

By Patti McSherry

TWO WEEKS BEFORE THE WORLD WAS shocked by the massacre of six Jesuit priests and two women in El Salvador, an attack against Guatemala's religious community occurred—and caused barely a ripple of press interest here. While not at the level of barbarity of the massacre, this attack was another escalation in the spiraling wave of violence that has engulfed Guatemala since a faction of its army attempted another coup in May 1989. Student leaders and human-rights workers have also been targets for disappearance, torture and murder in recent months. This time, it was a U.S. nun, Sister Diana Ortiz, who was abducted and tortured before escaping from one of her captors.

On November 2, Sister Diana, of the Ursuline Order, was praying in the garden of the Belen Retreat House in Antigua, where she was participating in a course. The following account is taken from her written testimony.

"She was alone 10 minutes reading the Bible when a man put his hand on her shoulder and said: 'Hola mi amor' [Hello my love].... He was the same man that had accosted her in Guatemala City [some months previously, this unknown man had approached her and warned her to leave the country].... Then another unknown man appeared. The first insisted that she had to accompany him.... They showed her a pistol and said they would harm her friends if she didn't go with them."

Eventually, traveling by foot and bus, they came to a house with a white police car parked in front. Inside was a uniformed policeman. They put her into the car and blindfolded her.

"The policeman said to the men, 'I see that your trip was successful.' After a trip of approximately one half-hour, they stopped and took her inside a place that seemed like a warehouse because there was a lot of echo. They went downstairs, where she heard screams of a woman in a great deal of pain and moans of men. They put her in a dark and very cold room that had a chair and a desk. They left her there for many hours. Then three men entered: the policeman, the men who had kidnapped her from the garden. They told her that they had business to take care of and that they were

Nun's torture in Guatemala shows spiraling violence

going to explain the rules of the game to her; they were going to ask her some questions ... if they didn't like the answer, they would burn her back with a cigarette.

"They removed her sweat shirt and the policeman began to abuse her sexually. But then the man who accosted her in

As religious protest in the U.S. and Central America has mounted over military atrocities in El Salvador and Guatemala, a crackdown is taking place against religious leaders in both countries.

Guatemala said, 'Let's take care of business first, and then we'll have fun.' They removed her blindfold and showed her some pictures. One was of her in the plaza of San Miguel Acatan and in the village of Yalaj. Both were during fiesta days. She recalled that those were two occasions when the military were present. They kept burning her for every answer she gave. [According to Sister Diana's U.S. doctor, who examined her in the States, she received 111 burns on her back.]

"...One of them blindfolded her again. One man hit her so hard in the face she fell to the floor, receiving lesions on the left side of her face. They pulled her up to a sitting position on the floor and began to abuse her sexually, in several ways, but not in actual rape, because at that moment a fourth man entered the room.

"Someone said, 'Alejandro, come have some fun.' But he answered them with an obscene word common in English among North Americans. He said, 'Idiots, she is a North American. Let her alone. It's already on the news on television.' The fourth person approached her and helped her replace her T-shirt and sweatshirt. He removed her

blindfold and said, 'Let's get out of here.'

"...During the trip Diana spoke in English and he answered in Spanish, but with a non-Guatemalan accent. He asked her to pardon them because they had confused her with someone else and that they had tried to prevent this with the anonymous letters and that she hadn't taken them seriously. She replied that she had stayed because of her commitment to a suffering people. He said they had something in common. That is, he also was concerned about the people and consequently was working to liberate them from communism. She said it wasn't the same because they didn't respect human life. The man told her that they were going to talk with a friend from the North American embassy who could help her."

At this point Sister Diana realized they were in a zone of the capital; she opened the door, ran out and made her way to the Maryknoll Center House. From there, she was moved to the safety of the papal nuncio of Guatemala. The U.S. ambassador visited her, but she would not discuss the incident with him. She left the country soon after.

Church under attack: Two nuns who worked with Sister Diana came to Washington, D.C., recently to meet with members of Congress, the media and human-rights and religious organizations about the crime. NISGUA, the Network in Solidarity with the People of Guatemala, is demanding that Congress call for an investigation.

Monsignor Prospero Penados, the archbishop of Guatemala, stated: "This attack cannot be seen but as a direct attack on the Catholic Church." He also announced that a Maryknoll sister, Sister Patricia Denny, had recently left the country after her house was broken into by unidentified men and she received repeated death threats. The archbishop said that these were actions intended "to force the Catholic Church to be silent and impede its denunciation of the crimes that occur in Guatemala." Recently, four other nuns left the country after death threats.

