

FEATURE

Reagan promising aid(?) to country

by John Sorenson

President Reagan has recently asked the U.S. Congress to approve an additional \$110 million in military aid to El Salvador. This amount is an increase over Reagan's earlier proposal for \$60 million and reflects the Reagan Administration's belief that the Soviet Union is supporting the revolution in El Salvador as an initial step in a process which would isolate the U.S. into a "Fortress America" situation. According to the *Toronto Globe & Mail* (Mar. 14/83), officials in both El Salvador and the U.S. have stated that the Reagan Administration is strongly encouraging a major military campaign involving more than a third of the Salvadorean army to wipe out the FMLN-FDR guerrilla forces. Thus while the U.S. claims to be seeking a political solution in El Salvador it is clear that a military victory is a major priority.

Reagan's proposal for increased military aid also contradicts a certification program which Congress imposed in 1981.

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To qualify for such aid, El Salvador must demonstrate its progress in observance of human rights, control of its security forces which have continually violated those rights, economic reform, and attempts to find a political solution to the country's conflicts.

Reagan's new request for military aid obviously implies that such progress has been made. However, as Joan Didion pointed out in the *New York Review of Books* (Dec. 2/82), reports on such progress seem to follow the rhythm of the certification process itself, with "improvements" taking place as the issue of continued aid occurs. The military/Christian Democratic junta has consistently demonstrated its disregard for human rights. Over the past 3 years 40,000 Salvadoreans have been killed and 700,000 have fled the country. Amnesty International stated in March 1981 that most of the estimated 12,000 Salvadoreans killed in 1980 were murdered while held in detention by the government forces.

Media coverage has frequently focused on secret right-wing para-military death-squads as being responsible for most of the murders in El Salvador. Part of Reagan's evidence for improvement in the human rights situation in El Salvador has been the government's outlawing of one of these organizations, ORDEN, in 1979. However, this has proved to be merely a formality, as ORDEN has been reorganized as the Frente Democratico Nacionalista and its activities in human rights violations continue.

Furthermore, concentration on the activities of the death-squads as independent organizations has allowed the U.S. to promote the junta as a centrist government attempting to balance the demands of both the extreme right and the left. However, the activities of the death squads as independent organizations have been greatly exaggerated and it is clear that they work closely with the government forces. Both the methods and the goals of the security forces and the death squads are the same and the latter are composed of

military officers allied to right-wing civilian interests.

The majority of victims tortured and murdered by the government are not armed guerrillas but civilian non-combatants. The main targets are peasant, particularly those who are involved in cooperatives and agrarian reform. Other victims include political leaders of the opposition, including Christian Democrats, religious workers, including Archbishop Romero, a critic of human rights violations, union leaders, doctors and health workers, teachers and students.

Murders by the security forces continue daily but any slight decrease in

returned from El Salvador have contradicted the U.S. Administration's claim that human rights are now being observed there. They reported obvious evidence of torture on those held in military prisons. In addition they found that the lack of medical services in El Salvador had resulted in an increase of diseases such as malaria and typhus. The delegation has urged the U.S. government not to certify that human rights are being observed in El Salvador.

The U.S. position is that it is determined to prop up the junta in order to prevent Communist infiltration into Central America. In 1981, Alexander Haig, former Secretary of State, announced that

export industry could not provide employment for these migrants, most of whom now live a marginalized existence in urban slums. Concentration on the Soviet threat minimizes the social inequalities and repression existing in El Salvador.

Additionally, the White Paper misrepresents the nature of the FMLN-FDR revolutionary forces. The opposition is composed of a wide variety of organizations: religious groups, unions, peasants, Christian, Liberal, and Social Democrats, as well as Marxists. By emphasizing the Soviet role, popular support for the revolution is ignored.

The *Wall Street Journal* (June 8/81) criticized the White Paper and interviewed its author, J.D. Glassman of the Foreign Service, who admitted that the report contained mistakes and guesswork. The *Washington Post* (June 9/81) also pointed out errors and misleading statements in the report. The *Post* noted that the captured documents which were used as evidence in

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the report did not support the conclusions drawn from them. Inaccuracies in translation changed the meaning and other documents captured at the same time contradicted them. The *Post* concluded that there was no concrete evidence of Soviet assistance to El Salvador.

