

ABSTRACT

The achievement of independence by Guatemala did not bring about national consensus. Both the nineteenth and twentieth centuries have been marked by sharp divisions of opinion among rival nationalists concerning the development of Guatemala. These divisions are reflected in the policies of national governments, and in vigorous and uncompromising opposition to the governments in power. So intense are the views of rival nationalists that opposing groups accuse each other of being anti-national or anti-Guatemalan. In this mutual conflict institutions such as the Roman Catholic Church may be attacked then re-established, foreign investment encouraged then opposed, the oligarchical minority group supported then challenged, the masses assisted then reprisals taken against them, or the United States favoured then opposed. One side of the conflict may be supported by the prevailing government while an opposing nationalist group impatiently awaits its turn to reverse the programmes of the government which it opposes.

In contemporary Guatemala, the national government by striving to institute socio-economic reform without alienating the traditionalists has failed to attract the strong support either of the traditionalists or of the masses. Although since 1944 the masses have come to participate more in the activities of Guatemala through labour unions,

cooperatives, and political parties, the problems of poverty and "social injustice" are far from being solved. The "cause" of the masses has therefore been firmly taken up by communist guerrilla organizations whose aim is the overthrow of the present "system". At the other extreme, the system as it stands is protected by the traditionalists for whom the maintenance of traditional values is regarded as essential for the achievement of 'modernity' without creating instability or seriously disrupting the traditional system of social relationships. Consensus appears to have been reached only on Guatemala's claim to British Honduras, and on Guatemala's relations with Mexico.