

By Joel Bleifuss

Our oiled web we weave

As the threat of a Gulf war rages—conveniently keeping other news off the national agenda—"our way of life" in the U.S. goes on. Not that the nation is unconcerned with the fate of "our" oil. Wisconsin's *Eau Claire Leader-Telegram* newspaper asked 14-year-old Katy Gutowski, "Should the U.S. keep troops in Saudi Arabia?" She answered, "I think we should just blow their heads away ... because we have to have oil." What is this girl's problem? Too many Saturday morning cartoons? Too many issues of the *New Republic*?

The war at home: On August 2—the very day Iraq invaded Kuwait—the U.S. landed in Garberville, Calif. Rep. Douglas Bosco (D-CA) described the operation as follows: "While most Americans enjoyed their summer barbecues, a tiny town in the California redwoods was attacked by the U.S. Army. Five Black Hawk Helicopters, one Huey, two C-130s, 150 National Guardsmen, 50 GIs from Fort Ord and 50 Bureau of Land Management agents have launched a full-scale assault by land and air to rid the area of marijuana plants. Yesterday a quiet little convent called to tell me that they had been invaded. Some at first thought it was the Russians, and then they were surprised to find out it was the Americans. Little old ladies out watering their tomato plants in the morning were shocked to see camouflaged GIs crouching around in the bushes. So far I am told drug czar Bill Bennett and his troops have confiscated 330 marijuana plants."

Behind every Bush: Of course it is easier to go after pastoral pot growers than the men who are making megabucks in the drug business. *Money Laundering Alert* reported in its August issue that 14 of the nation's 37 Federal Reserve Districts had cash surpluses on hand—a situation that should send a signal to federal regulators. "Cash surplus figures compiled by the Fed are considered a reliable, though not a foolproof, measure of money-laundering patterns," according to the newsletter. "One common factor found in 11 of the 14 cities [whose Federal Reserve Districts reported cash surpluses] is their proximity to a coast or border of the U.S. where some of the nation's principal drug-trafficking centers are located." The top four cities on the list are Miami, with a \$2.8 billion surplus; Los Angeles, with \$2.2 billion; Jacksonville, Fla., with \$1.9 billion; and San Antonio, Texas, with \$1.2 billion.

Pick a crime: Ranking seventh on the list is the Federal Reserve District bank in Philadelphia, which brings to mind the following piece of little-reported news. On August 16, on the bottom of page 12 of the *New York Times*, below an explanation of the newly discovered health risks of margarine, was a two-inch Associated Press story filed from Scranton, Pa.: "Two former state prosecutors pleaded guilty to cocaine charges in federal court today. One of them, Michael Trant, a former associate deputy attorney general, pleaded guilty to one count of cocaine possession, and the other, Richard Guida, who headed the state attorney general's criminal division until 1986, admitted one count of cocaine distribution. Mr. Guida is a longtime associate of Henry G. Barr, a former top aide to U.S. Attorney General Dick Thornburgh; Barr was indicted on drug charges by a federal grand jury in Harrisburg last week."

Candidly covert: The week Barr was indicted, President Bush sent U.S. troops to the Gulf and Thornburgh was "candid" about the S&L crisis. During an August 7 press luncheon, Thornburgh hailed the administration's decision to "put more resources and a new U.S. attorney" in President Bush's hometown of Houston, one of the epicenters of the S&L collapse. Not one official from any of Houston's failed S&Ls has been convicted of an S&L crime. (Nationally 165 people have been convicted of S&L fraud since October 1988.) Critics charge Houston's former U.S. attorney, Henry Oncken, with failing to pursue S&L fraud and filling the Houston federal courts with small drug cases. Others allude to something more sinister. During his August meeting with the press, Thornburgh was asked about allegations that some of the money laundered out of failed S&Ls was channeled by the CIA to the Nicaraguan contras and other U.S. proxies. He responded that he was "not aware" of any such links. "All I can say is nothing has come to my attention," he replied. "If there is anything out there, we'd be interested in it." But the *Houston Post's* Kathy Kiely, who attended the press luncheon, reported that last February, when Thornburgh appeared on CNN's Evans and Novak talk show, he was asked about the investigative series by the *Houston Post's* Pete Brewton linking failed S&Ls to CIA operatives. (See "The First Stone" Feb. 21, Feb. 28, March 14, April 25, June 6, June 20 and July 18.) At that time Thornburgh said he had heard about the *Post* series and would have the Justice Department investigate.

