

Shining Path, State Dept. assault Peru

by Valerie Rush

Last September's capture of Shining Path chieftain Abimael Guzmán by Peruvian security forces, and the subsequent arrests of large numbers of his followers, including most of the organization's leadership, should have marked the beginning of the end of that synthetic narco-terrorist monstrosity. And yet, thanks to the deliberate sabotage of the U.S. State Department, the International Monetary Fund (IMF), and the international human rights lobby, Shining Path is still sowing terror and devastation in impoverished Peru, which is forced to deploy its shrunken resources in continuing warfare with the narco-terrorists while fending off an escalating pressure campaign from Washington.

Setting the priorities

The immediate wartime tasks facing the Alberto Fujimori administration in the aftermath of Guzmán's arrest were essentially two: 1) to mop up the logistical and political support apparatus sustaining Shining Path, including its "fifth columnists" in the press, legal arena, and "human rights" lobby; and 2) to decree a unilateral break with the IMF, thereby putting an end to IMF-dictated austerity which has devastated the nation and which is destroying the very institutions, including the military, which are critical to the task of defeating Shining Path.

As 1992 came to a close, President Fujimori was showing signs of understanding that he had to move on these two fronts. He sacked Finance Minister and IMF ally Carlos Bologna, and hinted that a new economic direction was under consideration. He simultaneously launched a series of hard-line initiatives, including proposing a bill before the new Congress making "apology for terrorism" by the press a punishable crime. Shining Path's stable of "defense lawyers," including Guzmán's personal lawyer Alfredo Crespo, was busted when evidence was uncovered proving that they were directly involved in terrorist activity. Crespo was recently sentenced to a life term alongside his boss.

The crippled Shining Path nonetheless gathered its remaining cadre for a show of force, targetting Peru's Jan. 29 municipal elections, which were being looked to by President Fujimori as a demonstration to the international community that his policies stemmed from the people's will. Shining Path called one of its so-called "armed strikes" for Jan. 28 and 29, promising death to anyone who ventured out to either work or vote. In the weeks leading up to the elections, Shin-

ing Path murdered over 17 mayoral candidates across Peru. Another 100 candidates quit the race after receiving death threats, and many others were forced to take nightly refuge on military bases. A series of bombings and assaults against such American companies as American Airlines, Coca-Cola, and IBM were carried out.

And yet Peru's voters were not to be daunted. A deployment in Lima of 100,000 police and military succeeded in allowing the elections to be held in relative calm. Exemplary of the voters' optimism is that in Huamanaga, Ayacucho, the birthplace of Shining Path, more than a score of electoral slates were presented where in 1989 there had been only three.

State Department intervention

And that's when Washington went into action—yet again—to defend Shining Path's networks, in the name of "preserving democracy." According to an Agence France Presse news report, the U.S. State Department sent a communiqué to President Fujimori on Jan. 25 demanding that he guarantee freedom of the press and abstain from "intimidating" or "restricting" the communications media. In particular, it expressed concern over the President's announcement that Peru's intelligence service would be monitoring press reports to prevent use of the media on behalf of terrorism. Fujimori responded in a Jan. 31 television interview that while the Peruvian press can, and does, "say anything it wants," he would not tolerate "the free circulation of newspapers such as [Shining Path's] *El Diario* or *Cambio*," the newspaper of Peru's other narco-terrorist group, the MRTA.

Joining Clinton's State Department in this unabashed defense of Shining Path's propagandists was the so-called human rights organization Americas Watch, whose Feb. 5 report charged that the Fujimori government was "eroding" freedom of the press by seeking to jail journalists. Americas Watch is especially upset that "vague charges of apology for terrorism" were being used to persecute "political opponents, human rights defenders, and lawyers defending prisoners accused of belonging to Shining Path." This, after Shining Path's lawyers had been caught red-handed serving as the couriers for Guzmán's orders to the terrorist liquidation squads!

At the same time, explicit warnings are emanating from the Clinton administration that renewal or resumption of anti-drug aid to Peru will be "conditioned" on a human rights policy considered acceptable to Washington. Similarly, continued adherence to the IMF's free-market austerity dictates is the "condition" for a release of credit from the international financial agencies. Under this kind of pressure, the Fujimori administration has done some backpedalling, including at least temporary abandonment of his "apology for terrorism" crime bill and death penalty proposal, and a pledge from Fujimori that Peru would continue to play by the IMF's rules—for now.