

Foreign apologists back Shining Path war

by Gretchen Small

As Shining Path terrorists launched their "Tet offensive" inside Peru, a network of foreign apologists of Shining Path (Sendero Luminoso) opened an international front in the war against the Peruvian state. A group of so-called "Senderologists"—social scientists, anthropologists, journalists—have set themselves up as Shining Path's international "fifth column," turning their academic posts and news outlets into propaganda outlets designed to build legitimacy for Shining Path's hideous war.

A flood of newsletters and books dedicated to Shining Path have hit the market. In June alone, two major books promoting Shining Path as a legitimate political force were published, with several more scheduled for publication before 1992 is over. The first, edited by former State Department official David Scott Palmer (see preceding article), was the first book-length treatment of the Peruvian killers, but it was still directed to a specialized audience of policymakers and academics.

The second book, written by the former correspondent for London's *Independent* in Peru, Simon Strong, targets the mass media and the broader public. Promoted May 24 even before publication in the *New York Times* Sunday magazine section, Strong's book is now being heralded in reviews worldwide as a "must read" for non-specialists, "a very good introduction to a dramatic subject that is at the heart of the dilemma in not only Latin America but all Third World countries," in the words of Peru's pornographer and Nobel Literature Prize candidate Mario Vargas Llosa.

Strong's title, *Shining Path: The World's Deadliest Revolutionary Force* (London: HarperCollins), is misleading. The book attacks the very culture, institutions, and civilization which Shining Path seeks to eradicate from Peru: everything western and anything Christian. Peru's military is painted as genocidal maniacs; the Catholic Church, as violent oppressors of a preferred Indian culture; the government, as vile because it "was founded on European civilization." Shining Path exists because "Spanish conquistadors ripped apart the Inca empire and with it one of the world's great civilizations," Strong writes. Peru's business and political elite is declared to be genocidal, because "they feel they are fighting for a superior culture."

The book is a 274-page *racist* diatribe against everything which Peru has ever achieved as a nation. "Peru is not a nation, anyway. It is a country wracked by a political and economic infrastructure that is rooted in prejudices inherited

from colonial times and which, in effect, discriminates against the vast, Indian-blooded majority in favor of European descendants," Strong raves. He adds that, through Shining Path's war, "slowly, but surely, after 500 years the whites are being pushed out."

If the book reads like Shining Path propaganda, it is no accident. In his acknowledgments, Strong expresses his "great thanks" to five top Senderistas, among others, for their help in preparing the book.

Preparing the next wave

A review in the London *Guardian* July 18 of Palmer and Strong's books, by the *Guardian's* Richard Gott, identified the goal of this propaganda: "Quite suddenly, it has become permissible to discuss seriously the aims and ambitions and methods of Sendero Luminoso," wrote Gott. "For years, such discussion has been deemed inadmissible. The combined forces of both left and right have assembled to dismiss this revolutionary organization as the Andean equivalent of the Khmer Rouge—the Hitlerian image of the late 20th century—and further debate has been effectively ruled out."

No longer is this to be the case. He hailed the recent showing by British television Channel 4 of "an extraordinarily brilliant film" as the first sign of this change. The film showed Shining Path to be a "disciplined, highly motivated military organization, imbued with a near-fanatical zeal, with more than a sporting chance of taking power before the end of the century," a movement which exhibits "unquestioning devotion to a cause," and is "apparently successful and well-supported . . . devoted to promoting a Chinese-style Maoist revolution." He praises Palmer's book as "useful," and Strong's for demonstrating that Shining Path is only "the latest in a long line of legitimate, millenarian struggles" in South America.

Gott advances the new line: Shining Path can, and perhaps should, win in Peru. "The guerrillas will not *seize* power in any meaningful sense," he writes. "They will *assume* power at the moment that the old society disintegrates. Peru is undoubtedly now near that point, undermined by violence and terror, certainly, but also by the drug trade and endemic corruption, by the racism of the ruling elite. . . . I have heard wealthy Peruvians, living in exile because of the security situation in Lima, throwing up their hands in despair and asking aloud whether—everything else having failed—Sendero shouldn't be given its turn."

Lest these ravings be dismissed, the most recent study on Shining Path published by the RAND Corp. should be consulted. Prepared for a Defense Department project on "Andean Futures: A Comparative Political, Economic, and Security Assessment," author Gordon McCormick justifies Shining Path as an Indian uprising against the heritage of the Spanish conquest and argues that because the Peruvian government doesn't "understand" it, they will soon cut Lima off from the interior, and collapse the old order.