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RESIST

Newsletter #164

A call to resist illegitimate authority

March 1984

Free Elections in El Salvador

FRANK BRODHEAD

On March 25, 1984, more than a million Salvadorans will go to the polls. They will be casting their ballots in El Salvador's presidential election. Although the election will be interpreted as a vote for peace, it will be used by the Reagan administration to justify the continued U.S. military buildup in Central America. The Salvadoran election is not an exercise in democracy, but its opposite: a means to deny Salvadoran self-determination and to justify U.S. intervention.

For most Salvadorans the election ritual is meaningless and participation is compulsory. Voting is a means of keeping alive for another day. The election will affect Salvadorans chiefly by its impact on U.S. policy. It is for us, the citizens of the United States, that this election drama is conceived, written, staged, and interpreted. It is for us that the fine words of "democracy" and "self-determination" are scripted. It is for us—not the Salvadorans—that this election is called "free."

Our role in this election is not simply passive. As in much experimental theater, we as audience also have a role to play in the drama. If we find the election drama sufficiently convincing, our role may be expanded to support the dispatch of U.S. troops to Central America. Instead of a bit part, we may be offered the same leading role we had



Michael Scott/Oxfam America

in Vietnam. But if we denounce the drama as a fraud, as not genuine, as insulting and laughable, the Reagan administration may be blocked from escalating U.S. military aid to its Salvadoran clients at a militarily critical stage in the war.

Demonstration Elections

The Salvadoran election of March 1984 may be best described as a "demonstration election." That is, it is an election whose secondary purpose is to select political leaders or even to ratify the political leaders chosen by the Reagan administration. The purpose of the demonstration election, rather,

is to convince the citizens of the United States that their client government is freely chosen. While many colonial powers (including the Soviet Union) have sponsored fraudulent elections in client states, the demonstration election has become particularly important for U.S. intervention strategy. It is one of the major vehicles through which the United States legitimizes the expenditure of billions of dollars and thousands of lives in the slaughter of more thousands of lives in the defense of

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Defeating Reagan

As this issue of the Resist newsletter goes to the typesetter, the U.S. Battleship New Jersey, off the coast of Lebanon, is engaged in the heaviest and most sustained military action since the Vietnam War. An undetermined number of Lebanese civilians have been killed or maimed by the U.S. barrage. Jesse Jackson has correctly stated: "...countless numbers of civilians are being murdered by this latest assault. It's happening with a kind of blind, racist arrogance that is a reminder of Vietnam." In a fit of frustrated, revengeful rage, Ronald Reagan has exposed the bankruptcy of his militaristic foreign policy, caused unnecessary death and suffering and significantly increased the potential for a major military confrontation in the Middle East. Meanwhile, with the possibility of U.S. ground forces landing in El Salvador either before, during or after the Salvadoran elections in late March, it becomes very clear that we must prevent Reagan from winning his re-election bid. The thought of Reagan spending four more years in the White House without the constraint of having to think about his re-election is nightmarish, but real.

With presidential elections eight months away, it is crucial for the left to deal with this hotly debated issue and act immediately. Although every group on the left seems to have some kind of anti-Reagan strategy, National CISPES (the Committee in Solidarity with the People of El Salvador), at its first national convention, adopted a reasonable strategy that should be looked at. After intense debate, CISPES decided to support the rainbow coalition forming around Jesse Jackson and to contribute to the defeat of Reagan and his allies through focusing on their Central American and Caribbean policy.

Although the CISPES resolution stopped short of endorsing Jackson as



a candidate, the convention recognized the importance of a national rainbow coalition that is bringing together the poor, the elderly, the disabled, people of color, gays and lesbians, women and progressives. As the Mel King campaign did at a city-wide level in Boston, Jackson's rainbow coalition represents the potential for a unique and powerful national coalition that can have a serious impact in the political direction of this country. Jackson's candidacy is providing opportunities that should not be lost or ignored.

CISPES, in passing its resolutions, recognized that Reagan is extremely vulnerable on the issue of Central America. We must recognize that Reagan is also very vulnerable on the issues of arms control and the Middle East. There is a growing sentiment that Reagan's policies in these areas have failed miserably but unless this message is heard from the grassroots level, it will be ignored.

The left will never come to a consensus on how to defeat Reagan, but one thing is clear: he must go. The next several months provide an excellent opportunity to raise the important issues and put them on a national agenda. By doing this through demonstrations, forums, and door-to-door canvassing in our communities, we can significantly contribute to Reagan's defeat. The time to act is now.

