

Editorial

U.S. support to El Salvador unjustifiable

In an attempt to get more military aid for El Salvador's government, the Reagan administration announced last week that it wants negotiations between the El Salvadoran government and the rebels that are fighting it in the countryside.

Since Reagan and his officials have always maintained that the guerrillas are simply the puppets of what Reagan calls the "focus of evil" in the world — the Soviet Union — this new move seems unusual; but a second look shows it to be just another maneuver in the same old shell game.

Reagan calls for talks between the government and the rebels because it is politically necessary to call for negotiations, not because he will cause them to take place, or even necessarily wants them to.

To get enough members of Congress to agree to another \$110 million in military aid to El Salvador, in addition to the \$26 million already appropriated this year, Reagan must show in some way that he wants El Salvadoran abuses to stop. This new call for peace negotiations will probably end up as nothing more than a rubber stamp report every six months that the government uses in "pursuing" or "attempting" a negotiation.

At present, the El Salvadoran government already has one such requirement to meet every six months — a certification that El Salvador is trying to improve its human rights record. And the administration has continued to certify this human rights "progress," despite the government's dismal record. About 100 people are killed every week by the National Guard or by

government-supported right wing death squads. Over 35,000 Salvadoran non-combatants have been shot in the last three years.

The administration may not get the \$110 million it has asked for. Some Congresspersons don't like all that money going down the drain; others don't like supporting a murderous government. "The similarities between El Salvador and Vietnam are terrifying," said California representative Don Edwards.

The similarities are terrifying and strong: an oppressive regime justifies its indiscriminate killings by reference to the domino theory and the communist menace; the American government gets in deeper and deeper.

In order to justify continued U.S. aid — to squeeze it out of Congress, in effect — the administration has to keep two conflicting impressions in front of the public and in front of Congress: the dual images of the El Salvadoran government on its knees, and charging forward in combat. U.N. ambassador Jeane Kirkpatrick recently went to El Salvador and came back with a fairly grim report on conditions there, which became added fuel for the government's request for further aid. Officials have to make it look like El Salvador's government desperately needs aid to stay in power, then prevent the impression that the war is a losing cause.

The only way the guerrilla war will end is through bringing the guerrilla armies into the political process; and the only way that can happen is through unob-

structed land reform and genuine protection of human rights. A periodic assurance that things aren't as bad as they used to be is not enough.

It may be unlikely that a democratic government could exist in El Salvador with the support of either the present

regime or the guerrilla armies. But it's more and more clear that U.S. involvement in another country's conflict — especially on the side of an oppressive government — leads nowhere but to another Vietnam.

Eric Peterson



Black electorate's strength real, growing

Anyone who anoints himself leader of an organization called People United to Save Humanity thinks spaciously, and Jesse Jackson, founder of PUSH, is thinking of entering the Democratic presidential primaries.

He probably would get only a small sliver of even the black vote. Being frivolous with the franchise is a luxury of the comfortable. Besides, Jackson's complaint against the Democratic Party is, to say no more, unconvincing. It is that the party holds blacks "in contempt." Actually, it



George Will

has promised much to blacks, it has kept its promises and, given the parlous state of the republic's budget, there is not much more, aside from "affirmative action," it can promise at the moment.

A Jackson candidacy would be unserious. But the untrapped strength of the black electorate is serious and, for Republicans, ominous.

Winning re-election in 1982 as Pennsylvania's governor, Richard Thornburgh got 20 percent of the black vote, about double what most Republican candidates got, nationwide. But in 1978 he got more than 50 percent. True, in 1978 he was helped by the Democratic Party's entanglement with Frank Rizzo, Philadelphia's polarizing mayor. But in 1982 Thornburgh was endorsed by many state and national black leaders (including Jesse Jackson), yet could not counter the bitter, galvanizing hostility blacks feel for Reagan's policies and for Reagan personally. This bitterness may be the most underestimated force in U.S. politics today. Reagan is becoming the fourth factor in transforming the black electorate into a formidable anti-Republican sword.

A paper prepared by the Joint Center for Political Studies, a black research organization, notes that three events turned blacks into the Democratic Party's most cohesive block. One was the relief provided by the New Deal. Another was Harry Truman's civil rights legislation and the 1948 civil rights plank that provoked Strom Thurmond's Dixiecrat candidacy. The third was the Republican's nomination in 1964 of a candidate, Barry Goldwater, opposed to the 1964 Civil Rights Act.

Today, the paper says, "not only are the black poor dependent on government transfer programs; the black middle class is also heavily reliant on the public sector for

employment opportunities and contracting arrangements." This limits the extent to which the GOP can appeal to blacks even if it invigorates the private sector.

In 1956 Adlai Stevenson got only 61 percent of the black vote, and four years later John F. Kennedy got only 68 percent. But since the civil-rights revolution the Democrats' share (according to Gallup) has been: 1968 — 85 percent, 1972 — 87 percent, 1976 — 85 percent, 1980 — 86 percent.

True, Jimmy Carter got all but 14 percent of the black vote and lost all but six states. But momentous consequences can flow from changes at the margin in democracy. Of the 17 million blacks of voting age, only 10 million are registered and only 7 million voted in 1982. If 11 million voted, that would mean at least 3.5 million more Democratic votes.

In 1969 there were 1,160 black elected officials. Last year there were 5,160. But that is just one percent of all elective offices. Aside from two Mississippians elected during Reconstruction, Ed Brooke (R-Mass.) is the only black to serve in the Senate (1969-79). Only 52 blacks have served in the House, about half during Reconstruction; most — 21 — of the blacks elected in this century are now in Congress.

Only 14 congressional districts (three in Chicago) have black majorities. But blacks comprise at least 20 percent of the population in 86 districts which may be decisive in the Democratic primaries. Only 26 are northern urban districts. The other 60 are in the South.

Fifty-three percent of all blacks live in the South. But in four of the five states with the most electoral votes (California, New York, Texas, Illinois — a total of 136 electoral votes, more than half of the 270 needed to win), there are more than one million black voters. Twenty-eight of the nation's largest cities have more than 100,000 blacks. Thirty cities with more than 30,000 residents have black mayors. In 24 of the 25 largest school systems, a majority of the students are black or other racial minorities.

No candidate since Dwight Eisenhower in 1952 has won the presidency without carrying at least three of these six northern industrial states: Illinois, Michigan, New Jersey, New York, Ohio, Pennsylvania. In these states there are approximately 5.5 million blacks of voting age — a lot of them hitherto unregistered.

Republicans who are not dismayed by these numbers do not understand the political potential of the black vote, or the social failure represented by the fact that 11 percent of the electorate is essentially inaccessible to one party.

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