

—VIEWPOINTS

El Salvador: Vietnam and Iran Revisited

By Micheal Hussey

It's a familiar story by now. In the face of increasing pressure from a popular-based uprising, the Third World nation's nominal governments step up the level of violence in a steadily escalating civil war. At the same time, in an attempt to buy time and legitimacy, it resorts to limited and ineffective reform measures that fail to sway the civilian population or isolate the guerillas. The United States Government pours in large amounts of economic and military aid, as well as military advisors, in an effort to prop up the military-backed junta in its attempt to put down the rebellion. Unwilling to recognize the justice of the revolutionary struggle, the United States instead cries of outside involvement and becomes determined to make the small nation the battleground against an alleged Soviet-directed international conspiracy of aggression. The long road of deepening American involvement with its attendant rising cost in human suffering begins.

This continuing record of the injustices and tragedy of American diplomacy in the 20th century has now become exemplified in the small Central American nation of El Salvador. The people of this nation, a largely agricultural country of 4.5 million, are now involved in an armed struggle to overthrow almost 50 years of military dictatorship. Behind a broad-based coalition, The Democratic Revolutionary Front, the overwhelming majority of the population has coalesced, including all of the major opposition parties, trade unions, professional and small business associations, the Catholic Church, and peasant and student associations. It is with fierce determination that they are now waging this fight for social justice and democracy, a battle that has seen almost 11,000 people killed in the last 16 months, 80 percent of whom the Catholic Church there has attributed to crimes committed by the army and rightist para-military forces.

The Reagan Administration has embarked on a

campaign to bring El Salvador to the forefront of world attention and to make it a test of Allied and Soviet relations with the United States. In remarks that hauntingly recall the days of the Tonkin Gulf resolution, Secretary of State Alexander Haig sees the Salvadorian situation as giving form to complaints he has been making of Soviet expansionism, and his State Department spokesman makes assertions of guerillas, "organized from the outside." At the same time the U.S. government has seriously misrepresented the current situation in El Salvador. It has overestimated the viability of the current regime while downplaying its responsibility for repressive violence. The American government, as well as the media, has exaggerated the importance and value of the reform measures and also portrayed opposition forces as terrorists under the control of the Soviet Union and unwilling to engage in meaningful dialogue towards a resolution of the crisis.

In an attempt to increase American intervention in the Third World and move away from what it has derisively labelled as the "Vietnam Syndrome," the Reagan Administration ignores the most important lessons for the United States of its involvement in Vietnam and Iran. It now seems even more painfully obvious that large scale infusions of men, money and material will not shore up an essentially unpopular repressive regime nor prevent a popular revolution. The more mature, just, and farsighted American response to the popular struggles in Nicaragua and Zimbabwe is once again being shunned in favor of a hard-line approach that is bound to backfire. When the Salvadorian people know that the U.S. is arming the government that kills them, anti-American feelings grow, and they are forced to accept military and economic support from any source they can find in order to continue the struggle. Fewer developments would offer more opportunity for Soviet involvement than the escalation of American military involvement in El Sal-

vador. In the words of 24 congressmen who wrote to the President in March of last year, "We believe that sending military aid to a government which cannot control its own military, and which continues to brutally repress its own people, is a repudiation of the principles upon which the United States was founded."

In order to stop further bloodshed and to bring democracy and order to El Salvador, the United States must end its own military involvement and increase the opportunity for a peaceful resolution to the crisis through recognition of the FDR as the legitimate and representative voice of the Salvadorian people. The people of El Salvador themselves must decide their own destiny.

In order to further this end, a coalition of churches, labor unions, academics and other concerned individuals have formed a nationwide organization called the Committee in Solidarity with the People of El Salvador. A Stony Brook community and campus group, made up of representatives of the Latin American Students Organization, the Newman Club, the Democratic Socialist Forum, Red Balloon, the International Student Organization and other concerned groups and individuals, has started up in an attempt to educate the community about the situation in El Salvador and to end American involvement in that nation.

It is of the utmost importance that those opposed to the present state of American intervention in El Salvador become more organized and vocal. Those who ignored or slighted the beginnings of American involvement in Vietnam must in some way carry the responsibility for the tragic duration of that war. Today we carry a similar responsibility for the people of El Salvador and their struggle for freedom and social justice.

