

down on commercial speculation, delinquency and violent protests, which the bankers could easily exploit in order to undermine our democracy.”

Caldera was elected in December of 1993 on a platform of selective “intervention” in the economy, beating two major rivals who embraced neoliberalism. He has insisted that the government play a vigorous role in the economy. His conservative opponents now use the term “interventionist” to lump together his politicized campaign against the banking system, more general economic regulation like price and exchange-rate controls, and the suspension of constitutional safeguards—as well as Caldera’s general rhetorical opposition to neoliberal nostrums. While these critics have called for the prompt restoration of the suspended constitutional liberties, their main point seems to be that an attack on the neoliberal agenda is synonymous with an attack on democracy itself. Whether Venezuelans as a whole agree with that proposition remains to be seen.

—Steve Ellner

(Steve Ellner is the co-editor of *The Latin American Left: From the Fall of Allende to Perestroika*, which was published by Westview Press in 1993.)

HIT THE ROAD, JUAN

The anti-immigrant backlash spurred by California’s Proposition 187 has claimed its first victims: 200,000 refugees seeking shelter from repression and social upheaval in El Salvador. In early December the Clinton administration ended a program that accorded special refugee status to 200,000 Salvadorans living in the United States. The amnesty program, which was established in 1990, allowed the refugees to live and work here without fear of deportation.

The move could devastate El Salvador. The country’s economy, shattered by a decade of civil war, depends on remittances from some 2 million Salvadorans living abroad, more than 1 million of whom live in the United States (800,000 of these are permanent residents or are here illegally). Remittances from the United States will top \$825 million this year, more than double the earnings El Salvador gets from coffee, the nation’s largest export. These remittances mainly benefit the poor, providing a cushion for those hardest hit by IMF-mandated austerity programs. In effect, Salvadorans working at low-wage jobs in the United States provide some desperately needed economic stability to their homeland.

The amnesty program was originally prompted by the pervasive human rights abuses committed by the Salvadoran military and police against their political opponents. But the Clinton administration now contends that the human rights situation in El Salvador has “improved significantly” and that amnesty is no longer warrant-



MEDIA BEAT

By Pat Aufderheide

Free enterprise?

Public television looks like an early target of Republican wrath, what with Newt Gingrich denouncing the institution on C-SPAN as “a bunch of rich, upper-class people who want their toy to play with” and threatening to zero out the Corporation for Public Broadcasting’s appropriations.

He contrasted public television with C-SPAN itself, the private cable network that broadcasts congressional proceedings and other public affairs programs, offering this encomium to C-SPAN head Brian Lamb: “You went out as an entrepreneur, you sold the cable industry into putting on its own channel ... and you’ve gotten people to watch because they like it. And we don’t give you \$100 or \$200 million a year.”

Well, it depends how you count it. C-SPAN was created as part of a deal between the cable industry, the cities and Congress. The 1984 Cable Act gave cable a virtual monopoly; most subscribers have no choice of cable companies, and those companies program virtually all the channels.

The cable companies exploited the situation so grossly that within six years consumers revolted against high prices, bad service and cabling’s contemptuous treatment of public access channels. But not even the 1992 Cable Act, which feebly reintroduced some regulation, could undercut cable’s monopoly. The cost to the public of bad cable policy is arguably far higher than federal appropriations to the Corporation for Public Broadcasting.

The limits of public-interest entrepreneurship in the cable industry are highlighted by the fact that C-SPAN II is carried by far fewer systems than is C-SPAN I. In fact, since 1992, C-SPAN has disappeared altogether from some systems.

Enterprising public TV

As public broadcasting executives try to convince the Republicans not to pull the plug on their funding, they are handicapped by public broadcasting's murky image. "Public" broadcasting is a private institution, funded mostly by corporate and individual donations. Power is held at the local level, by the 350 TV and 550 radio stations that use federal funds. At most of them, the relentless seduction of prospective middlebrow members and corporate "underwriters" is a tawdry but inescapable fact of life. And almost everywhere—especially at stations located at universities, which are universally facing fiscal crisis—there are money troubles.

So it's getting harder and harder to draw the line between public and private. Take the latest gossip from New York's leading public TV station, WNET. The station's studios, representing a substantial public investment built up in sunnier times, are now a financial albatross, having proved too expensive for the likes of the (now part-TCI owned) *MacNeil-Lehrer NewsHour* and the *Charlie Rose Show*. One possible solution, bruited about in *Variety*: oily tabloid talk show host Montel Williams is considering moving his show to the studios.

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ed. Leaders from the Salvadoran community, however, point to a recent rash of abuses.

"The army still gets away with murder," says Mario Davila, a Salvadoran who works with the American Friends Service Committee in Boston. While the 1992 peace accords that ended El Salvador's 12-year civil war reduced the army's power, the threat of repression remains. Davila cites a mid-November incident when soldiers opened fire on demonstrators during a bus operators' strike, killing four. And right-wing death squads continue to strike at opposition political leaders. On November 10, David Merino, head of the Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front's land commission, was gunned down in a San Salvador restaurant. United Nations peacekeepers recorded 40 "arbitrary executions" in the first half of 1994.

Faced with opposition from Salvadoran activist groups in the United States and protests from the Salvadoran government, the Clinton administration is backing away from immediate deportations. The Immigration and Naturalization Service officially ended the special refugee program, but extended work permits for nine months and insisted that any implementation of punitive measures would be "delayed and gradual." Still, these are anxious times for Salvadoran refugees—the threat of deportation is postponed, but not ended. El Salvador's Bishop Rosa Chavez compares the situation to "when someone is given the death penalty: they are given a grace period but they are still condemned to die."

—Michael Zielinski

Tomorrow's News Tonight

By Steve Brodner

Newt in the Movies

Films at the Core of the GOP Agenda:

