

El Salvador: Insurrection in the f

November 28 marks the anniversary of the death of six leaders of the Democratic Revolutionary Front (FDR) — the political arm of the popular party in El Salvador. The FDR and the FMLN — the military arm of the organization — are still engaged in a bloody conflict with the right-wing government sponsored forces of the country.

Gateway News editor Greg Harris recently spoke with Rev. Greg Chisholm who attended the funerals of the six slain leaders in December of 1980.

Rev. Chisholm is Pastor of Edmonton's English and Spanish Language St. Pius X Catholic Church. He has been affiliated with the Inter-church Committee on Human Rights in Latin America for several years. His interview with the Gateway focuses on the realities of the situation in El Salvador, and touches on incidents of the war that have been largely ignored by the commercial press.

Gateway: What exactly is Canadian policy towards El Salvador right now? Isn't it more or less just acquiescence?

Chisholm: Yes. A year ago on November 28, 1980, the six major leaders of the FDR — the Democratic Revolutionary Front — were murdered. The FDR is the opposition force, together with the FMLN, the military arm of the organization. It's a very broad coalition of church, political, military, union, and intellectual organizations — very broad representation.

El Salvador has a long history. Maybe we should go back a little bit to lead up to the Canadian government's position and what we feel it should be.

Gateway: Certainly.

Chisholm: In 1932, January, there was an uprising where 30,000 peasants were murdered in two weeks. So this is a struggle of fifty years — a constant struggle. It doesn't happen because of Cuban infiltration or Russian arms as they would tend to posit the situation.

Up to 1979, every time they would elect a democratic government the military would step in, or they would have fraud in the elections, and so forth.

In 1979 we had the Nicaraguan revolution — the successful overthrow of the Somoza government; people were getting scared in the area. Then we had the made in Washington coup in October of 1979 in El Salvador where you had Social Democrats and Christian Democrats and the military junta forming a government and promising reforms. The reforms they began to implement in 1979 were what the late Monsignor Romero called, "reforms bathed in blood."

The same man who is now in charge of the agrarian reform in El Salvador — his

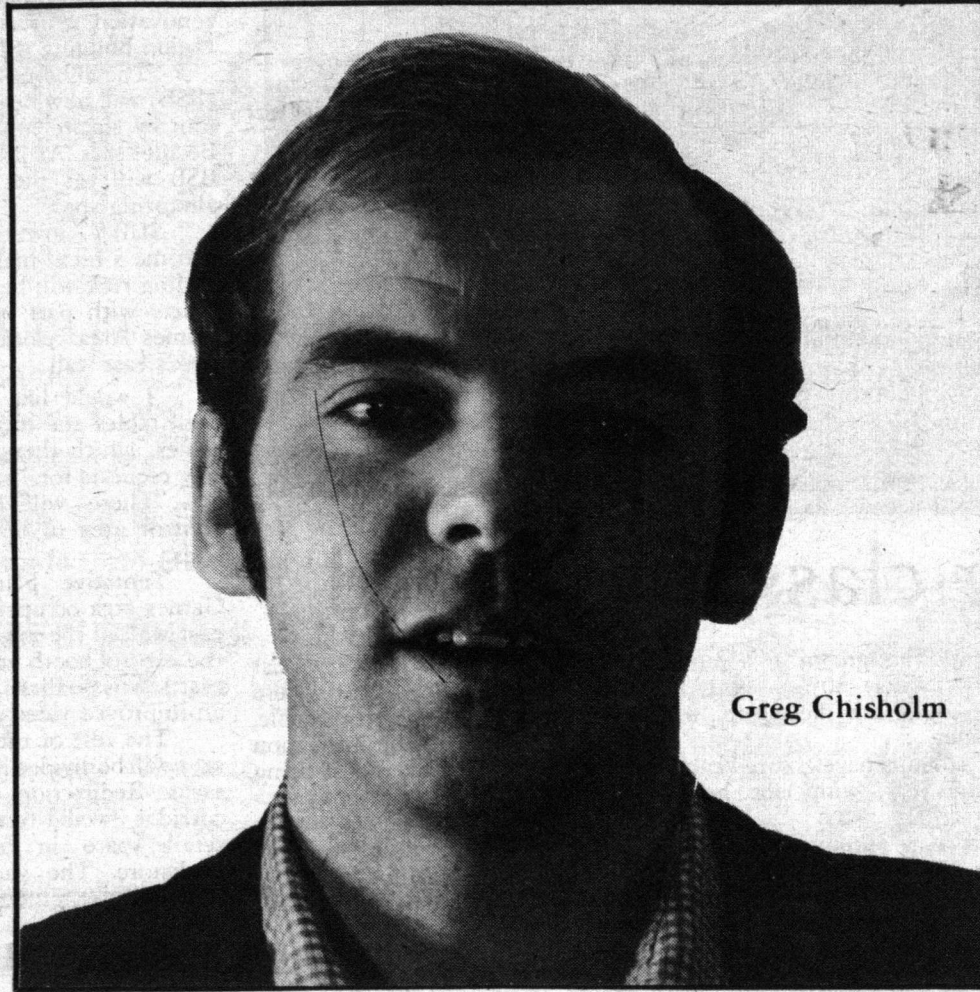
thousand who have been killed since October of '79. Thirty thousand dead. And some 90 percent of them are from the popular organizations and killed by the right-wing government-sponsored forces.

