



TOXICS

Since May 10 many Ponca City toxic victims have been camping out on the state Capitol grounds.

Editor's note: About a year ago In These Times' editors decided to expand our coverage of the environment for two reasons. First, we had come to believe that some of the greatest untold stories of the '80s were environmental—from pesticide poisoning of our nation's groundwater to chemical contamination of the Atlantic Ocean. And second, the toxic trail of one story would inevitably lead us to other, often more appalling, ones.

Perhaps no one knows these stories better than Adrienne Anderson. In her job as western director of the National Toxics Campaign (NTC), she has crisscrossed the country over the past four years compiling data, conducting research and, most important, organizing victims of environmental poisoning. Below, she tells the tale of Ponca City, Okla., where she is currently helping organize residents faced with nightmarish health problems caused by exposure to toxic chemicals spewed by Conoco, the city's largest employer.

By Adrienne Anderson

PONCA CITY, OKLA.

HERE, IN THE HEART OF THE BIBLE BELT, some ungodly things are going on. In this town that is home to more than 50 churches and 25,000 people, residents of the south side are being poisoned by their friendly neighborhood employer, Conoco, which is owned by duPont.

As if in a low-budget horror movie, the area is swamped with toxic sludge. The gooey, Halloween-orange stuff overwhelms creeks, ditches and sewers, bubbles up in parks and yards, pours through foundation walls to fill basements and sends up a blue flame when ignited with a match. In some homes, the sludge seeps up walls to drip from bedroom, kitchen and living-room ceilings. This low-budget horror show is presented under the big-budget aegis of the petrochemical industry and produced with the supervision of local elected officials. The profits are staggering.

Operating in Ponca City since the '30s, Conoco employs several thousand local residents and, as the only industry in town, dominates the local economy and political structure. Old-timers say that Conoco has kept other major industries out of Ponca to

The saga of Ponca City Oklahoma's deadly sludge

maintain control of the area's labor force. Conoco's refinery was purchased by duPont in 1981 and, according to local workers, is now duPont's largest and most profitable refinery.

The nearby south Ponca neighborhoods have been paying the price. Sandwiched between Conoco and the Arkansas River, these neighborhoods were built atop a spring-laden strip of riverbank that originally provided drinking water from a public fountain. But the fountain has been choked with sludge for years, and the adjoining park is now ankle-deep in toxic soup.

A deadly decimal point: Just before Christmas, Ponca City resident Mae Morgan had called me for help in my position as western director of the National Toxics Campaign (NTC) and described the smelly goo, the nearby refinery and the diseases among her neighbors. "The state tested the sludge over a year ago, but wouldn't give us the results," she said. An Oklahoma attorney had more samples taken, "but we never heard back from him either, so we had our own tests done." The lab analyses were back, but she didn't know what they meant.

"Read me the numbers," I said.

"Benzene, five zero zero zero point zero," she said.

"No, that can't be; the decimal point's in the wrong place," I replied.

When Morgan sent me the numbers I found out that it wasn't the decimal point, but the people of Ponca City who were in the wrong place. I compared notes with NTC board member Linda Burkhart, a victim of petrochemical poisoning in the Casper, Wyo., subdivision of Brookhurst, which is known as one of the worst toxic nightmares on record.

Burkhart was aghast. "Five thousand parts per billion of benzene in someone's home? Oh, my God, it's worse than Brookhurst," she said.

According to standard toxicology tests, benzene is a carcinogen that also causes birth defects and genetic mutations. The EPA's recommended levels of benzene to protect human health is zero. Besides benzene, the samples included more than 20 other pollutants, including trichloroethylene and arsenic. In addition to their toxicity, many of these chemicals are highly flammable and can explode on contact with the air.

"What should we do?" asked Morgan by phone from Ponca City.

"Call everyone you know and don't know in the area. Form a group, publicly release these results and get ready for a big fight," I advised.

The next day, the Ponca City Toxic Concerned Citizens (PCTCC) was born.

Troops mobilized: In subsequent months the group traded evidence of south Ponca devastation for the National Toxics Campaign's expertise in fighting polluters and the government: medical literature on the chemicals' health effects, copies of the laws, guides on how to use the Freedom of Information Act and other resources to address the community's poisoning.