IT'S TIME TO RESIST



ILLEGITIMATE AUTHORITY
Funding social change since 1967

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Free Elections in El Salvador

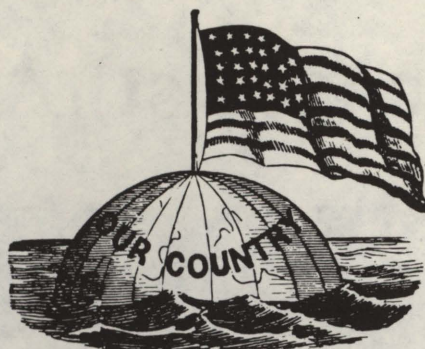
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U.S. "interests."

It is significant that such an exercise, a demonstration election, has become necessary in managing U.S. interests in the Third World. For it was not always so. The United States intervened in Central America prior to the Second World War with no thought given to "electing" a Somoza in Nicaragua or a Ubico in Guatemala. The United States required no such justification when it appointed Diem the president of the imaginary country of "South Vietnam." Indeed, the United States has frequently exercised its influence in Third World countries to *prevent* a free election, as it did in Vietnam in 1956 and in El Salvador in 1961 and 1972. The U.S. support for free elections is *selective*, tending to support free elections which ratify a candidate of our choice while opposing free elections in which the outcome is problematic.

The rise of the demonstration election is distinctly a product of the growing anti-imperialist revolt in the post-World War II period. More specifically, the United States gave little thought to using elections to legitimize its counterrevolutionary work in the Philippines or Greece in the 1940s, in Iran in 1953, or in Guatemala in 1954. But the prolonged U.S. involvement in Indochina undermined automatic domestic support for the imperial enterprise. By 1966 the Johnson administration found it expedient to ratify its rescue of antidemocratic forces in the Dominican Republic by staging an election; and in the following year it staged another election to consolidate Thieu and Ky as the leaders of Vietnam, thereby legitimizing further U.S. intervention as a response to the request of a "freely elected government." In both elections the Johnson administration was at pains to present the election-day events and the mechanics of the election as on the democratic up-and-up. Election observers were provided to supervise the fairness of the balloting.

The elections in the Dominican Republic and South Vietnam set the pattern for future demonstration elections. In both these and later elections a critical role in their legitimizing and demonstration function was played by the mass media. Because the purpose of the election is to influence U.S. citizens, the election managers in the State Department, Pentagon, and CIA must



rely on the privately owned U.S. mass media to shape the appropriate audience response to the election drama. There is clearly room for error here, as contradictory facts can (and often do) slip through. Yet on the whole the media fulfill their role by consistently accepting the *premises* of election drama, putting certain questions on the agenda and keeping others off the agenda. For example, the media can be counted on to play along with the "Will the guerrillas disrupt the election?" theme, and to accept the equation of a high voter turnout with political enthusiasm for the choices offered in the election. Most of the important questions, however, are kept off the agenda, or at least off the front pages. For example, completely lost in the media's fixation with political personalities and "Who will win?" are questions like:

1. Is there genuine freedom of speech? Could a candidate campaign for real land reform and the withdrawal of U.S. forces without being assassinated by government security forces or "death squads"?

2. Is there a free press? Could it support a candidate who was for real land reform and a withdrawal of U.S. forces? Would its reporters "disappear," would its editors be arrested, would its presses be bombed?

3. Can popular organizations grow and survive if they are independent and/or critical of the government? Are there trade unions, peasant associations, professional and artistic groupings? Are their officers assassinated or their militants routinely tortured by state officials? Ironically, this test—the existence of voluntary or "intermediate" organizations of citizens standing between state power and an atomized populace—is one stressed by liberal

democratic theorists in criticizing the lack of democracy in totalitarian states. Yet the free press in the United States seldom raises these questions when considering the context of a U.S.-sponsored election in a Third World country.

4. Is there a limit on what kind of political parties can contest the election? Can candidates campaign safely? Can a party be established without turning over thousands of names to the secret police? Will the party that gets the most votes actually hold office? Will all the major political forces in the country be allowed to be represented on the ballot?

5. And, is the level of state-sponsored terror sufficiently low that people acting in a political manner might reasonably hope to survive? How much of a climate of fear is compatible with making a free choice in the voting booth? Can a free choice be made in an atmosphere dominated by the army and associated death squads?

These and other questions affecting the fundamental qualities of political life are never on the agenda when the U.S. media are discussing a U.S.-sponsored election in "our" sphere of influence.