Now throughout all this, the American government and the Canadian government as well, and the press have tried to portray a situation which they say is this: "an extreme left wing over here and an extreme right wing over there, and a so called neutral government struggling in the middle — we must support this

Edmonton as Halifax, by the way. Gateway: It's not as remote as we'd think. Chisholm: It really isn't, it's very close. And it has a lot to do with the stability and peace of our own hemisphere, so we have a right to speak around and about the issues — it touches us as a people.

It is also the major test of the Reagan administration's foreign policy. How this goes will determine the rest of Latin America.

MacGuigan himself even criticized American policy at that time, this was in late 1980. The Americans would constantly



Greg Chisholm

government." Well, this is the farthest thing from the truth. It's being denounced from El Salvador and around the world. That is very clear.

When we were in El Salvador we could see very clearly that what is at stake is the people against the government and the government sponsored forces. There is no extreme left and right — there is a people and a government set against this people: an imposed, illegitimate government. Vice-president Bush said a few months ago in Venezuela that Duarte was elected — it's stupidity to even say that. He was never

posit this as a conflict between east and west: Russia and the States. But, within the rhetoric of the Liberal government, the north-south dialogue and the north-south question must enter in.

The reason why people are uprising and struggling to overcome a government in Latin America is because of a situation of injustice, and murder and violence and hunger. It has nothing to do with foreign communist infiltration. This is often used in a national security state doctrine where anybody who is against the state then becomes the enemy.

We see this creeping in, I think personally, in the Canadian constitution. In the national security doctrine the state decides what rights they are going to give to their people. The Latin American people are very conscious of that. The state doesn't give them rights, they demand the rights that they have as a people. Inalienable rights — it is not up to a state to decide which rights to give to a people. The state must preserve and enhance the rights of the people. This all enters into the picture.

So the very day that we are at the mass on December third, the Inter Church Committee on Human Rights in Latin America was meeting with Mark MacGuigan. And he promised then at that meeting that Canada would, and indeed Canada did vote in Mid-December in the United Nations General Assembly to condemn the present government for the violation of human rights, and to outlaw —

Americans expect something different from Canada — they really do. They constantly tell us that. They also distinguish between the Canadian government and the Canadian people, and between the American government and the American people, because there are hundreds of thousands of Americans who are also against the Reagan administration.

I think that's a very important distinction to make because a national security state says that a state and a people are one. But they are not — a state is to serve a people.

So anyway, I'll come back to that mass and what happens because that was the night just before the sisters were murdered just after we had met a couple of them — murdered by people who had stopped us on the road as well.

Gateway: Maybe you'd like to elaborate on that just a bit.

Chisholm: Well, perhaps we could and then I'll come back to what happened since then.

On December the second when we arrived at night, we met two of the sisters at the airport. They were waiting for the others to arrive from a meeting in Managua. They were waiting there. And we said "Hi" and so forth, and then the flight had been delayed and so we left the airport about a half an hour or so before the sisters arrived.