Within weeks, the PCTCC grew from three founding families to several hundred, headquartered in Morgan's health-products store just two blocks from Conoco. It made an ideal locus for activity, as members could pick up new assignments and discuss the latest lies emanating from Conoco and state agencies. Folks who were once homemakers and retirees soon became lay experts in hydrology, chemistry and medicine.

Invited by the PCTCC to speak at a public meeting on the issue in February, I decided it was time to get a first-hand look at the situation. I thought I was toxic shock-proof, having seen the worst of corporate behavior, government collusion with polluters and EPA insanity in the course of my work with the National Toxics Campaign (formerly the

National Campaign Against Toxic Hazards). But upon visiting the city and its toxic sludge, I couldn't believe my eyes. Atop one poisoned home, a sign attempted description: "Love Canal, Oklahoma." But after a first-hand look at the poisoned town, I thought to myself, "This place makes Love Canal look like a health spa."

Touring the perimeter of Conoco's giant facilities, there could be no question that Conoco was the source of south Ponca City's toxic woes, despite the company's denials. PCTCC members ask, "Who are we supposed to think caused this, the Dairy Queen across town?" Some of the company's more than 600 storage tanks are badly damaged and leaking, including two bordering the residential areas that are surrounded by thick pools of waste. The "troublesome groundwater problem," in the company's phraseology, "is not Conoco's responsibility." Yet the company is now sucking sludge up from the neighborhood under state orders.

Conoco's operations include several hazardous-waste evaporation ponds, a toxic-sludge farm and three incinerators. Effluents from Conoco's evaporation ponds still flow southward in a tributary commonly known by the Ponca Indians as "Stink Creek," toward their tribal lands at White Eagle, six miles away. This is how Dan Jones of the tribe described a long-held folk remedy for ridding the tribes' pets of fleas and ticks: "We throw them into Stink Creek for a swim."

About a decade ago, I was told by tribal members, the Indians' community well at White Eagle was inexplicably closed, and Ponca City built a water line out to them. They say that the tribe is now being billed more than \$30,000 a year for the alternative water. They are looking upstream to Conoco, wondering whether the official explanation for closing the well—excess salinity—really holds water.

Cattle graze along the fence line of the sludge farm, beneath posted signs saying, "Warning: may be potentially harmful." Area Conoco workers say that much of the toxic sludge is trucked in from Conoco's Denver refinery.

Vowing not to eat any locally produced beef while in town, I came upon yet another zoning disaster: a dozen trailer homes wedged between Conoco's sludge farm and its barrel recycling operations, where hundreds of 55-gallon drums are piled 20 feet high, draining residues of toluene and several other toxic agents.

Just an Okie drawl? In viewing videotapes of PCTCC meetings before coming to town, I had been struck by the halting speech of many of the residents. I wondered if they were experiencing solvent exposure—slurred speech, short-term memory loss, brain damage.

It soon became apparent that this was only the surface of Ponca's public health disaster. Southsiders are suffering a variety of ill effects commonly associated with chemical poisoning. During a "toxic tour" I made, fully garbed in protective equipment, I was swarmed by families from throughout the area who showed me, among other things, their gruesome rashes, bruised-looking legs and skin cancers. Mothers with small babies complained of going through boxes of Kleenex daily. Many older children are on allergy shots. "Can this be from the chemicals?" each resident would ask me.

A typical tale: Charles and Peggy Holick abandoned their family home on the recommendation of the city's fire marshall. Holick began corresponding with Conoco in Janu-

ary 1986, asking how he could correct the sludge problem in his basement. "This Conoco guy came out to take a look," says Holick, "and told me the discoloration of the water was due to the juniper berries dropping from the tree in the backyard."

Later Holick received a letter from John L. "Pete" Dimond, Conoco refinery manager, offering to loan a sump pump for the sludge, "as a neighborly jester" (sic). Not seeing this as a reasonable remedy, Holick says he asked, "Is it, or is it not, safe for us to live in this house?" Another letter arrived in December 1986 that again offered the sump-pump solution, but with this caveat: "Conoco will of course require that you sign a release of any and all claims against Conoco with respect to the house or your occupancy of the house."

While the Holicks helped in the early formation of PCTCC, Conoco continued to take the low road, denying responsibility for the problem and investing in an expensive public-relations campaign. In one publication for its employees, Conoco claims that it's a "myth" that the sludge is toxic. It says it is simply a mixture of iron oxide and "harmless bacteria."

