



# El Salvador on the brink

By Jeff Harrington

The situation in El Salvador is a desperate one, according to a labour leader who visited Halifax last week. Roberto Morales, a member of a Salvadoran trade union delegation touring Canada, spoke Thursday night to a small audience, painting a disturbing portrait of life in his country.

"They (the right-wing death squads terrorizing the country) profit from the war, and oppose ending it because they are not the ones getting killed. It is the peasants and workers who are suffering," Morales said.

Speaking through an interpreter, he said the death squads are composed of members of the right-wing ARENA party, the ruling Christian Democratic Party (PDC), and the U.S.-backed armed forces.

In the face of increasing violence and repression, popular movements in El Salvador have greatly increased their membership in the past few years. A 1988 report by the human-rights group Americas Watch states: "Forced to bear a disproportionate share of the costs of civil war, organized labour has confronted an employer class determined to maintain subsistence wages and a government which has employed a variety of tactics — from assassination to arrest — to maintain quiescence." Last week, Amnesty International accused the Salvadoran government of complicity in the recent wave of killings.

Tens of thousands of Salvadorans were murdered by the death squads in the early 1980s. Morales, a representative of the 650,000-strong National Unity of Salvadoran Workers (UNTS) is hoping for a political solution to the conflict to avoid further



Beth Abbott/Oxiham/Doveric

Morales: "International solidarity is very important"

bloodshed. The three-member delegation has brought with them three 'agreements' approved unanimously at the National Debate. This debate was a forum attended by a wide range of social forces, but boycotted by the right. The agreements demand: 1) the continuation of dialogue as the only alternative for a political settlement between the government, the leftist Farabundo Marti National Liberation Front (FMLN) guerrilla group, and the forces of the nation.

2) the end to U.S. intervention in the domestic affairs of El Salvador and 3) the installment of a popular government that responds to popular demands.

The UNTS is planning to have a half million demonstrators on the streets of the capital, San Salvador, on November 15 to "demand compliance to these agreements by the government." Despite the hopes of the vast majority of Salvadorans for a negotiated settlement, there are indications that

the war will not end soon.

The governing PDC party and ARENA both denounce the UNTS as a tool of the FMLN, who they are trying to eradicate with the help of \$3 million dollars a day in American aid.

The guerrillas have increased the scope of their operations, even attacking in broad daylight. In September, they successfully brought transportation to a virtual halt for the fifth time this year. "The rebels believe that they can take power by March," Morales said Thursday night.

The United States, known for its aggression towards leftist governments in what it considers its 'backyard', is unlikely to sit idly by. Concerning the possibility of U.S. military intervention, Morales said, "It is not the U.S. that is going to decide. The popular struggle is going to attain liberty, despite the U.S., just as in Vietnam."

International solidarity will play a very important role, if El Salvador is to avoid a return to the nightmare of the early 1980s, said Morales.

Morales and his colleagues, Humberto

Centeno and Dilia Melgar, are planning to meet with officials of the External Affairs Department to deliver the agreements of the National Debate. They also plan to assert that Canada is indirectly contributing to the war because its humanitarian aid is prevented by the corrupt El Salvador government from reaching its intended recipients.

According to Morales, when foreign aid arrived in El Salvador following the 1986 earthquake, "all the medical aid ended up in military hospitals. All the canned food ended up in the garrisons of troops. All the tents ended up in the back yards of rich people."

Morales said that leaving his country wasn't a problem. "It's when I go back that I'll have problems," he added. Indeed, Roberto Morales is the General Secretary of the national union of Salvadoran bank workers. Four people have held the position before him; they are all dead.

Anyone wishing to support Salvadorans in their struggle should call OXFAM/Doveric at 429-1370.

## Snapshot of strife

By Jeff Harrington

As El Salvador heads towards presidential elections next March, popular movements in the country are struggling to achieve a 'national dialogue' in the hopes of ending a civil war which has lasted eight years.

A National Debate, promoted by the Catholic Church was attended by 59 groups representing trade unions, church groups, universities and the private sector. The right refused to participate, claiming that the debate would be manipulated by the Farabundo Marti National Liberation Front (FMLN), an opposition guerrilla group.

