

El Salvador El Salvador

Gazette: So the FDR has pretty well gone underground?

Cuellar: Right. We understand that it is not the way to work, but we have no choice. You see, the FDR does political work, educational work with the people and our experience is that political work has to be open, has to be above ground.

One of the main problems in San Salvador - we have to do political work with the people. The people have to be more organized to face the repression. The army has the control of the capital city (San Salvador) and for us this is bad because it means the FDR can't work well.

Gazette: What is the connection between the FDR and the FMLN (Farabundo Marti Front for National Liberation)?

Cuellar: Ah yes, well in our experience we have seen that it is not possible for political change without the participation of the people. In Latin America, with the experience of the guerrillas, like Che Guevara in Bolivia, or in Chile and Argentina. They understood the important role of the mass of the people.

So in our country, we understand that our revolution will be the work of the whole of the people, so we have a political role for the people. The popular army force is the FMLN. They are connected because the army process comes from the political work, not from outside. Also, the political work trains people to understand the situation and then work for the popular army.

The other reason is that the FMLN is the vanguard, the political and military vanguard of the whole process. It has to be this way because we are in a war.

Gazette: So what kinds of weapons does the FMLN use?

Cuellar: Now the FMLN has stronger weapons, the normal weapons, from Germany, Italy, the M-16 rifles from the U.S. Some of the weapons are from Belgium. They capture weapons in the fight, after each battle with the army. That's the main way to get the weapons, not only rifles, but bombs, bazookas, machine guns, very many kinds of material, and they get mortars, and other artillery. It's very difficult to get weapons from outside the country, so we mostly stick to the weapons we get from the battles.

Gazette: Is it true that Panama sends weapons to the FDR?

Cuellar: No, it's not true. Well, do you say the government? Because we get weapons from the black market, but no government in the world is giving weapons to us. The governments, they don't want to get involved in our war, only the U.S. government.

Gazette: Will you ever go back to El Salvador?

Cuellar: Well, we can. You see the normal way we can't, but if the FDR decides we should return we have to, but we will go inside the same way as the weapons.

Students trade in university for guns.

Historically, students have taken a leading role in the revolutionary struggle in El Salvador. In 1932, during the great uprising of that year, many students in the University of San Salvador were executed for publishing an anti-government newspaper.

In July 1975, at least 37 students were shot by National Guardsmen during a march from the University to the centre of San Salvador.

In the interview, Guillermo spoke about the importance of the National University to the revolution.

Gazette: Have any universities closed?

Cuellar: Yes, the National University is closed, the Catholic isn't, but it has only 20,000 students and only three faculties (economics, engineering, and human science). The National University is the most important but it's now closed.

Gazette: Why?

Cuellar: Since 1981, the National Guard took over the university for its headquarters, because the National University was like a liberated zone inside San Salvador (the capital city). There were many meetings of organizations. For example, the first time the FDR presented itself to the people was in the university. And many political demonstrations happened inside the university.

In January 20, 1980, I was in San Salvador. We had the first demonstration in the streets totalling five hundred thousand (500,000) people, a number never seen before in the whole history of the country. This demonstration was repressed, it was really funny because you imagine this line, the length was maybe 10 or 11 kilometres. I was near the back and someone with me was listening to the radio. We knew the front of the line was repressed but we never heard the gun shots. So after this demonstration, on January 22, the people went to the University to be safe because we knew that the National Guard wouldn't come in.

Gazette: Anything else?

Cuellar: Well, the last thing I will talk about is that it's important for the students here to realize that in El Salvador young people can't go to university. Most of the young people are participating in the war now, like me for example. And other members of the group are also. Robert has three years of architecture, Franklin only 1 or 2 months, Paulino only one day after high school. We all decided not to keep studying because it's more important to work now with all our people.

Gazette: What do you feel about students in general in Canada?

Cuellar: We had important experiences with students, most of our concerns are in high schools and universities.

Gazette: Is there a difference?