On November 10, Guatemala's newspaper *Prensa Libre* reported that President Vinicio Cerezo expressed doubt as to whether the attack against Sister Diana had occurred at

all. Cerezo added that one could not say that a violation of human rights had taken place, since this was an act perpetrated by extragovernmental groups outside the control of the authorities. It was not clear how Cerezo reconciled his two apparently contradictory statements.

Terrorist attacks against religious workers are not a new phenomenon in Guatemala. Since the early '80s, 17 priests and thousands of church laypersons have been murdered in the military's bloody counterinsurgency campaigns. Under the military's national-security ideology, the religious community is suspect because of its championship of the rights of the poor. The generals and the extreme right still hold the reins of power in Guatemala, behind the increasingly discredited shell of civilian government under Cerezo.

As religious protest both in Central America and the U.S. has mounted over military atrocities in El Salvador and Guatemala, a concerted crackdown is taking place against religious leaders in both countries—with apparent backing by the Bush administration. The recent arrest in El Salvador of Jennifer Casolo, a representative of the Christian Education Seminars, after an arms cache was allegedly discovered in her house, was carried out with the support and assistance of the American Embassy. There are reports now that U.S. Justice Department officials and FBI representatives are considering charges against her under the little-used Neutrality Act—legislation not applied to U.S. mercenaries fighting with or assisting the contras. Americas Watch and some representatives of Congress have sharply criticized U.S. government officials for presuming Casolo's guilt.

Administration complicity: A spokeswoman from the State Department told me on November 20 that no protest had been filed by the U.S. regarding Sister Diana's abduction and torture because the case fell under Guatemalan jurisdiction. The Guatemalan authorities were responsible for the investigation, and the police were investigating. Such pronouncements of respect for Guatemalan jurisdiction provide a convenient justification for official U.S. silence: a silence that signals tacit acceptance of acts of terrorism, while shadowy death squads provide a convenient fiction to mask accountability.

Patti McSherry is a graduate student in political science who is also active in the human-rights field.

AWARENESS

IS THE FIRST STEP TO ACTION

Current Environmental Newsletter gives you information you can use to make a difference. CEN covers environmental issues of today in an accurate, concise format.

From the destruction of the rainforests to the depletion of the ozone layer to pollution in the water and air, CEN is there to give you the news you need.

Even if you don't think you can make a difference, you can. We're here to help you make it.

For sample copy and subscription information send \$3.00 to:

Current Environmental Newsletter
P.O. Box 17364
Richmond, VA 23226
ATTN: Dept. T

or call 1-800-899-1449 for Master Card/VISA orders.

CELEBRATE A DECADE OF FUNDING "CHANGE NOT CHARITY" WITH THE FUNDING EXCHANGE!

Saturday evening, January 13—Special Film Premiere
Diego Rivera: I Paint What I See is a stunning new documentary about the Mexican muralist and his controversial art. Supported by the Paul Robeson Fund for Film and Video.

Sunday late morning, January 14—Donor Brunch
National and local donors are invited to a brunch and discussion on current donor activities and future plans.

Sunday evening, January 14—Gala Party
An evening of entertainment and surprises at the world-famous Horn and Hardart Automat! In the spirit of Dr. King, we'll celebrate **A Decade of Social Justice** with special recognition for **Rev. C.T. Vivian** and **Anne Braden**, founders of the Center for Democratic Renewal, organizer **Leslie Cagan**, donor **Chuck Collins**, and Youth Activists. Local groups will also be honored with **Grassroots Victory Awards** by our member funds.

Call Nan or Robert for more information: (212) 529-5300

How I Spent My Thanksgiving Vacation

I spent a bit of Thanksgiving weekend, late in November, at Camp Solidarity, set up next to the Clinch River near the town of Lebanon in southwestern Virginia by miners striking the Pittston Coal Group. This was about the time that President Bush, warming up for the Malta summit, was boosting Western values of free speech and democracy. The Polish labor leader Lech Walesa had just been given an exuberant greeting by the president and Congress.

About 1,900 members of the United Mine Workers (UMW) have been on strike against Pittston since April 5, having worked without a contract for several months prior to that. The rest of the companies in the Bituminous Coal Operators' Association had signed this same contract, but Pittston, run by Paul Douglas, son of a famous U.S. politician of an earlier era, is clearly out to break the union. Pittston is trying to take back health benefits, retiree's health cards, overtime and vacation benefits. The company has tried to insist that it isn't, but miners don't decide to live on strike pay for eight months for frivolous reasons.

At first the strike got some coverage, but then—as I described here a couple of months ago—the national press mostly lost interest. Network crews and newsmen spent enormous sums to cover Soviet miners on strike, but five hours from Washington D.C., American miners waited vainly for the big guns of the press to show.

