourage stability in the region. Up until 1931, any government in the region that the United States refused to recognize fell. Moreover, because of the crisis in El Salvador's public finances and the likely need for renegotiation of

debt payments, “the position taken by the United States meant, literally, the death sentence for the new government” (Astilla Carmelo 1976, 50).

Washington’s position was quickly undermined, however, by the incompetence or willfulness of its minister in El Salvador, Charles Curtis.⁵ Curtis apparently favored Martínez’ taking power after the coup, in large part because he distrusted the junior officers on the “Military Directorate,” whom he characterized as “little more than half witted” and “utterly irresponsible youths,” having “no capacity and no fixed plan beyond getting rid of the present government” (quoted in Grieb 1971, 155). Curtis’ hostility to the Directorate continued after Martínez was named as provisional president, because he believed that the young officers had retained Martínez as a figurehead merely to satisfy domestic and foreign opinion, while continuing to exercise power themselves (Grieb 1971, 155).

Despite explicit and repeated instructions to make the U.S. Policy clear to both the directorate and Martínez, Curtis focused unsuccessfully on getting the Directorate to resign and neglected to send the signal that the U.S. would not recognize Martínez. In fact, he recommended recognition to the State Department.

Curtis’ actions succeeded only in buying Martínez some time, as Washington quickly sent a special envoy, Jefferson Caffery, to evaluate the situation. Caffery found that the “better elements” (that is, the upper classes) were now supporting Martínez, “as for the moment he offers a stable government and they very much fear that any change in the situation might bring renewed disturbances.” He advised applying pressure to oust Martínez before it was too late and replacing him with a provisional junta (Grieb 1971, 160). When this proved ineffectual, Caffery pressured the younger officers of the Directorate to ask Martínez to resign in favor of Colonel José Asencio Menéndez, who had been at sea at the time of the coup and was thus recognizable according to U.S. policy. But events intervened: “just as Martínez’ replacement appeared imminent, a series of so-called ‘communist-uprisings’ swept the country” (Grieb 1971, 162). The rebellion had an immediate political effect. On the second day of the uprising, the Military Directorate, which U.S. diplomats had been trying to coax into replacing Martínez, instead transferred full executive power to him (Elam 1968, 31). For its part, the United States abandoned its efforts to oust him, since removing him would jeopardize the unity of the military.

The Politics of the *Matanza*

The government had ample advance warning of the rebellion. During 1931 Communist-organized demonstrators and the security forces had engaged in increasingly frequent and violent clashes. Dozens of demonstrators were killed, yet the peasants’ militancy seemed undaunted. General José Tomás

Calderón (grandfather of President Armando Calderón Sol) reported to Martínez on the “ostentatious disrespect and lack of fear of authority” on the part of demonstrators and recommended reinforcements for the garrison in Sonsonate (Anderson 1971, 76). The Communist Party also viewed the combativeness of peasants in the western part of the country with alarm. In correspondence sent to the Comintern in Moscow, PCS officials complained that western peasants were moving too fast, demanding that the party participate in the January 1932 municipal and legislative elections. The party had only the beginnings of an organizational structure in the west, and feared that participating in elections would accomplish nothing while exposing the party’s membership to repression. Pressured by peasants who wanted representation at the local level, the party reluctantly agreed (Ching 1995). When the government committed blatant fraud in the elections, and when Communist protests were met with violence, the party’s Central Committee issued orders for the formation of a Revolutionary Military Committee to prepare for armed action.

As with participation in the elections, the decision to rebel went against the better judgment of most party leaders. One PCS official wrote to the Comintern that “we can’t stop the revolutionary wave . . . the masses have a thirst for blood and are under the illusion that with their machetes they are ready to carry out a movement of this kind” (Ching 1995, 30). The party knew they lacked the weapons, training, and organizational structure to defeat the government. Yet faced with the intense militancy of the classes they claimed to represent, they perceived no choice but to provide some leadership and coordination for the explosion that was about to come (Ching 1995, 31). First, though, they made a final effort to avoid armed conflict by sending a delegation to meet with the president. Refused an audience with Martínez, they warned his senior aides, “The peasants will win with their machetes the rights you are denying them.” The war minister replied, “You have machetes; we have machine guns” (Anderson 1971, 85–92).

By this point, the military had collected, through informants, detailed information regarding the preparations for revolt. The Communists’ planning was so slipshod that the military had little to worry about. There was, essentially, no military plan. The rebels simply hoped to overwhelm the military with sheer numbers, ignoring the difference in weaponry. Most rebels would be armed only with sticks and machetes. The only significant number of rifles available to them were ones cached in the west by Araujo loyalists planning to invade El Salvador from Guatemala, though they hoped to receive additional arms from sympathizers in military barracks.

The government dealt a crippling blow to the movement by capturing the party’s top leadership just a few days before the revolt. The Ubico government in Guatemala captured Juan Pablo Wainwright, who had been preparing to lead the forces from Guatemala. Shortly thereafter, on 18 January, the National

Police captured Augustín Farabundo Martí, the de facto head of the party, along with two of his key lieutenants, Alfonso Luna and Mario Zapata. Prior to his capture, Martí had issued orders for the revolt to take place on the 22 January, and the uprising went ahead, despite the arrest of the leadership and Communist supporters within the military. In the words of a Comintern report on the disaster, "The CC (Central Committee of the PCS) was effectively non-functional during the insurrection. (There was no) CC to direct the masses . . . no central leadership, no national command, just a series of local insurrections" (quoted in Ching 1985, 31). As Miguel Mármol remarked, "We did it too late, like assholes, we did it after the enemy had begun his repression and delivered devastating blows to our leadership apparatus, to the basic military nucleuses, putting us totally on the defensive" (quoted in Paige 1994, 20).

The "military nucleuses" to which Mármol referred were conspiracies among the soldiers in several army barracks to rise up in support of the rebellion. The Communist Party had circulated pamphlets in military barracks arguing:

Above all, the soldier is a worker or a peasant whom the rich exploit in factories, shops and fields. When he is still a youth he is taken to the barracks where he is forced to bear arms in defense of the wealth which he has produced for the rich as a worker or peasant.