The debate organizers stated: "The greater the participation of different social forces, the better we will avoid the evils and limitations of excessive politicization. The goal of the National Debate is not to destabilize the situation, nor to favour one side or the other, but rather to rationally and humanely move closer to peace."

The situation is grim. According to Amnesty International, a resurgence of right-wing death squad activity has resulted in the deaths of hundreds of Salvadorans over the past 18 months. The victims are often peasants and rank and file members of trade unions, a tactic designed

to intimidate anyone sympathetic to the guerrillas or organized labour.

At the same time, there has been a marked increase in guerrilla activity, including powerful bomb attacks on the wealthy areas of the capital, San Salvador and on the provincial headquarters of the National Republican Alliance party (ARENA), the U.S.-backed right-wing party that dominated the municipal elections on March 20. The guerrillas have long promised to spread the war to all parts of the country.

The U.S.-financed Salvadoran army has responded by mounting helicopter attacks and bombings on rural villages in an attempt to deny the guerrillas peasant support, destroying homes, crops, and livestock and killing those unable to flee.

During the strife, the economy has been destroyed. Only 23% of the working population have permanent jobs. The health care system is a mess, a situation exacerbated by the October 1986 earthquake, which rendered seven of the eight hospitals in the capital useless. The education system is chronically underfunded, and serves only 42% of El Salvador's 2.8 million school-age children. The housing crisis is also acute, with 900,000 homeless out of a population of 4,860,000.



Kang Jong-Hon, prisoner of conscience.

## What price freedom? Thirty-seven cents.

Prisoner: KANG JONG-HON  
Country: Republic of Korea (South Korea)  
Place of Detention: Taegu Prison

Kang Jong-Hon, born September 16, 1951 in Japan, where his parents and three brothers now live, was a medical student at Seoul National University when he was arrested in November 1985. At that time, more than 300 people, many of them Koreans from Japan studying in South Korea, were held for investigation. Thirty-nine of these stood trial.

Kang was sentenced to death for 'espionage' activities, charged under the National Security Law with infiltrating groups in South Korea on behalf of the People's Republic of Korea (North Korea).

At his trial, Kang states that the conviction had been obtained under torture. This contravenes the Constitution of the Republic of Korea, which states: "No citizen shall be tortured or compelled to testify against himself in criminal cases." It also contravenes the United Nations "Convention Against Torture..." (Dec. 1984).

Kang's sentence was commuted to life imprisonment under a presidential amnesty in March 1982 and reduced to 20 years under an amnesty in August 1984.

AI has reviewed all the available information and concluded that there are not sufficient grounds for accepting the court's findings that Kang was guilty of espionage. AI believes that Kang Jong-Hon was imprisoned for the non-violent exercise of his right to freedom of expression. AI has therefore adopted Kang as a prisoner of conscience and is calling for his immediate and unconditional release. Two other AI groups are working on behalf of Kang, one in England and one in West Germany.

Amnesty International is a non-partisan, grassroots organization dedicated to ensuring the right of every individual to hold and express their beliefs. Amnesty members write letters to governments around the world on behalf of men and women who are in prison

because of their beliefs, ethnic origin, colour, or language, so long as those persons have neither used nor advocated violence.

Individual prisoner cases brought to Amnesty International's attention are carefully researched and double-checked through the organization's head office in London, England before they are officially adopted as prisoners of conscience. The diligence of the organization's research has earned Amnesty International consultative status with the United Nations and the Council of Europe.

This year the Canadian section of Amnesty International has invited newspapers across the country to public the stories of four prisoners of conscience in recognition of Amnesty International Awareness Week. Gazette readers are encouraged to write to the addresses given, politely requesting the immediate release of Kang.

