

Death squads up ante in El Salvador

By John Clements

OAKLAND, CA

EL SALVADOR IS "THE MOST hazardous assignment in the world," *Newsweek* correspondent Beth Nissen said in the *Columbia Journalism Review* last summer. The *New York Times'* Alan Riding is under a death threat there. Washington radio reporter Rene Temeson has disappeared, and Mexican journalist Ignacio Rodriguez was gunned down by a sniper.

So it was no surprise that the news of the Nov. 27 murder of five members of the executive committee of the Revolutionary Democratic Front (FDR) came in bare-bones wire services reports without bylines. And the intimidation of journalists is but one indication of the extreme sensitivity on both sides of the unfolding conflict in Central America to how events are reported and perceived in the U.S.

Was it a coincidence that the Salvadorean right chose Thanksgiving Day—when most Americans' attention was elsewhere—to move on the above-ground leaders of the opposition? Or that the latest attempt against the life of junta moderate Colonel Adolfo Majano took

place on Nov. 4, the day of the U.S. elections? The answers to those questions remain speculative. But some things we know for sure:

- Dozens of workers, peasants and students are killed every day by Salvadorean government troops and right-wing death squads. On Dec. 4 four American women—two of them nuns—disappeared.

- The five leaders of the legal opposition organization were abducted from a press conference Nov. 27, and when their bodies turned up later in the day it was apparent that they had been tortured before they were killed. Forty other people seized at the same time have not been heard from since.

- Those reform-minded members of the government who have not been either killed or purged have either gone over to the left or fled the country. Col. Majano, a leading force behind the Oct. 15, 1979, military coup that ousted strongman General Carlos Romero and a major voice for reform, left El Salvador hours after the bodies of the leftist leaders turned up. Many say he will never return.

- The Salvadorean army failed after several weeks to drive guerrillas out of the northern province of Morazan. It was met by what one army officer described

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The junta's troops are out-numbered, but well equipped.

ISRAEL

Weizman stakes a claim on the center

By David Mandel

JERUSALEM

IT WAS GOOD POLITICAL THEATER, but Ezer Weizman's vote against the government in a parliamentary no-confidence motion and his subsequent expulsion from Menahem Begin's Herut—the leading coalition party—were really no surprise.

Ever since he resigned as defense minister six months earlier amid biting criticism from Begin and finance minister Yigael Hurvitz, Weizman had been an outsider. He had not actively tried to mobilize support within the government. Instead he waited without burning his bridges, cultivating allies to be called on in case the ruling coalition disintegrated on its own or Begin's illness became more serious, and occasionally doing something to keep himself in the limelight.

The last of these antics was the blunder of joining a Jimmy Carter campaign flight a few days before the U.S. election. Even those who criticized Weizman for the step—and his friends did not—would have had to forgive him if Carter had won. But Carter lost, and it was time for the former general to take drastic action at home.

Weizman has a reputation for impulsiveness, but a close look at the political context of his final break with the Likud—as it is now constituted—reveals a keen sense of timing:

- The no-confidence vote itself (which the government survived 57-54) was sponsored by both the Labor opposition and the extreme right, so Weizman successfully avoided tying himself down to any particular view.

- The issue cited in the motion was inflation—unpopular among almost all sectors of the population. Less than a week before the vote, the consumer price index for October was announced—a rise of 11 percent in one month that translated into an annual rate of 250 percent.

- Begin had just returned from a singularly unsuccessful trip to the U.S., where he failed to win an audience with President-elect Reagan but managed to

peevish liberal members of the Jewish establishment by handing out "Jabotinsky Medals" to extreme-right Christian fundamentalist leaders.

- The religious coalition parties had reached new lows in public esteem. One is embroiled in a major scandal, with the minister of religious affairs under investigation for giving and taking bribes; the other is currently trying to exploit its hold on the fragile ruling coalition to push through parliament a medieval law that would make autopsies and organ transplants nearly impossible.



Menahem Begin

- The Labor Party, in the final weeks before its convention, was experiencing a bitter leadership fight between old rivals Shimon Peres and Yitzhak Rabin.

- The West Bank was undergoing a flash of turmoil for the first time in months, with demonstrations and shootings following the shutdown of "Palestine Week" at Birzeit University—an annual cultural-political event that passed quietly in previous years when it was left alone. Weizman's more hawkish opponents had blamed the unrest of last spring on the defense minister's "lenient" policy, and credited the subsequent "quiet" to the hard line taken since. But with 12 Birzeit student leaders in jail and incidents continuing, the tension apparently was sufficient to cause the Israeli High Court to postpone the scheduled announcement of its decision on the appeals of exiled West Bank mayors Fahd Kawasma and Mohammed Milhem.

