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REFERENCE

LENNON HAS LEGACY

was born in 1940, when the bombs fell over England. War was a common childhood, and when we try to think of the generation that grew up in the 1960s and early 1970s, we naturally think first of John Lennon and the music that he and his band brought to the peace movement.

and John Lennon in particular, the popularity to disseminate a sort of war publicity politics. "War is what I want it," Lennon and his wife, Yoko, proclaimed in full-page Christmas messages that were occasional, difficult, but Lennon opened up rock-and-roll politics, and in an innocent, imitative way worked for peace. Young people who grew up with the music. Not so young people who grew up with the music. Not so young people who grew up with the music. Not so young people who grew up with the music.

In this issue, Dorothy Day, a peace activist for an earlier generation, is compared to Lennon. Like Day, Lennon believed that the potential recruits for the peace movement were only needed calling up. "You are a dreamer," he wrote, "but I'm not."

All the most alluring qualities of spontaneity, sedition, and an interview on the day of his death expressed the hope that the 1980s would be a decade of positive action. In Moscow and the West activating nerves, it would be a far better alternative to the peace movement of John Lennon to work for the peace. It would be a far better alternative to the peace movement of John Lennon to work for the peace.

DOROTHY DAY
Wilfrid Sheed
Colman
McCarthy

**OSHA AND THE
HIGH COURT**
Edward H.
Greer

**POLAND AND
THE BANKS**
Wendy Cooper

**THRILLERS:
WHO READS
THEM?**
Robert
Lekachman

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AFRICA**
Anthony
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SIDNEY HOOK
Philip Green

TERRORISM IN EL SALVADOR

THE JUNTA'S WAR AGAINST THE PEOPLE

JAMES PETRAS

On October 15, 1979, a coalition of left and centrist political groups joined reformists and rightist military factions to form a revolutionary junta, proclaiming their intention to redistribute land and democratize El Salvador. Thirteen months later a number of the civilian reformers who had participated in the formation of the original junta were kidnapped and murdered.

The November 27 assassination of the six leaders of the Salvadoran Democratic Revolutionary Front (a federation of several opposition groups) was only the most recent in the junta's all-out effort to eradicate its opposition with the army serving as its "enforcer." The active collaboration between the regime and the security forces was evident in the scores of armed soldiers who surrounded the meeting place where the kidnapping took place while helicopters circled the building.

The U.S. State Department and the junta predictably blamed anonymous "right-wing extremists." The protestations of innocence were so transparently false that even a *New York Times* editorial doubted their credibility. The subsequent murders of four American women should at last force Washington to admit that, in a little over a year, El Salvador has passed from rule by a well-intentioned reformist coalition to a murderous regime of the extreme right. Agrarian reform has been taken over by the army and used as a cover to hunt down peasant activists.

The October 15 coalition was a brief flare of hope in the long darkness of Salvadoran history. For the past fifty years, El Salvador has been run

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Junta

(Continued From Front Cover)

by repressive military (or military-civilian) regimes. Beginning with the massive slaughter of 30,000 citizens in 1932, El Salvador's landlord-military governments have sustained their rule through an all-too-familiar combination of electoral fraud and outright political terrorism.

El Salvador's landlords, who continue to hold its economic reins, are very strongly backed by a powerful faction in the military. Thus, it is not surprising to learn that the peasantry has suffered disproportionately at the hands of El Salvador's latest ruling junta: between January and August, 52 percent of those assassinated in El Salvador were peasants, followed by students (7 percent) and workers (3 percent). Not only does the recent clampdown on the peasantry reflect the ever-increasing political and social organization of the landlords and their supporters in the military but it also highlights the conflict over land that has always lain at the heart of Salvadoran politics. El Salvador is a small country in which the availability of land plays a leading (if not all-important) role: the concentration of rural property in a very few hands and the resultant demands of the peasantry for land redistribution have led the regime to concentrate on suppressing political—or any other—organizations in El Salvador's rural regions. This, in spite of the fact that the present junta came to power as purveyors of a supposed "agrarian reform."