The discontent which the soldier feels in the barracks from the oppression by which he lives is the result of the fact that a soldier, enduring the lies of chiefs and officers, feels that they are his enemies, because these same chiefs and officers belong to the same class which exploited him in the factories, shops and fields. (Elam 1968, 38)

The next circular was even more direct: "COMRADE SOLDIERS: Don't fire a single shot at the revolutionary workers and peasants. Kill the chiefs and officers. Place yourselves under the orders of the Comrade Soldiers who have been named Red Comrades by this Central Committee" (Elam 1968, 39). The conspirators in the army were uncovered when enlisted men reported suspicious activities to their superiors. The discovery of these plots precipitated a state of siege in 6 of the 14 departments (Elam 1968, 39). An entire company of the First Cavalry was executed by firing squad. There were similar executions in the First Infantry Regiment and the air force. The U.S. legation reported at the time that nearly half of the soldiers in the regular army were "dismissed" in January 1932. On 16 January, a week before the rebellion, officers disarmed, arrested, and shot many members of the Sixth Regiment of Machinegunners (McClintock 1985a, 119). Though easily suppressed, these rebellions reduced the effective numbers of the military and may have contributed to the determination of the officer corps to use extreme measures, since the Communists had committed the sin of carrying "the class struggle into the heart of the armed forces" (Rouquié 1987, 247).

The extent to which the government was prepared in advance for the revolt has led many observers, both at the time and since, to suspect that Martínez deliberately let the revolt go forward in order to make a dramatic show of putting it down. Mario Salazar Valiente wrote that “the martinista government premeditatedly permitted the communists’ plans to go forward” (1981, 92). Anderson found a widely held belief “among informed persons in El Salvador” that Martínez actually sought to provoke the insurrection in order to gain legitimacy in the eyes of the social elite and the United States. According to this view, the announcement of January elections in which the Communists were invited to participate, and the subsequent exclusion of the Communists from effective competition in the areas most prone to insurrection, were part of a diabolical scheme to provoke a reaction. Some historians argue that in the weeks prior to the rebellion, Martínez gave the Communist leadership more freedom of movement in the hope that they would successfully catalyze a revolt (Guido Véjar 1980a, 24). There are even reports of direct incitement to rebellion: the Salvadoran historian Mauricio de la Selva wrote that Martínez sent “army recruits back to their home villages to spread the word that the acting president wanted reforms, but the rich would not allow them unless a campesino demonstration changed their minds” (cited in Anderson 1971, 85).

On balance, the evidence of premeditation is incomplete. Despite good intelligence on the rebels’ plans, Martínez failed to redeploy greater forces to the west (in fact, small National Guard units were removed from towns that were likely targets of the rebellion, rather than being reinforced). This suggests that, at a minimum, Martínez was confident of the military’s ability to handle the situation: he could afford, in military terms, to let the rebellion go forward. Whatever degree of premeditation was involved, the military’s success in suppressing the rebellion, and the slaughter that followed, were extraordinarily beneficial to Martínez’ political position, both domestically and in relation to the United States.

The evidence is compelling that the *extent* of the slaughter was dictated by political calculations rather than internal security. The intensity of the violence, the random selection of victims, and the prolongation of the slaughter until there were no more targets (or until coffee growers became concerned that there would be no one to harvest the crop [Wilson 1970, 267]) are most consistent with an effort to demonstrate the usefulness of the armed forces to the social elite and foreign observers. Extreme repression helped create an impression of extreme danger. The U.S. minister in Guatemala in 1932 declared that the uprising had been “greatly exaggerated and used for political ends” (quoted in Anderson 1971, 150). A member of the U.S. legation at the time wrote, “The de facto regime is undoubtedly keeping up the fear of communism for practical reasons in order to make it appear that General Martínez is indispensable and cannot step aside at the present time” (quoted in McClintock 1985a, 121).

The prolonged, random violence is also consistent, of course, with a decision to prevent future rebellions by exacting a horrible price for this one. Such an explanation, however, presumes that Martínez was thinking far into the future in the midst of a very fluid political situation in which his tenure in office was highly uncertain. Though his actions had the effect of preventing further revolts for decades, it seems more plausible that Martínez was acting in accordance with his short-term political interests, which were best served by convincing the social elite and the United States that they needed him.

The Salvadoran social elite was easily convinced. The 1932 rebellion fulfilled their worst nightmare—a mass revolt by the “Indians” whom they had oppressed, and depended upon, for so long (Anderson 1971, 17). Prominent coffee growers had been expecting trouble for some time: Wilson quotes the coffee magnate James Hill as saying, “Bolshevism? . . . It’s drifting in. The working people hold meetings on Sundays and get very excited. They say, ‘We dig the holes for the trees, we clean the weeds, we prune the trees, we pick the coffee. Who earns the money then? . . .’ Yes, there will be trouble one of these days” (1970, 136–37). Yet, remarkably, the upper classes did virtually nothing to prepare themselves before the rebellion. Members of the elite in the western part of the country made virtually no effort to arm themselves or to take refuge. Though a civilian Guardia Cívica was formed once the rebellion began, this was a military initiative rather than a civilian one. The unreliable *Cívicos* played almost no role in the fighting or the massacre, but were consigned, instead, to manning posts in secure towns while the National Guard (and, in the cities, the National Police) did the dirty work.

Documents released by the government after the rebellion began helped reinforce the upper classes’ fear and willingness to support the military and Martínez. Among these were the orders that Farabundo Martí himself supposedly sent on 16 January, which instructed the rebels to use against the bourgeoisie “the most opportune means, that is to say: shoot immediately or kill them in some other way without delay. . . . Do away with all of them, saving only the lives of the children” (quoted in Anderson 1971, 92–93). The upper classes’ fears gave Martínez an opportunity to extract resources from them: he set up a Council on Public Order, which included representatives of five leading families, to coordinate the collection of funds, ostensibly to strengthen security arrangements and pay the troops. The council collected about U.S. \$200,000 for the campaign against “the Indians,” though a Canadian naval commander who observed its activities, V.G. Brodeur, noted, “Just how much of this sum eventually found its way into the soldiers’ pockets is a doubtful point” (quoted in McClintock 1985a, 119).

