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MARCH 84

CUSLAR NEWSLETTER

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ELECTIONS IN
EL SALVADOR

ARGENTINA:
RETURN TO
DEMOCRACY

EL SALVADOR:

BACKGROUND TO THE CRISIS

In March, 1982, elections were held in El Salvador. Then-Secretary of State, Alexander Haig, pointing to the "unprecedented" turnout, pronounced the results "a military defeat for the guerrillas as much as a political repudiation."

Now another election approaches. On Mar. 25, 1984, the people of El Salvador will elect their President. Speaking of the election plans in Nicaragua, which he will surely scrutinize closely, our current Secretary of State George Schultz said, "...the important thing is that if there is to be an electoral process, it be observed not only at the moment when people vote, but in all the preliminary aspects that make an election really mean something." (NYT, 2/6/84) But will he turn his critical eye on El Salvador as well?

THE CURRENT SITUATION

Civil War: The war in El Salvador has expanded to include most areas of the country. An estimated 10 to 12,000 FMLN (Farabundo Marti Front for National Liberation) guerrillas confront roughly 38,000 Salvadorean Army and security forces. Both sides have more than doubled in number since 1980. The guerrillas have greatly improved their combat capacity and have expanded their

range of operations. The government forces suffer from morale problems, as the recent mass surrenders at El Paraiso (Dec. 30, 162 soldiers) and Anamoró (late Nov., 135 soldiers) indicate. The Army has intensified its practice of forced conscription.

The Economy: This year's coffee production, which accounts for 60% of El Salvador's export earnings, is expected to be less than half of what it was five years ago, and cotton will be only a third of what it was then. (NYT, 2/5/84) More than \$1 billion in capital has been transferred out of the country-- 67% more than the estimated \$600 million in damages caused by the guerrillas, according to U.S. Embassy officials.

El Salvador depends on nearly \$1 million a day in economic aid from the U.S. The director of El Salvador's principle business federation says, "We would not be surviving if it were not for the aid." With one-third of the population unemployed, much of this aid is intended to provide employment opportunities in both the private and public sectors, to prevent enlistment into the guerrilla forces.

Repression: The Roman Catholic Church announced 6,096 civilians had been killed in 1983, with at least 4,736 deaths directly attributable to killings by the armed

forces and right-wing death squads. Americas Watch estimates that four times as many murders were committed by official uniformed Army and security forces as by the death squads. There has recently been an upsurge in death squad killings, aimed particularly at labor and peasant leaders, religious and refugee workers, and Christian Democratic politicians. The structure of institutionalized repression remains intact.

Refugees: At least one fourth of the Salvadorean population are refugees, either within the country or abroad.

Democratic Institutions: El Salvador has been in a state of seige for nearly four years. There is no freedom of the press, freedom of assembly, or trade union rights, nor does the judicial system function. (Not one member of a death squad or the military has been convicted in the 37,000+ killings attributed to them in the past 4 years.)

Agrarian Reform: A recent audit of El Salvador's land reform program by the Inspector General's office of U.S. AID indicated that even in terms of its limited objectives, the land reform has severe problems. Most cooperatives created by the reform are not financially viable. A third of the campesinos who have applied for titles to land they had previously rented are not working their plots because they have been threatened, evicted, or disappeared. (NYT, 2/19/84)
Late in 1983, the Constituent Assembly officially killed the cru-

cial Phase II of the land reform by passing Constitutional Article 104, which allows a single landowner to hold up to 500 hectares of land. (El Salvador Bulletin, 12/83) Thus the coffee plantations, the key to El Salvador's wealth, remain in the hands of their original owners (the oligarchy).

THE CANDIDATES

Six parties are participating in the upcoming elections. Three are very small, and would only be influential if no candidate gets a clear majority in the first balloting. The three leading candidates are:

--Jose Napoleon Duarte, leader of the Christian Democratic Party (PDC). In the current Salvadorean context, where all officially-recognized parties are right of center, Duarte is a moderate reformer. He has called for national dialog, saying that elections are only a first step toward compromise. He has little support within the Army,