PCTCC demands buy-out: Last March the PCTCC proposed that Conoco buy out their poisoned homes, and clean up the polluted area. Conoco rejected the offer outright, claiming in its employee newsletter, the *Ponocoan*, that the proposal was "more like a ransom demand." Playing its last trump card, the PCTCC retained a Washington, D.C., legal team that included Anthony Roisman, former hazardous waste enforcement attorney for the U.S. Justice Department who later became director of Trial Lawyers for Public Justice "after Reagan quit sending cases over for us to prosecute." Of Conoco's rejection of the community's buy-out plan, Roisman, now in private practice, said, "It will never be this cheap again."

The entire affected area could have been purchased by the company for approximately \$10 million, according to the PCTCC. An Oil, Chemical and Atomic Workers International Union local leader at the refinery claimed that this amount represents a small percentage of the net profits anticipated at the refinery this year, and represents a tiny fraction of duPont's first quarter net income of \$590 million (a whopping 50 percent increase over its 1987 first quarter earnings).

The same month that Conoco-duPont rejected the buyout, a counter group to PCTCC, called "Poncans for Progress," sprang up. A pep rally held last April 21 was attended primarily by Conoco's employees and their families. Each donned the company's new red T-shirts with the message: "Conoco: Ponca City's Best Neighbor."

Coerced to attend the rally or take a sick day, Conoco workers reported various threats to their jobs if they did not support Conoco's "pump 'n' dump" solution to the south Ponca pollution. Sources within the company have said that more than \$37,000 was spent on the T-shirts, "enough to have relocated a whole bunch of us," said Sue Sober of the PCTCC.

Quality of life: The hardest part of my job with the National Toxics Campaign is watching as toxic chemical poisoning rips the American dream apart in town after town. South Poncans lost the enjoyment of their homes and neighborhood. There are no picnics in the park. Homeowners once proud of their investments have given up. "It doesn't do any good to repaint," one resident explains, "because that stuff from Con-

oco eats it right off."

For years residents had hoped that the air's "bad smell" wouldn't really hurt them, but evidence mounted to the contrary. Helen Burns tried to grow tomatoes one summer, but "they didn't get any bigger than a nickel," she says. Dr. Mark Roberts, a medical consultant for the Oklahoma Department of Health, warned residents early this year not to eat their garden vegetables. Today plastic daisies and tulips decorate front yards where real ones won't grow.

Rev. James Johnson, the minister of a small church in the poisoned zone, lost his 18-year-old daughter to leukemia and his stillborn son was riddled with birth defects. "Pretty soon, you start putting two and two together," he says. He is now co-leading the multiracial toxics group.

The south Ponca local elementary school has been closed since 1973, "after children fainted in droves from a toxic cloud hovering overhead," remembers Anna Sue Rafferty, who was then on the school board. "Our kids were marched up to the park where ambulances carted them off to the hospital." One resident, a sixth-grader at the time, added, "Yeah, it was a hot day, but it looked like snow was falling everywhere."

Death and dye-jobs: Bessie Dolezal's beauty shop sits just across the street from where Conoco dumps much of its wastes into a stream that the company calls "Outfall 003." Locals, however, know it as "Acid Creek." "It's funny," says Dolezal, "the state cosmetology board told me I can't run my beauty shop from here anymore, but the health department says it's safe to live here." She sighs in despair then says, "Oh well, most of my clients have died anyway."

After stripping away several layers of denial, residents finally face the unavoidable truth that their lives are indeed in jeopardy. At the PCTCC's public meeting last February, attended by nearly 1,000, Burkhart tearfully described the illnesses and deaths in her Brookhurst, Wyo., community, from exposures to lower levels of the same chemicals found in Ponca City's sludge. As the "expert," I then detailed the symptoms and chronic health effects of those chemicals, which cause leukemia, birth defects, liver and kidney disease, immune system breakdown, etc. An eerie silence haunted the auditorium, broken when residents stood to recount their own tragic stories of death and disease. One told of losing three of his seven children to cancer.

City's response: Ponca's City Commission, which is dominated by Conoco men, voted in March to dump their properties on the south side of Ponca City. "Too expensive to maintain," Mayor Carl Balcer said of the plan by which city-owned land will be sold for a dollar or given away to non-profit groups, such as local churches or the soccer club. At the same meeting the Commission refused to discuss the PCTCC's proposal for Conoco's buyout of the polluted area.

