

# El Salvador. The hungriest people in Latin America.

*No wonder they're fighting for change. What are we doing there?*

American counter-insurgency "advisers." Helicopters and automatic rifles. Military and economic aid topping \$500 million — all to prop up a government that killed more than 10,000 of its own people in the last year.

A government that keeps control over El Salvador's wealth in the hands of a few, leaving the majority poor and hungry. A government whose own security forces raped and murdered four American churchwomen and massacred 200 Salvadoran refugees as they fled to safety.<sup>1</sup>

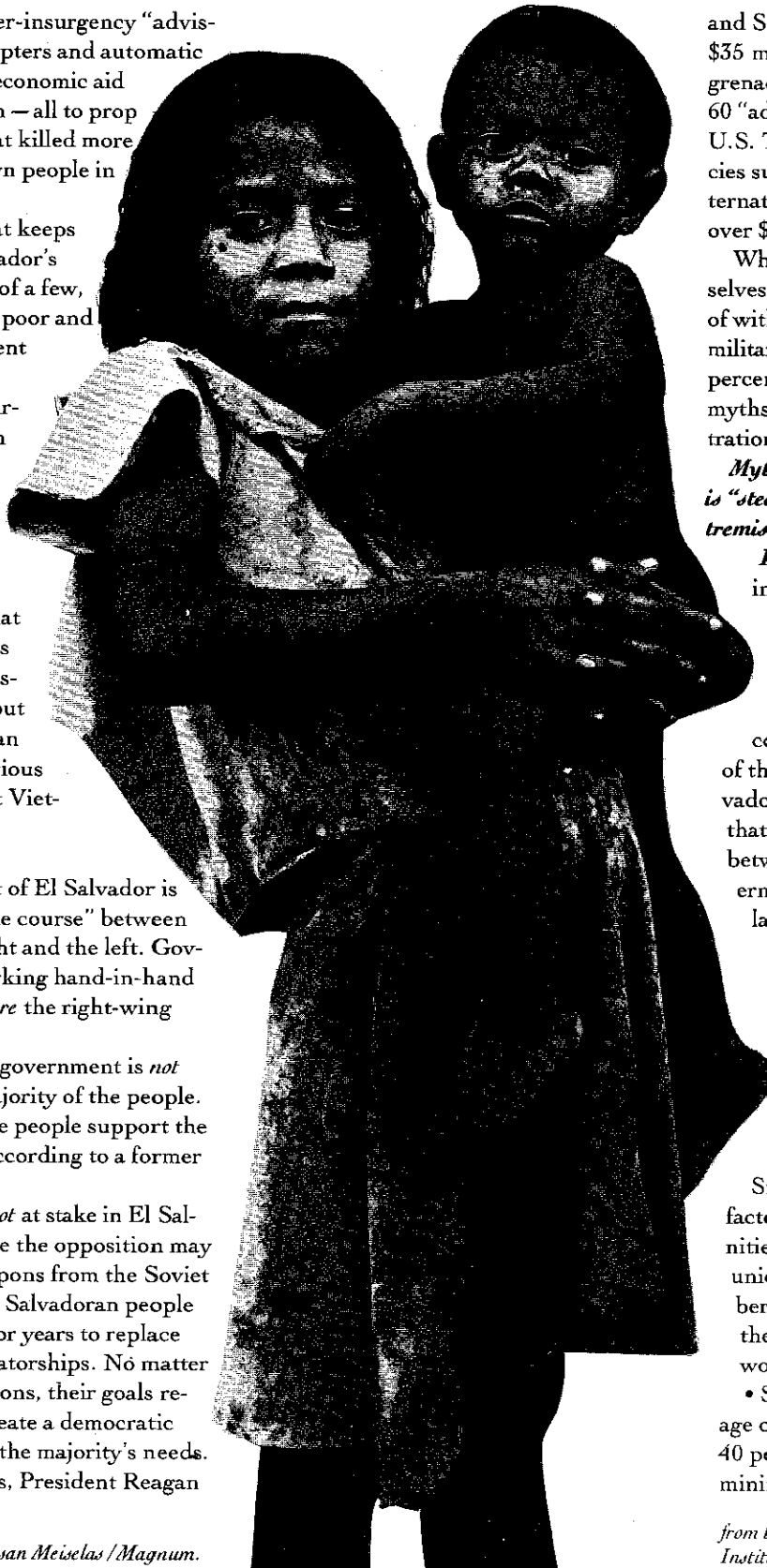
To convince us that we must intervene, is President Reagan distorting the truth about this Central American country, just as previous presidents did about Vietnam? In contrast to official statements:

