

the workers' struggle in the urban areas. In 1985, there was a great development in the labor movement and an increase in strikes, marking a growing leftist orientation. Eighty percent of the strikes were in state institutions. There were strikes in every ministry except for the ministry of defense.

In many respects, 1986 marked a turning point in the balance of forces. The state embarked on a series of agricultural reforms, designed to erode the FMLN's relations with the masses. However, the FMLN's political/mass efforts proved sufficient to weather this maneuver. The government raised the banner of defeating the revolutionary forces, relying on US support, and began preparing public opinion for this. The reactionaries thought it was only a matter of time before the revolutionaries would surrender, but they grossly underestimated the FMLN/FDR's ability to withstand and to adapt their tactics to meet the changing realities. Events in 1986 exposed the erosion of US efforts to

strengthen the government's military apparatus. The army had been increased from 12,000 to 52,000. Yet with more than \$3,000 million spent to renew the reactionary military establishment, plans for further enlargement have floundered. Instead, soldiers are deserting even though they were being paid more than workers in an attempt to buy their loyalty.

Parallel to its military problems, the government has failed to halt the economy's deterioration. Duarte's economic policy has not only antagonized the entire labor movement, it has created contradictions in the government institutions, pitting political and military officials against each other, and causing deep concern in the private sector. Businessmen are sending their money outside the country, and some have asked Duarte to resign. This downward slide has prompted US policy-makers to consider replacing Duarte, but so far this option has been put aside for fear of alienating his Christian Democratic Party and opening new contradictions that could

be exploited by the revolutionary movement.

The government's all-around failure has given the popular movement new opportunities to develop. The conflict is no longer solely between the rich and poor, but involves all sectors. In this context, the FMLN/FDR, while continuing the liberation war, launched a new peace plan in July 1986. The front has previously made initiatives for a political settlement to avoid unnecessary suffering to the people. What is new about the current plan is the unprecedented chance to rally a truly broad national front, including sectors of all different orientations, to the idea of a Salvadorean solution, rather than delivering the country's fate into the hands of US imperialism.

Providing the revolutionary backbone for the FMLN's continuing advances is the growing unification process in its ranks. The five component parties of the front have decided to unite into one. This has meant a restructuring of the military forces, and unification of all mass organizing work as well as informational activities. Comrade Handel summed up the significance of this by saying: «We have achieved an advanced level of national unity, and our struggle is very close to a decisive time. We don't set an exact date, but we are very close to gaining victory. We thoroughly understand the problems of the organization - without this, the enemy would have defeated us long ago. We are sufficiently strong to face the state. We are organizing the people and leading the revolution. Had we not achieved this unity, we would be dispersed in different areas... We are preparing ourselves for the enemy's next counterattack, while continuing our efforts for negotiations. We believe that decisive events will take place this year and the next. This is not a prophecy. It is our analysis.»

