

## JACK ANDERSON

# Latin Strongman May Embarrass Reagan, Falwell

Gen. Efraim Rios Montt, the new strongman of Guatemala, is a self-proclaimed born-again Christian. As such, he has been embraced with some fervor by President Reagan and the Rev. Jerry Falwell.

But I'd suggest they not hug Rios Montt too tightly. Sooner or later, he's going to prove an embarrassment.

The White House welcomes Rios Montt as a staunch anti-communist in volatile Central America. The administration hopes to persuade Congress that his regime's human-rights record is good enough to qualify it for American military and economic aid.

As for Falwell, the Moral Majority evangelist feels a "spiritual unity" with Rios Montt because of their shared fundamentalist religious beliefs.

Though Falwell and Rios Montt apparently have never met, Falwell and other fundamentalist Christians, including William Middendorf, ambassador to the Organization of American States, sat down to dinner with representatives of the Guatemalan regime recently in Washington.

I'm told that Falwell is secretly planning a special relief project for Guatemala, using money collected from various fundamentalist groups in this country.

But here are some facts that both Reagan and Falwell seem willing to overlook:

Since Rios Montt seized power on March 23, the constitution has been suspended, 324 elected mayors have been cashiered and replaced by the general's toadies, and a "state of siege" has been declared.

The military now has the right to arrest suspected leftists without formal charges and keep them incommunicado and to enter homes without search warrants. Prisoners sentenced to death no longer have the right of appeal.

Despite all this, the Reagan administration has produced a six-page "fact sheet" that claims Rios Montt has improved the human-rights situation in Guatemala. Essentially, the administration is arguing that it's all relative: Rios Montt's record is better than his predecessors'.

Human-rights watchdog groups and congressional staff members who have visited Guatemala since Rios Montt's coup disagree with the State Department's conclusions. They say the slaughter of the innocents has increased since Rios Montt took over.

Indeed, a Guatemalan exile, Julia

Esquivel, told my associate John Dillon that the situation has grown "a thousand times worse" in her homeland under Rios Montt.

Though urban violence has declined, she said, persecution of suspected leftist guerrillas in the countryside has increased dramatically.

Esquivel, the vice president of the Committee for Peace and Justice, a human-rights group outlawed in Guatemala, accused Rios Montt of conducting a campaign of genocide against the country's rural Indian population.

Villages and families have been wiped out because the government suspects the Indians provide the guerrillas with recruits, refuge and supplies.

"Rios Montt uses the Bible, he speaks of love and fidelity," Esquivel said, "yet out of the same mouth he orders the massacres."

Footnote: The State Department insists that the increase in rural violence in Guatemala "appears, when identifiable, to be largely the responsibility of the [leftist] guerrillas," according to the Foggy Bottom fact sheet.

The State Department also points encouragingly to the fact that Rios Montt has brought a number of former government officials to trial on corruption charges, and has reportedly improved relations between the government and the Catholic Church.

Tuesday, October 12, 1982

# RICHARD COHEN

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## COLUMBUS

Recently, the Japanese got themselves in a wee bit of trouble by issuing some history textbooks that did not conform to the facts. The books glossed over Japan's brutal invasion of China and the inhumane way it treated the civilian population. China yelled bloody murder and Japan had to back down. It forgot that winners, not losers, write history.

Nowhere is that clearer than in our celebration of Columbus Day, named for the man who neither discovered America nor gave it its name, and whose feat was not just the inevitable result of foresight and courage, but of advancements in navigation and ship building. What Columbus did, others would soon have done anyway.

But if Columbus is to be remembered, then it ought to be not only for accidentally discovering the New World, but also for enslaving and murdering the Arawak Indians he met there. The Arawaks were unfortunate to have lived on the West Indian and Bahamian Islands, one of which, San Salvador, was the landfall sighted on the morning of Oct. 12.

On the island of Hispaniola, which now consists of Haiti and the Dominican Republic, Columbus set about enslaving the Arawaks and killing off any who put up the slightest protest. He sent some of them back to Spain as slaves ("Let us in the name of the Holy Trinity go on sending all the slaves that can be sold," he wrote) and kept the others on the island to dig for the gold that was not there.

