A Year of Living Dangerously

by Robin Greyson

The year before an election is always a period of political instability and conflict. In the best of times the rhetoric heats up, the flashbulbs pop and we get a quickening of the political pulse, hopefully without too many risks being taken. These, however, are not the best of times, nor is Ronald Reagan the best of men.

There is a political exercise that right wing politicians of Reagan's sort are attracted to in times such as these. It is known as "Thatcher's manuever." It involves an unpopular leader who has inflicted unemployment, recession and poverty on her/his constitutuents returning to office as heroine/hero on the basis of a little well-planned imperialism. Though Margaret Thatcher, in the Spring of 1982, looked to be the most unpopular Briton since Typhoid Mary, she was swept back into office a few short months later, after managing to kill a few hundred of Her Majesty's troops, and rekindling the old glory/gory days of empire.

There is nothing complicated about this maneuver. The lives of one's countrymen are traded for a small national victory and a large amount of personal popularity. Of course, the maneuver must be carefully conducted: the opponents must be small and easily subjugated (fair fights are to be avoided at all costs); loss of life cannot be too great (yours), or too small (theirs); and the whole business must come no more than a year before Election Day (ours is a t.v. generation with a short attention span). It helps if one's opponents are of a different race (nothing like a little guilt-free racism to get the national temper in shape). It is important that one win, and win big. No minor concessions or acts of apology are acceptable. Land must be taken, nuclear reactors leveled, or governments overthrown. In the words of Vince Lombardi: "Winning isn't everything; it's the *only* thing."

Television coverage is also very important, but it must be of the right sort. There can be no shots of your soldiers with their brains blown out in some rice paddy, or of your Marines raping or napalming your opponents (not suitable for the kind of family audience that should be your goal). Censorship is, therefore, mandatory, and can be justified on the basis of: 1) the good of your country; 2) the good of their country (admittedly somewhat harder to pull off); 3) the good of your service men; or 4) the good of the news media themselves. This last one has the added advantage of making oneself appear to be a champion of the press.

There are, however, two problems with the Thatcher manuever. First, it is addictive: once used, it becomes all the easier to use again, its affects last for only a short time and must be constantly repeated; and each episode must be larger than the previous one. Second, the maneuver is best carried out by former colonial powers or isolated garrison states which have few international responsibilities. The maneuver, you see, has a tendency to make future diplomacy much more difficult, to lock one into military action, and to isolate one from allies.

Unfortunately, after the invasion of Grenada the U.S. will have no lack of opportunity to learn of these consequences. Take Central America, for example. The U.S. is tied, as is well known, to a number of right-wing dictators in this area. What little control the Reagan Administration has had over these butchers is now gone. Since the opponents of these regimes have already been labeled as part of the "Marxist/Communist/Cuban Conspiracy," it becomes virtually impossible for the U.S. to allow peace negotiations or de-escalation of hostilities. Are we to sit down with members of the "Evil Empire?" Are we to push Central American Generals to negotiate with forces against which we have just shed American blood in Grenada? Can we allow our martyred boys to become victims of appeasement? Of course not. The events and rhetoric of the last few weeks have built a set of public expectations both here and in Central America that equates dialog and discussion with treason. We have in fact strengthened the hand of the D'Aubuisson's in Central America, and left ourselves with only military options in that part of the world.

The American experiment with the Thatcher maneuver in Grenada is a frightening way to begin an election year. Given the potential sources of military conflict around the world (Lebanon, Iran, Cuba, Nicaragua, El Salvador, the Philipines) we are in for a bad twelve months. We have isolated ourselves from any but our most reactionary allies (both in Latin America and in Europe). We have pushed the Soviet Union into a corner and through our rhetoric and adventurism made negotiations or compromise nearly impossible. We have managed to define every Third World insurrection as part of some international Communist menace. We have backed ourselves into a foreign policy corner in which military intervention has become the only "patriotic" option. Nineteen eighty-four may be worse than even Orwell imagined.

Nicaragua

mon Nicaraguan names. And yes, they are also common North American names. The marines who occupied Nicaragua at the beginning of this century planted more than just the flag.

Why this "ancient history?" First, it demonstrates the hypocrisy of the U.S. What is objected to is not foreign domination of Nicaragua, but the decrease in U.S. domination. Second, it shows that Nicaragua has had no lack of experience with foreign subjugation, and would not submit to yet another form.

Moreover, it is not just from Cuba or the Soviet Union that Nicaragua receives help. The single largest amount of aid comes from Mexico. There are also aid projects from Canada, Sweden, France, and West Germany. What surprised me most was the large number of North Americans working for the Nicaraguan government. Needless to say Nicaragua is accepting help where ever it can get it.

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1983: Resistance Decentralizes

• Civil Disobedience Grows • San Diego Trials

People committed to disarmament, the demilitarization of our economy and a non-nuclear future have initiated a national network this year: a federation of organizations that practice non-violent civil-disobedience. In San Diego, the Ballast Point Organizing Project (BPOP) is part of this trend.