- The government of El Salvador is *not* "steering a middle course" between extremists of the right and the left. Government troops, working hand-in-hand with death squads, *are* the right-wing terrorists.

- The Salvadoran government is *not* supported by the majority of the people. Eighty percent of the people support the armed opposition, according to a former U.S. ambassador.

- U.S. security is *not* at stake in El Salvador simply because the opposition may be getting some weapons from the Soviet Union or Cuba. The Salvadoran people have been fighting for years to replace U.S.-supported dictatorships. No matter where they get weapons, their goals remain the same: to create a democratic government serving the majority's needs.

Despite these facts, President Reagan



and Secretary of State Haig are sending \$35 million worth of helicopters, rifles, grenades and ammunition — plus at least 60 "advisers." Economic support from the U.S. Treasury and U.S.-dominated agencies such as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund may total over \$500 million.<sup>2</sup>

What can we do? How can we ally ourselves with the Salvadoran people instead of with a government representing only military officers and the wealthiest two percent? First we must cut through the myths promoted by the Reagan administration and much of the press:

*Myth: The government in El Salvador is "steering a middle course" between extremists of the right and the left.*

*Reality:* Government forces, working directly with right-wing death squads composed of off-duty and retired military personnel, were responsible for more than 80 percent of the killings last year, according to the careful documentation of the Catholic archdiocese in El Salvador.<sup>3</sup> *The Wall Street Journal* reports that "peasants can see little difference between the extreme right and the government's security forces, and it is the latter they say they fear more."<sup>4</sup>

*Myth: The Salvadoran government is supported by the majority of its people.*

*Reality:* At least 80 percent of the Salvadoran people support the armed opposition, according to former U.S. Ambassador Murat Williams.<sup>5</sup>

Small farmers, landless peasants, factory workers, the Catholic communities, students and teachers, trade unionists, and even many members of the aristocracy make up the opposition front. And no wonder.

- Salvadorans have the lowest average caloric intake in Latin America, 40 percent less than the recommended minimum.<sup>6</sup>

## *Is our security threatened because the Salvadoran people are fighting against a*

- Seven out of ten Salvadoran children go hungry.

- 60% of the people have no land at all; they are lucky if they can work a few months of the year for \$1 a day.

El Salvador has the worst income inequality in Latin America. The wealthiest two percent, known as The Fourteen Families, has long controlled over half the farmland, where they produce coffee, cotton, sugar cane, and beef — all exports, not crops to feed the hungry in El Salvador.

Encouraged by the defeat of Somoza in Nicaragua, resistance to the Salvadoran dictatorship mounted. A few young military officers decided to modify the most repressive aspects of their society to avoid losing control completely. With U.S. encouragement, they overthrew Gen. Carlos Humberto Romero on October 15, 1979.

For a very short time, a broad alliance of reform-minded Salvadorans seemed to be in control; a civilian-military junta was created. But within three months virtually all the civilian leaders resigned when they realized the military leadership was not only totally opposed to reform, but was carrying out a campaign of terrorism far worse than under Gen. Romero.

A second junta also failed to control the military. After the murder of the four American missionary women in December 1980, the U.S. government insisted that the discredited politician José Napoleón Duarte be installed as a civilian president. But control remains with the military.

Most of the civilians who quit the government joined the popular opposition, united in the Democratic Revolutionary Front (FDR). Lawyer Guillermo Ungo, who resigned from the first junta, became president of the FDR.

