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Salvadoran Rightwing Deputies Stage Indefinite Legislative Boycott In Protest Of Duarte Regime's Policies

by Deborah Tyroler

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On Jan. 6, 17 of 60 members of the Salvadoran national congress declared an indefinite boycott of legislative sessions in protest of government economic policies. The 17 rightwing party deputies described President Jose Napoleon Duarte's "war tax" and 12 fiscal and credit reforms decreed in late 1986 as "monstrous." These deputies and others are calling for the president's resignation. The so-called war tax is aimed at boosting the military budget, in an effort to consolidate the on-going counterinsurgency offensive known as "United for Reconstruction" initiated last year. This tax along with other fiscal measures scheduled for execution in 1987 are opposed by important sectors of the Salvadoran business elite and landed oligarchy. Leading the opposition against Duarte's Christian Democrat government are the Nationalist Republic Alliance (ARENA) and the National Conciliation Party (PCN). Both parties argue the new economic policies only serve to escalate the "chaos" in the country and thus benefit the rebels. At a Jan. 6 press conference, after hinting that perhaps the time has arrived for the military to assume direct control of the government, ARENA leader Alfredo Cristiani told reporters, "The economy is in ruins, we have unprecedented inflation, and what is worse, an enormous polarization of forces in the nation." Cristiani said the legislative boycott would continue until the government modifies its strategies in the economic, political and social areas which he said have caused a "national crisis." Congressional approval of any measure requires at least 40 votes for passage. President Jose Napoleon Duarte's Christian Democrat party controls 33 seats. Among upcoming votes are approvals of foreign loans and the renewal of the national state of emergency in effect since 1980. A "minimum" demand presented by the conservatives is a new strategy for pacification "because Mr. Duarte's strategy of dialogue has failed and this does not help the armed forces," said Cristiani. Other demands include revamping the economic recovery and stabilization program, as well as the reprivatization of economic activities in the areas of foreign trade, banking and finance. A diplomat who requested anonymity told SALPRESS on Jan. 7 that the US has not yet "decided on a formula to replace Duarte." He was responding to speculations about the possibility of promoting the unification of three "tendencies" within the ruling party. These tendencies led by Abraham Rodriguez, Fidel Chavez Mena and Jose Antonio Morales Erlich converge on plans for economic recovery via revitalization of the country's traditional oligarchies.

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