In January and March of this year a thousand U.S. citizens were arrested for trespassing at Vandenberg Air Force Base protesting the scheduled test flight of the MX missile. The Vandenberg actions were representative of the anti-nuclear power movement's tendency to gather in one single locale. On June 20th, the International Day of Disarmament, this tendency was reversed; numerous non-violent direct action protests occurred throughout the U.S. and in western Europe, Japan, and New Zealand. Rallies, vigils, marches, teach-ins, and peace-camps were all held in support of those committing civil disobedience at defense plants and military installations. Livermore, Groton, Chicago, Albuquerque, El Paso, St. Louis—the list goes on. Protests materialized in sixty cities across the U.S. and in two dozen of these locations nearly 2,000 people were arrested for acts of conscience. Here in San Diego, BPOP and Community Energy Action Network (CEAN) sponsored a demonstration at the gates of Ballast Point Sub Base, where 400 people witnessed the arrests of 33 activists.

October 1983 brought more nationally coordinated protests in solidarity with the two and one half million Europeans who demonstrated their opposition to the deployment of the Cruise and Pershing II missiles. Organizers estimate that 100,000 people participated in one hundred and fifty U.S. events throughout October, with another 100,000 participating in Canada as well. There were 1,600 arrests nationwide.

• In Minneapolis, 577 people were arrested at the gates of Honeywell Corp., a sub-contractor for the Cruise and Pershing missiles. Among those arrested at the ten hour blockade of Honeywell's world corporate headquarters were two engineers who had resigned because of the company's involvement with nuclear weapons, and the Minneapolis Police Chief's wife.

• At Rocky Flats in Colorado where Rockwell International produces the plutonium triggers for nuclear weapons, 17,000 people encircled the plant in a symbolic show of resistance.

• 5,000 marched in L.A. past TRW, McDonnell Douglas, Northrop, Hughes Aircraft, and Rockwell International. 71 people were arrested for acts of civil disobedience.

• 7,500 attended demonstrations in upstate New York at the Seneca Army Depot, the main storage and transshipment site on the east coast for nuclear weapons bound for Europe. 386 were arrested on federal trespassing charges when they climbed over a fence into the army base. There has been an ongoing womens peace camp in Seneca Falls for the past year.

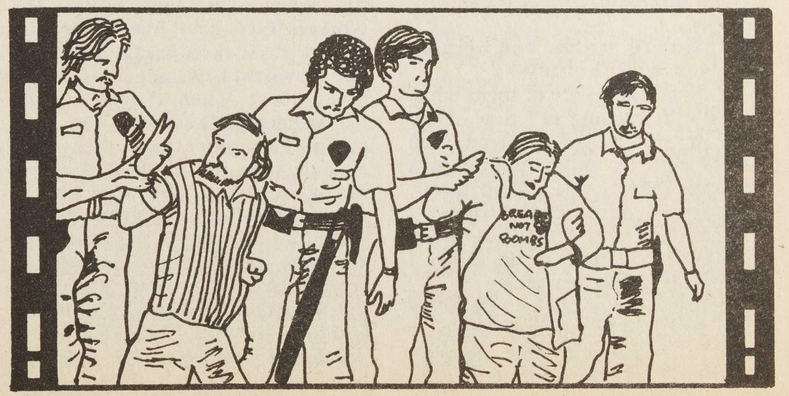
• 400 supporters gathered at Monthan Air Force Base in Tucson, Arizona, where all ground launched cruise missile personnel are trained. 51 people were arrested for federal and state trespassing. There is also an ongoing peace camp at Monthan.

• In San Diego, a week long set of events culminated at General Dynamics/Convair where 21 people were arrested, and 250 more participated in a rally and "Die-In." One woman, a General Dynamics employee, was fired for distributing leaflets to fellow workers.

Throughout the nation, and here in San Diego, activists who have been arrested are finding their lives increasingly caught up in court rooms, within legal collectives, incarcerated, on probation and spending weekends collecting freeway trash on state work crews (community service). The strategy of civil disobedience is fostering some serious debate.

San Diego on trial

Of the 33 arrested at Ballast Point, 21 people spent 3 days in jail, and then pleaded no contest to the charges against them. Twelve of these twenty-one accepted one year probation, and were sentenced to jail time already served. The other nine refused to accept probation, and were sentenced to an additional five days on county work crews. Ten of the twelve people who spent no time in jail also pleaded no contest, and were sentenced to one day of community service as well as given one year probation. Two other individuals pleaded not guilty, and took their own cases to court (pro per). One of these people, Adam Webber, was convicted and sentenced to ten days community service and given one year probation. Webber, who initially refused probation, was ordered to serve 90 days in jail instead. After 5 days in jail, Webber accepted the initial offer by Judge Arreolla.

Bill Phipps, the other Pro Per defendant, has received a lot of attention from the press because of the presiding judge in his case. Judge

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