ANDERSON

**Heiner Müller: history's scribe**

By Paul Hockenos

The striptease of humanism lays bare the bloody roots of culture.
—Heiner Müller

It's been a rough year for intellectuals in the now-defunct German Democratic Republic (GDR). However curbed under the dictatorship, culture functioned as one of the only mediums for social critique and protest. During a few fleeting days last autumn, the East Germans and their artists appeared united on the streets of Leipzig and East Berlin. But the hopes of the country's intelligentsia were soon dashed. The outpouring of resentment against society's cultured elite shocked the painters and authors, directors and poets. They retreated back to their desks, ideals shattered.

Even for arch-skeptic Heiner Müller—known as a latter-day Beckett for his grim, apocalyptic plays—the depth of embitterment proved a rude awakening. A notorious outsider, the playwright stayed on the sidelines while intellectuals such as novelist Christa Wolf and painter Bärbel Bohley petitioned their visions of a new society. And when East Germany's most celebrated living dramatist-director since Bertolt Brecht made his appearance in November on the revolution's stage, he fared no better than the rest. Before he had stumbled through a speech prepared for him by the Initiative for Independent Trade Unions for a rally, the crowd jeered the short, stocky, bespectacled figure from the podium.

Müller's reticent political debut was as out of character as it was ill-timed. Although loose and congenial in the confines of his East Berlin flat, the 61-year-old writer is uneasy with the crowds of critics and fans that now swamp him in theater lobbies. Throughout his more than three decades of plays, poems and essays, the tragedy of cultural elitism and revolutionary utopias have been dominant themes. In press interviews, the caustic Müller has come down hard on the naivete of the Wolfs and Bohleys.

"One aspect of the state policy here was to drive a wedge of privilege between the intellectuals and the population," he explains in his raspy voice. "You may travel, the others may not. The division was clear, and it worked very effectively. At least in this century," his angular jaw twitches as he speaks, "the privileged cannot speak for the underprivileged." Last fall, a people who had been silenced for 40 years finally had the chance to speak for themselves. As usual, he argues, intellectuals

tried to formulate goals too early in the people's name. Frantz Fanon, says Müller, adding another figure to the cast, from Sophocles to Derrida, that peppers his dialogue, pointed out during the African liberation movement that intellectuals are the revolution's greatest foes. "They always want to build something, when first the masses must tear it down."

Modern tragedy: On the 14th floor of a drab cement apartment block, the author's flat looks little like an abode of privilege. Toppled stacks of books and aging newspapers lie scattered across the yellow-brown linoleum. Above the smog-enveloped city hub, the clamor and exhaust from the noon-time traffic seem to have permeated the discolored walls. Müller grins. He lights another eight-inch cigar and exhales through enlarged nostrils, surrounding his head in a cloud of smoke. An open bottle of scotch sits on the kitchen table. He finds us some clean glasses.

Dressed in his standard attire of black T-shirt, jeans and polyester sport jacket, he reflects on his own complex relationship to the GDR. As the son of a textile worker imprisoned in 1933 for his work with the Social Democrats, the young Müller first saw the socialist state through the eyes of his anti-fascist upbringing. "I was raised in one dictatorship, and then came the anti-dictatorship," he says. "It was a liberation from 'the other,' but I couldn't identify with the new system either."

The tragedy of modern socialism, he says, is the separation of knowledge and power. Antonio Gramsci warned of this trend in a letter to Lenin in 1921. "For the first time in history," Gramsci wrote, "the rulers stand under the [intellectual] level of the ruled. If this discrepancy is not addressed, the experiment will be ruined." "That is exactly what happened," says Müller. "Everything that has transpired in Eastern Europe is a tragedy of stupidity and ignorance."

After a short stint as a journalist for the weekly *Sonntag* and the journal *New German Literature* in the early '50s, Müller began his creative work in earnest. The 27-year-old writer's first plays reflect his own internal struggle over the goals of the new state and their totalitarian manifestation. As his tone became more abrasive, his work was banned for its "perspectiveless defeatism." In 1961, he was expelled from the Writers Union. Four years later, his wife and co-worker, the poet Inge Müller, committed suicide.

Even during the hardest years of Stalinism and neo-Stalinism, intellectuals such as Müller enjoyed a modicum of freedom to write and produce. Then, as now, the dramatist drew heavily upon the ancients and, above all, upon Shakespeare. In the early '60s it was impossible to write a piece directly about Stalinism. His voice rising above the city din, Müller explains, "One needed these models when one really wanted to pose questions." In this way, theater had an immediate, vital function in the GDR. Pieces may have been censored or banned, but when one finally got two or three hours of stage time, it was free. It was much like the monarchy and proletariat of Shakespeare's day, he says. "For the proletariat, theater was actually the first attempt at democracy."

Past lapses: Yet for Müller, the relationship between theater and democracy, between politics and culture, is far from clear. With a grin he says, "The problem with theater is that it is allowed everything and can do nothing." Smack in the middle of the heated debate over the role of art and the artist in the new Germany, the maverick playwright still finds himself at odds with the establishment. He scorns the belief that "high culture" or the in-vogue concept of a German *Kultur* can somehow prevent a relapse into the political atrocities of the past. He maintains that high culture itself is deeply complicit in the legacy of modern barbarism. "As long as freedom is grounded on violence and art on privilege," he says, "artworks will tend to serve as prisons, the masterpieces themselves complicit with the ruling power."

The '80s brought Müller from relative obscurity to the forefront of European theater. Since the Berlin Wall's removal, his pieces are the most produced in Germany, playing to overflow crowds from Freiburg to Rostock. Müller's subject matter is an unlikely one for box-office records: his tableau is history, above all, German history. The condition of the *Deutsche Misere* and the continuity of tragedy and violence in history thread their way as common themes through each of his plays. His works deconstruct the modern condition—exposing the conscious and unconscious structures that have perpetrated themselves from medieval Prussia to the newly united Germany. Like an archaeologist, the director-writer exposes layer upon layer of ossified lies and silence. The structures of modern socialism, as well as those of post-industrial capitalism, rest on the same foundations that justified Auschwitz and Bergen-Belsen.

Juxtaposer: From his earliest plays, Müller's work has been a polemic with the master of socialist drama, Brecht. In the 1956 play *The Wage Squeezer*, he juxtaposes the newfound "socialist consciousness" of the party-loyal worker in the late '40s to that of his former Nazi colleagues. Written roughly in the style of Brecht's didactic theater, the play won him theater's highest prizes in the GDR. But the East German regime soon soured on the playwright's increasingly bleak evaluation of their new state. His art's form moved steadily away from the Brechtian model, becoming ever more surreal, obtuse, fragmented.

Though his focus shifted from the building of German socialism to the larger dilemma of contemporary Europe, the German questions have remained Müller's reference point. "There never was a zero hour, and there never will be," says Müller from behind his thick, black-framed eyeglasses. He gestures in the direction of Alexanderplatz, where the unification festivities are in full swing, and smiles. West German politicians are peddling the fiction that the "post-war" chapter of their history has finally come to an end. "Politics survives on dispossession and forgetting," he says. "The Federal Republic is simply using the 40 years of the GDR to bury the 12 of the Nazi era. But Auschwitz existed and will always exist—whether the Germans want

to forget it or not."

Dressed to the nines at the elegant Freievolksbühne in West Berlin, the audience queueing up for the long-sold-out premier of *Germania Death in Berlin* seems to confirm Müller's reservations. In the East, critical culture was *verboten*; in the West, it is consumed without effect. At the theater bar he grins shyly, a bit awed by the flattering response. In the same T-shirt and jacket, cigar and scotch in one hand, he recognizes me among his entourage. He raises his big arm around my shoulder, asking: "You think I have time to write these days?" He then shrugs and laughs.

The production of this 1956 piece, directed by the Brecht protégé B.K. Tragelehn, resembles more the style of the early Müller than the multimedia extravaganzas of his recent self-directed work. On the stark stage, figures from Germany's past enter and exit through three looming doorways. Cryptic fragments from the 1918 revolution, the GDR's founding day, Stalin's death and the 1953 East Berlin workers' uprising expose the synchronicity of time. Against the orthodox Marxist notion of a set historical chronology, Müller portrays past, present and future as interwoven in every moment.