The City Commission isn't the only organization to turn its back on the problem. The *Ponca City News* is now selectively printing letters about the city's poisoning. None of the churches outside the immediately polluted area have offered any support, catering instead to what southsiders deride as "Conoco Christians."

The state of Oklahoma seems equally unresponsive to south Ponca's plight. Gov. Henry Bellmon denies the problem despite having seen—and smelled—the evidence himself. After brief exposures to south Ponca without protective respiratory gear, Bellmon

became sick and was unable to work for several days. Local headlines read, "Bellmon bedridden after sludge visit."

Shortly thereafter, Bellmon came under fire for a questionable land deal, with oil industry campaign contributors buying the governor's undistinguished farm land at three times the assessed value. Seeking support for its buy-out proposal, PCTCC noted that "we've asked nowhere near three times the assessed value for our properties," and urged the establishment of the "Governor Bellmon South Ponca City Relocation and Medical Trust Fund" with profits from the shady deal.

Undisclosed state of Oklahoma tests—obtained through the Freedom of Information Act in 1988, a year and a half after they were conducted—revealed that all 12 south Ponca areas sampled were saturated with toxic chemicals, with benzene levels up to 25,000 parts per billion in the Willow Springs Park. No one notified area residents of the dangers and health implications of the test results, however, leaving them to suffer prolonged exposures to the dangerous conditions in their homes.

The EPA: Once aware of the state's tests, Ponca City residents demanded EPA action, but the results were all too predictable: samples were taken improperly, broken and otherwise blotched. Repeated EPA tests suffered similar setbacks, which gave Conoco time to suck up incriminating evidence from the most contaminated areas.

Discounting independent evidence of contamination by solvents, heavy metals and hydrocarbons, EPA Region VI decided that the area doesn't qualify for Superfund cleanup monies due to a big-oil loophole exempting petroleum derivatives. Yet an opposite determination was made for the similar Brookhurst case in Region VIII. While Brookhurst is a Superfund site, Ponca City, with higher levels of toxins affecting more people, must await the good will of the company that poisoned them.

Outraged, the PCTCC urged EPA Administrator Lee Thomas to investigate its Region VI office. The reply, referred from Washington, D.C., back down to the Region VI office, contained an even more creative explanation for the area's contamination: "natural gas leaks from home appliances."

Setting up house at the Capitol: Seeking relief from the nauseating exposures and pointing the finger at Bellmon, the PCTCC took the governor up on his statements that the Poncans "could relocate themselves at any time." On May 10 the Ponca victims did just that, setting up tents at the Oklahoma state Capitol beneath Bellmon's window. The toxic refugees put up a billboard naming the new community: "Gov. Henry Bellmon South Ponca City Toxic Relocation Project."

That same day the governor said at a press conference, "They'll be gone when the first rain comes."

To show the National Toxics Campaign's support, I pitched my own tent with the toxic refugees. The first night Capitol security guards stopped by to warn us of the area's high crime rate. "Inside or outside the Capitol?" I wondered aloud to fellow campers. Secure in that answer, we all slept soundly under the stars.

Support poured in for the toxic refugees. Capitol workers brought down cafeteria leftovers. Postal workers, firefighters and Agent Orange-exposed veterans came to evening prayer vigils. Boxes of fruit were donated. Citizens from around the state joined the tent city with their own tents in support.

On day five of the encampment residents descended upon the Oklahoma Democrats' convention, gathering enough delegate support to overwhelmingly pass a resolution urging Bellmon to seek federal disaster aid for the immediate evacuation of south Ponca City.

Religious leaders from around the state began to respond with moral indignation. Father Jogues Epple, vicar of St. Paul's Episcopal Church in Clinton, Okla., is now mobilizing Christian support for justice in Ponca City, arguing that "the word 'Christ' means 'anointed in oil,' but I don't think our founders had Ponca's toxic sludge in mind."

Entering its third month, the tent city is taking on a more permanent character, with rocking chairs, a laundry line and enough munitions for an army. Still waiting on Bellmon to evacuate them, the PCTCC plans to stay. "We like it here," says Lester Burns, noting he hasn't taken a single sinus pill since moving to the Capitol. "We'll be here until Bellmon finds us someplace else to live."

