

## Document Profile: "Unión Comunal Salvadoreña, El Salvador"

**Title:** Unión Comunal Salvadoreña, El Salvador: manifestación de la U.C.S. pro reforma agraria

**Contributor:** Unión Comunal Salvadoreña

**Publisher:** Santa Tecla, El Salvador: Unión Comunal Salvadoreña

**Date:** 1980

### Description and Contents Summary:

This source is a 1980 promotional pamphlet produced by Union Comunal Salvadoreña (UCS), a land redistribution organization heavily backed by the United States government.

In 1979, the Salvadoran Civil War began when the Junta Revolucionaria de Gobierno (JRG), a centrist junta, overthrew the old-guard rightist government in a coup. The Frente Farabundo Martí para la Liberación Nacional (FMLN), a Marxist coalition that aspired to armed revolution with the goal of forming a communist state, emerged as the JRG's opponent in the Civil War. With this threat apparent, rightist death squads realigned themselves with the government and the US (as well as Chile, Argentina, and Israel) and funneled support to the JRG in order to promote stability, and eliminate a potential new communist state in the midst of the Cold War. This manifested in widespread violent government repression. The 1979 coup resulted in the freeing of El Salvador's massive peasant population from the brutal semi-feudal *latifundio* system, run by a small number of rich, rightist landowners, under which they had toiled for centuries. As peasants made up a majority of El Salvador's population, the Civil War was effectively a race between the JRG and the FMLN to gain the favor of this vital group. Not only did the JRG need to win on the battlefield; they needed to appease and stabilize the peasant population by instituting land reform, before the FMLN instilled them with revolutionary Marxist ideas. To achieve this end, the JRG, in cooperation with the American Institute for Free Labor Development, formed UCS. Many rightists and land-owners—members of the same rightist government that put land reform into effect—fought back against this initiative with death squads and brutality, even assassinating UCS director Rudolfo Viera in January, 1981. This violence, along with a "lethargic bureaucracy", made UCS's progress in instituting land reform incredibly slow. This pamphlet is part of that campaign.

This ten-page pamphlet was created, published, and distributed by UCS, around the year 1980. Its main purpose is to inform the Salvadoran peasant population of the organization's mission of agrarian reform. On the opening page, the organization states its main goal, which is to "eliminate the *latifundio* and distribute the land to peasants without land". Following that is a list of fifteen other objectives to ensure the wellbeing and prosperity of its members, such as educational seminars and the inclusion of women. The pamphlet's format clearly demonstrates the organization's appealing promises in order to persuade the masses to join, and gives no mention of the serious issues plaguing their mission.

### Significance:

It is clear that the visual layout of this pamphlet has been optimized to carry UCS's plan to the peasants of El Salvador as efficiently and persuasively as possible, essential in a large-scale plan of such high stakes. The design was likely influenced by low levels of literacy on the part of the rural population, which can explain its simple and accessible layout. The language too is simple—each page contains concise information, and an image for visual appeal. One page features the letters "UCS" as a collage of photographs of *campesinos*. The various fonts used likely have specific motivations behind them, too—

the *UCS* on the front page is slightly angular, and the two main headings—“Objetivos” and “Proyectos”—are in frilly block font. This font seems to include Latin American or indigenous motifs, less “Western” than the standard font used in the pamphlet’s body text. On the back, “LA U.C.S. EN MARCHA” is written with streamlines that suggest rapid progress.

Furthermore, the pamphlet is simple in its message, perhaps oversimplified, presenting an idealistic view of the UCS’s capabilities. UCS presents itself as a powerful, well-connected organization with the ability to help the people but does not mention that its mission is constantly being compromised by a slow bureaucracy and right-wing violence, not to mention the disarray and damage caused by the Civil War itself. This source is valuable because it provides a view into this period of Salvadoran history, not from the eyes of academics, but from the perspective of those over whom, effectively, the war was being fought. It reveals the discrepancy between what the *campesinos* were promised, and what they received. Taking into account the historical context of the Salvadoran Civil War, this UCS flyer can be seen as what it was—not necessarily part of the altruistic and strong campaign it was presented as, but rather part of a strategic and political move that was badly failing.

**Page Count:**

**Geographical Subject:** El Salvador

**Subject:** land reform; Salvadoran Civil War (1979-1992); Unión Comunal Salvadoreña

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**Works Cited**

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