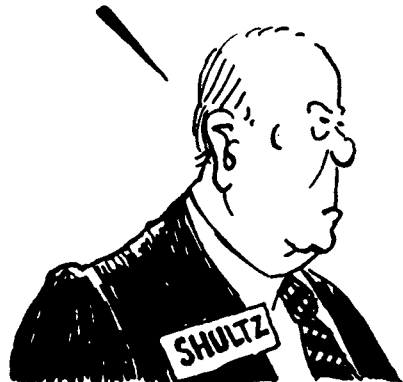


EDITORIAL

THE NICARAGUAN REGIME IS A DANGEROUS
AND SUBVERSIVE FORCE IN THE
REGION



AND NEGOTIATE
WITH THE
OPPOSITION



BUT THAT'S WHAT
THEY JUST
ANNOUNCED



WE WILL NOT ACCEPT THEM UNTIL THEY'RE
WILLING TO FORSWEAR FOREIGN ARMS,
ADVISORS AND ADVENTURES...



SEE HOW DEVISIVE
THEY ARE



WASSERMAN

The buried issue in Central America

Nowhere is the cynical dissimulation of the Reagan administration's policy on Central America more apparent than in its attitude toward elections in El Salvador and Nicaragua. Hailing the pointless elections in El Salvador as "a practical yardstick of democracy," Secretary of State George Shultz declines (in the words of the *New York Times*) to say that the United States will stop supporting the *contras* in Nicaragua should the Sandinistas be confirmed in power by an honest election on November 4.

For Shultz, the March 25 El Salvador election is a model of democracy because it will be "swarming" with observers—indeed, Shultz told the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, there will be "more observers than voters." But in El Salvador, as the *Wall Street Journal* (February 27) reports, the reason for the swarming is clear. It is an exercise in Reagan-style media hype, an election that "many citizens" see as "a meaningless exercise undertaken more to please the 'Yanquis' than to improve conditions." As one citizen quoted by the *Wall Street Journal* observes, "They're having this election for propaganda. Because the United States wants it. Because that's the way Ronald Reagan will send us money."

But the election will make little difference inside El Salvador, as the *Wall Street Journal* notes, because no matter who wins, the army will hold and exercise power. A victory by Jose Napoleon Duarte may lead to a coup. A victory by Roberto d'Aubuisson will only strengthen the death squads.

On all this, Shultz says only that the administration agrees with Congress on the need (as the *New York Times* puts it) "to end death squad activities in El Salvador and to foster a better criminal justice system"—as if the death squads were simply an informal way of cracking down on law breakers.

No such magnanimity for the Sandinistas. Their regime is "resisted" by the *con-*

tras, Shultz told the Senate Committee "because it betrayed its own revolution"—which, of course, the United States opposed anyway. In Nicaragua, he said, "the elections are one thing," but "there are many aspects of Nicaraguan behavior that are incompatible...with the kind of world we would like to see down there." A world, presumably, where death squads are seen as a form of criminal justice, and, therefore, where all opponents of the murderous regime in El Salvador are seen simply as criminal.

And that, of course, is the point. In the eyes of the Reagan administration, any attempt to overthrow the oppressive oligarchies of various Third World countries—and especially those in Latin America—is seen as a criminal conspiracy directed from abroad for the purpose of strengthening the world power of the Soviet Union and weakening the world power of the United States. So the bottom line is that it doesn't matter how many elections the Nicaraguans have, or how open and democratic they are. And it doesn't matter how irrelevant the El Salvador elections are or how active the death squads are. As long as Reagan is in office, we will support the oligarchs and oppose the revolutionaries.

An old story.

But there is nothing new in this. The Reagan administration is clearly more aggressive, more openly on the side of the reactionary military oligarchs and more hostile to the democratic aspirations of the people of Central America and other Third World nations than most recent administrations. But Reagan's policies are not much different in principle than those of his predecessors. And they are not opposed in principle by his loyal opposition in Congress, or by the leading contenders for the Democratic presidential nomination.