(The writer is a senior philosophy major and a member of the Stony Brook Committee in Solidarity with the People of El Salvador.)

Student Government Equals Tyrannical Rule

By Joseph Coppa

When tyranny is abroad, "submission," wrote Andrew Eliot in 1765, "is a crime." Such a crime will not be committed by a group of students whom I represent. We are disgusted with the corruption and abuses of power that have become commonplace within the so-called student government known as Polity. Our response, to avoid the crime of submission, is to propose in a referendum before the student community a new Polity Constitution, that will eliminate as much as possible those abuses we have seen in Polity that can be eliminated through constitutional revision. As did Howard Beale in the movie *Network*, we will also force open the window to a student government that is often nailed shut and declare that: "We are as mad as hell, and we are not going to take it anymore."

What we are not going to tolerate anymore involves a number of things: the corrupt, illegal, unconstitutional and undemocratic actions of people presently in power; and the flaws in the present constitution that allows the disease of megalomania to flourish like chickweed. This article, and as many others as Statesman will be generous enough to print, will touch on all of the above ills that presently plague Polity. In addition, future articles will explain what changes have been made from the present constitution, and why they are needed. In this way, plus through posters, flyers and person-to-person contact, we will try to educate and inform the campus community as to why we are convinced this new constitution is needed. That will be in the near future, but first, we must begin with some of the motivations for why we have committed ourselves to reforming Polity.

We are outraged at the elitist attitudes taken by students now in office. Your student "representatives" want

you to pass a constitutional amendment that would forbid you from placing referenda on the ballot allocating a specific amount of money to a specific organization. Presently the New York Public Interest Research Group (NYPIRG), and certain sports organizations are funded a specific amount of money because you, the students, approved such funding in a referendum. Your student government officials want to take this power over your own money away from you, and leave it with the "wiser" student politicians. Why? Polity believes that their power is being taken away. If students can decide for themselves where their student activity money is going to be spent, the student government does not have control over that money. They want to have complete control. It is the "Big Brother" attitude from 1984 taking over, that is so often used by today's administrators and politicians: "We know what is best for you. We will control your life. You are not capable of deciding such decisions. We will do it for you." Such an attitude is not only an insult to one's intelligence, but more importantly, it is repulsive to the concept of democracy. It is elitist.

We are angry that the student government ignores the legal demands of the student population. A little more than a year ago, the student population passed a referendum allocating NYPIRG a certain amount of student activity money. You, the students decided, and passed the law, that gave NYPIRG this money. What did the wise student politicians do last semester? They decided to give NYPIRG less money than you had demanded legally in a referendum! Why? The present students in office consider referenda, the expressed will of their constituencies, to be merely "advisory" and not binding, even though it states in your present student constitution that referenda passed are to be

adopted (i.e. accepted and legally binding). But these politicians ignore not only your constitution, which you, the students placed into law, but they show their repugnance for the student population by ignoring our wishes too. Such action shows not only the "big brother" mentality taking over, but indeed, it warrants recall or impeachment from office.

We accuse the present government of illegally and undemocratically approving the Polity budget. The Polity budget, which allocates about \$700,000 of your student activity money, was written by the seven people sitting on the Polity Council, and blindly approved by the Polity Senate. How could only seven people write a budget that serves the needs and interests of about 10,000 students? The Polity Council held budget hearings before the Polity Senate was elected, thus excluding the Polity Senate from its constitutionally required involvement in hearings. In

addition, the Polity Senate (99 percent of its members), did not even care to look at, or discuss, the budget. They blindly passed it. Such action represents the ultimate in irresponsible, unrepresentative, and unintelligent voting. A great injustice has been done to the students.

In the preamble to the proposed new constitution, one section contains the following sentence: "It is the right, if not the duty, of the students, being the source of sovereign powers, to alter or to abolish this government, if it as a governing body becomes destructive of any of these unalienable student rights." One such student right involves "the right to be secure against tyranny, abuses of power, and usurpations of the public trust."

This right to be secure has been grossly violated, and a group of concerned students see the need for instituting new government. We ask for your support in fulfilling this need.

(The writer is a Commuter Senator.)

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