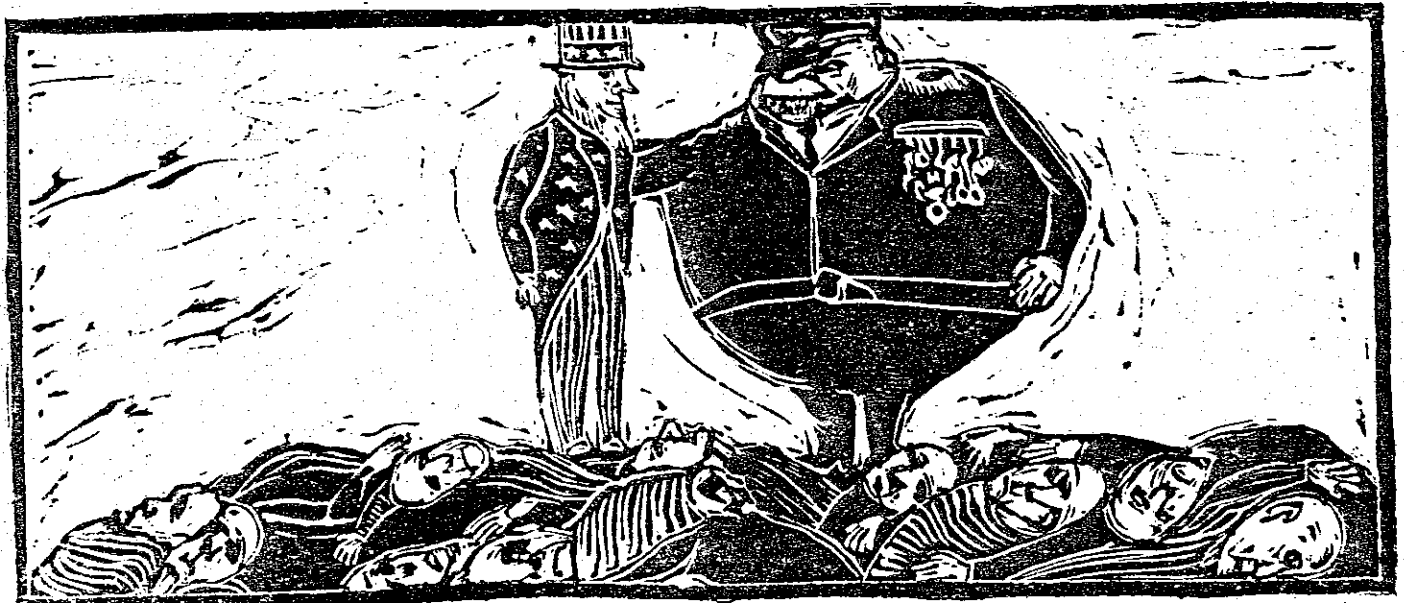
In the late 1960s, broad-based social movements began to gain increasing influence among a wide range of Salvadoran occupational groups. Urban-based trade unions and rural-based peasant associations proliferated: factory workers, teachers, rural day laborers and peasants holding small plots organized themselves and began to demand recognition from employers, landlords and the state. Religious, university, civic and professional groups began to cooperate with these associations, defending their claims for legitimacy and equity. The landlord-military regimes—frightened by the

potential political power of these organizations—responded by escalating repression, causing support for the mass organizations to grow and solidify as individual victims sought protection in numbers. A counterresponse followed. Soon, both sides were carrying arms; guerrilla organizations proliferated, protecting the unarmed mass organizations and retaliating against attacks from the regime and its paramilitary organizations.

This cycle of increasing mass opposition to stepped-up repression by the Government was described by a leader of El Salvador's teachers' union (ANDES):

Fifteen years ago the teachers' union was organized in response to economic circumstances. We began our organizing drive with the primary school teachers and then moved on to the high school teachers, basing ourselves on the need to improve the status and condition of teachers. Primary teachers were first organized. The growth of the trade union led the Government to force teachers employed in the capital to take jobs in distant provinces. Our first mobilizations were in opposition to the power of the administrators over the teachers. Beginning in 1970, secondary school teachers were organized by ANDES in opposition to Government-controlled policy changes. Between 1970 and 1975, Government repression took the form of taking and dispersing militant teachers to remote areas, taking prisoners and an occasional assassination or prisoner disappearance. By 1975 one hundred percent of the primary and ninety percent of the secondary school teachers were organized. Beginning in 1976, state violence began to escalate. The original trade union focus on immediate economic issues began to shift, the organization began to be politicized. Under the General Molina regime (1972-1977) 150 teachers disappeared and 36 were killed; under General Romero (1977 to October 1979) 96 were killed; under the current junta 181 school teachers were killed between October 15 and July 31. There are 22,000 teachers in total.

This is the history of the regime's repressive tactics in virtually every area that has been organized by the people. Prior to the present period, the military and paramilitary groups were more selective—targeting specific leaders and spokesmen. But now assassination has come to be used rou-



tinely as a tool of the Government. As one teacher said, "A common saying in El Salvador these days is, 'I am leaving the house but I don't know if I will return!'"