The story of Columbus and the Indians is an awful one. By the time Columbus finished with the Indians, there were simply none of them left. In eight years, or by the year 1500, half of the 250,000 Indians on the island had either been murdered by the Spanish under Columbus or had killed themselves out of desperation. Over on Cuba, the Indians were undergoing a similar fate. A young Spanish priest, horrified at what he was seeing, wrote that in three months alone, 7,000 children died. As for Hispaniola, the

This is not history as I learned it. Instead, I was taught about a Columbus who was a man ahead of his time. He was brave. He was pious. He thought the world was round while others thought it was flat. He did not mess in slavery and genocide and he was not in the exploration biz for the bucks but so that people would someday gather around his statue, name avenues and cities after him (the District of Columbia, for instance) and hold parades in his honor. Thanks to him, this is one parade the Arawaks will miss.

The other side of Columbus is briefly sketched in Howard Zinn's "A People's History of the United States." Zinn is a radical historian and he has an interesting (although much-criticized) way of looking at history. He likes to turn over the rock of hero-worship and expose the gunk that lies beneath—to give the "people's" view of history. In the case of Columbus, it is slavery and genocide. Columbus might be a hero to us, but he was nothing but a killer to the Arawaks who, after all, had already "discovered" their island. Even Columbus' admiring biographer, Samuel Eliot Morison, holds him accountable for the extinction of the Arawaks.

Zinn's portrait of Columbus does nothing to diminish Columbus' standing as a mariner or as an explorer. But it is interesting to look at history from another perspective, to see it, say, from the viewpoint of the Arawaks, and to thus question our notions of heroism.

Nations seem to have a fundamental need to clean up their history. In this way, they cast themselves as heroes, make themselves seem better than they really are, and inevitably repeat the mistakes they made before. The Japanese tried it and failed, but there is no doubt they will eventually succeed and then the lessons of their own history will be lost on them. The Soviets do it all the time and so, for that matter, do we. At the moment, for instance, we are revising our history of the Vietnam war, the prerequisite for waging a similar war some time in the future.

Back to Columbus. It is his time of the year and no newspaper column could possibly deprive him of his annual spotlight. But we would be better off as a nation if we extolled him for the good things he did, condemned him for the bad and learned, as he should have, from his mistakes.

Happy Arawak Day.

# Guatemalan Massacres Charged

*Amnesty International Blames Military in Report Disputed by U.S. Official*

By Terri Shaw

Washington Post Foreign Service

The military government of Guatemala, hailed by the Reagan administration when it took power seven months ago as a hope for an end to political killings in the Central American country, has suffered two new blows to its fading prestige.

The London-based human-rights group Amnesty International yesterday made public a statement saying government forces have "massacred more than 2,600 Indians and peasants in a new counterinsurgency program launched after Gen. Efraim Rios Montt came to power in March."

The statement was issued as the leaders of two Guatemalan parties that had supported the coup that brought Rios Montt to power were in Washington to publicize their disillusionment with his government and their demand that the military begin the process of handing over power to an elected civilian government.

The issues of human rights and democratic rule are crucial to efforts by administration officials to obtain military aid for Guatemala. Military aid was suspended in 1977 following charges that the Guatemalan government was involved in widespread killing and torture of its opponents.

Since then Congress has watched Guatemala's human-rights record closely, and no further military aid has been appropriated.

The House Foreign Affairs Committee has approved \$250,000 for military training, but the bill has not yet passed. The administration has also expressed a desire to sell Guatemala between \$3.5 million and \$4 million in spare parts for planes and helicopters. But sources on Capitol Hill said the proposed aid has failed to receive the backing of the House Foreign Affairs Committee as required under an informal agreement between the administration and the committee.

Meanwhile, the administration has decided not to block international bank loans to Guatemala on human-rights grounds as had been done in the past, State Department sources said. The officials said the loans would be considered on a "case-by-case" basis on their economic merits and would not be opposed "automatically." An official said, however, that the new policy has not yet been implemented in actual votes.