The political consequences of the upper classes’ gratitude to Martínez were almost immediate. “Under pressure of the emergency,” Parkman reports, “the National Legislative Assembly on February 5, 1932, elected him constitu-

tional president to finish Araujo's term, and leading liberals joined his government. Having established himself with the oligarchy and much of the urban population as their savior from the horrors of Communist revolution, he launched his career as El Salvador's last, and perhaps greatest, *caudillo*" (1988, 20).

International Legitimacy

Even though Washington had been moving away from military intervention in the region and was on the verge of removing the Marines from Nicaragua, it would not have been unreasonable on Martínez' part to suspect that the United States (or other powers) might intervene, especially since the State Department in Washington took a dim view of him. In reaction to the 22 January rebellion, U.S and Canadian warships rushed to Salvadoran waters and offered to land troops if needed (Anderson 1971, 129–30; Grieb 1971, 163). Understandably, Salvadoran officers were not keen on permitting a Yankee military intervention in view of the unsavory history of such actions in Honduras, Nicaragua, Santo Domingo, and Haiti. They made a point of demonstrating that they had the situation well in hand. General José Tomás Calderón sent a message to the captains of four ships anchored off Acajutla that the Communists "had been totally beaten and dispersed" and would be "entirely exterminated." He reported on 29 January that "already 4,800 of them have been liquidated." According to one account:

Commander Brodeur went ashore to pay his respects to the General, and to "verify . . . in a general way" the report of 4,800 killings. On shore, he was enthusiastically embraced by General Calderón, invited to lunch in Sonsonate the next day, and to "witness a few executions." The commanding officers of the Canadian ships *Skeena* and *Vancouver* accompanied General Calderón and an aide to Sonsonate, and "given an exceedingly good lunch . . . they were shown five Indians who were about to be shot, but did not witness the actual execution as this was thought to be inadvisable." (McClintock 1985a, 116)

Calderón came to regret his announcement of the 4,800 "liquidated" Communists, as this received prominent and not entirely favorable treatment in the international press. He subsequently clarified that by "liquidated" he had meant "broken and dislocated" (Anderson 1971, 130). In view of other evidence, however, and his clear intent to dissuade the U.S. forces from landing, it is likely that he meant what he said the first time.

Anderson concludes that in committing the *matanza*, "Martínez may have been trying to pose before world opinion, especially that of the United States, as the champion of anticommunism" (1971, 134). U.S. attitudes toward

Martínez indeed shifted markedly following the *matanza*. Although the State Department continued until 1934 to hold that he could not be recognized, the tone of U.S. communications with his government changed, and the United States halted active measures to unseat him. The State Department sent the following message to U.S. Chargé William J. McCafferty: “You will of course make it clear that the Department as it has already stated is not (repeat not) motivated by any unfriendliness against General Martínez for whom it has great regard” (Grieb 1971, 165). McCafferty’s communications began to reflect a new tone of moderation, referring regularly to the “efficiency” of the new government. Once Martínez was officially “elected” to office, the United States found a means of recognizing him.

His success in preventing U.S. intervention further reinforced Martínez’ credentials with the Salvadoran civilian elite and contributed an additional dimension to subsequent right-wing political ideology. El Salvador had always enjoyed greater economic independence from the United States than its neighbors. With the *matanza*, El Salvador became one of the few countries in Central America and the Caribbean to survive a major internal upheaval without suffering U.S. military intervention. This independence became a point of nationalist pride and a source of friction between civilian rightists and the military when, in the 1980s, the Salvadoran military aligned itself closely with the United States at the expense of upper-class interests.

The Protection Racket

During the crisis of 1931–32, it was unclear whether the military or some reconstituted regime of the social elite would end up governing El Salvador. The political disunity of the upper classes, combined with the high level of popular mobilization, presented an opportunity for Martínez and the military to expand their political power. Yet both the Salvadoran upper classes and the U.S. government were skeptical about Martínez. The 1932 rebellion gave him the opportunity to establish his political legitimacy through mass murder of opposition peasants and workers. Neither domestic political forces nor the international community (aside from negative news coverage) provided any significant incentives for restraint. In fact, the risk of invasion by U.S. forces provided an incentive for a conspicuous demonstration of will and capacity to maintain order, regardless of the human cost. Clearly, the upper classes, with their fears of rebellion and their general interest in a frightened, unorganized, and low-cost workforce, favored harsh measures. To the extent that Martínez hoped to win their acceptance, he had good reason to deliver the kind of coercion that they would prefer.

But Martínez was not simply an instrument of landowners. He was in a position to manipulate elite perceptions of threat through the kinds of measures

he chose to use in retaliation against popular unrest.⁶ This enabled him to establish, on a national scale, a protection racket under which he offered to defend them from a threat that he either provoked or made to seem greater than it was. Moreover, he was able to extend this racket to influence U.S. policy makers, who shared the Salvadoran social elite's concerns about the purported Communist threat and were thus manipulated into recognizing Martínez despite official policy to the contrary.

Although Martínez was a personal *caudillo*, he represented the military as an institution. Thus his increased control over the state signified, from the beginning, an expanded and enduring role for the armed forces in the politics of the nation. "By dealing successfully, if brutally, with the question of disorder," Elam observes, "Hernández Martínez had acquired the right to advance the process of militarization" (1968, 45). According to Rubén Zamora, militarization meant not only "a hypertrophic development of the repressive apparatus of the state, but also a constant shift in our political life, lasting until the present. This act [the repression of 1932] has been the base upon which there has taken place the development of an increasingly autonomous state, which has not only grown quantitatively and qualitatively, but has also developed a greater capacity to act *politically*" (1976, 518, emphasis in original).

The durability of the events of 1932 as a basis for militarism resulted in part from the nature of the rebellion and the lessons that elites learned from it. As Jeffery Paige points out, "The fact that El Salvador's only experience with social reform and popular mobilization ended in insurrection led by sectarian followers of the Communist International profoundly influenced popular and elite attitudes toward reform and social change" (1994, 22). From the point of view of the elite, reformists had created political space for opposition, and the result was a Communist-led rebellion. Thus most wealthy Salvadorans learned from the events of 1931 and 1932 that reformism and organized opposition opened the door to revolution. The political implication of this was that the only way to prevent revolution was to deny any political space for either elite-led reformism or popular mobilization. The perceived need for political exclusion made the upper classes more willing to leave governing in the hands of the armed forces, reversing their tendency of the late 1920s toward greater participation in national political affairs. It also provided historical precedent that justified, in the eyes of the Salvadoran upper classes, a self-serving political dogma of resolute opposition to any socioeconomic reforms.