Accompanying the widespread killing are deliberate attempts to terrorize those who might protest: public assassinations, the display of mutilated corpses and the targeting of prominent individuals. One teacher was killed in front of his class. Another teacher, active in the union, was killed two days after receiving a teaching award. And, most gruesome, the head of an assassinated teacher was put in front of the school to teach the other instructors a lesson. The institutionalization of terror on a massive scale has led, on the one hand, to the closing of institutes and the flight of teachers (there are at least 150 exiled Salvadoran teachers in Costa Rica) and, on the other hand, to the extension of organization among employees in the Ministry of Education and closer teacher collaboration with revolutionary political organizations.

The experience of the teachers' union typifies the conflict between the Salvadoran people, clamorous for popular representation, and an autocratic state, dead set against it. Demands for a popular organization independent of the state have permeated the society, and have propelled a nervous regime into state violence. The repression has not only deepened but has also become more extensive, covering all occupational groups. Middle class and working class, rural and urban areas—all have been affected. Members of religious groups and small-business people have also been assassinated—neither property ownership nor church status offers protection against the Salvadoran junta.

The operational procedure of the repressive forces is spelled out in a document published by the Salvadoran Archbishop's Legal Aid group:

July 19, 1980. At least 1,000 strongly armed, masked men wearing bullet-proof vests, with badges identifying them as members of the Death Squad, accompanied by members of the Army and agents of the National Guard invaded the Hacienda "Mirador" in which the majority of peasant members belonged to Union Comunal Salvadoreña [the Government-recognized Christian Democratic Union]. . . . Witnesses present indicated that agents of the National Guard and masked individuals shot 60 peasants. They were selected beforehand after 300 peasant cooperative members were captured.

In this case, even peasants supporting the regime—or at least the civilian faction of the regime—were not immune to its violence. All who are involved in seeking social change, whatever their formal affiliation, are considered suspect. Moreover, as a number of parish nuns and priests testified, the military carries out a policy of collective guilt: whole families and villages are attacked and destroyed because of

the activities of particular individuals. The Legal Aid report records:

On July 9, 1980, 31 members of the Mojica Santos peasant family, all residents of the village "Mogotes" of San Pablo Tacachico, department of La Libertad [31 kilometers northwest of the capital] were shot by the para-military organization, ORDEN. Fifteen children were killed hugging their mothers, all of them under ten years of age. That same day the National Army and agents of the National Guard occupied the area and began to sack the peasants' homes.

The savage nature of the Salvadoran junta has been obscured by the systematic effort of the U.S. Government and media to displace responsibility onto nongovernmental forces, a tactic also used by the junta, which constantly denies its collaboration in the repression. The official U.S. view is that the regime represents a "centrist political movement . . . against extremists of the left and right." The full statement of the U.S. position was presented in Congressional testimony by William Bowdler, Assistant Secretary of State for Inter-American Affairs:

The extreme right, still powerful and unrepentant, finds its economic interests mortally endangered by the JRG's [the Revolutionary Governing Junta's] reforms. Two right-wing coup attempts have been thwarted, but the threat remains. Rightist elements are financing a campaign of assassinations against civilians who might cooperate with the military in the reform process.

Seeing power slipping from their grasp in the wake of the reforms, leftist cadres first attempted to induce massive street confrontations, even exploiting the funeral of Archbishop Romero for this purpose. This effort failed, leaving the insurgents with clear responsibility for the violence and deaths that resulted. More recently, the left has shifted its focus to the countryside, assassinating agrarian reform officials, attacking the security forces, and terrorizing peasants who cooperate with the reform program.

Our position is clear. We believe that the October 15 program, which is now being implemented by the Revolutionary Governing Junta, offers the best chance for social change, political liberalization and respect for human rights in El Salvador. Both publicly and privately, we have vigorously supported the Junta and opposed a repressive or non-reformist solution for El Salvador. . . .

We believe violence from both left and right *must* be curbed. Terrorism exacts a tragic human and even political toll. Terrorism by the right is particularly damaging just now because the former association of elements of the security forces with the extreme right has left suspicions that undermine the moral authority of the new regime.

The U.S. policy is thus directed toward condemning "violence" from both the left *and* right, and supporting the regime. U.S. policy makers frequently cite "human rights and church sources" for their estimations of the loss of life. However, they never proceed to examine the data presented by these same sources concerning the identity of those carrying out the violence.

The data collected by Legal Aid clearly refute the U.S. position. The J.R.G.'s repressive forces, according to Legal Aid, were responsible for 80 percent of the assassinations

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groups (the "right-wing extremists" referred to by Assistant Secretary of State Bowdler), for only 20 percent. Clearly, the scope and the duration of the violence indicates that the junta is not a "moderate centrist" regime but rather that it is even more repressive than the forces U.S. policy makers choose to describe as "extremist." The organization responsible for the greatest number of political murders—the National Army—is part of the junta. (Between June and August, the National Army was cited by Legal Aid as the perpetrator of 1,092 political assassinations, while the number of assassinations committed by all of the seven other groups mentioned only came to 969.)