A simple litmus test of media bias is to imagine a similar election within the Soviet sphere. In such cases the U.S. media has shown an astonishing ability to cut through rhetoric about "democracy" and to perceive the real meaning of an election ritual. In the Polish election of 1947, for example, the U.S. media accurately criticized the election as a farce. They ridiculed the idea that a high turnout meant political enthusiasm for the communist regime, and correctly analyzed it as an indication of coercion and fraud. They reported the restrictions on the opposition party's candidates, their difficulties in campaigning and getting on the ballot, their exclusion from the government-controlled press and radio, and the censorship placed on opposition party newspapers. During the Polish election of 1947 the U.S. media did not feature long lines of apparently happy voters eager to do their duty, as they did during the elections in the Dominican Republic, Vietnam, or El Salvador.

In short, it may be taken as a rule of thumb that the U.S. media will focus on the mechanics of the election and

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You're in the (sexist) Army now

Does Khaki Become You?
The Militarization of Women's Lives
 By Cynthia Enloe
 South End Press, 1983
 224 pages, \$8.00 paper

KATHY GILBERD

What are the links between the oppression of women and militarism? Does the military really need—or want—women in its ranks? If we fight for the rights of women in the military, or for improved working conditions for women in defense industries, are we supporting militarism? What does it mean for women, as women, to challenge militarist ideas? *Does Khaki Become You* provides a valuable introduction to these issues.

Feminist opposition to nuclear weapons and militarism is an increasing political force in the U.S., in Europe and elsewhere. The Seneca Women's Peace Camp, the Women's Pentagon Action, the Greenham Common Peace Camp, the recent attempt of U.S. churchwomen to demonstrate in Honduras, women's anti-nuclear activity in Micronesia, and the mushrooming of local women's actions have made women central to the peace movement, and made it clear that we need to examine the military and its use of women.

Cynthia Enloe's book takes a thought-provoking look at the many ways women are affected by, and needed by, the military: as enlistees and officers, as medical personnel, as military wives, as prostitutes, as defense industry workers and as citizens generally affected by militarist ideology. For instance, she traces the evolution of the women's nursing corps from "camp followers" who tended the wounded in early wars whose role was eventually legitimized as army nurses.

At the same time, she looks at the way the ideologies of sexism and sex-role stereotypes are used to promote militarism and to control women's relationship to the military. In



Women Marines circa 1970.

photo by Chuck Rogers

response to those who consider the military simply a microcosm of society, Enloe suggests that the military expands and reinforces society's sexism, by giving it a stamp of approval. She begins with the understanding that the military needs women as a gender to promote a belief that armies must fight to save women and families. At the same time female participation in military efforts is distinct from "combat" in which "real men" may participate. This separation is done by categorizing military work required of women as "support" work, women's work.

To allow women into the essential core of the military, however, would throw into confusion "all men's certainty about their male identity and about their claim to privilege in the

social order." This is the basis of the current effort to force enlisted women back into traditionally female occupations, and to reinforce their official exclusion from combat.

Through interviews, vignettes and a marvelous compilation of statistical information, *Khaki* shows us the lives of military-related women and the mechanisms used to control them. It demonstrates how definitions and boundaries of "support work" change, often swiftly and dramatically, as the military's needs change.

Especially instructive is the section on women in current military industries. Noting that "the present post-war era is a militarized peacetime," Enloe traces the re-militarization of women through their exploitation in electronics and related industries. In

interviews with women in the U.S., England and the Philippines, she reveals the oppressive condition under which they work, the means by which they are separated from understanding and control over the products they create, and the consequences when these women come together to talk about and act on their exploitation.

Official efforts to control women's lives and interactions within the military provide insights into the very conscious manipulation of our oppression. Enloe takes a look, for example, at the significance of anti-lesbian witchhunts in the military, in which women, recruited with promises of training and work in traditionally male fields are punished and banished for not being heterosexually "feminine" enough. Even more sobering are the periodic changes in governmental restrictions on prostitution in military base areas, and the racist conceptions which consider the women of third world countries "recreational outlets" for male troops.

Women do rebel, though. Enloe provides examples of these rebellions, including interviews with Navy women

subjected to anti-lesbian prosecutions and others conducted with activists in defense plants. She gives insufficient attention, however, to the history of women who organized within the military during and after the Indochina war—the women who wrote and distributed underground newspapers, organized G.I. coffeehouses, and helped to make the public aware of dissent within the ranks. Likewise, the smaller but significant movement among military wives during that period is not discussed in any detail.