- Finally, both despite and because of the utter collapse of Yigael Yadin's Dem-

ocratic Movement for Change (DMC) after it won 15 out of 120 seats in 1977, there are plenty of leaders who aspire to occupy the political center in Israel. The polls that indicate Labor could now win an outright majority for the first time ever may be deceiving, since the "undecided" category consistently runs a close second. But since none of the other centrists has made his or her intentions clear Weizman's move gives him a head start.

Weizman was explicit about his intentions of forming a new election list. He even challenged potential partners to stand up and join him, singling out two popular but controversial ex-generals by name: Moshe Dayan, who played a key role in nudging Begin during the Camp David negotiations but quit the government a year ago, and Yitzhak Rabin, who presumably will lose the battle to control the Labor Party. Also "invited" were some of the Likud's liberal faction, who share Weizman's criticism of the Begin government's extremism. Other potential candidates are members of the splintered DMC who have not yet found new homes in the two major blocs.



Ezer Weizman

It is far too early to assess Weizman's chances of putting together a list credible enough to overcome the stigma of the Yadin-DMC fiasco in 1977. His electoral strategy will be the same as theirs: to win enough seats that neither of the two large blocs is strong enough to form a coalition without him. Israel's proportional system is made for such a strategy—the National Religious Party has used it successfully—but arithmetic bad luck

has kept it from working for the DMC or other centrist, breakaway attempts of the past.

It is also too early to predict the ideology of Weizman's new party, assuming it takes shape. Both he and most of his potential partners are pragmatists, anxious to hold or at least share power and flexible enough to bend with its balance. But broad themes can be distinguished:

- For one, Weizman, Dayan and most of the other Israeli "centrists" do not share the extreme right's mystical-nationalist attachment to territory. They would be willing to give up such symbols as the settlements if pressures from the U.S., Egypt and perhaps Saudi Arabia and Jordan could subdue the Palestinians to their liking.

- The centrists would favor a neo-colonial solution to the Israel-Palestine conflict, in which Israel is spared the duties of direct military rule but continues to benefit as an economically dominant power in the region, able to exploit Arab labor and markets in the currently occupied territories and—if possible—beyond.

- Inseparable from this regional vision is a global one that sees Israel—and its future Middle Eastern allies—firmly tied to U.S. interests.

- Economically, the centrists are tied to the pragmatic Israeli capitalists who would like to see the country smoothly integrated into the world market. To achieve this, given the current mess, they recognize the need to drastically reduce military spending and to lower workers' real wages (which have already dropped by between 8 and 14 percent in the last year, according to different estimates).

There are potential flaws in the centrist solution: If peace, on Weizman's terms, can be achieved despite long odds, Israel's workers, freed from the threats of war and terrorism, will be even more unwilling to pay the price of "economic recovery." It was workers' anger that kicked Labor out of power in 1977, and domestic issues are the source of the Likud's unpopularity today.

Nevertheless, a broadly defined, centrist consensus does exist now in Israel, and ideologically it extends beyond those who are floating between the two major blocs to include the Likud's "moderates" and Labor's "pragmatists." Though Weizman may or may not succeed in pulling it all together at this juncture, in the medium range convergence around something close to his views seems likely.

IN THE NATION

PRIVACY

"Greetings" from the state red squad

By George L. Corsetti

DETROIT

AFTER ILLEGALLY SPYING ON citizens for decades, the Michigan state police have been ordered to find 38,000 individuals and 400 organizations and give them free copies of their "subversive" files. In a precedent-setting decision, state circuit court Judge

James Montante told the police to use its drivers' license computer bank to locate the victims of surveillance, and to publish newspaper announcements of the file release for those who cannot be located directly.

The state police mailing comes after years of citizen protest and legal wrangling. In 1974 the Michigan Association for Consumer Protection learned that it was being investigated by state police. Ouraged, the group sued Gov. William

Milliken and the police. The state admitted the probe of the suburban-based consumer group was illegal, but denied the existence of any widespread spy operation. Yet Gov. Milliken ordered the police to begin destroying the "red squad" files. Judge Montante stopped the file shredding.

The state's attempt to destroy the files, coupled with other revelations of FBI and CIA spying, alerted Michigan activists to the far-reaching implications of the consumer group's suit, and the case was expanded to include anti-war and labor activists, socialists and other dissidents. The Detroit Police Department and Mayor Coleman Young were added as parties to the litigation.

In 1976 Judge Montante ruled that Michigan's anarchist and subversive statutes—under which the spying ostensibly had been justified—were unconstitutional. He ordered the "red squads" disbanded and instructed the defendants to work out a method of notifying the victims of surveillance. Now, after four

Anti-war and student groups were, of course, objects of surveillance. But more recent entries showed a growing concern with consumer groups, environmentalists, women, gays and pro- and anti-bus-ing advocates. During the recession of 1974-75, the Detroit police began to focus on the unemployed. As one red squad officer testified, "If those people decide, because of their thinking or this concern for unemployment, to go to the streets and demonstrate, we become involved."