**Myth:** *The junta's attempt to introduce land reform demonstrates its commitment to the interests of the majority.*

**Reality:** A state of siege suspending civil liberties was decreed the same day as the land reform. Then government security forces moved into the countryside, ostensibly to "enforce" the reform. As Con-

gressman Gerry Studds (D-Mass.) found on a fact-finding tour, the military's policy is "a combination of murder, torture, rape, the burning of crops in order to create starvation conditions, and a program of general terrorism and harassment."<sup>7</sup>

A Salvadoran land reform official tells this chilling story of the first days at a "reformed" plantation:



**Arrest means execution in El Salvador.**

"The troops came and told the workers the land was theirs now... The peasants couldn't believe their ears, but they held elections that very night. The next morning the troops came back and I watched as they shot every one of the elected leaders."<sup>8</sup>

Salvadoran officials criticize the land reform program as "a 'symbolic' measure which was proposed because it would look good to American politicians, and not necessarily because it would be beneficial or significant in the Salvadoran context."<sup>9</sup>

Over 60% of the rural population are not even potential beneficiaries. And the "benefits" condemn many of those included in the reforms to marginal existence on plots too small and too poor to support them.<sup>10</sup> The coffee estates — source of the oligarchy's wealth and power — have hardly been touched.

"Most peasants consider the land reform a cruel hoax intended to buy time and divert international attention from the counter-insurgency campaign terrorizing the population," conclude Laurence R. Simon and James C. Stephens Jr., authors of a detailed study of Salvadoran land reform.<sup>11</sup>

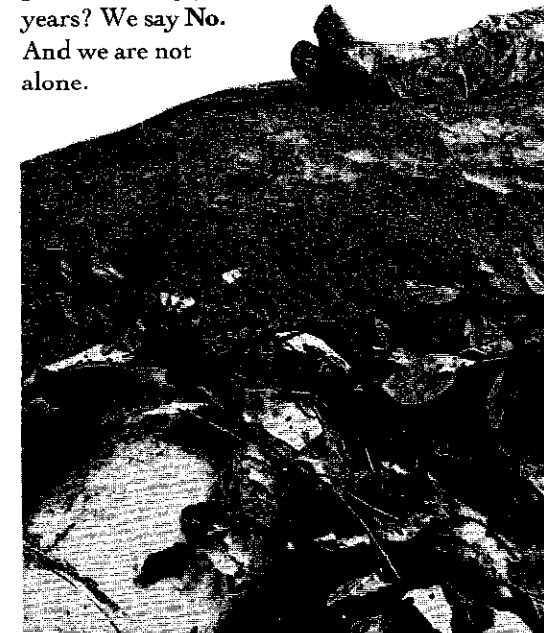
**Myth:** *U.S. security is at stake in El Salvador because the armed opposition may be getting some weapons from the Soviet Union or Cuba.*

**Reality:** The Salvadoran people are risking their lives to determine their own future, not to install a foreign-controlled government. Since the electoral road is blocked, people have joined the armed opposition as their only hope. They are buying weapons on the international market, taking them from government troops, and accepting them from those who offer them. The basic fact about outside intervention is this: *the only foreign military personnel in El Salvador are Americans.*

Most American allies — France, West Germany, Austria, Italy, Belgium, The Netherlands — oppose U.S. military intervention. Mexico, which should be the first to seek international intervention if there were truly a communist threat so close, is a leading supporter of the opposition Democratic Revolutionary Front.

**We can prevent another Vietnam.**

Is our security threatened because the Salvadoran people are fighting against a military government which has kept them poor and hungry for over 50 years? We say No. And we are not alone.



**Friends pray for the American nuns killed by Sal**

## *military government which has kept them poor and hungry for over 50 years?*

Two weeks before he was assassinated more than a year ago, Salvadoran Archbishop Oscar Romero called for an end to U.S. military aid, crying, "In the name of God, stop the repression!" Over 86 members of Congress have co-sponsored H.R. 1509 to cut off military aid to El Salvador. Senator Kennedy has introduced a similar bill, S. 728, in the Senate.

Escalated intervention in El Salvador will damage U.S. prestige in the world whatever happens. If the opposition wins, the United States will again be on the "losing" side. If massive aid allows the military to hold off the people a while longer, U.S. leaders will feel committed to escalation in support of a brutal, anti-democratic government — and world opinion will again be against us, as in Vietnam.