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would govern. From 1913 to 1927, the Presidency was controlled by one family, the Melendez Quinonez, in a period known as "the dynasty." (North, p.24) But in Jan. 1931, in the midst of the Great Depression, with labor and rural organizing on the rise, the relatively liberal successor to "the dynasty" permitted fair elections. A populist candidate, Arturo Araujo, was elected. The oligarchy withdrew its support from the government, and in the absence of any clear program, Araujo was unable to govern and was deposed in a coup in Dec. 1931. The coup brought to power Gen. Maximiliano Hernandez Martinez, who the following January suppressed a peasant rebellion in the coffee growing region (organized in part by communists), and proceeded to massacre 30,000 Indian peasants in what is known as the matanza. The government security forces and army worked in conjunction with "White Guards" organized by the landowners to crush the "communist menace." Hysterical anticommunism; racism, and murderous repression have marked the military/oligarchy's response to any subsequent challenge to their power in the countryside.

After the matanza, El Salvador was governed by a succession of Colonels and Generals who came to power either through coups or fraudulent elections (See fig. 1). Any serious opposition was repressed. However, in the 1960s, under the influence of "modernizing" military rulers, a limited political opening was permitted,

and the Christian Democratic Party (PDC), which called for modest reforms, began to make electoral gains in municipal elections and in the national Legislative Assembly. In 1970, the PDC endorsed the call of an agrarian reform congress for the Salvadorean state to undertake "massive expropriation in favor of the common good." (North, p.69)

By 1972, unions were organizing, students were demonstrating, the Church was defending the rights of peasants to organize, and the demand for agrarian reform was widespread. In this context, the 1972 Presidential elections took place, with a PDC-led opposition coalition (UNO) running Napoleon Duarte with Guillermo Ungo for Vice-President against the "official" Party of National Conciliation (PCN) candidate, Col. Arturo Molina. By all objective accounts, Duarte and Ungo won. But the military government closed the polls, imposed a news blackout, and then declared Molina the winner. An attempted coup to enforce the UNO victory failed, in part due to support for Molina from Guatemala and Nicaragua under the auspices of CONDECA, the U.S.-sponsored Central American Defense Council. (Dunkerley, p.86) A wave of repression began against the Christian Democrats. The brief "opening" in the political process had ended, and the military/oligarchy alliance had reasserted itself.

The stolen election and the repression which followed convinced many Salvadoreans that

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the electoral path to change was a dead end. After this, guerrilla organizations began to gain more recruits, and mass popular organizations formed to bring direct pressure to bear on the government. UNO ran another candidate in the 1977 Presidential elections, but again lost through blatant fraud, as repression continued to intensify under the new President, Gen. Romero. An attempt at a reformist coup in Oct. 1979 deposed Romero but failed to halt the repression or implement any genuine reforms.

"REFORM WITH REPRESSION"

After the Oct. 15th, 1979 coup, the U.S. quickly began to send military aid to the new junta, and increased its economic aid by over 500%. In Nicaragua, Somoza had been deposed by the Sandinistas in July, and El Salvador was clearly moving toward a revolutionary explosion. A military/Christian Democratic junta, anti-communist and friendly to the U.S., was highly preferable to "another Nicaragua." Although the "reformist" junta was rapidly deserted by most of the Christian Democrats who served on it when they realized they were powerless to stop the repression, Napoleon Duarte was willing to participate in it from 1980 to 1982, thus allowing the U.S. to portray it as a "centrist" government. A land reform was also announced, as proof of the good intentions of the government, but the repression that was simultaneously unleashed in the countryside indicated that no real reform

Figure 1. 50-year history of elections and coups in El Salvador.

DATE	EVENT
Jan '31	Honest elections. Arturo Araujo wins, takes office.
Dec '31	Coup. Imposition of Gen. Maximiliano Hernández, Dictator for 12 years.
Apr '44	Coup. Imposition of Gen. Omin Aguirre y Salinas, previous Director of Police and Minister of War.
Mar '45	Dishonest elections. Official Military candidate Gen. Salvador Castañeda assumes power.
Dec '48	Coup. Imposition of Junta headed by Maj. Oscar Osorio.
Mar '50	Dishonest elections. Maj. Osorio assumes the presidency.
Mar '56	Dishonest elections. Col. José María Lemus claims office.
Nov '60	Coup. Enjoys popular support. Civilian-military Junta takes over.
Jan '61	Counter-coup. US-supported. Imposition of Junta headed by Col. Adalberto Rivera.
Mar '62	Dishonest elections. Col. Rivera assumes the presidency.
Mar '67	Dishonest elections. Imposition of Gen. Fidel Sánchez Hernández.
Mar '72	Dishonest elections. Duarte and Ungo run together on opposition coalition ticket and win. Imposition of Col. Arturo Armando Molina.
Mar '77	Dishonest elections. Once again opposition wins. Imposition of Gen. Carlos Humberto Romero.
Oct '79	Coup. Imposition of civilian-military Junta that through the next year changes composition twice, towards the right.
Mar '82	Controversial constituent elections.