Through masks and voices: Whores and revolutionaries, Gestapo and proletarians cross paths. In the flow of history, the vocabulary of truth, discipline and camaraderie are used interchangeably. The result is a macabre collage of subjective voices clashing with the political utopias of the day. The conflict subverts the viewer's common-sense perception of reality, forcing him to examine the incongruities Müller reveals. In one remarkable scene entitled "The Holy Family," a pregnant Joseph Goebbels, with the aid of a gasoline-swilling Hitler, Mother Germania and the Western Allies, gives birth to a wolf-like monster—the Federal Republic. The gangly creature unwraps the Allies' presents, while England, France and the U.S. sit cross-legged on the stage—hear no evil, see no evil, speak no evil.

The essence of Müller's aesthetic is the unresolved dialogue of contradiction and irony—exactly that which modern politics deny. "I don't want to step up as 'the author,' as prose writers must," he says. "With theater I can have masks, lots of masks, and say 'that' through one mask and the opposite through another." In this way, theater is a valuable artform under dictatorships. Müller describes his plays as an "erotic game," a "prolonged orgasm between the public and the actors" that climaxes in the final scene. "In this sense, theater is a corrective to politics," he says, "because what's disappeared from politics is the erotic. When politicians become impotent, power serves as an ersatz for the erotic and the sexual."

Irony is equally central to Müller's enigmatic persona. His views on politics and culture must be difficult to reconcile with his new position as president of the still-East Berlin Academy of Arts. After decades compromised by the cultural policies of the old regime, the institute looked hard for a clean name to put it back on its feet. "I had only one argument against it: I don't have the slightest desire to take this post. And that's no argument," says the freshly elected president. He wants to convert the former bastion of provincialism into an international organization with a rotating presidency occupied by a non-German. No less contrary to his decades-long themes, he hopes to cultivate a "state- and ideology-free space" where innovation in all the arts may occur.

Müller's unlikely position is in fact the ultimate statement of his art's form. Neither his plays nor his politics offers the ready-made solutions that people await so eagerly from their public figures. His dialectic of contradiction is an impulse to confront the vicious cycle of history. "Naturally, art must disturb," he says. "And now we [in the united Germany] must determine how and what it can and must disturb."

Team players: The Justice Department has a backlog of 21,000 unprosecuted S&L cases. Missing from that case load is an examination of Neil Bush's involvement in the failure of Silverado Savings of Denver—the bailout of which will cost the taxpayers an estimated \$1 billion. In mid-September the Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation announced that it was suing young Bush and other Silverado officials for \$200 million. One week later the Office of Thrift Supervision (OTS) brought Neil before an administrative law judge. The OTS asked the judge to order Neil to refrain from becoming involved in any future conflicts of interest with federally insured financial institutions. Tough stuff. As for the Justice Department, it has brought no charges in the Silverado case despite indications that Neil and two of his real-estate-developing business associates played financial games with millions of dollars in Silverado loans—loans that Neil had voted to approve. A cynic might say that the Justice Department is not taking action in this case because it involves the president's son and the president's political supporters. One of young Bush's business partners, a man who defaulted on tens of millions of dollars of Silverado loans, is Kenneth Good. In 1988 Good gave \$100,000 to George Bush's presidential campaign, thereby joining a group of the president's financial backers known as Team 100.

Our spoil: Robert Bass, a Fort Worth financier, did very well in the Reagan-Bush administration's S&L fire sale. In late 1988 the Federal Home Loan Bank Board, the agency that regulates S&Ls, sold the insolvent American Savings and Loan of California to the Robert Bass Group for \$410 million raised by Bass and \$2 billion put up by the federal government in the form of FSLIC subsidies. In 1989 American Savings and Loan earned Bass \$122 million in profits, a 30 percent return on the original investment. It now appears there could be another sweet deal in the works. Last July, Bass Enterprises Production Co. agreed to finance the drilling of three oil wells in Bahrain for the Harken Energy Corporation of Dallas. The cost of this drilling is estimated at \$25 million. The *Houston Post's* Brewton reports, "President Bush's oldest son, George Bush Jr., is a director, large stockholder and \$120,000-a-year consultant to [Harken Energy Corporation], a Texas oil company whose potentially lucrative drilling rights in the Persian Gulf are being protected by American troops and would be jeopardized if Iraq invaded Saudi Arabia." According to Brewton, Harken signed an exclusive deal in January with the government of Bahrain for "the exclusive right to explore for, develop, produce, transport and market oil and gas throughout most of Bahrain's offshore territories. ... Energy analysts marveled at how Harken, a relatively small, unknown company with operations primarily in Texas, Louisiana and Oklahoma, was able to garner the Bahrain rights. This is an incredible deal, unbelievable for this small company," [an energy analyst] told *Forbes* magazine. [Forbes, however, failed to mention the Bush connection.] It is not known how many shares of Harken stock George Jr. owns. The company's 1989 report says he held 345,426 shares—or just 1.1 percent of the total stock. On the other hand, 1989 news reports identified George Jr. as the second-largest Harken shareholder behind Harvard University, which owns 30 percent of the company. What is known is that recently the president's son did some divesting. In the weeks before the Iraqi invasion Bush sold 225,000 shares of his Harken stock, but he doesn't recall when—some time in "June or July," he says. By selling early, he made about \$191,000 more than he would have if he sold after the invasion, when the price of Harken stock fell from \$3.60 to \$2.75 a share. This raises the question: what did young George know and when did he know it?