Khaki also includes a short chapter on women involved in wars of national liberation, and there are important interviews with such women. While pointing out real gains, Enloe also notes the tendency to give women secondary military positions during revolutionary periods, and then to demobilize them in the post-revolutionary period. She suggests the situation will continue "unless women are politically self-conscious and organizationally vocal as women about what they want to gain from their participation in the revolution's military

effort...."

Throughout, Enloe gives important insights into the relation between militarism and the oppression of women. At the same time she poses questions about the best way to respond to the contradictions we uncover, and about the advantages and problems inherent in support for women's struggles against the military. *Khaki* points out that "scrutinizing the ideological difficulties armed forces have in coping with women can reveal contradictions, gaps and cracks... into which a politics of resistance can intervene." And while some of the contradictions—the relations between sexual oppression and class oppression in militarist institutions, for example—remain to be discussed more thoroughly elsewhere, *Khaki* prepares us to carry the discussion further.

Kathy Gilbert works with the Military Law Task Force of the National Lawyers Guild in San Diego. This review originally appeared in the Guardian, an independent, radical news weekly. The Guardian is located at 33 West 17th St., NY, NY 10011, 212/691-0404.



Ellen Shub/CPF

A member of the Gray Panthers protests at the Pentagon (April, 1980).

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Free Elections in El Salvador

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election day events when assessing a U.S.-sponsored election, while shifting its focus to the more fundamental (and allegedly undemocratic) parameters of political power when the election is in an enemy sphere of influence. Thus the *New York Times* passed on, without comment, Secretary of State George Shultz's criticism of Nicaragua's forthcoming election: "An election just as an election doesn't really mean anything," he said. "The important thing is that if there is to be an electoral process, it be observed not only at the moment when people vote, but in all the preliminary aspects that make an election really mean something." (Feb. 6, 1984) The U.S. media has placed off the agenda the "preliminary aspects" of U.S.-sponsored elections, i.e. precisely those qualities "that make an election really mean something."

El Salvador

The election held in El Salvador in March 1982 was a classic demonstration election. The political climate in the United States was sceptical and increasingly critical of our Central American policy. Despite one of the most conservative Congresses in many years, public opinion in the United States had forced somewhat cumbersome restrictions on the amount of U.S. aid sent to El Salvador. The March demonstration election was instrumental in stemming this tide of scepticism and criticism. It gave the Reagan administration some badly needed breathing room, letting it regroup its right wing, fire conciliators like Undersecretary of State Thomas Enders and Ambassador to El Salvador Deane Hinton, and increase the U.S. military presence in Central America without taking a beating from the Democrats and doubting Republicans in Congress. In thinking about the March 1984 Salvadoran election, therefore, it is useful to analyze how the last election achieved its demonstration purposes.

By March 1982 two years of state terror had cleared the ground for a free election in El Salvador. The country had been under a legal state of siege since March 1980. Freedoms of movement, residence, thought, and assembly had been suspended. All Salvadoran newspapers that were critical of the government had been closed. Among the 30,000 civilian victims of the secur-

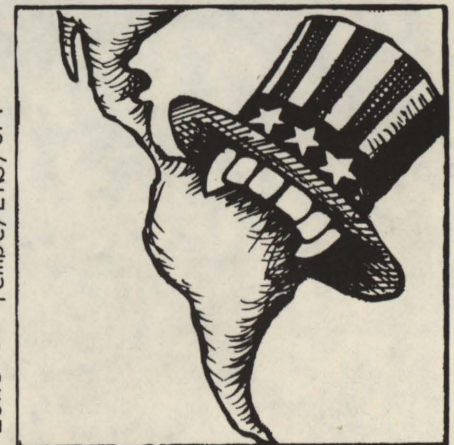


ity forces and death squads were priests and church officials, human rights workers and labor leaders, at least twenty leaders of the Christian Democratic Party, and more than 1,000 students. The media did not dwell on these longer term factors in the election. Instead they stressed the long lines of enthusiastic voters defying threats of guerrilla disruption to cast their vote. They did not reflect too much on the fact that the long lines were produced by allocating only a few polling places for each city (e.g. 13 in San Salvador), by making voting legally obligatory, and by identifying those who voted by marking their identity cards. Neither the media nor the official U.S. observer team criticized the use of transparent plastic ballot boxes and transparent paper ballots. Although Salvadoran election officials and the U.S. Embassy predicted between 500,000 and 800,000 Salvadorans would vote, a turnout of more than 1,500,000 did not arouse scepticism. Two studies done by the Central American University in El Salvador claiming that it was physically impossible for so many people to vote within the allotted time were quickly buried by the U.S. media. Nor did they spend much time puzzling over how a "massive vote for peace" could have resulted in the victory of those forces most determined to pursue the war against the guerrillas.