Letters requesting the release of Kang Jong Hon may be sent to:

His Excellency President Roh Tae-Wee  
The Blue House  
1 Sejong-no  
Chongno-gu  
SEOUL  
Republic of Korea

His Excellency Mr. Prk Sook-gil  
Ambassador of the Republic of Korea  
151 Slater St., 6th Floor  
Ottawa, Ont.  
K1P 5H3

Letters should express concern that Kang Jong Hon was imprisoned for the non-violent exercise of his freedom of expression, in contravention of the United Nations' Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Mention that Kang John Hon is currently serving his sentence in Taegu Prison and that he was arrested in 1975. Letters are more effective if it is clear that writer is aware of the details of the prisoner's case, and if they are written in a respectful manner.



Complacency kills

# A gentle reminder from Amnesty

by Lynda Cassels

During the coming weeks of pre-election rhetoric most of us will let slip at least the occasional snide comment about Ed, Brian or John. Or, succumbing to the heat of alcohol-enhanced debate, release our political frustrations in a torrent of lively expletives ... The more assiduous of us may go so far as to actively campaign for the government or one of the opposition parties.

In many countries such "subversive" activities could be enough to send you to prison. Thousands of "prisoners of conscience" in over 80 countries are currently imprisoned because of their beliefs, religion, sex, or ethnic origin. Many were arrested for crimes no more insidious than speaking out against the policies of their government, or knowing someone who did. Many are detained without trial, and torture is common practice. Some are never informed of the charges against them.

For more than 25 years Amnesty International has been working to secure the release of prisoners of conscience around the world. The non-partisan, volunteer-based human rights organization has proven that, with persistence, the concern of individuals can effect results. Seven hundred thousand Amnesty International members from 150 countries pledge their support to the organization, and hundreds of thousands write personal letters to heads of government on behalf of individual pri-

soners. According to the organization's 1988 annual report, more than 1600 prisoners of conscience were released during 1987.

Amnesty International, aren't they the people who pulled together those amazing *Human Rights Now!* concerts last month? None other. Under Amnesty International's banner Bruce Springsteen, Sting, Tracy Chapman, Peter Gabriel and a host of others brought the *Human Rights Now!* campaign to capacity crowds around the world. The Toronto and Montreal concerts last month sold out. For everyone who went there seemed to be five more who wished they could. But there were other voices as well, quieter ones, whose hushed criticisms were nonetheless heard and heeded by Amnesty.

Why is a respectable organization like Amnesty International tarnishing itself with the hype and glitter of rock? They're ruining their credibility, these voices whispered. An editorial in the *Toronto Star* questioned the integrity of what is called "superstar do-goodism."

Agreed that the exuberant festival atmosphere generated by *Human Rights Now!* is discordant with the sombre nature of human rights work. Equally agreed that for many of those who attended, and perhaps for some of the performers, enthusiasm for human rights was a transient and fleeting phenomenon. Yet it cannot be refuted that the driving force behind human rights work is and must be the will,