So far, Bellmon has failed to act, despite the fact that elsewhere in the U.S. local residents have been evacuated in less dire situations. In one, Wyoming Gov. Mike Sullivan sought federal disaster area relief to evacuate hydrogen sulfide-exposed residents of Rawhide Village. In another, the Lowell City Council relocated residents with arsenic in back yards of their Massachusetts subdivision.

But cracks in the state's do-nothing policy have begun to form. On Memorial Day (day 20 of the toxic tent city), Oklahoma's Democratic State Treasurer Ellis Edwards announced that not enough had been done to help the Poncans. During a June meeting with the PCTCC and National Toxics Campaign, Edwards pledged to fund his own independent investigation of the Ponca City disaster.

Cracks are now appearing at the federal level as well. Since the PCTCC's formation the U.S. Justice Department has finally clamped down on Conoco for 15 years of Clean Air Act violations that the EPA had failed to enforce. But despite protests from PCTCC and NTC, Conoco will only have to pay a \$250,000 fine.

Can't go home again: Leaving Ponca City fills one with guilt, yet after each trip I return to Denver's infamous "Brown Cloud" breathing a heavy sigh of relief. For days afterward I lay on the couch watching *Leave It to Beaver* in an effort to block images of the horrors I've seen, and recuperate from the fevers, known to my friends as the "Ponca Pox."

The toxic poisoning of America has reached monumental proportions. Existing remedies are inadequate against the scale of the crisis. Ponca City, Love Canal, Brookhurst and Times Beach. The litany will continue until we, as a nation, adopt policies of toxic prevention, forcing polluters to eliminate the deadliest chemicals, alter hazardous processes, and substitute materials proven safe, before entering the stream of commerce to eventually poison our water, air and lives.

We cannot let corporations treat our communities as toxic toilets, aided by government agencies and abetted by elected paties for these polluters. Because the sad truth is that these toxic towns, once broken, cannot be put back together again. □

For more information on Ponca City's toxic disaster, contact Adrienne Anderson at (303) 333-9714.

Speaking of Duarte in the past tense and Salvador's future imperfect

By Chris Norton

SAN SALVADOR

LIKE A PATRIARCH IN ONE OF GABRIEL GARCIA Marquez' surrealistic novels, Salvadoran President Jose Napoleon Duarte, watching his world slowly crumble around him, also began to fall apart. Stricken by incurable cancer of the stomach and liver, he is unlikely to resume his post. His exit signals the end of an era in El Salvador, as well as a defeat for U.S. policy there.

Duarte and his Christian Democrats were the "third force," the pro-U.S. center that had eluded American strategists in Vietnam. Promising reform that would weaken the landed oligarchy and undercut the rising left, Duarte's 1984 election to the presidency convinced a skeptical U.S. Congress to increase aid. It also allowed the Reagan administration to deepen the war and temporarily put the FMLN guerrillas on the defensive.

Yet when the stricken Duarte bade a tearful farewell to his government at Ilopango Air Force Base (transfer site for secret contra arms shipments) and was flown on a huge Galaxy C-141 U.S. military plane to the heart of the Empire for treatment, he was already a defeated man.

His Christian Democratic Party, discredited by corruption charges, had been roundly

defeated by the rightist Arena Party in the March assembly elections. Arena now controls the assembly and is in a strong position to win the presidency next year.

The vote reflected widespread disillusionment with Duarte, who in 1984 had promised peace and economic recovery but instead had presided over a deepening war and continued economic deterioration.

Following the March election debacle, Duarte's party was hit by a split over who

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would be its presidential candidate next year. The two rivals were Julio Adolfo Rey Prendes, Duarte's former chief of staff and communications minister, and Fidel Chavez Mena, the former planning minister.

Rey, a hard-drinking, baggy-eyed, Chicago-style pol, had long ago maneuvered himself into control of the government's patronage apparatus and the party structure. But the U.S. Embassy, concerned that Rey was unelectable because of his circle's reputation for corruption, supported Chavez, a colorless but honest technocrat. Duarte, depressed and reclusive, stayed on the sidelines until the last minute, resisting the embassy's frantic efforts to get him to intervene on Chavez' behalf.

"Just the same": Already Duarte is being referred to in the past tense. This represents an astonishingly rapid descent for a man painted by the Reagan administration as indispensable to democracy in Central America. "The country is going on just the same," notes one Latin American ambassador. "Duarte's exit has made no difference at all."