Over the next 50 years, the elite sometimes found that support for militarism contradicted their own opposition to reforms, particularly when military leaders sought to attract greater popular legitimacy or promote development models different from the *laissez faire* liberalism the social elite preferred. Working through allies within the military, the elite ended the Martínez regime, blocked political openings and economic reforms in the 1960s and 1970s, and

contributed to a policy of mass murder by the armed forces in the late 1970s and early 1980s.

From Violent Rise to Nonviolent Fall: The Martínez Regime

Often characterized as little more than a reinstatement of “oligarchic” rule, the Martínez regime was actually a considerable departure from previous regimes in El Salvador, marked by elaboration and strengthening of the internal security apparatus, state intervention in the economy, an expanded administrative role for the armed forces, and personalism. The first three developments proved to be lasting; the personalism of Martínez’ rule became his undoing. His struggle to remain in office catalyzed elite opposition, and his response to that opposition—populism and repression against the elite—directly undermined the basis for his rule, which was his ability and willingness to protect the privileged and suppress the rebellious poor.

Shortly after the *matanza*, Martínez established new mechanisms of state control throughout the country, but with particular impact in rural areas. The most important of these was the requirement that all persons carry an identification booklet known as a *cedula de vecindad*, a type of internal passport that enabled authorities to more closely track the travels and places of residence of rural citizens. These measures, combined with laws outlawing the Communist Party and prohibiting publication of all doctrines deemed “anarchic and contrary to public, social and economic order,” helped to institutionalize the security state established initially through the terror of the *matanza* (Gordon 1989, 66).

The essential role of the “protection racket” in legitimating the Martínez regime came to the surface whenever a serious challenge arose to his position. During the brief provisional presidency of Colonel Menéndez, which provided the formal discontinuity in power that allowed Martínez’ “election” and recognition by the United States, the security forces miraculously uncovered a new “Communist conspiracy,” strengthening the enthusiasm with which the Salvadoran elite and the United States welcomed back the “savior” (Parkman 1988, 151). As both elite and mass resistance to a fourth Martínez term began to grow in 1943, an opposition pamphlet “accused Martínez of pinning the ‘Communist’ label on the campesino uprising of 1932 and perpetrating the massacre to secure his own position, asserting that he was plotting another ‘Communist revolt’ for the same purpose” (Parkman 1988, 49). Even after Martínez’ resignation in May 1944, student organizers of the civic strike that had brought him down caught members of Martínez’ secret police attempting to provoke a group of peasants into looting stores in San Salvador, presumably to create a pretext for the dictator’s return (Parkman 1988, 88).

When the protection racket was in full force, however, Martínez had an unprecedented freedom to maneuver in state economic policy. While the

Meléndez-Quirón governments had talked about state economic measures and carried out a few small experiments, Martínez acted boldly to protect the country's coffee industry, in the process not only violating the *laissez faire* norms of most of the country's elite but expropriating the assets of Salvadoran and foreign creditors. Shortly after taking office, Martínez decreed the Ley Moratoria, which suspended the payment of all domestic private debts, reduced the interest payments on them by 40 percent, and prevented further foreclosures of mortgages on land (Anderson 1971, 149). Given the depression conditions faced by many coffee producers, this measure, though obviously harmful to the bankers in the short run, preempted the foreclosure of hundreds of coffee properties, including many small to medium-sized farms, and thus prevented massive additional concentration of land. In 1934, Martínez established the Banco Central de Reserva (Central Reserve Bank) and took away the right of the private banks to issue their own paper money. In the same year, he established the Banco Hipotecario (Mortgage Bank), which was charged with providing production credits for commercial agriculture. Not surprisingly, these measures were greeted with caution and even opposition by members of the liberal economic elite because they expanded the economic role of the state. By the mid-1930s, however, their utility for the coffee economy as a whole was recognized, and Martínez won the "unqualified support" of the civilian elite (Elam 1968, 57). Even after the worst effects of the depression were past, Martínez continued to expand the role of the state: The new constitution of 1939 "for the first time gave the state the exclusive right to regulate the coining of money, mail, telegraph and telephone services, and radio broadcasting, and increased the number of enterprises that might be operated as state monopolies" (Parkman 1988, 21).

Several of Martínez' ventures, including the Banco Hipotecario, were partnerships of the state and the economic elite. The Compañía Salvadoreña de Café (Salvadoran Coffee Company), established in 1942, attempted to stabilize prices and make production loans. In the late 1930s, the Banco Hipotecario branched out into marketing and warehousing activities for crops and handicrafts.

Martínez' interventions broke the dominance of the private banking sector in production financing. Moreover, the main civilian partners in the Banco Hipotecario were major coffee and cattle producers themselves, rather than financiers. The Asociación Cafetalera (Coffee Growers' Association) and the Asociación Ganadera (Cattle Producers' Association) between them owned 95 percent of the stock in the Banco Hipotecario (75 percent was held by the Asociación Cafetalera alone) (Parkman 1988, 37). In the process of establishing these quasi-statal financial institutions, Martínez intertwined state and private interests. While these banks served private interests and supported the key productive sectors of the economy, they also served the personal interests of

state officials. The Banco Hipotecario, for instance, played a prominent role in mortgage lending to military officers (Gordon 1989, 72).

Guido Véjar (1980a) depicts the Martínez regime as an *expression* of the restored dominance of the coffee growers, but the sequence of events suggests that Martínez' policies made the growers' recovery and relative advance possible. The state under Martínez, in other words, exerted considerable initiative of its own. Martínez chose actions that were in the interest of, though often initially opposed by, the coffee growers. Combined with the protection he offered, his policies transformed the growers into key supporters of his government for almost a decade.