Graphic bananas: An S&L-connected figure who is defending one way—not necessarily "our" way—of life is Carl Lindner of Cincinnati. Lindner is an old friend and business associate of jailed S&L crime figure Charles Keating. In their book *Inside Job: Looting of America's Savings and Loans*, Stephen Pizzo, Mary Fricker and Paul Muolo write that in 1979 the Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) accused Lindner and Keating of a long list of SEC violations, including using a bank they owned "to make loans to themselves without collateral, extend themselves new loans to cover the interest they owed on the old loans, roll over loans as they matured without demanding payment and guarantee loans that other banks had made to Keating and others." Keating and Lindner, who owns Chiquita—formerly United Fruit—join Bass and Good as members of President Bush's Team 100 financial-support group. But the Bush presidency is not the only cause Linder supports. Like Keating, Lindner has a keen interest in graphic depictions of human sexuality. His fortune funds Citizens for Community Values, the anti-pornography group that spearheaded the campaign against the Robert Mapplethorpe exhibit at the Cincinnati Contemporary Arts Center.

A political purge

Renew America Now (RAN) has come up with a novel approach to ridding Congress of fat cats and impropriety: don't vote for *any* incumbents this November. "Congress needs an oil change, and I don't know anybody that retains a used quart—even for sentimental reasons," says RAN founder Rick Hotchkiss. Because the nation can no longer afford to support a self-serving Congress, the Boston-based group is urging voters to cast aside party affiliation for a 100 percent turnover in the House and 35 new members in the Senate. RAN plans to use its funds for a national advertising campaign urging voters to "reminisce" about the S&L bailout, for example, before pulling the lever.

Hungry for justice

As long as the world's leaders maintain their emphasis on military might over sound social policies, half a billion people across the globe will remain chronically hungry, according to the Hunger 1990 report released by the Bread for the World Institute on Hunger and Development. Worldwide military spending is now estimated at \$1 trillion. Nearly one-third is spent by the U.S., and the Third World share increased from 7 to 19 percent between 1960 and 1987. Wars disrupt food production and distribution, lead to environmental degradation and create refugees, says the report, leaving women and children among hunger's greatest victims. Nearly 40,000 children under the age of five die each day from preventable infections and malnutrition—the same as if 100 jumbo jets, each loaded with 400 infants and children, crashed every 14 minutes. The report's conclusion: a demilitarized world could easily meet all of its food needs.

To Public Enemy, with love

Music, it has been said, calms the savage breast. On that note, an African-American Marine stationed in Saudi Arabia is asking the political rap group Public Enemy to send over some race-affirming music and paraphernalia—"something that would bring our morale and hype to an all-time high." According to the letter, black Marines are bombarded with the "hype" of their white counterparts—T-shirts sporting sadistic slogans, flat-top haircuts and the music of Guns 'N' Roses. But the same black Marines are forbidden to wear "box" haircuts—well within grooming regulations—and T-shirts reading "Black By Nature, Proud By Choice" or "Black By Popular Demand," because they are deemed "racist."

