

# Political participation for Honduras

by Thomas Vradenburg  
OTTAWA -- Salvadorean refugees in Honduras are living in an "ethos of fear", which three Canadian MPs and an OXFAM representative think the federal government should do something about.

Warren Allmand, a former cabinet minister, NDP immigration critic Dan Heap, Tory MP Joseph Reid and Professor Meyer Brownstone of OXFAM-Canada told an Ottawa press conference that the Canadian government should bring the problem of refugee harassment to the attention of the United Nations. The four returned this week from a fact-finding mission to El Salvador and Honduras.

Canada should take part in an observer force to act as a deterrent to the Honduran army and the Salvadorean army and ORDEN paramilitary forces, they said. Salvadorean troops have entered Honduras without query from Honduran authorities, and kidnapped and murdered Salvadorean refugees as well as members of CARITAS, a Honduras aid organization. This was done on the pretext that the refugees and aid workers were supporting the guerillas. Members of other aid organizations in the border area have been harassed, Allmand said, and CARITAS is considering pulling out.

"There has to be a continuation of international presence along the border," Reid said.

Mesa Grande, one of three camps housing a total of 20,000 Salvadorean refugees in Honduras, was strafed the day after their mission left, Allmand said.

The most critical problem is security, Brownstone said. There are only four U.N. observers cov-

ering a mountainous 200-mile border, Heap said. He stressed that the observers should be conspicuous but unarmed, so as not to make the Honduran government fear their sovereignty is being threatened.

There is apparently little reason to expect the Honduran government will solve the refugee harassment problem itself. The military and police operate independently from the civilian government, and members of the Honduran military are sympathetic towards their Salvadorean counterparts, Allmand said, though the Honduran government officially has nothing to do with the war in El Salvador.

As well as the observer team there should be reception centres, staging camps, and more make-work projects for the refugees, Brownstone said. "All camps require substantial additional material support." The situation "ranges from precarious to desperate," he said.

One case study noted there were 12 latrines for 3,000 people in one camp, with up to 10,000 more refugees expected in the next few weeks. Chronic water shortages were also reported.

The Honduran government has recently begun a relocation program, with the idea of moving the refugees away from the border. Many of the Salvadoreans do not want to move, Allmand said, often because they are too old or sick. There are medical facilities and work projects in the camps. When they are forced to move, the refugees have to leave behind their few possessions.

Allmand hinted that the relocation program is meant to empty the border area so that the Honduran army can militarize it.

The four recommended that Canada should take in more refugees. Canadian immigration officials set a quota of 1,000 for central America last year, and fewer than that applied, Allmand said.

For a Salvadorean refugee to apply to enter Canada, he must go to Mexico City and wait up to six months to have his case processed, Heap said. He recom-

mended that Canada should set up a mission in the Honduran-Salvadorean border area. When the opportunity presents itself, it is hard to guess how many refugees would apply. The four also recommended expanding the quota, but did not say by how much.

Canada should not support the elections in El Salvador, Allmand said. Only the rightist parties are

permitted to run, and the Democratic Revolutionary Front, or FDR, is not, even though it has wide popular support.

The security problem in the border region will have to be solved before relief agencies can do their job efficiently. In future they will have their work cut out for them; it is clear the civil war in El Salvador is not going to end soon, March elections or not.

## Cutbacks bad for everyone

MONTREAL(CUP) McGill students are planning a campaign to demonstrate the effects of education cutbacks on society as a whole in an effort to coordinate student opposition to actual and

proposed budget cutbacks by federal and provincial governments.

The project is being organized for the students society by McGill students Bruce Ness and Paul Smith, vice-president external affairs.

Ness believes it is vital that students erase the perception they are only acting in their own interests by protesting cutbacks. He said students are concerned about the impact reductions in funding grants will have on the larger society.

"We're going through a time of economic and technological transition in which more and more educated and properly trained people are going to be needed," said Smith.

"And this is not the time to cut back on the financial support given to education," he said.

Ness said the movement will concentrate on increased public awareness of the problems incurred by cutbacks in education.

"The first goal is to reach the public, via the media and otherwise," said Ness.

"A lot has already been done

by the students to make their wishes known to the government. We now have to start making the public more conscious of what is going on," he said. "In the final analysis, it's the public that, every four years or so, makes the decisions."

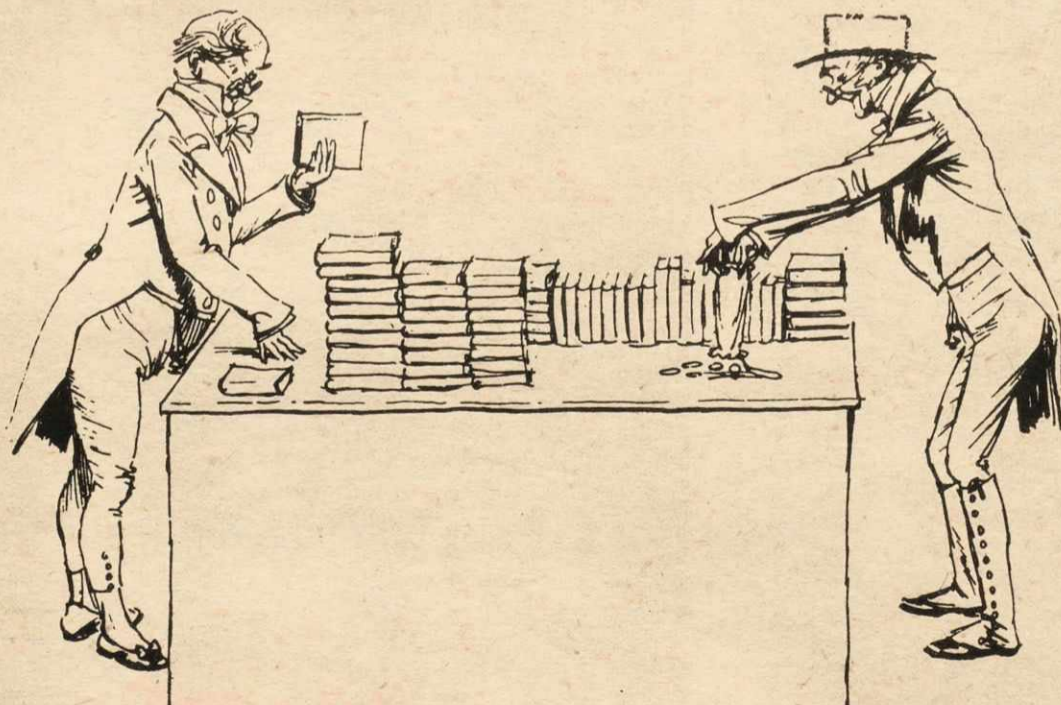
Smith said student protest can have an effect on government actions. He believes vigorous lobbying by the Canadian Federation of Students (CFS) was at least partly responsible for the federal government decision to maintain the existing arrangement of Established Programs Financing (EPF), which provides block grants to the provinces for education and health and social services.

Smith and Ness both hope student representatives will have input during the current round of federal-provincial negotiations. The existing agreement expires March 31.

For the moment, the focus will be the CRS-organized nationwide anti-cutbacks week, March 8-12, and a workshop/conference with Quebec education minister Camille Laurin, slated for February 18.



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