

Andean Report by Peter Rush

Shining Path in pre-election rampage

Peru's terrorist gang threatens to assassinate all candidates for office—and is making good on the promise.

The Shining Path terrorist group has launched a new assault against the nation of Peru, in the run-up to that country's presidential and congressional elections April 8. Five candidates for public office were gunned down in two weeks; all candidates have been threatened; and bombs have blown up political offices and other targets in several cities.

Despite claims of having recently killed or arrested several leaders of the Shining Path, the Peruvian government has in fact lost control over much of the country. The economic devastation caused Shining Path's depredations, compounded by the profound depression into which this poor country has sunk following the government's return to orthodox monetarist measures three years ago, has left the government without the resources to effectively combat the narco-terrorist plague.

Yet, in the elections, the major parties are offering made-in-the-U.S.A. economic prescriptions for "shock" programs which will finish off whatever is left of the economy, in the name of fighting inflation. The current front-runner, Democratic Front candidate Mario Vargas Llosa, for example, proudly announced that under his shock program, some 500,000 government workers may have to be fired shortly after he takes office.

Even the ruling APRA party's Luis Alberto Sánchez, a loyalist of the International Monetary Fund, felt impelled to warn that under current conditions, any such action "would advance us toward a civil war."

In mid-March, Shining Path ended a period of relative quiescence, and launched a renewed assault. As it did just before last fall's municipal elections, it issued a proclamation warning that it would kill any candidate who stood for election next month. "We issue a severe and final warning to all candidates to resign. If not, we will annihilate them implacably," said a statement delivered by the guerrillas to a radio station in the southern departmental capital of Ayacucho, the original base area of the group.

The statement was delivered following the fifth assassination of a candidate in less than two weeks. On March 22, four gunmen shot José Gálvez Fernández, a candidate of the Democratic Front coalition, pumping his body full of bullets as he left his home in one of Lima's working-class districts. The day before, Shining Path assassins shot dead José Dhaga del Castillo, a candidate for Congress from the APRA party, hitting him as he stepped from the shower in his home in Huancayo, 130 miles east of Lima.

Shining Path's threat to step up its pace of assassinations is not idle. The group murdered more than 100 candidates for municipal office prior to last fall's municipal elections.

The government imposed a 30-day state of emergency in Lima after the killing of Gálvez Fernández. But unable to offer protection to all the candidates, the government then announced that the best it can do is to help candidates to get their own licenses to carry weapons.

Other violence by Shining Path or

the other terrorist group, the MRTA, has also escalated. An APRA campaign worker was murdered March 18; three Navy sailors were killed in an attack in the Amazon region on March 19, and two independent candidates for Congress, along with three others, were killed on March 20. A car-bomb detonated outside the Economics Ministry building on March 23 killed one and wounded 20, at least 8 seriously. Three more civilians were killed on March 26 in Ayacucho.

Also on March 26, bombs damaged six offices of political parties in Lima, while explosions rocked three other cities. Shining Path also blacked out part of Lima, and contrived to burn a swath into a nearby hillside in the shape of a hammer and sickle. They also burned down a textile factory in Lima on March 20, and looted a market and shoe store.

The chaos has been compounded by a wave of strikes and agricultural disasters. A strike by 15,000 electrical workers was expected by the press to black out a number of regions, accomplishing the same effect as blackouts caused by Shining Path's sabotage of electrical transmission towers. Refuse has piled up on Lima's streets due a sanitation strike, and hospitals, government offices, and textile factories have been shut down. The port at Lima was shut for nine days by a strike, and most of the nation's copper workers are into their third week of a strike which has crippled the industry that provides Peru the largest portion of its export earnings.

On top of this, a drought has slashed agricultural output from much of the southern portion of the country, while the collapse of the transportation network has left rice grown in the north to rot. Imported food is also rotting, sitting on the docks in Lima, lacking the means of transportation to move it to its final destination.