



FARABUNDO MARTI

— TESSA MARCUS

The National Liberation Movement in El Salvador draws its name and inspiration from Farabundo Martí, who in the brief 35 years of his life made an irreplaceable contribution to the struggle of the people of El Salvador.

Farabundo Martí, affectionately known as "Martí, the Black", was born on May 5, 1893 in the small, south-western town of Teotepque, La Libertad Department. Son of a middle peasant, he witnessed the poverty and hardship of the small peasants and farm workers who worked for his father and on neighbouring farms.

He went to university to study law and soon became involved in student politics. He was an avid reader, taking in all the works of anarchists and Marxists that filled a small shelf in the library of the law school. Increasingly he began to reject university life and the morality of the ruling class that it expressed and embodied. He rejected its distance from the problems of the people and its failure to side with the oppressed. On taking the decision to end what promised to be a brilliant legal career, he said: "I refuse to be an accomplice in the exploitation of my people."

In 1920 Martí was arrested during a student rally in San Salvador and deported to Guatemala, where he worked as a farmhand and lived among the Quiché Indians. He was again forced to flee from the authorities, this time to Mexico where he fought with the Red battalions of Mexico peasants against a reactionary rebellion.

He returned to Guatemala for a brief period, where with other Central American intellectuals, they formed the Central American Socialist Party in 1925. Later that year, he returned to El Salvador clandestinely, working actively in the newly formed Regional Federation of El Salvador Peasant Workers.

Over the next two years, "The Regional", as it was popularly called, attracted more unions, set out a national programme of land reform and struggled for an 8 hour working day. One of its most interesting projects was the People's University, at which peasants and workers were taught to read and write, and political economy. The experience he gained with "The Regional" was decisive in forming his character as a revolutionary and as an organiser.

In 1928 "The Regional" sent a group of internationalists to support Sandino's units and Marti was in the contingent. Sandino gave him the rank of colonel and made him his private secretary. Differences between the two men developed, for whilst Sandino was anti-imperialist, Marti had gone one stage further, identifying himself with the aims and ideas of Marxism-Leninism. Their ideas were not incompatible. However, at that stage, these differences combined with their forceful personalities led Marti to return to El Salvador. They both continued the struggle and retained a mutual respect for one another. Just before his execution Marti said: "I wish to declare emphatically that I believe in Sandino, that he has not sold himself to the Americans and is a sincere man."

On his return in 1929, he found El Salvador in economic crisis. The oligarchy was divided and the military growing in importance, and the workers and peasants movement was growing. "The Regional" continued to actively organise, especially in the rural areas.

The Araujo regime was in power, having gained considerable popular support because of the land reform promised during the election campaign. It was, however, to remain a promise rather than a reality, causing considerable popular discontent. This combined with the severe effects of the world economic crisis, intensified the misery of ordinary men and women and stimulated the revolutionary upsurge. On March 28, 1930 the Communist Party of El Salvador was founded by a small group of workers and intellectuals on the shores of Lake Ilopango. One of its founders, Marti, emerged as amongst the most authoritative and experienced of its leaders. Worsening economic conditions and heightened consciousness, which had been stimulated by the work of "The Regional", provided the newly formed CP a receptive and

eager audience in broad sections of the oppressed. For people in the campos and the tiny working class in San Salvador the Communist Party held out hope of real change:

- a 36 hour week;
- the right to unionise;
- the right of rural workers to strike;
- social and unemployment security;
- a minimum wage;
- free and universal education;
- state ownership of transport;
- equal opportunities for women;
- an end to discrimination against Indians.

The ideals of communism appealed to the Indians equally. They also knew who was responsible for their oppression. Jose Feliciano Ama, popular Indian leader, placed the support of his people behind the communists.

REPRESSION

Protests against the failures of Araujo's term of office mounted. Araujo called out the troops and there was bloody repression. In response Marti led a march on Araujo's house to denounce the bloodshed. He was arrested and thrown into prison with Rafael Bondanza. It was April 9, 1931. Popular pressure demanding his release grew and eventually he was set free.

Popular protest continued. In May, 1931 police fired on demonstrators near Sonsonate, a town of 2,000 inhabitants and the commercial centre of the coffee region, killing workers and peasants. More protesting peasants were mown down and in Zaragoza, south of San Salvador. The Government hunted Marti throughout the countryside, identifying all opposition as his work.

In October, Araujo prohibited the export of gold. The bankers retaliated by withholding credit to coffee growers. Hunger and poverty increased. By the November harvest there were few jobs and no money to pay the workers.

On December 2, 1931 the Araujo term of office was abruptly ended by a military coup which installed General "El Brujo" Martinez at the helm of the new Junta.

"El Brujo", a student of theosophy (i.e. any system of speculation which bases the knowledge of nature on that of the divine), had bizarre and eccentric ideas. It was his considered opinion that, for example: *"It was good that children receive the beneficial effluvia of the planet, the vibrations of the earth. Plants and animals don't use shoes."*

and

"It was a great crime to kill an ant than a man, because a man dies and is reincarnated while an ant dies forever." To this fate he sent tens of thousands of Salvadorans.

Despite the coup and military rule, Martinez decided to go ahead with the municipal elections in January, 1932. The Communist Party put in candidates. Thousands signed the electoral rolls as their supporters and many communist candidates won, even though the party was barely a year old.

But the Martinez Junta refused to certify their victories. Popular outrage mounted and mass insurrection was planned. The campesino (peasants) prepared to march on the town halls in their communities; sympathetic officers were to lead a rebellion in the garrisons; the workers prepared to strike. January 22nd was set as the day of national popular insurrection.

But word got out and reached Martinez. Marti and two of closest associates were arrested on January the 18th. The barrack revolt was aborted over the next two days and mass arrests began.

On the night of the insurrection the peasants of the western provinces, where the revolt was primarily centred, marched on the towns, machetes in hand. A principal target was Sonsonate. The

peasants met the army in the Town Square. Despite its superior firepower, the army was forced to flee into the town fort. By 10.00am the rebels withdrew to a nearby town. They numbered 5,000 and were led by a woman called "Red Julia".

The ruling class was enraged. Martinez mobilised to crush the rebellion. The army was joined by a Civic Guard made up of members of the upper class, "loyal civilians". The *matanza* (massacre) began. A pitched battle continued for several days and hundreds lay dead. The ruling class wanted blind and bloody vengeance. In Izalco, groups of 50 men were tied together by the thumbs and led to the graves as a machine gun dropped them into the hole.

The roadways were littered with bodies as the National Guard killed anyone they met.

Using the electoral rolls from the January municipal election, the army went out to systematically kill virtually all members and supporters of the Communist Party.

Farabundo Marti died before a firing squad on February 1, 1932. In all some 30 000 people were murdered in the *matanza*, 2% of the population of El Salvador. A survivor of a mass execution who crawled out of a mass grave and fled the country wrote of the *matanza*:

"I believe that the drama of 1932 is for El Salvador what the Nazi barbarity was for Europe, what the North American barbarity was for Viet Nam — a phenomenon that completely changed — in the negative sense — the face of a nation. ... Since that evil year all of us are other people and I believe that since then El Salvador is another country. Above all else, El Salvador is today the work of that barbarity."

Miguel Marmol. A Shoemaker)