In Congress, even the liberals who have tried to whittle down the amount of aid proposed for El Salvador by the admini-

stration, or who have tried to stop, or restrict, Reagan's overtly covert war against Nicaragua, collapse when Secretary Shultz gets annoyed at their hinderance. In one such exchange last week, Shultz angrily declared, "I really don't understand you people. Here we have an area right next to us that a cross section of Americans on a bipartisan commission have studied carefully—really worked at it—and concluded it is in the vital interests of the United States... Now you're telling me that because there are problems, let's walk away."

"No, no," responded Rep. Sidney Yates (D-Ill.).

A similar exchange took place with Rep. David R. Obey (D-Wis.), who backed off from saying that negotiations should be encouraged in El Salvador between the rebels and the government.

But, of course, we should walk away. Or, rather, we should never have been there in the first place. Recently, many liberals and neoliberals have been saying that the supposed "lesson of Vietnam"—that we were "on the wrong side"—is wrong. In *Newsweek*, Meg Greenfield asks: "Were those now running the country 'the right side'?" But this misses the point. We were not on the wrong side—we were the wrong side.

In Vietnam, after the French lost the battle of Dien Bien Phu, the United States set up the South Vietnamese government that it supported in the ensuing civil war. Similarly, in Nicaragua, the *contras* could not have existed as a military force without encouragement and direction from the United States. And in El Salvador, as in Guatemala, the government could not have come to power and would not last long without overt or covert aid from the CIA and the administration.

Everyone who takes the trouble to think about it knows that Reagan administration talk about supporting democracy in Central America is the sheerest and most cynical hypocrisy. But in a showdown, Reagan is supported by most

liberals, some of whom may actually believe that democracy is the issue in Central America, and that the U.S. is on its side. The real issue in Central America, however, is not democracy but self-determination and national independence—without which democracy is impossible in any case. As in Vietnam, where the Vietnamese people first defeated French imperialism only to have to fight American imperialism for another 20 years, the people of Nicaragua and El Salvador are engaged in a struggle that is at bottom one for their own national sovereignty. If they cannot win that fight, they will never have a democracy.

Intervention is the issue.

That does not mean that the Sandinistas or the El Salvador rebels are democrats in the sense in which most Americans understand that term. We do believe that they represent the best hope for democracy in Central America. But even if we didn't we would oppose intervention by the United States, just as we would oppose intervention in our own country by any foreign power claiming to be acting in our best interests.

The underlying issue in Central America is not whether the Sandinistas have betrayed their own revolution, or whether the rebels in El Salvador and elsewhere are democrats. It is whether the United States, or any other country, has the right to determine for others what kind of society they will have. Yet this issue is virtually non-existent in public discourse.

In the coming election it should be a major focus of discussion. Democrats who oppose Reagan and his policies should be forced to confront this issue, not the ones framed by the administration. That is the lesson of Vietnam, where too many innocent liberals for too long were sucked into the debate on the wrong terms. Central America could well be another Vietnam. It would be better to prevent that than to live with its consequences.

LETTERS

In These Times is an independent newspaper committed to democratic pluralism and to helping build a popular movement for socialism in the United States. Our pages are open to a wide range of views on the left, both socialist and non-socialist. Except for editorial statements appearing on the editorial page, opinions expressed in columns and in feature or news stories are those of the author and are not necessarily those of the editors. We welcome comments and opinion pieces from our readers.

PARADOX

ROBIN BATES' LETTER AND YOUR REPLY (ITT, Feb. 8) hit on the fundamental paradox of the USSR: it is an autocracy with an enlightened social philosophy. Thus in the same country dissidents are sent to gulags and genuine progress in sexual equality and general welfare is made. On the day-to-day level the power of the state is enforced by various sorts of uniformed bullies whose only pleasure sometimes seems to be to shout "This is forbidden!" at hapless citizens; yet Russians openly break minor rules every chance they get. Russia is neither a socialist nor a "fascist state" as a definition for its system doesn't fit either.