Martínez was similarly assertive in dealing with foreign creditors. In 1932, he defaulted on El Salvador's obligations to U.S. creditors under the 1922 loan agreement, canceled numerous contracts with U.S. corporations, and nationalized the utility companies, many of which were foreign-owned (Astilla Carmelo 1976, 61–62; Wilson 1970, 256). His confrontation of U.S. creditors proved to be well-timed: the new Roosevelt administration preferred to avoid unseemly interventions and therefore did little more than provide its good offices to help the New York bankers renegotiate payment schedules for bondholders. A first agreement on rescheduling (struck in July 1932) provided for El Salvador to pay between 15 and 20 percent of customs revenue, rather than the 70 to 100 percent of the original agreement. Martínez later suspended even this reduced rate of payment, and negotiated a new agreement in May 1933 that lasted until 1935. One more suspension of payments (1936) achieved a still lower interest rate (Astilla Carmelo 1976, 116–18).

Aside from the fun of testing U.S. resolve, brinkmanship toward U.S. creditors gave Martínez considerably more public revenue to work with, and he devoted much of it to programs for the poor. In 1932 he created the Fondo de Mejoramiento Social (Social Betterment Fund) and an agency to administer it, the Junta de Defensa Social (Social Defense Board). Mejoramiento Social was used to transfer a limited amount of land to landless peasants: "Great estates were turned into Haciendas Nacionales and divided up. Roads were run between the small parcels, so that they could not be reunited" (Anderson 1971, 150). Relatively few people (less than 2 percent of the peasantry) benefited from the reforms, and the new farms were not economically successful. Large-scale growers complained about the deterioration of formerly productive plantations, but the reforms went largely unchallenged, especially in comparison with the growers' strenuous reaction in 1976 when President Arturo Armando Molina attempted smaller-scale land reform. In the mid-1930s, coffee producers were still beholden to Martínez for the 1932 crackdown and for economic policies that were helping them to weather the depression. They were therefore unwilling to challenge him, even when his social policies cut directly against elite ownership of land.

This willingness to give Martínez the benefit of the doubt disappeared during the latter part of his period in office. When he sought a third term as president in 1939, many of his cabinet officials resigned.⁷ All were below the level of minister, but they were the highest-ranking *civilians* in the government, since military officers controlled most ministries. The civilians had been an important source of technical and administrative competence for Martínez' regime, and their participation in his government had signaled the support of the economic elite. Their departure left Martínez surrounded by military advisers, incompetent civilians, and yes men, and vulnerable to the sort of administrative collapse that had undermined his predecessor, Araujo.

The main reason for the resignations was constitutional. As Parkman puts it, "Alternation in office was one principle of the Constitution of 1886 that had been consistently honored in practice, and Martínez' assault on it threatened to do away with "the last vestiges" of El Salvador's liberal institutions and traditions" (1988, 30).⁸ In addition, Martínez' economic nationalism and bias toward the coffee producers was impeding the development of new industries, particularly cotton. In response to increased international demand during World War II, entrepreneurs had begun growing cotton along the coastal littoral—with considerable success, except that import restrictions made it difficult to obtain the machinery and chemicals needed for more efficient production. Cotton growers began to organize among the professional staff of the Banco Hipotecario and played an important role in galvanizing opposition to Martínez (Gordon 1989, 75).

As elite support dried up, Martínez turned increasingly to a popular base. Beginning in 1942, he tolerated rudimentary forms of labor organizing, and in 1943 tried to make the cause of labor and land reform his own, harking back to the themes of his 1931 campaign for the presidency. "His speeches to the weekly Pro-Patria assemblies in early 1943 attacked the concentration of wealth in the hands of the few, while expounding on the virtues of cooperatives and Mejoramiento Social's land distribution program" (Parkman 1988, 35). This strategy of seeking broad popular support as elite support dried up was parallel to the strategies used by the Meléndez-Quirón and Romero Bosque governments before him, as well as the military governments of the 1960s and 1970s. Martínez' flirtations with pro-labor politics were not entirely successful: the concrete benefits were meager, and workers remembered the events of 1932. His efforts to find popular support, however, did galvanize elite opposition. Members of the upper class became concerned that Martínez might proceed with social security legislation, a minimum wage, and, worst of all, reforms to the tax system that might make it effective in collecting revenues from the rich. They were also concerned that Martínez' initiative to create industries under the umbrella of Mejoramiento Social might generate unwanted competition for existing firms (Parkman 1988, 35–36).

These fears were well founded in the sense that Martínez did move aggressively to wrest more money and more political power from the agrarian elite. In 1943 he fixed cotton and coffee prices, raised taxes on cotton and coffee, and passed laws that allowed the state to interfere in the management of the cattle and coffee associations. Since these associations controlled the Banco Hipotecario, controlling them would allow Martínez to take over the bank and its resources, even though the bank's funds had originally come from largely private sources. Opponents suspected that he intended to make the bank a patronage machine for his Pro-Patria Party.

To understand the nature of the Martínez regime, it is crucial to follow the sequence of its unraveling. The economic elite's initial objections to Martínez did not stem from his policies, but from a perception that he had worn out his legitimacy by trying to perpetuate his own power. Particularly within the middle classes, opposition stemmed mainly from his repressiveness and flouting of even minimal standards of constitutionality. U.S. Vice Consul H. Gardner Ainsworth noted that the middle classes had "almost no direct economic grievances against the government" (quoted in Parkman 1988, 55). Martínez had inserted an economic dimension into his conflict with the elites by directly assaulting their core interests. He tried to rally the military to him with populist talk, telling officers that the "capitalists were against him" and that "all his plans for social betterment and economic improvement—including higher pay for the Army—[were] being blocked by the selfish and uncooperative attitude of the wealthy class" (quoted in Parkman 1988, 52). At the same time, he attempted to shore up the protection racket by reporting to the oligarchy that he had discovered a major Communist conspiracy to exploit any openly contested elections. His ability to pose as a protector, however, clashed with his need to control elite-led political opposition. He took to arresting members of the elite, and by 11 January some 40 were in custody (Parkman 1988, 53).

On 25 January 1944, the Constituent Assembly revised the Constitution to give itself the power to elect the president, and proceeded to do so. This had been expected. What was not anticipated was a series of laws that allowed Martínez to establish a monopoly of any "services that may be beneficial to the community and which the laws may determine" (Parkman 1988, 54). These laws basically gave Martínez the power to nationalize or socialize any aspect of the economy, and they galvanized opposition to Martínez among the upper classes. U.S. Vice Consul Overton Ellis polled the leading 24 families in the country and found that 20 of them were anti-Martínez, 2 supported him, and 2 abstained from expressing an opinion (Parkman 1988, 57).