The Treasury Department, in a letter to the House subcommittee on international development institutions, said the administration is considering the new voting policy because of "indications of improvements in the human-rights situation in Guatemala."

The Reagan administration, which would like to see a strong Guatemalan military to counter what it describes as Cuban and Soviet intervention in Central America, in many cases has supported the Guatemalan government's contention that massacres of peasants in the northern part of the country have been committed by leftist guerrillas.

Amnesty International and other human-rights groups say that the Guatemalan armed forces are responsible for most of the killings of unarmed civilians in the countryside.

In an unusual high-level response to Amnesty International's charges, Thomas O. Enders, assistant secretary of state for inter-American affairs, sent a four-page letter last month contesting a report on Guatemala by the human-rights group.

The Amnesty report accused the Guatemalan armed forces of "widespread killings, including the extrajudicial execution of large numbers of rural noncombatants, including entire families, as well as persons suspected of sympathy with violent or nonviolent opposition groups."

Amnesty International's report listed 112 incidents between March and July in which men, women and children were murdered in rural areas. The number reported killed in each incident ranged from one or two to as many as 100.

Enders said in his letter that the U.S. Embassy in Guatemala had been unable to corroborate many of the incidents listed by Amnesty and had differing information about other incidents. In seven specific incidents listed by Enders, he said the embassy findings supported the government contention that guerrillas were responsible for the killings.

The letter said two State Department officials visited the village of Salacuin in Alta Verapaz Province about three months after a reported massacre, and "confirmed the embassy account" that "guerrillas killed 26 people, including a mother nursing her infant."

Enders also said he assumed that many of the incidents listed by Amnesty International had been reported by groups he described as "closely aligned with, if not largely under the influence of, the guerrilla groups attempting to overthrow the Guatemalan government."

Larry Cox, a spokesman for Amnesty International, said the group's researchers obtained first-hand information from a "full range" of sources, including missionaries, medical personnel and anthropologists living in Guatemala, defectors from the military and "numerous" survivors of the reported attacks.

Amnesty International's office in London, in a statement referring to Enders' charge that the human-rights group took information from organizations linked to

the guerrillas, said: "Amnesty International does not regard the political views of any source, or the fact that a source may be considered suspect by another party to the conflict, as reason for refusing to consider testimony."

The last official Amnesty International mission to Guatemala was in September 1979. Cox said yesterday's update on the massacres was released in connection with the organization's annual "Prisoner of Conscience Week."

Amnesty's July report emphasized that all peasant eyewitnesses who have reached "comparative safety abroad" have blamed the armed forces, rather than the guerrillas, for the massacres they saw.

Meanwhile, Vinicio Cerezo, secretary general of the Guatemalan Christian Democratic Party, and Renan Quinonez, secretary general of the National Renovating Party, met last week with Craig Johnstone, director of the State Department's Office of Central American Affairs, to discuss the demand by four major political parties that the military hand over power to a "democratic and pluralist" civilian government.

The two moderate parties have made common cause with two right-wing parties in demanding a "return to constitutionality" and refusing to participate in the newly formed Council of State, a civilian advisory board. Leaders of the four parties have signed a document urging political freedom, "free and clean elections" and the "eradication of violence and all types of [paramilitary] armed groups."

All four parties had supported Rios Montt when he first came to power. The two right-wing parties that signed the "Democratic Commitment" statement are the National Liberation Movement and the National Authentic Central.

The government responded to the parties' refusal to participate by decreeing censorship over all reporting of political activity in addition to the censorship already in effect restricting reporting on the war against the guerrillas to official military communiqués.

Cerezo said in an interview that he had met with the Inter-American Human Rights Commission during its visit to Guatemala last month and given testimony that kidnappings and killings of political figures appeared to have resumed recently after stopping during the first months of the new government.

Guatemalan Ambassador Jose Zelaya Coronado denied the latest charges by Amnesty International, saying soldiers have "very precise instructions from the chief of staff to respect civilians."

Special correspondent John Dinges contributed to this report.