The police also worked closely with corporate security personnel. Files subpoenaed from the Chrysler Corporation, for example, showed a meticulous record-keeping system strikingly similar to the police department's. The files included names and license plate numbers of persons who distributed literature at plant gates, copies of the literature, photos, news clips and organizational charts of dissident groups as well as the personal and political affiliations of employees and non-employees. The corporation's security officers, many of whom had previously been employed by police intelligence units, admitted to cooperating with law enforcement agencies and providing them with information.

The Michigan State Police, in turn, admitted giving information from their "subversive" files to Panax Corporation for use in making background checks on employees and job applicants. (Panax is a conservative Michigan-based newspaper chain whose publisher has been under investigation by the Justice Department and the Securities & Exchange Commission for allegedly acting as an agent of South Africa in attempting to manipulate U.S. public opinion by acquiring the *Washington Star* and *Sacramento Union*.)

Unlike the state police, the Detroit police have yet to establish a timetable for the release of their files, which they admit exceed 100,000. Mayor Young, himself a victim of McCarthy-era witch hunts, has been reluctant to make the files public, arguing that damage suits by surveillance victims would bankrupt the city. Young promised to reveal the names of informants, but so far has failed to do so.

George L. Corsetti is a Detroit lawyer. People who have been politically active in Michigan or believe they may have a file are asked to contact the National Lawyers Guild, 1035 St. Antoine, Detroit, MI 48226, (313)963-0843. The Guild's Political Surveillance Project has agreed to assist victims in obtaining more information and in referring them to attorneys to process damage claims.

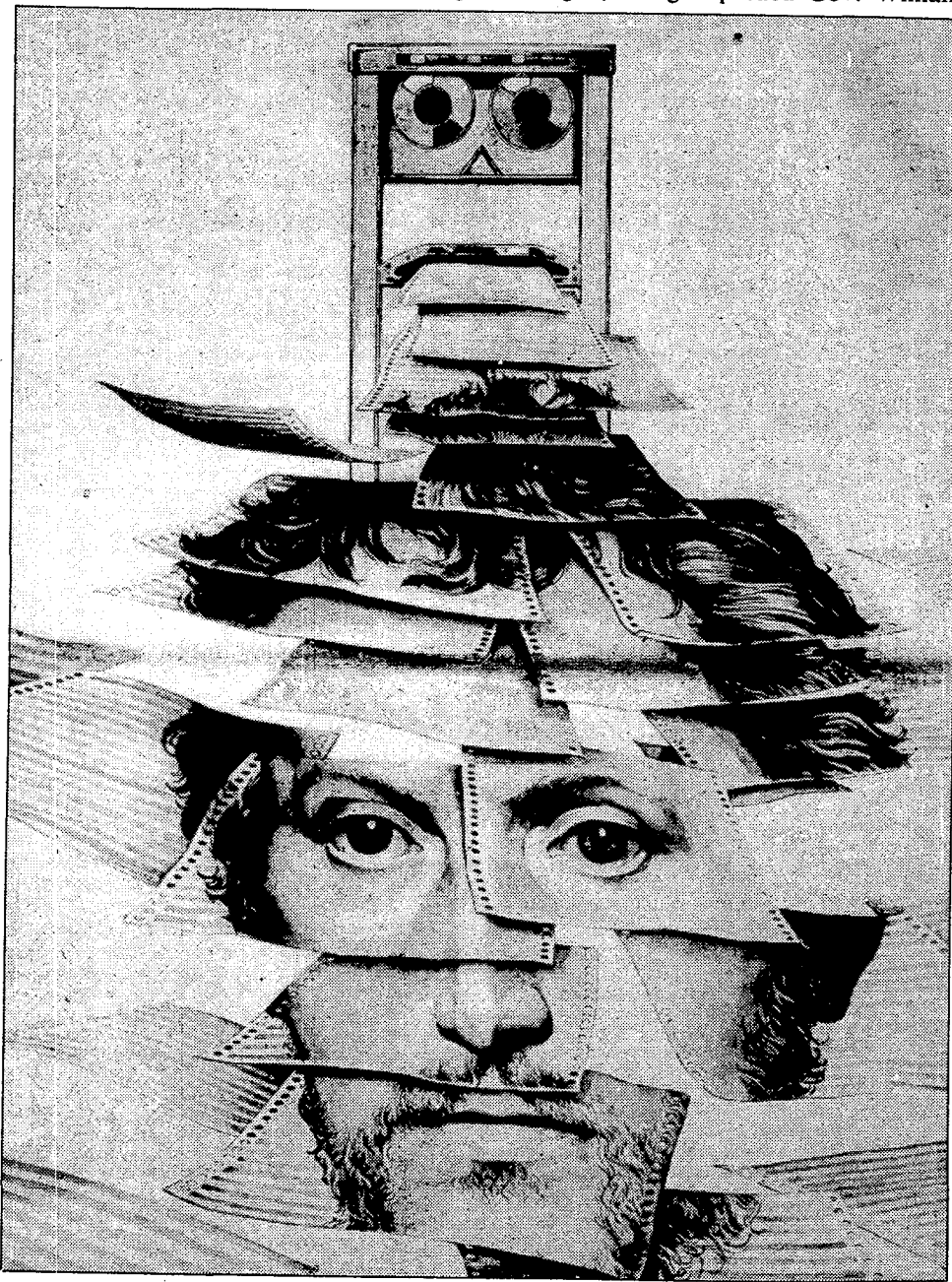
Michigan police must notify 38,000 people in their files.