Of course, "just the same" means not very well for the U.S. Duarte was Washington's "Great White Hope," the reformer who would turn the war around and be the Reagan administration's model for defeating left insurgencies. And Duarte started off to rave reviews. After his first year in office he was lauded by the U.S. media for having improved human rights, checked the guerrillas and tamed the army and the right.

Now, however, the guerrillas are stepping up their activities, a frustrated army is killing more civilians and the right is on the rise. To many observers, despite \$3 billion in U.S. aid, the polarization and violence of the early '80s seem to be returning.

"Duarte is a sad figure, a tragic figure," says a European diplomat. "He's a man who lived in a world of illusions. He wanted to be the first democratically elected president, and then he got there and he couldn't do anything."

When Duarte returned from exile in Venezuela in 1980 he joined a military dominated junta, rationalizing that his presence would help prevent a bloodbath. During this period military/rightist death squads ran wild, killing more than 30,000 suspected leftists. Although Duarte later said he was powerless to do anything about the squads, others in

Duarte frequently was praised for improving human rights, but the improvements were due more to outside pressure than to any reforms Duarte instigated.

his party disagreed. The party's progressive wing, led by Ruben Zamora, withdrew and eventually aligned with the guerrillas.

From then on Duarte argued that if he were elected president in 1984—rather than being appointed president of the junta by the military—he would have more power. Duarte promised to achieve peace through negotiation, address the structural causes of the conflict and respect human rights.

But quickly it became clear that even as the elected president Duarte did not have much real power. His idea of dialogue was for the guerrillas to lay down their arms and incorporate into the "democratic" system. When the rebels put forward their own demands Duarte quickly lost interest and yielded to pressure from the army and the U.S. Embassy, ending the dialogue after only two meetings in 1984.

The U.S. main man: Although many reforms were implemented in 1980, they never received the support they needed to function. After Duarte was elected in 1984, the U.S. Embassy pressured him to downplay the reforms and make concessions to his traditional enemies in the oligarchy, a key part of the fragile counterinsurgency alliance that the embassy didn't want to alienate.

Duarte frequently was praised for improving human rights in his country, but the improvements were due more to outside pressures, such as warnings from the U.S. that continued abuses jeopardized U.S. aid, than to any reforms Duarte instigated. The army could humor U.S. sensibilities while the war was going well. Yet with the guerrillas taking the initiative, army killings are on the rise.

Under Duarte there were political openings such as greater press freedom (especially on TV) and the return of rebel leaders such as Ruben Zamora. But those achievements may prove transitory. Duarte's supporters say his major success has been to start the country on the road to democracy. But the most thoughtful of them admit that El Salvador isn't a democracy, and that his major failure is that the left hasn't been brought "into the process."

Perhaps a moderate center could have worked in 1972, when Duarte, allied with the left, won the presidency but had his victory stolen by the military. The country was far more polarized when he returned from exile in 1980 and made the controversial decision to ally not with the left but with the military, the Christian Democrats' traditional enemy.

Aligning with the military turned out to be Duarte's pact with the devil. It turned the party to the right, setting it on a course that would see its traditional reform program abandoned under the exigencies of the U.S. counterinsurgency project. And with the exit of the younger, more radical members of the party, it was left in the hands of older, anti-communist "politicos" like Rey.

Even if Duarte had seriously wanted to negotiate peace, he would have had little support in the party for confronting the powerful military or the U.S. Embassy. Duarte was ambivalent, and the party, left in the hands of its most corrupt members, was more interested in taking advantage of the U.S. funds flowing into the country and building its patronage machine. Antonio Guevara Lecayo, the Christian Democratic president of the Assembly, symbolized to what depths the party had sunk. Fond of gold jewelry, which he carefully removes when interviewed on foreign television, Guevara supplemented his modest salary by importing more than three dozen expensive, duty free cars and reselling them. Presently he is finishing construction of a hilltop mansion that cost more than half a million dollars, which amounts to a fortune in a Third World country.

The Arena Party, although it has learned to moderate its image, represents the Salvadoran oligarchy and seeks to overturn the reforms of the Duarte era. It also talks of stepping up the civil war, which would accelerate the already increasing trend of human rights violations.

The best that the left here can hope for is a Democratic win in November's U.S. elections and a subsequent reduction of U.S. military aid to El Salvador.

Chris Norton is *In These Times'* correspondent in El Salvador.

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