Cuellar: Yes. For example, two or three days ago we had a concert in Wolfville, in the university, and at the beginning of the concert we asked if they knew anything about El Salvador and nobody answered. I can't believe that university people don't know anything that's going on in the world but that's okay. We want to tell you in our songs what's going on in El Salvador.

Gazette: Do you think you downplayed the peasant violence in the concert last night? There was mention of the new offensive of the FMNR, but I was wondering if otherwise it was purposefully downplayed, or were you emphasizing positive things?

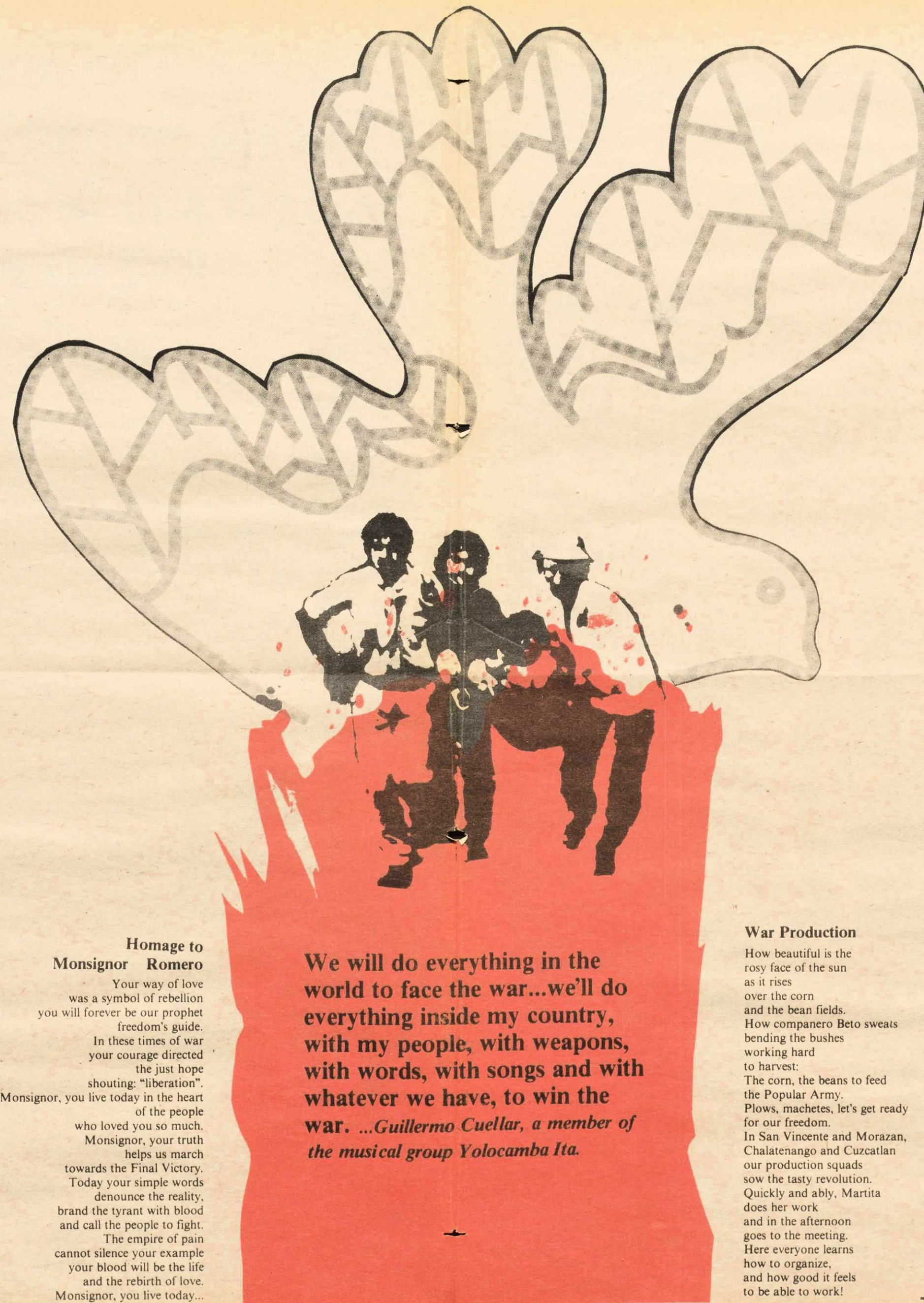
Cuellar: Okay, yes, it is intentional (emphasizing positive things). We try to show what is really going on in El Salvador. We are in war and we have to face it. War is not easy for anybody; war is not wonderful for anybody, but we don't have to show the people of the world the face of suffering in El Salvador. For example the refugee situation in Honduras and the refugee situation inside my country; and the number of families with parents, brothers, sisters, sons, daughters, died. Yes? And we understand that we don't have to base our fight on suffering. We have to base our fight in hope and in concrete work inside and outside El Salvador.