The only way we can "win" is to allow the people of El Salvador to decide their future. Not by designing their land reform program. Not by dictating who should be in their government. Not by sending helicopters and "advisers" to a military which former Ambassador Robert White calls "one of the most out-of-

control, violent, bloodthirsty groups of men in the world."<sup>12</sup>

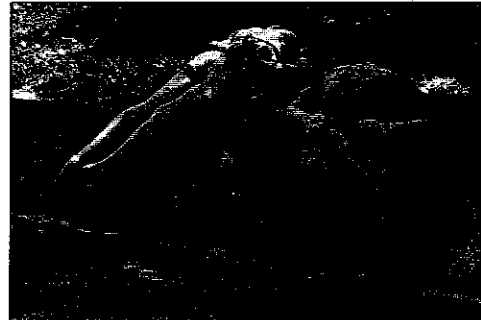
We can ally ourselves with the Salvadoran people by removing the obstacles that our tax dollars are putting in their way.

- We can write our Congresspeople to insist they vote to eliminate military aid to the junta and support H.R. 1509 and S. 728.

- We can work with one of the more than 400 groups around the country opposing U.S. intervention.

- We can organize educational forums in our schools, churches, unions and workplaces.

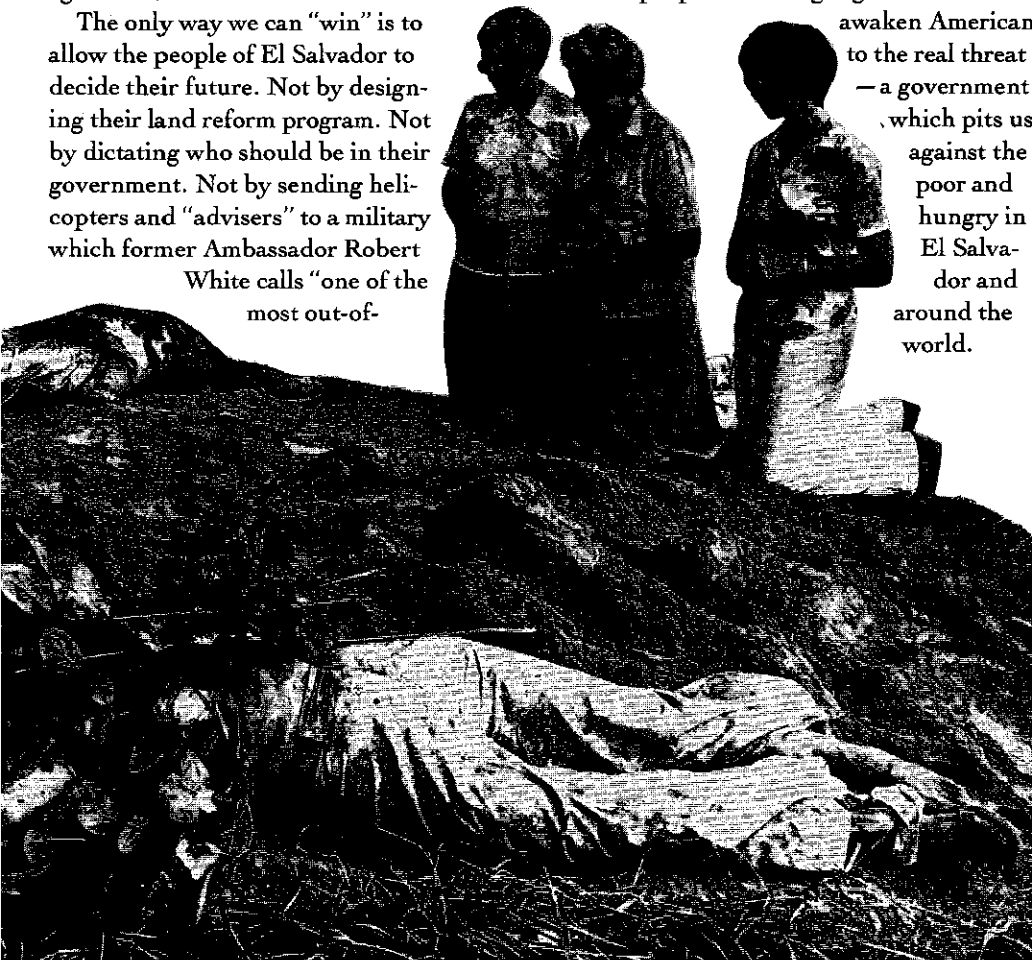
We must stop our government from sending weapons and "advisers" to an undemocratic government fighting against its own people. Working together, we can awaken Americans to the real threat — a government which pits us against the poor and hungry in El Salvador and around the world.



