

# Character of regime uncertain

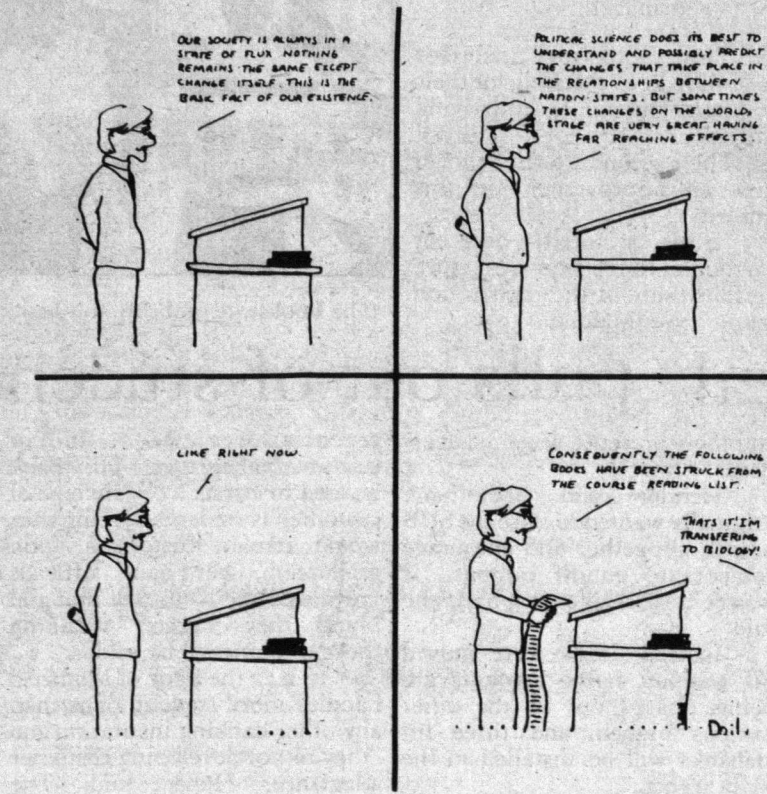
by BUD GODDERIS for Canadian University Press

The present position of the Canadian government towards the sad events in El Salvador was made clear to Canadians when the Secretary of State for External Affairs, the Hon. Mark MacGuigan rose to speak against a motion on El Salvador which was introduced by the NDP on March 9, 1981.

The motion stated "that this house condemns the government for its failure to protest the American military intervention in support of the military junta in El Salvador, and calls on the Prime Minister in his talks with the president of the United States to urge an end to military involvement on the side of a repressive regime which denies civil rights and is fighting those who wish to establish a democratic government."

MacGuigan responded to the motion by echoing U.S. Government policy. He stated that "opinions may differ as to the character of the regime (the Duarte government in El Salvador), but not as to the character and motivations of those fighting against it." He then quotes Robert E. White, the former U.S. Ambassador to El Salvador, as saying that "the ultimate enemy of Western civilization and of the U.S. in El Salvador is a Marxist-Leninist group dedicated to the overthrow of the government by force and the elimination of all U.S. influence from the region." "The men with the guns," according to Mr. White, "are committed Marxist-Leninists".

The revolutionary opposition in El Salvador has a much more complex profile than the Secretary of State suggests. It is Catholic, agrarian and nationalist in its very roots, but it also has strong Marxist, Christian



democratic and social democratic trends, with militant students, and accountants, printers and bank clerks among others in its ranks.

MacGuigan continued, "Canada, like many other countries, welcomed the overthrow of the dictatorial regime of General Carlos Romero in 1979 and its replacement by the government of progressive civilian and military leaders. This government adopted a number of social and economic measures which it believed would bring about needed social reforms. For example, it nationalized the banks and foreign trade. It also took initial

steps to introduce a much needed land reform and adopted other measures in an attempt to provide a government which would be more attentive to the political, social and economic needs and aspirations of the population."

The Secretary of State spoke in high terms of the present leader of El Salvador, Napoleon Duarte: "a respected Christian democrat who is widely believed to be the best person to lead a reformist government at the present time." The Duarte government, according to MacGuigan, "has pledged to turn over 40% of the land to small landowners, to proceed with

other social reforms, to hold free elections in 1982 — three years earlier, I might add, than the leftist regime in Nicaragua — and to grant amnesty to left-wing guerillas". The Secretary of State certainly gives the impression that Duarte cares for the people of his country.

It is interesting to contrast MacGuigan's words with those of Carlos Fuentes, a leading Mexican novelist, who recently asked himself the question "who cared about El Salvador?"

In answering his own question, Fuentes said, "I shall tell you who cared. Father Rutillio Grande cared who was killed because he said that poverty is not the will of God but the greed of a few. Archbishop Oscar Romero cared, who was killed because he found it intolerable that illiteracy in El Salvador would affect almost half the population. Four American religious workers cared, who went to work so that infant mortality in El Salvador would not be three and four times higher than in any industrialized nation. The leaders of the National Democratic Front cared who offered political opposition along with political solutions and paid for it with their lives. Jose Napoleon Duarte, the president of El Salvador should care. He who was tortured by the same thugs with whom he shares power today, who was deprived of his electoral victory in 1972 by the same guerillas with whom today he offers free elections to a population that has seen its brothers and sisters and fathers and mothers and children die, assassinated by the same death squads that are supposed to guarantee free elections in El Salvador."

In his speech to the house the Secretary of State contends that the Duarte government is hindered by "extremist opponents on the left and right."

He places great credence in

the U.S. Government white paper published in February 23, 1981, which indicated that the U.S. Government "had obtained incontrovertible evidence that massive amounts of weapons and military equipment...had been provided to the revolutionary forces in El Salvador by a number of socialist block countries and funneled through Nicaragua with the apparent cooperation of Nicaraguan officials."

These weapons, according to MacGuigan's reading of the white paper, were "of western origin, presumably to disguise their source — some of which had been specifically identified as being U.S. weapons left behind in Viet Nam."

In fact, the now-famous white paper has proven under scrutiny to be contradictory, and is far from being a convincing document. Questions have been raised about the very authenticity of the supporting documents. One of the startling realities that emerges from these documents is that they simply do not support the U.S. administration's charge that El Salvador is being subjected to "indirect armed aggression by communist powers".

One document used by the State department to show communist aggression actually contains evidence to the contrary. The white paper also completely ignores the fact that the Salvadorian guerillas are obtaining many of their weapons from the international arms market. As in most liberation wars, a large portion of the guerilla arms also comes from the U. S. compliments of the local militaries that the U. S. has armed.

MacGuigan concludes his address by saying that "sheer outpourings of moral indignation are not much help. They may ease the conscience but they do not advance the solution."

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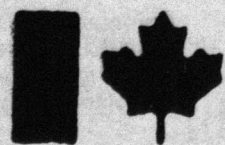
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