We will do everything in the world to face the world and to face the war and to win the war. We'll do everything inside my country, with my people, with weapons, with words, with songs and with whatever we have, to win the war.

The Church gets involved in politics, working for social change

One of the most significant features of the present struggle in El Salvador is the involvement of the Catholic Church.

Since 1968, the church has been one of the greatest supporters of social change, origi-



Homage to Monsignor Romero

Your way of love was a symbol of rebellion you will forever be our prophet freedom's guide.

In these times of war your courage directed the just hope shouting: "liberation".

Monsignor, you live today in the heart of the people who loved you so much.

Monsignor, your truth helps us march towards the Final Victory.

Today your simple words denounce the reality, brand the tyrant with blood and call the people to fight.

The empire of pain cannot silence your example your blood will be the life and the rebirth of love.

Monsignor, you live today...

We will do everything in the world to face the war...we'll do everything inside my country, with my people, with weapons, with words, with songs and with whatever we have, to win the war. ...Guillermo Cuellar, a member of the musical group Yolocamba Ita.

War Production

How beautiful is the rosy face of the sun as it rises over the corn and the bean fields. How compañero Beto sweats bending the bushes working hard to harvest:

The corn, the beans to feed the Popular Army. Plows, machetes, let's get ready for our freedom.

In San Vicente and Morazan, Chalatenango and Cuzcatlan our production squads sow the tasty revolution. Quickly and ably, Marita does her work and in the afternoon goes to the meeting. Here everyone learns how to organize, and how good it feels to be able to work!

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nally initiated at the Parish level and then slowly becoming policy at the higher levels, culminating in the appointment of Oscar Romero as the Archbishop of San Salvador.

Monsignor Romero, who was thought of as a 'conservative', quickly became the symbol of the struggle for social change in El Salvador. Ironically, three days before Romero was murdered at the altar, he approved plans for a popular mass put forward by Guillermo and the group Yolocamba Ita.

In addition, four Maryknoll Sisters from the United States and eleven El Salvadorean priests have been murdered by government and right wing 'death squads', a symbol for the sacrifice of the clergy in El Salvador.

The next record album by Yolocamba Ita (their fourth), now in the planning stage, is dedicated to the sacrifice of the Catholic Church, specifically the many religious workers who have been killed in the last few years.

Gazette: Could you elaborate on the role of the church in the present struggle in El Salvador?

Cuellar: I am Catholic. I have been working with the church for eight years. The work of the church from the beginning has been very important in the awakening of the people about what is going on in our country. Since 1968, the church work began in small communities, trying new pastoral experiences. Since 1968 a very wide movement inside the church has been growing. When Monsignor Romero was the Archbishop in 1977, he had a whole process that was pushing him. Monsignor Romero was one part of a whole process. Ten, twelve years before him there was nothing in the high levels of the church. The basic work with the people had been growing until it touched one bishop. When Monsignor Romero was strong, and before Monsignor Romero, this church had been working a lot with our people, mostly with the peasants in the country, with the students in the city, and workers.