Some people's kids

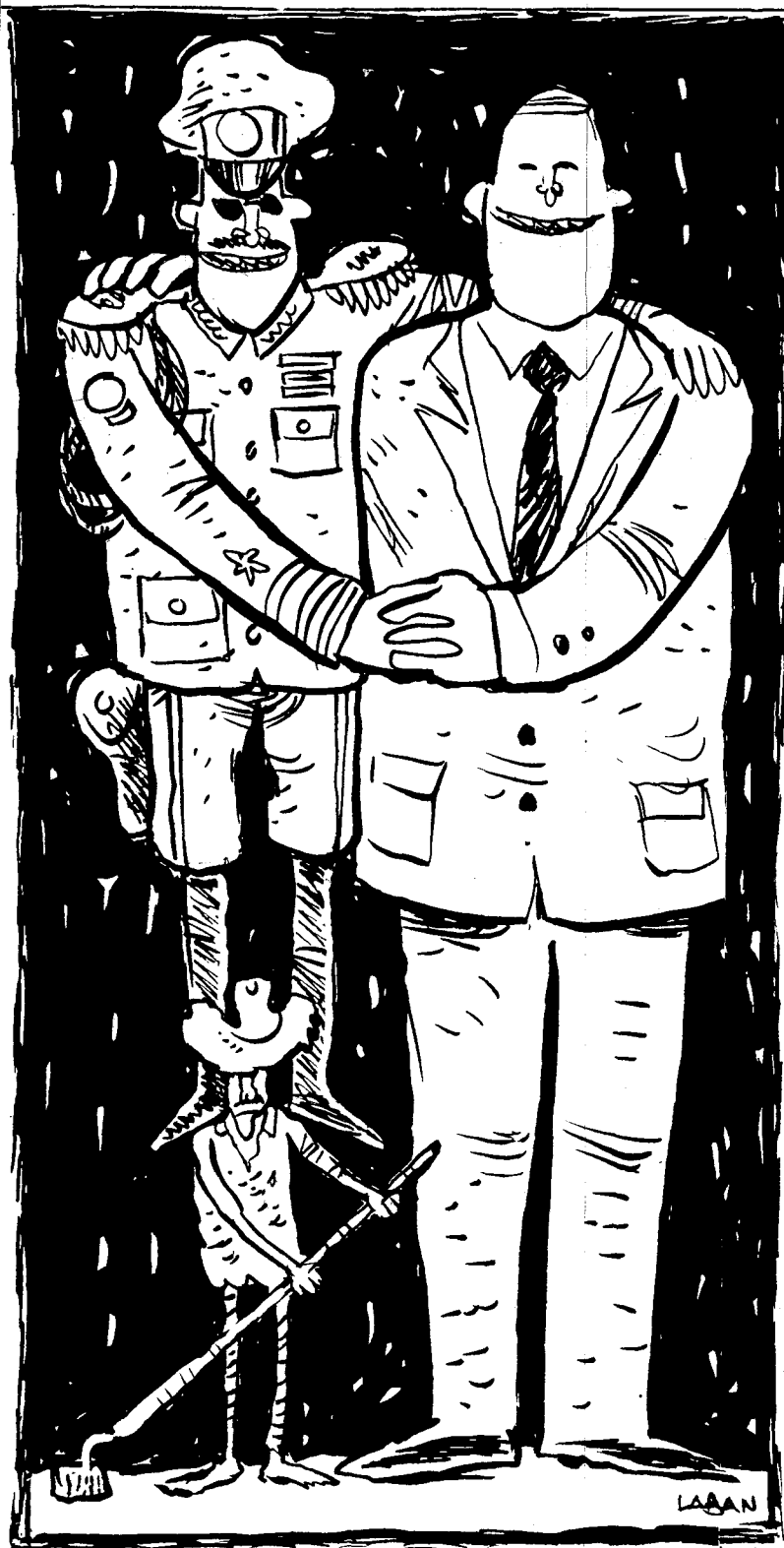
The campaign of Colorado Republican Senate candidate Hank Brown took a beating last month when his son was charged with attacking a "long-haired" university student and forcing him to recite the Pledge of Allegiance. The young Harry Brown, 21, and two friends are accused of attacking Jamie Breitzman on a street at the University of Northern Colorado. Breitzman claims he started to recite the pledge but was repeatedly struck by the drunken Brown for not placing his right hand over his heart. "He [Brown] said, 'Say it with fire, say it with passion, say it like you mean it,'" Breitzman recalls. Brown and one of his companions were charged with third-degree assault two months after the incident was reported. According to Breitzman, police took interest only after someone notified the *Greeley Tribune*—in the congressional district Rep. Brown has represented for 10 years.