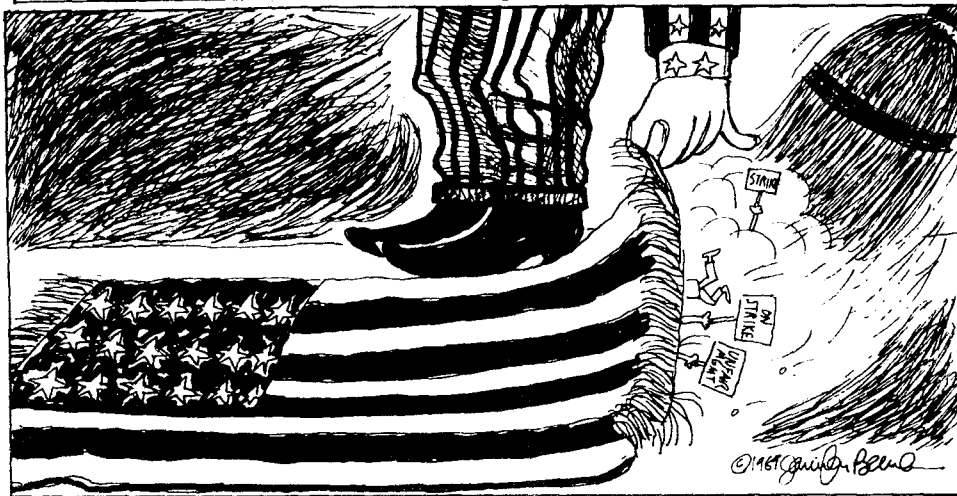
It wasn't as though there was a shortage of dramatic incidents. At about 4 p.m. on September 17, two U-haul trucks drove up the road to Pittston's Moss No. 3 coal-preparation plant and disgorged 98 striking miners who promptly occupied the plant. It was a tense situation. The governor of Virginia, Gerald Bailes, sent increasing numbers of state police into the area. By 7 p.m. on September 20, 75 hours into the occupation, a U.S. district judge had ordered the miners to vacate the plant and 5,000 supporters were ringed around Moss No. 3. At 9 p.m. the occupiers marched out and melted into the crowd. For nearly four days Pittston's operations in Southwest Virginia had been at a standstill.

Such scenes in the Soviet Union or Poland sent network executives scurrying to book costly satellite time to relay back the dramatic pictures. It was the first occupation of this sort in the U.S. since 1937, but none the less one ignored by ABC, CBS, NBC, CNN and Headline News. AP and UPI carried nothing on their national wires for two days. Nothing ran in the major papers till the *Washington Post* picked up an AP story on September 19. The *Wall Street Journal* opened its coverage with three sentences in a story a day later. A couple of weeks before I got to Camp Solidarity, Jackie Stump, district president for the Mineworkers in that region, had won a victory that once again offered an opportunity for dramatic coverage by a press hoarse with reporting revolt from below in Eastern Europe.

Prior to the election on November 7, the local member of Virginia's House of Delegates had been Donald McGlothlin Sr., a 20-year veteran of the statehouse and father of circuit court judge Donald McGlothlin Jr., who had fined the union \$30 million for

ASHES & DIAMONDS

By Alexander Cockburn



strike activities. The miners thought that McGlothlin Sr. should have been doing more than announcing his neutrality in the dispute. Three weeks before the election, Stump announced he would run as a write-in candidate. He won by a 2-to-1 margin. When a Klansman triumphed in a race for the Louisiana statehouse, the press rushed to New Orleans. But Stump's write-in victory, virtually unprecedented in U.S. political history, drew scant attention.

In the canteen of Camp Solidarity, a stoutly built and well-armed structure raised by miners on land owned by a UMW member, I talked to James Hicks, president of the union local 1259. Hicks, a 42-year-old Vietnam veteran, said about 50,000 supporters of the miners had stopped off at the camp at various times since it was set up in midsummer. He'd been interviewed by journalists from Australia, the Soviet Union and Europe and was having a hard time trying to figure out why U.S. miners on strike for eight months had become virtually off-limits to the national press and TV networks.

Later I drove a few miles to a motel near the town of Coeburn (which sports signs saying it's Virginia's tidiest town, I was pleased to note) and next morning picked up the Sunday edition of the *Washington Post*, which carried a story about the strike and not a single quote from any striking miner.

The *Post*, like most U.S. newspapers, has time for strikers so long as they are on the far side of what used to be called the Iron Curtain.

