(Report, continued)

The Democratic Convergence is a liberal coalition which was able to place fourth in the recent elections, despite widespread reports of their ballots being burned.

UNTS, the national union organization, encounters many hardships trying to organize workers, especially since businesses are supported by the ruthless military.

Conamues is an umbrella organization for several women's groups. During our meeting there we learned that Maria Christina Gomez, a teacher, had been abducted and murdered a few days before.

On April 12, we left San Salvador and headed north to Teosinte. At the first checkpoint, we were sent to the headquarters of the 4th Brigade, which is in charge of the area. We were kept waiting at the headquarters for two hours and then were told that we could go to Chalatenango City but not to Teosinte, as there were military actions there. This turned out to be untrue.

In Chalatenango City, we met with Bishop Alas, who told us that it was becoming increasingly difficult to get material aid to the repopulated villages. He promised nevertheless to deliver what we had brought to Teosinte.

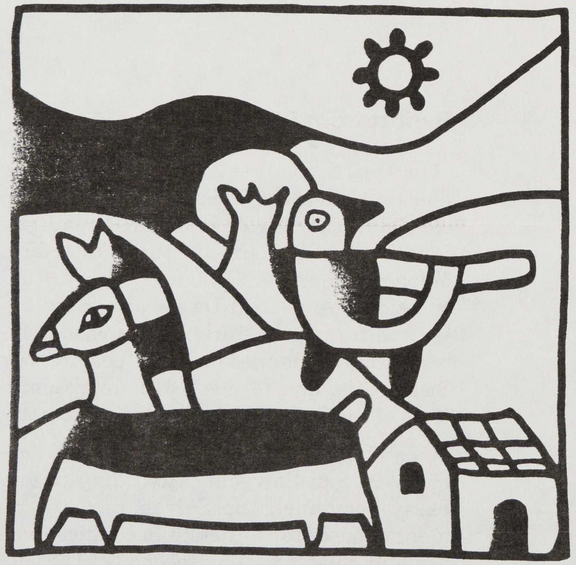
Meanwhile, the people of Teosinte had heard that we would not be able to get to the village. Fifteen of them crowded into a pickup truck and came to meet us in Chalatenango City. It is hard to convey on paper how it felt to meet them. It was like being with long-lost relatives. There was a warmth the likes of which we seldom feel in ordinary life.

Struggling to live, the villagers were very moved by strangers offering moral and financial support and vigilance. They are constantly under threat, yet there is something magnetic about people with such strength and bravery, yet love and gentleness.

We spent only one day with the villagers, but it is a day long to be remembered. We talked about their lives, about their needs and their plans for the future. They aren't hoping for luxuries. They are starting a health program and a school. They want to fix their road, which at the best of times is accessible only by 4-wheel-drive vehicles. They want to buy a cow; milk is not available in the village now.

We left with promises to keep in touch and a sincere hope to return. With the help of the good people of Arlington, we will continue to send aid and will soon be planning another delegation. Next time *ALL THE WAY!*

A final note: In the near future a longer written report will be available. There is much more that is important to know about events in El Salvador and in Teosinte. The report will soon be available from the Arlington Sister City Project.



Repression in El Salvador

In the midnight hours of April 20, a combined assault force attacked the offices of CRIPDES and the CNR, the organizations that coordinate the refugee movement and repopulated villages like Arlington's sister city. Trapped in the attack were a baby, five pregnant women, an elderly man, and some 20 ill campesinos seeking help at CRIPDES' clinic. Hauled away to Treasury Police headquarters, 72 people were kept standing without food or water for 15 hours and interrogated. Many were severely tortured, including six CRIPDES leaders who remain in prison, urgently needing medical care.

Salvadoran activists think CRIPDES was attacked because of its central role in organizing the most radical part of the civilian population to resist the army and build a new society. But CRIPDES was not the only target: the same night saw raids on the offices of the women's organization ADEMUSA and the union federation FUSS. Seven other movement offices were surrounded in the following days, and more people were captured.

The raid was exactly the sort of big human rights violation that is supposed to trigger cuts in U.S. support. Instead, Ambassador William Walker blamed the victims and revealed the lineaments of U.S. policy under the new ARENA regime. "We found sticks with nails in the offices, so we think these people weren't just interested in humanitarian things," Walker told Senator Dodd (D-CT) in a phone call. "The police had a search warrant. Constitutionally, they can hold people 72 hours. The laws are being upheld."

The laws are also being extended to make rising repression legal. Making it all legal is easy for ARENA–it controls El Salvador's courts, legislature, executive, town governments, and has substantial influence in the all-important military. Measures being discussed include shoot-on-sight curfews, an extension of the 72 hours during which people can legally be detained and actually tortured, and the creation of an ARENA party network of informers who report their neighbors' activities to the military.

The Bush administration is eagerly embracing the expanding terror network, while few congresspeople seem interested in cutting the flow of dollars that pays for it. Even our presumed supporters in the U.S. Congress are vacillating. John Kerry, for example, welcomed Alfredo Cristiani to Washington late last year. Cristiani, El Salvador's new president, is simply a front-man and apologist for the excesses of ARENA.

Nicaragua Struggles to Survive

Despite the devastation of Hurricane Joan, despite the cruel embargo of the U.S. government, the Nicaraguan people continue to survive. Nearly 300,000 were left homeless, 10,000 head of cattle were killed, and in places almost all the corn and bean crops were lost. Meanwhile, support for the Contras continues. The U.S. cynically hopes to keep the Contras alive while the Nicaraguan people suffer from natural disasters.

We can help in many ways. We can keep the issue of support for the Nicaraguan people and opposition to the murderous Contras in the public eye. NECAN (1151 Mass. Ave., Cambridge) is organizing hurricane relief brigades to travel to Nicaragua. Oats for Peace, sponsored by CASA (492-8699), provides food and relief for Nicaragua.