(Source: Mesoamerica, 4/82)

was intended. The right wing was actually in control and out for blood, and the Carter administration found it preferable to give its support, rather than permit an FMLN/FDR victory.

THE 1982 ELECTIONS

By 1982, there was full-scale civil war in El Salvador, the Reagan administration had committed itself to "drawing the line"

in El Salvador, and Congress was becoming increasingly uneasy about the high levels of military and economic aid being requested for El Salvador, given its ongoing human rights violations. Domestic and international pressure was mounting for a negotiated solution to the conflict, but the Reagan administration was clearly seeking a military victory over the Salvadorean left. So, in an effort to defuse criticism, the Reagan administration pressured the Salvadorean government to hold elections for a Constituent Assembly that would draft a new constitution and pave the way for return to "democratic" rule. By this time, repression had eliminated or driven underground any opposition that might have participated in elections. The FMLN/FDR refused to participate, knowing it would be suicidal to do so.

The U.S. backed Duarte and the Christian Democrats as the ideal vehicle to give the Salvadorean government an aura of legitimacy. But while the PDC got 35.5% of the vote, Roberto D'Aubulsson's ARENA won 25%, and in coalition with the other right-wing parties gained control of the Constituent Assembly.

Nevertheless, the elections were a victory for the Reagan administration, because they had fulfilled their primary purpose of "legitimizing" the Salvadorean government, thereby allowing aid to continue to flow. The U.S. media portrayed the elections as free, with a massive turnout

indicating a repudiation of the guerrillas. The history of governmental repression against the opposition, the state of siege, the death squads, were all ignored.

Also ignored were some details regarding the elections which made their validity even more doubtful:

- Voting was mandatory by law, and the Minister of Defense had announced that not voting was "an act of treason." The electoral law required the authorities to demand evidence from the people that they had voted, and to report anyone without such evidence.
- Voting was not anonymous. Ballots had numbers that corresponded to those on lists voters had to sign.
- The long lines the cameras showed us were the product of few polling places. There were 13 for all of San Salvador, with an estimated half half million voters.
- The Salvadorean government threatened not to pay March salaries to those who did not have a stamp on their I.D. cards indicating they had voted.
- The army had sound trucks going around telling people to vote.

When we recall that state terror has been a fact of life for years in El Salvador, the details mentioned above suggest that intimidation was a significant factor in the turnout.

DIRECT INTERVENTION?

The situation in El Salvador is even more polarized now than it was in 1982, both between the various parties of the right, and between the right and the left. None of the candidates participa-

ting in the elections are likely to move toward negotiations with the FMLN/FDR, particularly given the FMLN/FDR's terms. They call for a basic transformation of the political and economic structure of Salvadorean society. The oligarchy and its agents, the death squads and corrupt military, must go.

An electoral victory by either D'Aubuisson or Duarte could provoke a military coup: D'Aubuisson, because some Salvadorean officers think his associations with the death squads could lead to a cut-off in U.S. aid, which would lead to the inevitable defeat of the Salvadorean military; Duarte, because he is perceived as too willing to make a deal with the FMLN/FDR that could threaten the status quo.

Guerrero is the candidate most likely to be able to satisfy all the major forces on the right:

The military, the oligarchy, and the U.S. Therefore, it is possible that he will "be won" through electoral fraud.

A coup could provide the pretext for a direct U.S. military intervention. Once again, the U.S. government could say it was intervening to save "democracy" from the extreme right and the extreme left. An "invitation to intervene" could be arranged with the U.S.-sponsored Central American Defense Council (CONDECA), perhaps with a token participation of troops from Guatemala and Honduras.

Even if no coup occurs, and the elections and their outcome proceed smoothly, the increasing strength of the FMLN may necessitate a clear decision: Intervene directly or "lose" another Central American country to "communism."