Gazette: You were working in the church before you left? What kind of work did you do?

Cuellar: Well, first I was in the Christian community in San Salvador. The Christian community is not a big thing, as there are a lot of Christian communities working...it seems many years ago. And when Monsignor Romero was the Archbishop he created the Pastoral Commission to do the coordination work with the Christian communities. He chose one priest and one nun to do this work, and each community was to elect a representative, a lay person (secular person) and I was elected to the Pastoral Commission. The work of the commission was to coordinate the work in the Archdiocese, not in the whole of El Salvador, only in the four provinces in the Archdiocese. I worked for two years in the Archbishop's office.

Presently, one-third of the territory in El Salvador is controlled by the FDR-FMLN. These "liberated zones", as they are called by the FDR, are located mostly in the eastern regions in the mountains. Cuellar describes how in these zones, the governing functions are organized by the people who live in the area.

Gazette: Is the organization of the FDR different in the liberated zones than in the non-liberated zones?

Cuellar: Yes, they work very differently in the non-liberated zones. They have a better chance to do work with the people, most of them children, peasants, and women. There is very interesting work going on in the church. They have more security, they feel more safe so they are really well organized.

Each small region has what we call "popular power", Farabundists - this comes from Farabundo, like the name 'Sandanistas' comes from the hero Sandino in Nicaragua. This power is like a local government, like a mayor, but it is not a person, it is a commit-

tee with representation from the peasants, educational workers, church workers, as well as others. They have control of the region. It's a new government.

The Democratic Revolutionary Front has many problems in San Salvador, the capital, because the army is in almost every part of the city.

"The Americans are in control" of the government.

The United States government now has about sixty military advisors working in El Salvador, to train Salvadoreans in anti-guerrilla warfare. Also, Salvadorean troops have been trained in the U.S.

The U.S. has supplied the El Salvadorean army with M-15 rifles, helicopter gunships, counter-insurgency fighters, and military support equipment. This support is paid for out of the approximately 150 million dollars of American military and economic aid in 1982.

The American government stems criticism of this heavy support for a government that is recognized to be brutally intolerant of anti-government expression, by pointing to liberal reforms. A highly publicized land reform program was to transfer ownership of some land from the few very rich owners to peasant farmers. This program has been effectively scuttled since the March, 1982 elections, in which the right-wing ARENA party achieved a parliamentary majority.

Gazette: How do you see the American involvement when you are in El Salvador?

Cuellar: Well, they are in control. There are many, many advisors. Several of them are fighting in combat on the offensive. The weapons are all American: guns, bombs, the helicopters and fighters.

There is also a political involvement, because they are doing work with parties of the right wing. They helped to build the electoral process in March this year, and they helped to build the land reform program. So they are the leaders.

Gazette: What ever happened to the land reform?

Cuellar: It's a really funny thing that the American ambassador was the first person to announce the end of the land reform, not the (El Salvador) President, not the government. In a big meeting of land owners and business men, he said that due to the war, land reform would be no more. They are the real leaders inside our country.

Gazette: Were the land reforms important to you?

Cuellar: No, it wasn't the (kind of) land reform that our country needs.

Gazette: Were the deeds already issued to peasants revoked?

Cuellar: Yes, but in our country the most important land is the land of the coffee plantations, sugar cane and cotton. This is the backbone of our economy. And this land wasn't included in the land reform.

Yolocamba Ita sang a song with the chorus "Yankes go home". They explained, however, they have nothing against the American citizens. They are referring to the American government and to the Marines. "We have received most of our support, in big demonstrations and in money, from the American people."

Yolocamba Ita are not allowed to enter the United States. Last year, they were offered a visa to enter the country, however, they would have had to go back to El Salvador to get it. Fearing they would be killed, Yolocamba Ita has not yet taken up the offer.

Informational contributions for this article from the Latin America Information Group of Halifax and John Kirk of the Dalhousie University Spanish Department are much appreciated.