Political assassination thus must be seen as a principal instrument of rule, and U.S. policy, therefore, must be described, not as supporting centrist reform but as sustaining extreme right-wing terrorism. Moreover, in addition to their responsibility for political assassinations, the army and the official military security units must be held accountable for the arrest and disappearance of a growing number of political opponents. Not only did the number of political prisoners taken grow from ten in January to eighty-one in August but the assumption by most observers is that the 211 political prisoners who have disappeared so far this year have also been killed. The evidence strongly indicates that the U.S. Government, its ambassador in El Salvador and the junta's supporters in Washington are deluding the American people when they say that the Salvadoran dictatorship is a "centrist" regime, dissociated from the terror.

To the contrary, it appears that Washington has put in power and has been sustaining an extreme rightist regime that is systematically exterminating its opposition. Certainly, Washington's attempt to blame the violence on nongovernmental groups is undermined by reports that clearly link the paramilitary death squads with the regime's security forces. A report published by Legal Aid describes the takeover of the peasant village of San Vicente by a death squad on July 7—the torture, rape and assassination of seven peasants, followed by the decapitation of one. The report concludes by describing the squad's curious departure: "The members of this so-called 'squad' after committing these acts, were evacuated by a Salvadoran National Army helicopter."

Another report, dated April 17, noted the arrival of the paramilitary group Orden: "Several hundred members of . . . Orden, protected by the National Army and agents of the National Guard, militarily invaded Christian peasant communities. . . ." They killed sixteen peasants that day. And nuns and priests working in rural communities say that Orden members collaborated with the National Guard by providing names of community activists, meeting in National Guard headquarters and participating with the army in the liquidation of independent peasant leaders elected by agricultural co-ops. One small farmer described military attempts to coerce him into joining Orden:

I did not join Orden because of the injustices that it commits. The National Guard and National Police began to ask about me—to frighten me to join Orden. The local Commandant of the National Guard pressured me to join Orden. I told him I don't belong to any group. I just dedicate myself

to my work. To them anyone that didn't join was obligated to collaborate. According to the Commandant, "He who does not collaborate is opposed."

The junta's intervention in El Salvador's economy has not liberated the peasants from landlord oppression, and has deepened and extended state oppression. "Agrarian reform" has in fact become a vehicle for building a vast network of rural police informers and paramilitary agents linked to the military machine. These "reforms" have transformed a traditional dictatorship into a ruthless totalitarian police state. The right-wing terrorist groups are as integral a part of the Salvadoran police-state operation as the Gestapo and the NKVD were to the Nazi and Stalinist regimes. The tolerant U.S. attitude toward the J.R.G. has only served to absolve the regime, thus allowing it to continue its ritualistic political murders without having to answer to world opinion.

El Salvador is a country that has been occupied by its own military; there is only one authority that exercises power and acts with impunity: the armed forces. The armed forces treat the civilian population like an enemy in a full-scale war: motorized invasions of rural areas, search-and-destroy missions and the sacking of rural property are the most common manifestations of the rampant militarization of Salvadoran society. Between January and May of this year, the armed forces engaged in 274 military invasions of peasant areas. In the same period, eighty-six military operations took place in urban areas. The purpose of these actions is to destroy any and all organizations and activities that exist outside the hierarchy of the militarized police state and to terrorize the rest of the population into acquiescence. Church, student, trade union and other meeting places have been systematically destroyed.

Along with the annihilation of the social basis of political opposition, the regime has been silencing all forms of cultural dissent: the universities have been taken over by the military, opposition newspapers have been bombed and machine-gunned into submission and a large percentage of the intellectual community has been killed or has fled into exile. One Salvadoran writer describes the regime's practice of cultural terror in the following terms:

We were a literary group of young writers—under 30—sympathetic to the left. I left the country after four of the twelve members were killed. The death squad took pictures of our group meeting in a café. Later, one was killed in the café, another was captured in his house and has disappeared. They searched my house for me. . . . I worked at *La Cronica* [a daily newspaper of the democratic opposition]. I was an editor. There were constant death threats. Our offices were machine-gunned twice in a row. . . . I was a member of the Cultural Workers' Center. They blew up the meeting hall. A popular cultural movement was beginning to emerge. Dance, theater and literary—entire groups were exterminated. Five publications stopped. The Cultural Workers' Front began in solidarity with the Nicaraguan Revolution, before the fall of Somoza. It included leading writers, theater and dance people and others. We were not affiliated with any political group. We were approached by [leftist] political groups when