Such is the power of ideas. Socialism may be only a ghost haunting the ruins of the revolution, but it is powerful enough to keep the system from being worse than it is, if nothing else.

About Farley Mowat's *The Siberians*, mentioned by Bates: while Mowat is good-natured and sincere—and quenches many silly stereotypes—he's naive. Mowat didn't know Russian and so was a captive of translators. He saw primarily what the authorities wanted him to see.

Whatever Mowat's faults, he's more honest than Hedrick Smith whose *The Russians* might've been definitive had he not prostituted himself to U.S. ruling class ideology. Smith uses *Time* magazine's gambit of drawing generalizations from anecdotes and passing off glibness as insight.

—Alex Shishin
Palo Alto, Calif.

ME-ME-SEX-SEX?

I PROTEST ERIC MANKIN'S ARTICLE (ITT, Feb. 22) on Masterpiece Theater. Day after day I write, talk, protest against nuclear power and bombs, against environmental pollution, against the Oligarchy that runs our country so badly—but in the evening, or for an hour at 1:00 p.m., I enjoy BBC's excellent drama on NET, or I read the classics.

Does Mankin expect me to avoid Shakespeare, Greek drama, Austin, Trollope, Dostoevsky, Tolstoy, Moliere, etc., because their works deal with kings? Must I forego *Don Giovanni*, *Aida* and other operas because they deal with royalty? Must I listen to the rasping rock'n'roll and join screaming teenagers in worship of drugged Presleys to grow up believing the ignorant yak of old Hollywood actors? Should my reading be limited to *Garp* and the vulgarity of much of modern prose—dealing with me-sex-greed-violence-me-sex-greed-sex-violence?

More to the point, why not compliment Big Biz when it spends money to raise the level of intelligence in our country—and then try to educate their board of directors: to waken them, as individuals, to the personal horror of nuclear war, or radiation spills from power plants? They too will be crisped or vomit and starve in the long winter. They too will have deformed grandchildren and suffer from diseases related to pollution. Speak to their profit motive by which they are turning us into a banana republic as they buy up land or water rights from poor farmers, as they sterilize our soil, as they give jobs to robots and thereby ultimately lose their money-making base. But do *not* damn

them for educating citizens.

Mankin ignored Cronin's tale of medicine in a mining town; and he does not recognize the power in a household of an Irish cook or Irish nursemaid! Besides, *The Irish R.M.* is delightfully funny and laughter is needed in this world.

—Frances Tyson
Las Vegas, N.M.

SUBLIMINAL

ERIC MANKIN'S APT COMMENTARY on Mobil Oil as the Medicis of public television (ITT, Feb. 22) neglected one of Mobil's most remarkable achievements: turning Dickens' *Nicholas Nickleby* into a commercial for Reaganomics. The play's theme is that society is, irremediably, a jungle and that there are many unscrupulous businessmen like Ralph Nickleby. Fortunately, however, there are also virtuous businessmen, like the charitable Cherryble brothers, who providentially pick Nicholas off the unemployment line to groom as their heir. Viewers were obviously meant to make the connection between the Cheerybles and today's virtuous businessmen like the executives of Mobil Oil.

Mobil was widely praised for its sponsorship of *Nicholas Nickleby* first on syndicated TV and in its recent repeat on PBS, as well as for its accompanying, low-key public service announcements. These appeals for charitable contributions to private programs serving deprived schoolchildren, the aged and handicapped were in precisely the areas where the Reagan administration has cut back public funding.

Thus the subliminal message of both the play and commercials was that social ills like the present high unemployment or inflated gasoline and heating prices are inevitable and can't be cured by government intervention. However, if the government simply cuts taxes and eliminates regulation to allow executives and large shareholders of companies like Mobil to make million-dollar yearly incomes, these corporate Cheerybles can be trusted to care for the truly needy.

—Don Lazere
San Luis Obispo, Calif.

