

El Salvador: Toward A New Dark Age?

by Christine Bierre

For over 30 years, Lyndon LaRouche and his associates have warned that the policies of deregulation and financial globalization will lead the world to a new dark age. How often have people accused us of exaggerating?

And yet, this is happening every day before our very eyes. Only a few stable, even though extremely poor countries remain in black Africa. Many others, like Somalia, Ethiopia, Liberia, Sierra Leone, and Central Africa have nearly broken down entirely; others such as the Congo Republic, Congo Brazzaville, and Ivory Coast are struggling to survive. In the last 30 years, African states weakened by the International Monetary Fund policies, have sold out their infrastructure (trains, ports, public companies) and ceased all subsidies to essential national production. As a result, epidemics are rampant, reducing age expectancy to 46 years (vs. 80 in Europe); insecurity is widespread; groups of gangs or unpaid soldiers live by attacking private citizens or charging them fees for crossing their property; roads are impassable; schools no longer function; and the jungle is taking over the cities.

Gangs Run Rampant

Similar destruction of civilization is now threatening some countries of Ibero-America, such as El Salvador. Developing rapidly in the 1950s, when a Central American market created the conditions for rapid economic growth throughout the isthmus, El Salvador went rapidly downhill. First there was the elimination of the common market, following a United Fruit-manipulated “football war” between El Salvador and neighboring Honduras. Then there was the protracted civil war opposing the left wing to a right-wing reaction which ripped the country apart for nearly 15 years, between 1975 and 1990.

The problems of survival of that country today are the sequels to that war, which ravaged the countryside, while nearly 1 million Salvadorans migrated illegally to the United States. Many went to California, where, imprisoned for petty or other crimes, they soon learned the lessons of the California gangs: Human life is worth nothing, not even \$10. Repatriated from the United States to their countries of origin, these extraordinarily violent youth gangs, having lost all sense of humanity, have invaded not only El Salvador, but many of the other Central American nations. Known as the Mara Salvatrucha, these youth gangs, their skin covered by tattoos, impose terror on their communities. Estimated at more than



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In Ataco, El Salvador, people typically have to live behind bars to protect themselves from youth gangs.

100,000 in El Salvador, and coming back from the United States at the rate of five airplane loads per month, these youths are imposing protection rackets on businessmen, school-teachers, bus drivers, students, and citizens, and are prepared to kill for \$10 or less.

The state of San Miguel in the eastern part of the country is in a state of near-revolt against the central government, which is accused of being unable to deal with the violence of the Maras. Pressured by local businessmen subjected to protection racket by the Mara Salvatrucha, the governor of the state and the private sector are threatening to boycott payments of taxes unless strong measures are taken to deal with the problem. In the past, some had gone as far as financing anti-delinquency death squads! In the capital city of San Salvador, pharmacies and other businesses are being hit by the racketeers.

In the suburbs of San Salvador, youth gangs have been targeting bus drivers. On several occasions, when the drivers refused to hand over their revenues, these gangs killed the drivers and burned the buses with all passengers inside! Teachers are subject to extortion, and more than 80 have requested this year to be transferred to other cities, after having been threatened in their local areas. The residential areas of San Salvador are being targeted by the gangs, who get inside houses using false pretexts, rob, rape the women, and kill whoever gets in their way and refuses to pay.

With the government unable to deal with this existential crisis, more and more exasperated voices are calling for the adoption of emergency measures—martial law or curfew—with the danger that the issue of delinquency will be used by emerging *caudillos* (honchos) as a pretext to bring back the dictatorial military regimes which have sometimes run these countries. While strong and competent law-and-order measures are necessary today to curb barbarism which is totally out of control and threatening society as a whole, equally strong measures need to be taken in the economic domain to deal with the causes of this problem: poverty, illiteracy, loss of human values, and destruction of protective family ties by

the war, which forced many family members into exile in order to make a living. Conditions must be created for members of the gangs who want to leave the gang, to get rid of their tattoos, a precondition for them to be able to get jobs.

In addition, some people estimate that 40% of El Salvadoran youth grow up without a parent, because their parent(s) is/are working outside the country, the El Salvadoran daily *El Diario de Hoy* reported in April 2006. The figure is credible, as it is estimated that one-quarter of the population has left the country to find work. Financiers hail the steadily increasing remittances sent back home by these expatriates—El Salvador's Central Bank reported a 13.3% increase in remittances in the first quarter of 2006, over the year before—but how can a nation survive where nearly half its children grow up without seeing their parents for years on end?

While President Tony Saca is refusing to take the road leading to extraordinary measures, his austerity policies and recent calls for tax increases cannot contribute to the necessary pacification of the country. Juridical reforms will also be necessary to protect witnesses, juries, and other personnel involved in dealing with this criminality, and whose lives are endangered by the Maras.

Poverty and Disease

Too weak to deal with delinquencies, the deregulated state is also too weak to deal with epidemics, provoked also by poverty and misery. In recent weeks, dengue fever in both its classic and hemorrhagic variants has reached a peak. In the third week of August, more than 400 cases were registered in the hospitals, the majority being of the classical variety, but highly lethal hemorrhagic cases have been steadily growing. Dealing with that disease carried by mosquitoes, is foremost an economic problem. Hundreds of thousands of citizens have migrated from the poor countryside to the cities, living in shacks built on the soil in areas with no clean water. Under those conditions, the heavy rains in this tropical country create the conditions where stagnant bodies of water are everywhere, and mosquitoes carrying the disease reproduce massively. Small groups of military brigades can be seen fumigating those spots in the areas most concerned by the disease, but ultimately it is only the creation of adequate housing and water management that will solve the problem, something the present government cannot do with its present budget and economic policies.

Beautiful El Salvador, with its five volcanoes and luxurious vegetation, its beaches of black sand, and its industrious population of 6 million, is thus turning into an inferno for its citizens, with many wondering whether they should not migrate to safer lands. Number two on the list of criminality after Haiti, high on the list of mortal epidemics, shaken often by earthquakes against which the population has no way to defend itself, El Salvador is a good example of how the entire world will go, if we don't act now to stop the decline of civilization.