Truman made him do it

Curtis LeMay, the U.S. general who supervised the 1945 atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki and the 1948 airlift on Berlin, died Oct. 1 in California at the age of 83. LeMay, who died of a heart attack, asserted years after World War II that the bombings were useless in obtaining the surrender of Japan. "We dropped the bombs because Truman told me to," LeMay said during a 1985 interview. Air Force chief of staff from 1961 to 1965, the same LeMay declared during Vietnam that unless the North Vietnamese retreated, "we're going to bomb them back into the Stone Age."

We snooze, you lose

Wyoming Republican gubernatorial candidate Mary Mead is sorry for a recent campaign speech, but not because of any objectionable statements she might have made. "I got reports saying it [the speech] was boring," said Mead, "and that I hadn't really said anything." One week after the Sept. 19 speech to the Wyoming Association of County Officials, Mead wrote a formal letter of apology, "not necessarily to change anybody's mind about me, but just to let them know that it mattered."



A bomb for El Salvador's preferred trading status

WASHINGTON—The ability of the Salvadoran government to sustain both the rapidly deteriorating economy and its 10-year war against the Farabundo Marti National Liberation Front (FMLN) depends on U.S. assistance—in the form of aid and trade. While the U.S. Senate considers a 50 percent cut in military aid, a group of labor and human-rights organizations is making an end run on the trade portion of U.S. support for the Salvadoran economy.

In a case that may have tactical implications for other solidarity labor struggles, the organizations are asking that El Salvador be dropped from the official U.S. list of beneficiary developing countries under the Generalized System of Preferences (GSP), which allows El Salvador to export the majority of its foreign trade duty-free to the U.S.

The groups are basing their case

on a 1984 provision of the U.S. Trade Act that links GSP status with compliance with internationally recognized worker rights, including the right to associate, organize and bargain collectively.

Representatives of various U.S. labor-rights committees, the AFL-CIO and Americas Watch were among the groups requesting denial of preferential trading benefits at hearings late last month by a subcommittee composed of representatives from the departments of Labor, State, Treasury, Agriculture and Commerce. They were joined by two Salvadoran unions—one from the right, the National Union of Workers and Peasants (UNOC), and one from the left, the National Union Federation of Salvadoran Workers (FENASTRAS).

Officially, the subcommittee must base its decision on fairly narrow legalistic grounds—if it can be established that labor rights have been consistently violated and that no effective steps have been taken to rectify the pattern of abuses, then the preferential status should be denied. But political considerations will un-

doubtedly be a factor.

Nor will the most egregious human-rights violations, such as assassinations and bombings aimed at labor, figure prominently in the decision. These abuses "fall under the criminal justice code," according to Ron Dobson, the Department of Labor representative on the subcommittee. "The right to life," he continues, "is not listed as a worker right" included in GSP guidelines.

At the hearings, the petitioners challenged this mechanistic interpretation. "It is obvious that when union offices are blown up and union organizers are tortured and killed, the rights to organize and bargain collectively are violated," said Philip Kete, a Washington-based lawyer for FENASTRAS.

Gerardo Diaz, who also testified for FENASTRAS, was a vivid reminder of the reality of the threat to unionists. He was wounded in the October 1989 bombing of FENASTRAS headquarters in which 10 people were killed and 40 wounded. "It is clear," he told the panel, "that as long as they have preferential treatment, they will see it as a green light to continue persecution of union members."

In a graphic demonstration of the new configuration of opposition forces in El Salvador, Diaz, head of FENASTRAS, was joined at the hearing by Amanda Villatoro, a leader of the right-wing UNOC.

This tactical unity between UNOC and FENASTRAS reflects the new, broad-based opposition movement that has coalesced in the wake of the far-right ARENA election victory last March. By emphasizing common concerns, such traditional opposition elements as leftist unions, human-rights and church groups have sought out alliances with former supporters of the late President Jose Napoleon Duarte. Disgruntled owners of small and medium-sized businesses, more conservative church groups and all the political parties—except ARENA—have begun to push for a negotiated solution that incorporates an amelioration of the social and economic injustices that they acknowledge as precipitating and prolonging the war. ARENA and its military supporters have been increasingly isolated by this alliance.

The decision on El Salvador's GSP status will be handed down in April by President Bush, acting on the recommendation of the U.S. trade representative. Until then, petitioners hope that the U.S. threat of a change in trade benefits will act to deter violence against unions. While the impact of being dropped from the GSP rolls would not be as serious a blow to the government of El Salvador as a cut in military aid, the petitioners hope it will send a message that the Salvadoran elite can understand: continued repression and war are bad for business.

—Terry Allen