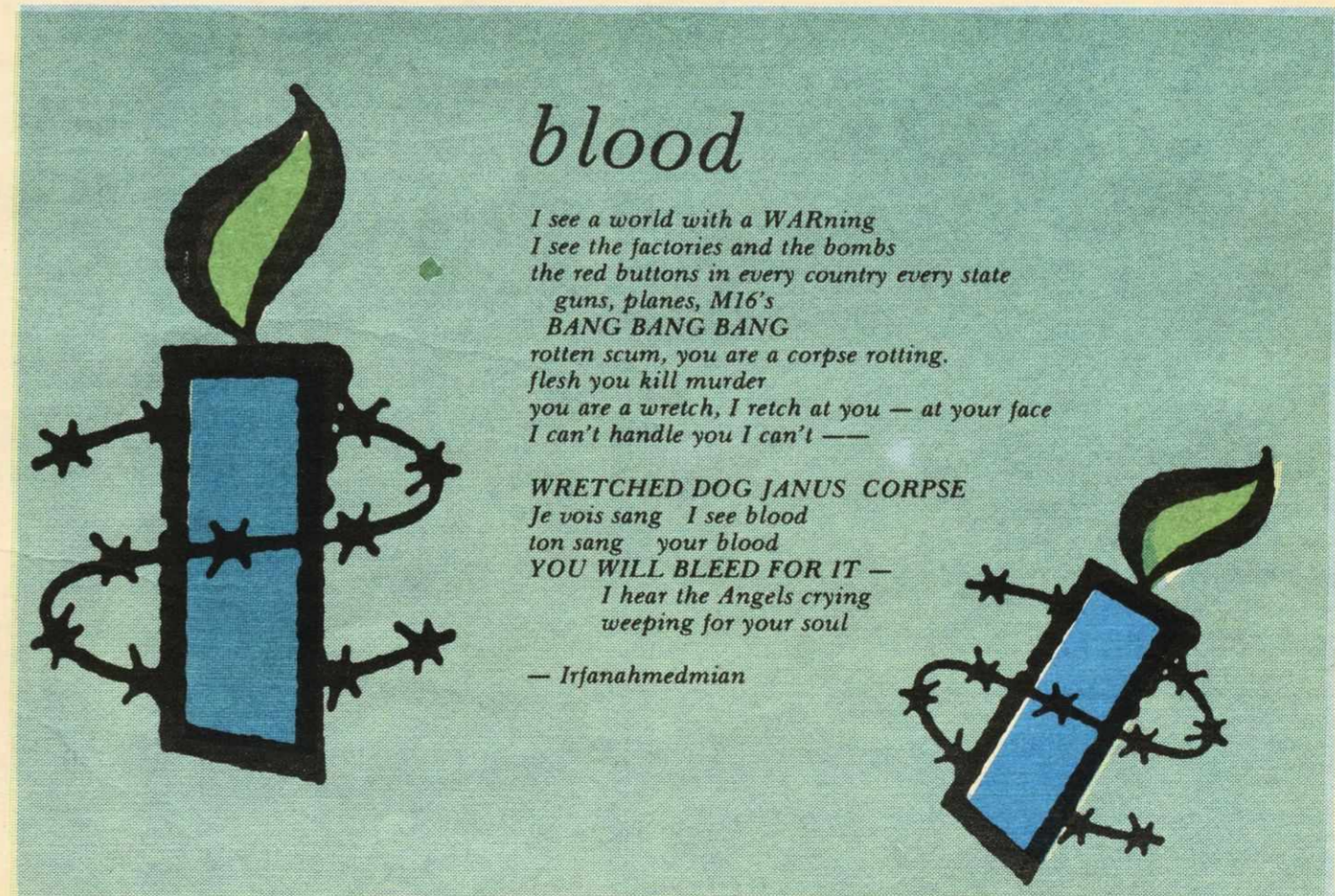
determination and awareness of the people. Once roused, public awareness need only be directed to be made effective.

This is the challenge facing Amnesty International in the aftermath of *Human Rights Now!*: to channel the excitement and enthusiasm generated by the concerts toward the very real human crises which Amnesty faces.

1988 marks the 40th anniversary of the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights, yet at this moment prisoners of conscience are held in over 80 countries, and as many as 90 governments are known to practice torture. The nations which ratified the Universal Declaration were acting on behalf of their people, and of the people of all nations. It is clear from the statistics that governments are not prepared to live up to the wishes of the people. The people must act themselves. The function of Amnesty International is to direct that desire and give it voice.

It seems a suitable time, as Canadians across the country revel loudly in their freedom of speech, for Amnesty International to nudge us in the side and remind us of what a freedom it is. The third week in October was Amnesty International Awareness Week. This year is had a lot to compete with, but as you uproot these obnoxious campaign signs someone keeps sticking in your lawn, think for a moment.

Speaking your mind is not a small privilege. Use it.



## blood

I see a world with a WARNING  
I see the factories and the bombs  
the red buttons in every country every state  
guns, planes, M16's  
BANG BANG BANG  
rotten scum, you are a corpse rotting.  
flesh you kill murder  
you are a wretch, I retch at you — at your face  
I can't handle you I can't —

WRETCHED DOG JANUS CORPSE  
Je vois sang I see blood  
ton sang your blood  
YOU WILL BLEED FOR IT —  
I hear the Angels crying  
weeping for your soul

— Irfanahmedmian