The core of opposition to Martínez was an organization called Salvadoran Democratic Action, created in 1941 by many of the officials who had resigned from Martínez' government. Forced underground after only two public rallies, it became "the general staff of a conspiracy to frustrate Martínez' fourth-

term aspirations" (Parkman 1988, 42). The moving spirit of the conspiracy was a coffee grower named Agustín Alfaro Morán, former auditor general in Martínez' government, founder of the *Compañía Salvadoreña de Café*, and president of the *Asociación Cafetalera*. Alfaro Morán clearly represented the sentiments of the coffee producers: these elites were flirting with the idea of governing the country.

The upper-class conspirators had middle-class allies, particularly among professionals, whose political ideas and expectations had been heavily influenced by Allied wartime propaganda about democracy and self-determination. A charismatic physician named Arturo Romero emerged as a champion of reform and attracted additional middle- and even lower-class support. He was known, among other things, for his generosity in treating indigent patients. The movement as a whole, however, depended on upper-class bankers, merchants, and the coffee elite for leadership and financial support. U.S. consular official Overton Ellis reported that the Alvarez family, which owned the world's largest coffee mill, was a key supporter, as was the most prominent citizen in Santa Ana, Francisco Alfaro (Parkman 1988, 44).

Meanwhile, a parallel conspiracy developed within the military. Army officers' reasons to oppose Martínez had little to do with his conflicts with the upper classes. The main grievance stemmed from his favoritism toward the security forces—the National Guard and National Police—over the regular army. The security forces had always received much better pay, but after 1937 Martínez allocated them a growing percentage of the budget, and they received new weapons. Promotions too tended to favor officers in the security forces (McClintock 1985a, 127–28).⁹ Within the army, promotions were based not on merit, but rather on personal loyalty to the dictator. During the 1940s, Martínez replaced commanders of internally strategic posts with officers who had risen up through the ranks, removing those who had been trained in the academy or abroad. His personal secret police constantly surveilled officers, and he created a civilian militia using members of his Pro-Patria Party, a move that violated the military's monopoly on armed force. These grievances cut across the ranks (Elam 1968, 108–9), but most of the conspirators were younger, academy-trained regular army officers. A high proportion were lieutenants; most were in their twenties, Parkman reports. One informant told her that 70 to 80 percent of the army supported the revolt (1988, 58).

The civilian and military committees joined forces in early 1944, and on 2 April they struck while Martínez was out of the capital. Two army brigades in San Salvador and the Second Brigade in Santa Ana rebelled. However, the First Artillery barracks (called *El Zapote*), the National Police, and the National Guard held out against the rebels, who prematurely announced over the national airwaves both their anticipated victory and which units had refused to join the revolt. Hearing on the radio that the security forces' barracks had held,

Martínez managed to work his way, apparently without resistance, to the National Police headquarters. The rebels were soon defeated, with considerable casualties. En route from Santa Ana to the capital, a convoy of army troops (and probably armed civilians) were ambushed by the security forces, who killed 53 and wounded 134 (McClintock 1985a, 130; Parkman 1988, 60).

The execution of 10 alleged conspirators chilled many Salvadorans and led ultimately to Martínez' downfall. Twenty other officers were sentenced to death in absentia, along with nine civilians from the Democratic Action committee.¹⁰ Dr. Romero was captured, wounded, and taken to a hospital in San Salvador, where he remained under a death sentence. Popular revulsion against the sentences provided Martínez' elite opponents with the opportunity they had been looking for. Democratic Action called a general strike that was so complete that the dictator left office one week after the strike began.

Though clearly a popular action, the unprecedented effectiveness of the *huelga de brazos caídos* ("strike of fallen arms") depended in large part on support from the elite. The strike was led by students from the university, most of them from elite or middle-class families, with organizational and financial assistance from businesses, banks, and wealthy citizens. Individual businesses and families contributed as much as 5,000 colones (U.S. \$2,500). Business owners and bankers paid workers, taxi drivers, and bus drivers to cooperate and provided some with safe houses to protect them from reprisals during the strike.

Organizers attempted to avoid large demonstrations, which might give Martínez a pretext to use violence. In the end, however, a number of large demonstrations took place, and Martínez showed restraint. His regime, if not the state itself, was in grave danger; yet despite his imprisonments and executions, he did not use widespread violence as he had in 1932.

The explanation for his passivity is that mass killing could no longer serve to legitimate his government before the economic elite. They were, after all, paying people to participate in the strike. Repressing demonstrators would not have made them feel better protected; moreover, since they were playing an important role in mobilizing popular opposition, there was, at least for the moment, relatively little risk that the movement would go beyond the immediate goal of ousting Martínez. The dictator was therefore no longer in a position to manipulate the perception of threat; on the contrary, his increased use of repression against members of the elite in the months leading up to the strike, including the police shooting of a youth from a wealthy family, had made Martínez himself a threat. When secret police agents failed to provoke the looting that might justify a crackdown, Martínez found that he had run out of leverage. His only choices were to violently attack the social elite or to leave office. He chose to go.

1944–1948: The Transition to Institutional Rule

Before he left the country in 1944, Martínez managed to impose an officer of unswerving personal loyalty, General Andrés I. Menéndez, as his successor. Surprisingly, instead of attempting to establish *martinismo sin Martínez*, Menéndez announced his intention to hold free elections and even permitted the civilian liberals who had mobilized against Martínez to reorganize Democratic Action into a new political party, the Democratic Union Party (PUD). He also tolerated the formation of a National Workers' Union (UNT), which quickly enrolled 50,000 members. Surviving cadres of the clandestine Communist Party were the top and mid-level leadership (Elam 1968, 76; Gordon 1989, 75).

The electoral campaign got under way during June and July 1944. The PUD quickly established an overwhelming popular advantage, in part because its presidential candidate, Arturo Romero, was widely viewed as a hero of the confrontation with Martínez. Opposing the PUD was a reincarnation of the old *Martinista* party, Pro-Patria, renamed the Unification Social Democratic Party (PUSD), whose candidate was the hardline General Salvador Castañeda Castro. PUSD had the support of sectors of the armed forces that were hostile toward Romero.