years of delays and foot-dragging, the state police are finally going ahead with their mailing. (The first batch of notices went out on Nov. 13.)

Proceedings before the court revealed the existence of thousands of secret files that showed city and state police to have been an integral part of a political spying apparatus that included not only the FBI, the CIA and other federal agencies, but also private corporations, which used the information to blacklist dissidents.

Attendance at a demonstration or forum was often enough to open a file, some of which date back to the '30s and '40s. Information—often erroneous—came from banks, utilities, employers, landlords, newspapers and other public sources, as well as from paid police informants.

While FBI and CIA files have been accessible for years through the federal Freedom of Information Act, the Michigan files offer a rare opportunity to view local police surveillance operations. It appears that city and state police were primary information gatherers, and that the results of their work were passed on to other agencies, such as the FBI, on a regular basis.



POLICE

New Orleans cops kill four suspects

By Gary Modenbach

NEW ORLEANS

FACED WITH PROTESTS FROM community groups over the police shootings of four blacks, New Orleans police chief James Parsons resigned Nov. 24. The shootings took place during an investigation of the murder of city patrolman Gregory Neupert, whose body was found Nov. 8 in a residential area near the Algiers-Fischer housing project on the west bank of the Mississippi River.

Though police stated that they had no significant clues as to the identity of Neupert's killer, teams of police immediately began searching the Fischer project and

the black neighborhoods surrounding it and allegedly harassing young people in the area.

On Nov. 11 police shot and killed Raymond Ferdinand, who allegedly was resisting arrest. Although police claim that Ferdinand pulled a knife on them, a young woman who was with Ferdinand when he was stopped stated that the knife was sheathed and inside a small bag. Police have given conflicting accounts of why Ferdinand was being arrested, first stating that he was a suspect in the Neupert killing, then saying that he had thrown down a bottle of pills when they approached him.

Then, on Nov. 13, James Billy Jr. and Reginald Miles, two suspects in the killing of officer Neupert, were shot to death

during early-morning raids on their homes. Sherry Singleton, who lived with Miles, was also killed.

Police said that all three of the victims had attempted to shoot at police and that the officers fired in self-defense. But roommate Kim Landry said that she saw Billy standing with his back to the police and his hands above his head as she was being led out of the house shortly before he was shot. Neighbors of Miles and Singleton said that they heard Singleton pleading, "Don't shoot."

On the day that Billy, Miles and Singleton were killed, Chief Parsons held a press conference in which he indicated that there would be no investigation of police conduct in the shootings. Parsons also said that police had "definite proof" that Billy and Miles had killed officer Neupert, that this proof would be released to the public at a later date and that as far as he was concerned the "case is closed." To date, no "definite proof" has been produced.

Parsons' statements further inflamed public opinion in the black community, which was already concerned about the police shooting of Ferdinand and the Labor Day shooting of Lawrence Lewis Jr. in the Desire Street project. Parsons

quickly became the focus of protests by both black and white community groups. Rose Loving, a school board member and Algiers-Fischer area resident, demanded a complete investigation and explanation of the shootings.

On Nov. 20, Mark Lane and Mary Howell, attorneys for the family of Sherry Singleton, held a press conference at which they stated that they had witnesses to verify that Reginald Miles was in a bar five blocks away at the time of officer Neupert's murder. Later that night, a group of protestors led by a small militant group, the Liberation League, shouted down Chief Parsons at an anti-crime forum sponsored by a local good-government organization.

On Saturday, Nov. 22, a group called the Concerned Citizens of Algiers called for a boycott of all stores in the central business district if Parsons was not removed from office in 72 hours. On Monday morning, Parsons announced his resignation. Rumor has it that he will be replaced by Sidney Cates, a black ex-police officer who currently heads the Housing Authority of New Orleans.

Gary Modenbach is a New Orleans activist.