I headed up toward Philadelphia, next stop on a tour I've been making to promote a book I've just co-authored about the Amazon. The newspapers and TV screens were filled with images of ecstatic East Berliners shopping in the West, also of Czechs mustered to face down their masters. The airwaves and opinion columns were flush with paeans to the victory of Western values while simultaneously covering the six Jesuits murdered by U.S.-supplied Salvadoran government soldiers who were rewarded for their barbarous slayings by fresh infusions of cash from the U.S. government.

As with the miners' strike, you'd think from the networks and from newspapers like the *New York Times*, *Washington Post* and *Wall Street Journal* that national reaction to the slaying of the Jesuits had been in line with White House support for the d'Aubuisson regime nominally headed by Alfredo Cristiani. But outside the beltways surrounding New York and Washington's media barons, the sentiment is markedly different.

I traveled from Philadelphia to Boston to Madison, Wis., to the twin cities of Minneapolis-St. Paul. The *Philadelphia Inquirer's* lead editorial for November 27 called U.S. policy toward El Salvador "a duplicitous charade" and said that if one looked back at slain Archbishop Oscar Romero's advice to Jimmy Carter nine years ago not to intervene with U.S. aid, it is difficult to conceive that El Salvador would be worse off today if Washington had heeded the archbishop's advice. A *Boston Globe* editorial for December 1 concluded that "the best approach for the U.S. is to get out [of El Salvador] unilaterally, without trying to mastermind the war."

Madison's *Capital Times* had already determined in an editorial for November 18 that though the Bush administration was speeding up military aid to the government, "the dead priests had a better idea: forge a government that includes the rebels instead of continuing a war that brings only more and more death."

The St. Paul *Pioneer Press Dispatch's* lead editorial for November 29 said the failure of the Reagan-Bush policy had become "painfully evident."

What about popular reaction here to U.S. policy in El Salvador? You wouldn't know it from the networks that sent teams prowling the backstreets of Leipzig in search of dissent, but between November 13 and December 1, the organization National Pledge of Resistance tallied 195 demonstrations, including occupations, blockades of federal buildings and, in the case of Seattle, blockading of Interstate 5 by protesters.

The Committee in Solidarity with the People of El Salvador (CISPES) counts 400 protests since November 11 and reckons it's

the largest such wave opposing U.S. policy since the Vietnam War. The day I arrived in Minneapolis, a committee of the city council was considering a motion—reckoned virtually certain of passage by the council and approval by Mayor Don Fraser—barring the city of Minneapolis from retaining the powerful law firm of O'Connor & Hannan for any new services until it is no longer employed by Cristiani, ARENA or "any other entity involved in the repression of El Salvador." This law firm, founded in Minneapolis and with branches in Denver and Washington, D.C., has registered as an agent under retainer for Cristiani.

Under TV lights in the crowded city council chamber, some witnesses recounted to council members the atrocities wrought by the ARENA government. Legal witnesses rejected O'Connor & Hannan's defense that it was merely fulfilling the duty of providing a client proper legal representation. Indeed, it seems that O'Connor & Hannan have been lobbyists, among many such services, choreographing a Cristiani visit to Washington. O'Connor & Hannan partner Joseph Blatchford, who handles the Cristiani account, drafted an op-ed column for the *New York Times* that appeared under Cristiani's name.

As the testimony wound down in the council chamber, council member Walt Dziedzic intervened. In the past, Dziedzic said, he'd been opposed to council interventions into the realm of foreign policy. He'd been a policeman who had grown up in working-class northeast Minneapolis. He remembered the work there of nuns like the church women murdered by a Salvadoran right-wing death squad. "Now," said Dziedzic to a hushed chamber, "I've gone full-circle from cop to protester. I'm not proud of myself for sitting silent on El Salvador. I sat silent till the Jesuits were murdered, and I'm not going to sit silent any more."

Amid cheers, Dziedzic said he supported the motion to break city ties with O'Connor & Hannan until the firm gave up working for Cristiani. Listening to Dziedzic, I felt the same way as I had after talking to Hicks back in Virginia. Here were a vet and a cop, part of the vast spectrum of voices mostly caricatured as "the silent majority," who want justice of a kind unappetizing to Bush and the clique of press people around him who chirped about democratic values in Malta while blind to the realities of southwest Virginia and El Salvador.

Distributed by the L.A. Weekly.

Redwood Cultural Work Presents

A Benefit Concert for the Middle East Children's Alliance

Pete
SEEGER

Holly
NEAR

and special guest

Marcel
KHALIFÉ

Ronnie
GILBERT



Friday, January 12, 1990 8:00 pm

Berkeley Community Theatre

for more info: 415/548-0542 or 415/428-9191