*The bodies of two women killed by security forces and dumped on a roadside.*

### Footnotes

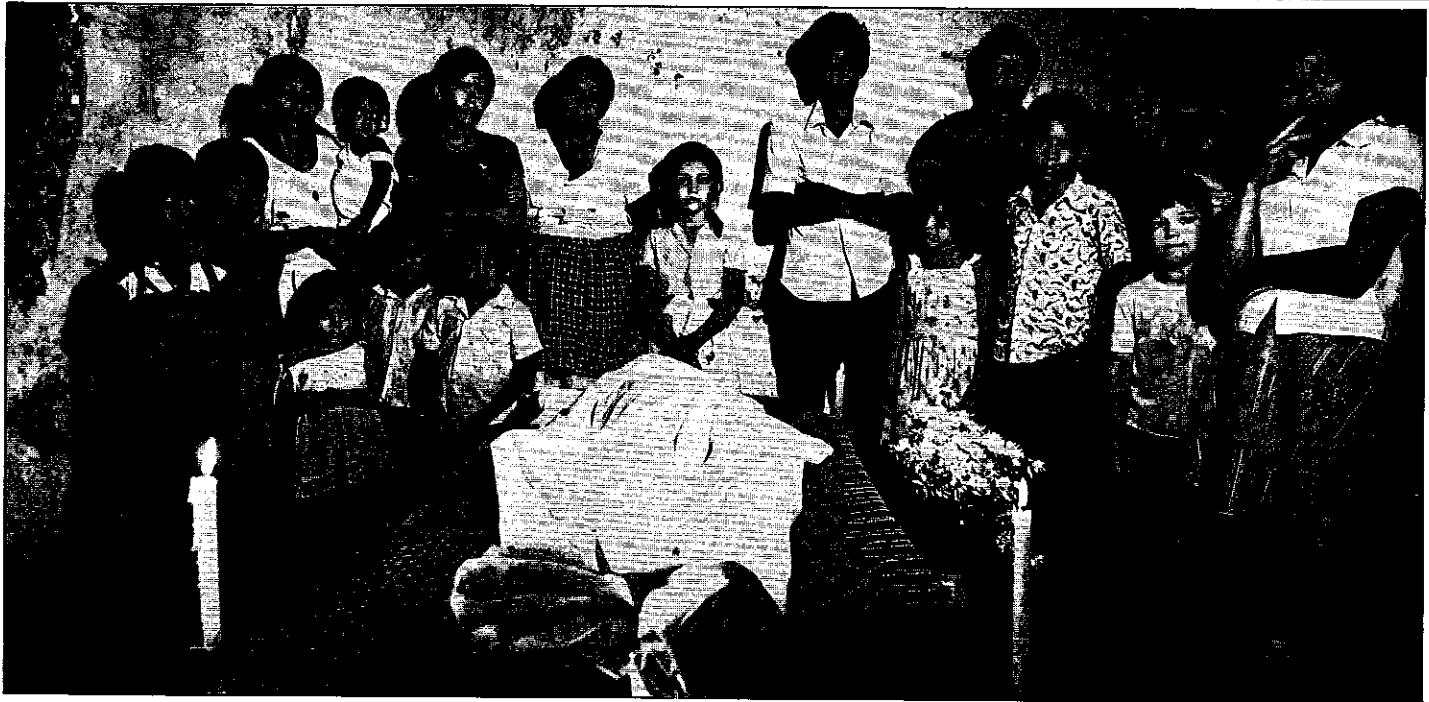
1. Warren Hoge, "Slaughter in Salvador: 200 Lost in Border Massacre," *The New York Times*, June 8, 1981, p. 6.
2. As of July 1981, according to Jim Morrell of the Washington-based Center for International Policy, over \$500 million in aid has been, or is likely to be, approved, including: U.S. AID, \$76.8 million; U.S. military aid, \$35 million; Food for Peace aid, \$30.9 million; International Monetary Fund, \$160 million; Inter-American Development Bank, \$101 million; and World Bank, \$77 million.
3. Socorro Juridico del Arzobispado de San Salvador, *Repression Carried Out by the National Army of El Salvador...*, October 1, 1980, p. 4.
4. January 15, 1981.
5. Letter to *New York Times*, December 28, 1980.
6. *Statistical Abstract of Latin America*, 1980, Vol. 20, table 110. See also, *El Salvador: Demographic Issues and Prospects*, World Bank, October 1979, p. 23.
7. *Central American 1981: A Report by Rep. Gerry Studds to the House Committee on Foreign Affairs*, February 1981, p. 29.
8. *NACLA Report*, July-August 1980, p. 17. See also *Washington Post*, December 18, 1980 and *Christian Science Monitor*, December 29, 1980.
9. Mac Chapin, "A Few Comments on Land Tenure and the Course of Agrarian Reform in El Salvador," June 1980 report, p. 20.
10. Laurence R. Simon and James C. Stephens, Jr., *El Salvador Land Reform 1980-1981: Impact Audit*, Boston: Oxfam-America, 1981, p. 70.
11. "Salvador Land 'Reform,'" *New York Times*, January 6, 1981. See also the Oxfam report above.
12. *The New York Times*, March 8, 1981.