While the popular PUD and the military's PUSD campaigned against each other, the economic elite of the country was in political disarray. Some planters and members of the financial elite belonged to the PUD; others supported the military. Two splinter parties, the Salvadoran Agrarian Party and the Social Republican Front, had elite support. Both put forward candidates who were divisive and transparently self-serving, and garnered little support. The relatively low quality of the economic elite's electoral effort and candidates reflects the fact that, despite their distaste for Martínez, they had grown accustomed to working through the military rather than competing directly for political power. They lacked the political will to build a unified party and compete against the more radical agenda of the PUD. This failure made a democratic outcome unlikely and a return to military intervention almost inevitable.

From June through October, popular mobilization shaped the political campaign. Mass demonstrations forced the Assembly to reverse a decision to make an old-guard *Martinista* the first designate of interim President Menéndez. The assembly then renounced Martínez' 1939 constitution and reinstated that of 1886, which provided greater confidence in future elections. Meanwhile, whatever commitment may have existed within the officer corps to observe the results of the coming election quickly eroded. Arturo Romero's PUD joined forces with members of Democratic Action and the UNT labor federation to form the United Democratic Front (FUD), creating in the process a mass-based political party in which the PCS was known to have considerable

influence (Gordon 1989, 75–76). The FUD laid out an ambitious agenda, including a “complete economic and social overhaul of the country” (Elam 1968, 82). The liberal press in San Salvador joined in attacking the military as anti-democratic, corrupt, and abusive. Faced with the prospect of handing over government to a group of civilians who “had no record of respect or sympathy for the entire concept of armed institutions” (Elam 1968, 93), the divided military began to reunify in opposition to the elections and the civilian liberals, leading to attacks on Romero and his followers, searches, insults, arrests, and occasional shootings throughout the country (79). The various factions of the social elite did not trouble themselves to reunify: they stood back and let the military deal with the situation.

Military opposition to the electoral process eventually took the form of a bloodless coup d’état against Menéndez, led by the director of the police, Colonel Osmín Aguirre y Salinas. Aguirre had been the director of police in the early years of the Martínez administration and had been one of the principal architects of the *matanza*. Not surprisingly, he justified his coup in the language of the protection racket: “The seriousness of the moment in which I have acted has not escaped me; a man aware of his responsibilities. Anarchical ferment has kept the country in constant peril during the last few days, seriously threatening the institutional life of the Republic. The Salvadoran family has been divided by a flood of passion and we men of conscience could not help but be alarmed by the proximity of chaos” (quoted in Elam 1968, 97).

Aguirre delivered the protection expected of him. The evening of the coup, leaders of the PUD, Democratic Action, and the UNT were arrested and slated for deportation. In the next week, hundreds of liberal opponents were jailed. The university was closed down by its own administrators; and the two main liberal newspapers in the country also succumbed to pressure to close.

Aguirre appears to have been opposed by the commercial and financial sectors of the elite. As businesses and banks throughout the country closed following the coup, the military took over and informed employees that they would be dismissed if they did not show up for work (Elam 1968, 99). Using such means, Aguirre headed off the kind of general strike that brought down Martínez.

Meanwhile, FUD leaders who had been deported to Guatemala formed a government in exile and received international recognition. An invasion force of some 2,000 FUD militants, with some support from junior and mid-ranking army officers included Oscar Osorio, who was to become president in 1950. Like the Communist insurrection of 1932, the force was “untrained and undisciplined,” and depended on the success of a series of planned uprisings in army barracks (Gordon 1989, 76). When support failed to materialize from within the army, the invasion force was quickly overwhelmed by Aguirre’s forces. Four hundred and fifty of the rebels were killed, as were 150 govern-

ment soldiers (Elam 1968, 103). Though demonstrations still occurred, the defeat of the FUD invasion removed the last serious opposition to the military. The high command could once again claim to have saved the country from communism and chaos.

On 14 January 1945, military rule was confirmed with the essentially uncontested election of General Salvador Castañeda Castro as president. Despite efforts to sideline Aguirre and other factional competitors within the military, Castañeda did not succeed in reestablishing a personalistic regime comparable to that of Martínez. In fact, his policies created the conditions for his removal only three years later by a movement of “progressive” officers who sought to renovate military rule, carry out substantial reforms, and govern on an institutional, not personalistic, basis.

The threat posed by the PUD and FUD during 1944 had caused the military to pull together across generations, professional backgrounds, and ideologies. The brutality and conservatism of the Castañeda government, however, and the absence of an immediate threat to the military as an institution, weakened once again the glue that had temporarily held the various factions together. With the basic principle of military governance firmly established, junior and middle-ranking army officers with internal, institutional grievances and a more populist socioeconomic philosophy decided to put the *Martinista* old guard out to pasture.

Their project was facilitated by the fact that, despite his repressiveness toward the civilian community, Castañeda did not attempt to build a system of personal control within the military as had Martínez. He allowed, in effect, a political *apertura* within the military institution. He also enhanced the relative power of the regular army by bringing the National Police under the control of the Defense Ministry, rather than the Ministry of Interior (Elam 1968, 123–24). Castañeda committed the error of simultaneously providing junior officers with an easier context within which to organize and giving them reasons to act against him. He decreed a new law that regulated the number of officers at each rank; its impact was strongly in favor of existing senior officers, leading to the expectation that many junior officers would be dismissed. He then proceeded to send reformist junior officers out of the country for training.

In December 1948 Castañeda took extraconstitutional steps to prolong his term by two years, triggering a coup against him organized by a group of army majors. Once in control, the *golpistas* held a meeting of the entire officer corps in which three officers and two civilians were chosen for a Revolutionary Governing Council. The vote was held without regard to rank, with each officer having an equal vote, which favored the more numerous junior officers. The new council forced the retirement of all officers above the rank of lieutenant colonel, effectively eliminating all of the officers with close ties to Martínez. They then appointed a cabinet made up of middle-class civilian

professionals. The council promptly abrogated all inconvenient constitutional provisions but promised to hold elections for a Constituent Assembly and a new government in 1950.