And we left the airport in a car which was exactly the same in every way as the sisters' car. And we know now from communications evidence that the security forces were talking about the sisters' arriving that night — so they knew they were coming, and they had isolated them and identified them in their communications network.

We were stopped on the road — when I think back on this, oh my God. They thought that we were the sisters, that there were women in our convoy as well. So they stopped us and went through our stuff and realized that we weren't Americans — they looked through all our passports, and then they let us through.

And about forty-five minutes later, down the same road, at the same point the sisters were stopped and murdered. And these were government troops, not any other para-military troops, they were government troops.

Gateway: Why were the sisters murdered?

Chisholm: Well, there are several theories on that. The Archbishop felt that it was kind of a slap in the face of the American Government — to test out their new Reagan policy. Reagan people were saying (he wasn't in power yet — it was the lame-duck administration, Carter was still in until January, but he had been defeated) that the new administration would no longer mix human rights with diplomatic activity.

The present U.S. ambassador to the U.N. is Jean Kirkpatrick, and she said that the Carter administration's rhetoric on human rights was "intellectual debris," and that from now on what would determine American policy in Latin America were American interests and not human rights. I think that's very important.

The other thing is that the sisters — they weren't political people, they worked with the poor and the refugees and the sick. They had presented to the American ambassador concrete information of the violation of human rights on the part of government forces. So that could have been another strike against them.

The other possibility which is remote but is still a real possibility is that it was just a barbaric act of an immoral and demoralized

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name is Roy Prosterman — is an American who was also in charge of the 'village pacification' programs of Vietnam. And he was also in charge of the Philippine agrarian reform program.

That's why many of the methods used are the same. They go in and they ask local peasants to elect their leaders and then they murder all the leaders that were elected, and then they put in their own people.

And so by January of 1980 you have a massive resignation in the government of all the Social Democrats and half the Christian Democrats because there is absolutely no use in being involved, or to identify with the repression. From January to June you have this coalition and the forming of the FDR. So now all the opposition forces are united in the FDR/FMLN.

And in the middle of that in March 24 you have the tragic assassination of that great man, Oscar Romero.

Gateway: Yes, I'd like to talk about that at some point.

Chisholm: We could do that even right now. I'm going to lead up to what the Canadian position is.

Gateway: Why don't we continue with that then and come back to Romero.

Chisholm: Sure, we'll come back to Bishop Romero because I think it's very, very important as one example of the thirty

elect to this presidency. He was elected several years ago and then was overthrown. In '72 I think it was.

Gateway: He was in exile for a while and then returned, didn't he?

Chisholm: That's right. And it's interesting. Why is he now allowed to be in the government? He is not controller, he is not commander of the armed forces, in fact he has no real control over the armed forces at all.

Gateway: That seems to be the myth that the United States is trying to portray, that Duarte has support of the people.

Chisholm: That's right. And it's absolutely false.

And so, up to June we have the formation of the FDR. There is a lot of activity from June to November.

On November 28 the FDR is meeting in a Jesuit High School in San Salvador, the capital. Two hundred military surround the school. They take out the six leaders, and the next day their bodies appear in the streets, mutilated, gouged, arms cut off, and heads cut off.

We were invited to go down to that funeral on December third. Delegations from around the world were invited, including the Canadian Churches. There's a broad coalition of groups in Canada working on El Salvador because of the importance. El Salvador is as close to

this was the vast majority of states within the UN — any shipment of arms to that regime in El Salvador, from anybody.

The United States did not vote for that. They voted against it.

So that was the Canadian position. The first real sign of an independent position.

Gateway: Which kind of fell by the wayside.

Chisholm: That's right. And Latin

"If the Americans continue to pump arms into El Salvador at the rate they're going, there could be two hundred thousand dead."

ed national guard. Everything is possible because there's not that much reason sometimes to the murder — but it looks like they were centered out.

And so in the ensuing months of January February and March, Haig's people came to Ottawa and then Reagan came to Ottawa. They concocted the famous "White Paper" on El Salvador...

Gateway: Which was a sham...

Chisholm: Which was a sham and