*Salvadoran security forces.*

*Photographs by John Hoagland.*

*Government security forces were responsible for 80% of the killings last year.*



John Hoagland

## El Salvador Resource Guide

- To find the group closest to you that is working against U.S. intervention in El Salvador,** contact: Committee in Support of the People of El Salvador (CISPES), P.O. Box 12056, Washington, DC 20005, (202) 887-5019 or Inter-Religious Task Force on El Salvador, 475 Riverside Dr., Room 1020, New York, NY 10115, (212) 870-3014 or Religious Task Force on El Salvador, 1747 Connecticut Ave., NW, Washington DC 20009, (202) 387-7652.
- To organize a film showing,** order: *El Salvador: Revolution or Death* from Unifilm in New York, (212) 686-9890 or

San Francisco, (415) 864-7755. *El Salvador: Another Vietnam?*, a videotape, and *The Seeds of Liberty* (a new film on the role of the church in El Salvador) from Catalyst Media in New York, (212) 620-3028.

- To learn more,** read: *El Salvador Land Reform 1980-1981*, \$3.50 from Oxfam-America, 302 Columbus Ave., Boston, MA 02116. *Legislative Update on El Salvador*, published every 10 days by Coalition for a New Foreign and Military Policy, 120 Maryland Ave. NE, Washington DC 20002, (202) 546-8400. CISPES publishes *El Salvador Alert!* (\$5/6 months) and distributes books and pamphlets. Write for their list.

"El Salvador: The False Promise — and Real Violence — of Land Reform," *Food Monitor*, Jan-Feb 1981 (\$2.50 from 350 Broadway, New York, NY 10013).

*Aid as Obstacle: Twenty Questions about our Foreign Aid and the Hungry*, by Frances Moore Lappé, Joseph Collins, David Kinley (excellent background on U.S. aid), \$5.85 postpaid from IFDP, 2588 Mission St., San Francisco, CA 94110.

*Reagan and El Salvador: Roots of War*, a 100-page clippings packet, \$6.50 postpaid from Data Center, 464 19th St., Oakland, CA 94612. Bulk discount available.

*Written by Nick Allen /IFDP  
Design by Kerry Tremain  
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Fourth Printing: July 1981*

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