In terms of previous certifications which Reagan has made to Congress, it is clear that inaccuracies exist in the Administration's assessment of the El Salvador situation. In 1981 rather than improving human rights conditions, the junta actually increased political arrests and assassinations. Instead of controlling the security forces, the junta gave promotions to those officers involved in torture and murder. The 1980 land reforms showed little progress and the junta continued to refuse to negotiate politically with the FMLN-FDR.

The United Nations General Assembly in 1981 and 1982 expressed its concern over human rights violations in El Salvador. Contrary to the U.S. claim that the revolution was Soviet-controlled, the Assembly found that the conflict was internal. The U.N. also called for a halt on military aid to El Salvador and advocated a negotiated political settlement. Reagan's plans for increasing military aid to El Salvador clearly violates the U.N. proposal and will certainly threaten chances of a political solution in the near future. Reagan's refusal to seriously consider the internal social and economic causes of the Salvadorean revolution in favour of an insistence on a supposed Soviet threat clearly demonstrates a lack of concern for human rights and an increasing readiness on the part of the U.S. to take a militaristic approach to political issues.



numbers is viewed by U.S. officials as a sign of "progress". Similarly, while the Assistant Secretary of State, Thomas Enders, claims in a *U.S. News and World Report* article (Feb. 21/83) that the land distribution program implemented by the junta is a success, the *New York Times* (Feb. 20/83) demonstrates that only a small percentage of those who apply for land titles actually receive them.

Elections held in March 1982 were also considered by the U.S. to be a sign of

Soviet arms were being supplied to El Salvador through Cuba and that the U.S. would increase its own military aid to the area. A U.S. State Department White Paper (Feb. 23/81) claimed that the Soviet Union, with the aid of other Communist states, was organizing, arming, and directing the guerrilla forces in El Salvador.

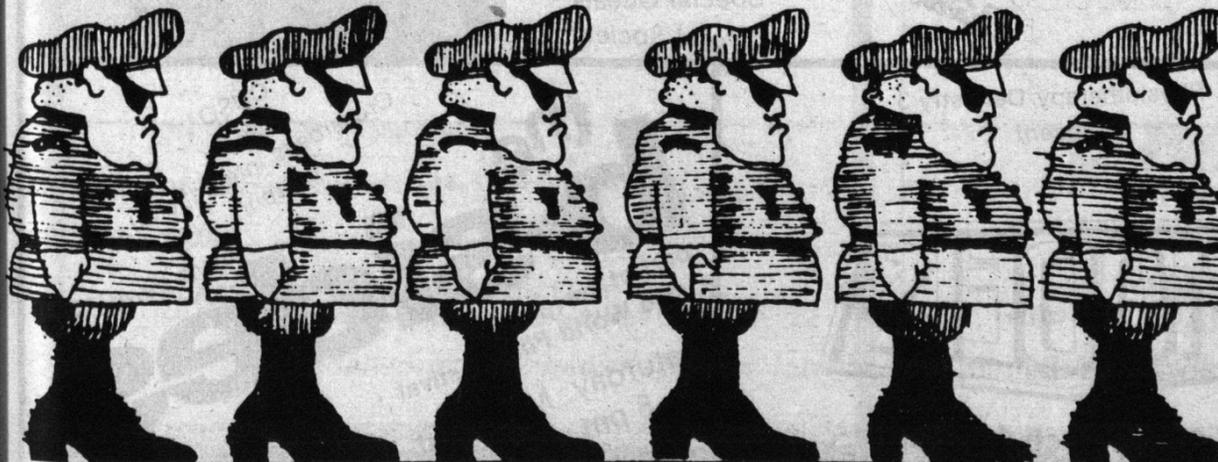
The assertions made by the White Paper, however, were unconvincing. By stressing the Soviet role it overlooks the

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political reform. However, the FMLN-FDR opposition representatives refused to participate, saying they would be murdered if they attempted to take part in the election. Liberal and Christian Democratic candidates have been assassinated in the past and those who have connections with the political opposition have been kidnapped and imprisoned.

A delegation of U.S. doctors recently

internal causes of the revolution, the fact that a small oligarchy known as the "14 Families" has controlled El Salvador's economy since the mid-19th century when communal peasant lands were expropriated for coffee plantations. A large body of seasonal migrant workers were created, many of whom moved into the cities following an industrialization boom in the 1960s. El Salvador's capital-intensive



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