W.. Babcock

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could provide Alfonsín and his ministers with some of the support they need to launch their economic program. The prosecution effort, in serving as a reminder of the abuses suffered under military

rule, may help to promote the cooperation needed between the new administration and its political opponents in order to make democracy a reality in Argentina.

Francine D'Amico

LATIN AMERICAN BOOK STORE

We would like to remind our readers that the Latin American Book Store has a variety of books in Spanish for sale in the CUSLAR office. Titles not in stock may be ordered. (The Book Store has compiled an extensive catalog of over 1,000 titles.)

CALENDAR

March 13th
Tuesday

Jorge Dominguez, Professor of Political Science, Harvard University, will discuss "Cuban Policy in Central America," 12:15pm, 202 Uris hall; and "Cuban Foreign Policy in the Context of U.S.-Soviet Relations," 4pm, Kaufman Aud., Goldwin Smith Hall.

March 19th
Monday

Ernesto Vela, former Dean of Arts and Sciences, National University, San Salvador, will speak on the role of the intellectual in El Salvador. Room G, Rockefeller Hall, 10:10am

- March 20th
Tuesday
- Panel discussion on "Caribbeans in the U.S." with Luis Rafael Sanchez, renowned Puerto Rican author. 8pm, Goldwin Smith "D".
- March 21st
Wednesday
- Tompkins County Campaign for Peace with Justice in Central America meeting, First Baptist Church. Presentation on the elections in El Salvador by Waldo Babcock. 7:15 pm
- March 22
Thursday
- CUSLAR Films: "Todos Santos Cuchumatan" (Guatemala) and "Seedtime of Hope" (El Salvador) 8pm, Uris Aud. Free.
- March 23rd
Friday
- Benefit Square and Contra Dance, Claudio Buchwald, caller. Henry St. John's School, 8:30pm.
- March 24
Saturday
- Fourth anniversary of Archbishop Oscar Romero's assassination in San Salvador.
- Coffeehouse concert to benefit Chilean Solidarity work by an Andean band from the Chilean Cultural Workshop in Toronto. 8pm, One World Room, Anabel Taylor Hall. \$4 admission includes refreshments.
- March 25th
Sunday
- Moosewood Brunch to benefit Guatemalan refugees. Call Moosewood at 273-9610 for information on seatings.
- Show of pre-colombian artifacts from Guatemala begins at Rio de Lana. Opening 2-4:30pm.

The CUSLAR Newsletter provides CUSLAR members and other concerned individuals with the opportunity to present information and analysis on topics pertaining to Latin America and the Caribbean. Therefore, the positions of the articles in the newsletter do not necessarily reflect the positions taken by CUSLAR as an organization.

WHAT IS CUSLAR?

The Committee on U.S./Latin American Relations (CUSLAR) is a Cornell University-based group which works in Ithaca and the surrounding areas to promote a greater understanding of Latin America and the Caribbean. We are particularly concerned with the role of the United States in influencing the social, political, and economic conditions of the region. Within this context we support the right of the people of Latin America and the Caribbean for self-determination and their efforts to free themselves from a legacy of colonialism, underdevelopment, and oppression.

Our calendar of events includes a very popular film series, speakers, and panel discussions on current issues. Our office is a resource center, with a large variety of up-to-date publications including periodicals, pamphlets, books, slideshows, and materials from national and international sources. CUSLAR receives ongoing information from various national solidarity networks, as well as other upstate groups.

The CUSLAR office is in G-29, Anabel Taylor Hall, at Cornell (phone: 256-7293). The office is open to the community on weekdays; weekly meetings are held on Mondays at 5pm. Come and join us. There is much work to be done and we welcome participation of individuals as well as local organizations. Bring us your suggestions and comments on our programs and written materials.

Much of CUSLAR's work depends on individual financial contributions. Phone bills, printing costs, magazine subscriptions, etc. add up rapidly. We are perpetually short of funds to do the work we need to do. Your contribution will help us continue our work, and allow us to mail you the Newsletter and other CUSLAR announcements. (While campus mailings are free, we would still appreciate a donation for printing costs.)

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Address _____

____ I'd like to subscribe to the Newsletter. Here is my contribution of _____
 ____ Here is my contribution of _____ for CUSLAR's other projects.

Mail to CUSLAR, G-29 Anabel Taylor Hall, Cornell U., Ithaca, 14853, or drop off at the office, film showings, or information tables.