COCKBURN

JUST FOR THE RECORD, I DIDN'T think it "improper" for Alexander Cockburn to accept a grant from the Institute for Arab Studies. I did think it a mistake for him not to discuss the matter with his editor and jointly determine when and whether disclosure was appropriate. Anyway, thanks for your good piece (ITT, Feb. 15), and know that we are pleased and proud to publish him in *The Nation*.

—Victor Navasky
Editor, *The Nation*

SURPRISE!

ENCLOSED FIND MY CHECK FOR A one-year subscription to your excellent paper.

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—Paul Moore
La Mesa, N.M.

APPRECIATION

ENCLOSED IS A CHECK FOR \$17.00 TO continue my student rate subscription for one more year. Also enclosed is a check for \$5 to express my appreciation for your work in producing one of the finest political publications I know. Reading news publications does not come naturally to me. For years I could read very little in this area as I found almost all papers either unreadable, uninformative or both. *In These Times* was a real godsend in this respect, as it manages to be both readable and informative and, as a union activist and a radio programmer, I find that *ITT* focuses on much of what I find useful to know. So thank you many times over.

—Joel Gordon
Madison, Wis.

TOO SIMPLE

KALAMU YA SALAAM'S ARTICLE (ITT, Feb. 1) has a number of excellent observations on being black in the city of New Orleans. The dual economy he describes, though, is a simplified model that fails to address the role of the large urban white working class. I am a white boy who has lived in the Lower Ninth Ward and "hacked taxis in the French Quarter" until I got "a 'good payin' job' toiling on the riverfront." Where do I fit in?

The failure to acknowledge the existence of white working people (or Latin and Indochinese workers) makes it a lot easier to point fingers, but harder for organizing. Class solidarity is a messy issue that Ya Salaam has avoided.

It is interesting that Washington, D.C., a city that does fit very closely the colonial dual society model (a black service economy with virtually no white working class), has developed a much higher degree of political unity and black economic mobility than New Orleans. Perhaps if the class and race lines were as congruent in New Orleans as Ya Salaam implies he would have an easier time.

—Ian Christoplos
Washington

EDB

IN RECENT WEEKS, INCREASING ATTENTION has been focused on the almost daily discovery of ethylene dibromide (EDB) residues in a wide variety of American food products such as flour, cake mix, bread and oranges. Several unanswered questions remain about EDB, such as how much of our grain supply contains this chemical. But some conclusions can already be drawn:

- EDB is an extremely powerful carcinogen in laboratory animals and a probable human carcinogen. The EPA estimates that a lifetime exposure to EDB at 31 ppb [particles per billion] would result in 750,000 excess cancers. Residues in some grain products have now been found as high as 5,400 ppb and up to 2,000 ppb in the pulp of oranges. EDB is known to cause heritable genetic mutations and reproductive effects, including male sterility.

- The National Cancer Institute determined EDB to be a carcinogen 10 years ago. Failure to cancel the use of the product years ago resulted from the abuses of former high-level EPA officials and chemical and food industry influence. Even without future use of EDB on grain, residues are likely to remain in the food supply for many years.

But the critical question is how many more EDBs will occur in the future? Roughly 85 percent of the pesticides used in the U.S. have never been adequately tested to determine if they cause cancer, and an even greater 92 percent have not been tested for causing genetic mutations.

Reform legislation now pending before the Congress (HR 3818) sponsored by, among others, Sen. William Proxmire (D-Wisc.) and Representative George Brown (D-Calif.) would open up the pesticide decision-making process to the public and require complete testing of all pesticides for their chronic health effects. A strong message needs to be sent to the Congress that the public simply will no longer tolerate cancer-causing chemicals in their food, their drinking water or their workplace.

—Albert H. Meyerhoff
San Francisco

CORRECTION

A typographical error in "Malcolm's Message" (ITT, Feb. 22) misrepresented Malcolm X's political transformation upon his return from Mecca. The sentence in question should have read: "Malcolm came to see whites organizing in white communities as a basis for multi-racial unity."

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