The “Revolution of 1948” sought to establish a new model of military rule based on regularly held elections, expanded social services, and increased state intervention in the economy, particularly in the form of investment and support for industrialization. By expanding state intervention, they hoped to shift productive resources out of agriculture into industry and commerce, reducing over time the economic and political preeminence of the agrarian elite and softening the acute distributional inequities in Salvadoran society. By involving the entire officer corps in decisions, they sought to ensure that the role of the military in politics would be an institutional commitment, rather than the project of a single individual such as Martínez. Yet during the 30 years of institutional military rule inaugurated in 1948, the military never escaped the narrow confines of the protection racket he had established. Like Martínez, post-1948 military presidents failed to build a genuine base of mass political support. What independence they did demonstrate on political or socioeconomic issues triggered elite opposition, usually in the form of conspiracy with conservative factions of the armed forces. Military presidents repeatedly found that staying in office required them to retreat from major reforms and demonstrate their usefulness through repression. The resulting model of rule, despite its reformist and corporatist pretensions, ultimately collapsed into what Enrique Baloyra (1982) has called “reactionary despotism,” setting the stage for revolutionary war.

In the 1980s a series of edited volumes focused on internal violence by states: Stohl and Lopez 1984, 1986; Lopez and Stohl 1989; Bushnell et al. 1991. There were also a few books: McClintock 1985a, 1985b; Moreira Alves 1985; Pion-Berlin 1989; and Rummel 1990, 1991, 1992, 1994a, 1994b; and some articles and papers: Banks 1986; Bollen 1986; Goldstein 1986; Mitchell and McCormick 1988; Mason and Krane 1989; and Lauria Santiago 1991.

3. Protest and Internal War are variable names and thus capitalized in the original.
4. Some versions of this argument, including that of O'Donnell (1978), adopt the structural view that the state will defend the capitalist order, but not necessarily the interests of capitalists. In other words, the state may carry out policies that hurt entire sectors of the capitalist classes, but will use coercion as necessary to prevent challenges to capitalism as a system.
5. Baloyra adapted the term "reactionary despotism" from Giner (1979).
6. Some believe that land privatization affected indigenous communities in Guatemala. Pérez-Brignoli argues, correctly, that the Mayan communities in the highlands were little affected by these changes in land tenure, though they were affected by subsequent vagrancy laws and other labor-coercive measures (1989, 84–85).
7. Corporatism is a form of government in which political participation is channeled through a limited number of official parties and organizations, rather than through the plethora of independent parties and interest groupings characteristic of pluralism. Exclusionary corporatist regimes differ from pure authoritarian regimes in that there are at least the forms of popular consultation and incorporation, though these may be so tightly controlled from above as to be effectively meaningless. Inclusionary corporatist regimes differ from populist regimes in that the latter generally lack formal, state-sponsored mechanisms of interest mediation such as official unions or party structures. Although Stepan is writing specifically about corporatism, his distinction between inclusionary and exclusionary strategies can be applied to any non-democratic regime.
8. Bueno de Mesquita and Lalman, for instance, argue that from a realist point of view, with full information states should never go to war (1992, 60).
9. Other factors that can affect the ability of a leadership group to take power include how well known it is, whether it is seen as having international support, and whether it has good access to military or organizational resources.
10. Although the Argentine, Uruguayan, and Salvadoran states have literally harbored organized crime activity against wealthy citizens such as kidnapping for ransom, theft, and killing for hire, there is a broader analogy to be drawn about the political relationship between the state and civilian economic elites.

Chapter Two

1. The urban police force at this time was called the *Policía de Línea*. The name was later changed to *Policía Nacional*, though the institution remained continuous until it was replaced by a civilian force in 1994. For simplicity, I have used the term National Police throughout.
2. Kenneth Grieb (1971, 42–43). This description is based on interviews with Robert Gregg, then a resident of San Salvador.

3. Hernández Martínez is always referred to in Salvadoran histories as Martínez, contrary to the usual emphasis on the paternal surname in Spanish. According to Grieb (1971, 153), the American minister in San Salvador was sufficiently uncertain of the military's attitude toward the 1931 elections that he requested that a warship be held in readiness in Panama for hasty deployment to El Salvador should a revolt take place.

4. Under the provisions of the 1922 loan, El Salvador retained control of its own customs houses, though the U.S. fiscal representative, William Renwick, was empowered to allocate a substantial share of the revenues to bondholders abroad. Renwick made his presence as benign as possible through his tact, low profile, and evident love and respect for the country. Nonetheless, his role raised questions about Salvadoran sovereignty, and it was widely expected that the next loan could involve direct foreign control of customs houses or other heavy-handed fiscal intervention (Astilla Carmelo 1976, 27).

5. Secretary of State Henry Stimson "was very disappointed with the way his Minister had acted during the emergency. . . . Curtis had served as American Minister in Santo Domingo, where, according to Stimson, 'he had done badly.' His tenure in El Salvador was disappointing as well, prompting Stimson to write in his diary that 'It only shows that when you have a man who isn't quite up to snuff, the lightning is sure to strike wherever you put him'" (Astilla Carmelo 1976, 45).

6. Some observers have argued that Martínez' belief in the transmigration of souls made him less concerned than most leaders about taking human lives, but I would argue that these views merely facilitated what he already had powerful political incentives to do.

7. These included Alfonso Rochac, auditor of the Treasury, Margarito González Guerrero, chief of the legal staff of the Treasury; Manuel López Harrison, undersecretary of public works; Hermógenes Alvarado, undersecretary of government; David Rosales, undersecretary of public instruction; Max Patricio Brannon, undersecretary of finance; and Agustín Alfaro Morán, auditor general of the Republic (Parkman 1988, 30–31).

8. Even though the Meléndez-Quirón families had controlled the presidency for three terms, no *individual* had served more than one consecutive term, thus observing the constitutional prohibition on *continuismo*.

9. By the 1970s it was common for academy-trained army officers to serve for a time in the security forces. Many security forces officers, however, were promoted from the ranks and served only in the security forces. In the 1930s and 1940s, the forces were even more separate.

10. Castro Morán (1989, 177–78). Mariano Castro Morán, then a lieutenant, was among those sentenced.

Chapter Three

1. One of the three, Fabio Castillo, later ran for president as the candidate of the Renovating Action Party (PAR) after it had been taken over by the Communists.

2. *Foco guerrillero* refers to the model of revolutionary struggle that was successful in Cuba—namely, use of military action, rather than mass organizing, to destabilize and ultimately overthrow a vulnerable regime. For this brief period, the PCS focused its energies on developing a military capability rather than expanding on its traditional union organizing activities.