The cooperation of the U.S. media enabled the Reagan administration to pull off the demonstration election and to temporarily halt the rapid loss of popular confidence in its Central

American policy. The promise of elections during the March 1982 certification hearings in Congress, and the results of the elections during similar hearings in July, allowed the Reagan administration to claim that it was supporting self-determination in El Salvador. At a minimum, the election undercut those liberal Democrats who claimed that the guerrillas had broad support and should therefore be included in negotiations. The election helped retain the support of Christian Democratic parties in Europe and Latin America for the alleged U.S. efforts to restore the mythical "center" in Salvadoran politics. It kept the congressional military aid pipeline open a little wider and a little longer. And, perhaps most important, it facilitated the Reagan administration's contrived "search for peace," whereby the scope of possible negotiations between the political forces in El

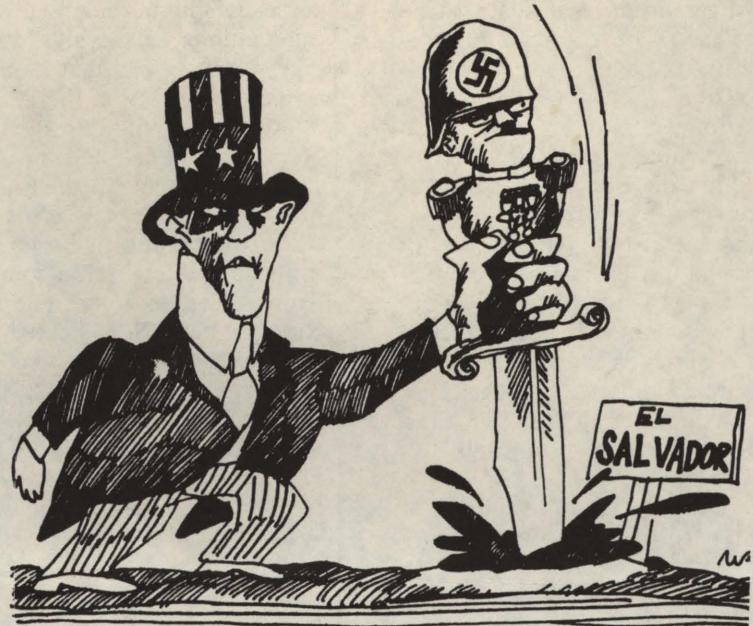
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Salvador was reduced to including the guerrillas within the next round of the electoral process. As the media and the U.S. Congress had largely accepted the legitimacy of this electoral process, the guerrillas were placed in the position of losing credibility if they refused to play the electoral game, or being defeated in an election drama controlled by the security forces and the Pentagon if they chose to participate.

March 1984

Like its predecessor the March 1984 Salvadoran election is a demonstration election. It is intended to pacify the home audience and to provide a suitable climate in which Congress can consider the recommendations of the Kissinger Commission for increased military aid. Whatever the additional consequences of the election for Salvadorans, its main effects will be in the United States. U.S. officials have been working on this election for a year or more. Special Envoy Richard Stone's first assignment was to (unsuccessfully) attempt to move the elections up to last fall. Members of the State Department and the last official U.S. observer team have been in Salvador making arrangements for the election. The United States has put up \$6 to \$8 million for the election computers alone. The



depth of the U.S. role in the election is indicated by a *New York Times* report last May:

The Central Intelligence Agency plans to support the election by intensifying its collection of intelligence information about the guerrillas' military plans and operations so as to help the Salvadoran military block anticipated efforts to disrupt the voting... Because the State Department and the Salvadoran Government

lack expertise in conducting elections ... a lot of the work will be turned over the private contractors... A concern in El Salvador or the United States would likely handle an extensive print and television advertising campaign to promote the major voter registration drive that the Salvadoran Government hopes to conduct.

These efforts are being made for our benefit and not in the interests of Salvadoran democracy. They should be seen for what they are: the props, script, and stage lighting of a shoddy farce.

Frank Brodhead is a member of the Resist board. He, along with Edward Herman, is co-author of a recently released book entitled: Demonstration Elections, published by South End Press in Boston.

**DEMONSTRATION ELECTIONS
U.S.-STAGED ELECTIONS IN
THE DOMINICAN REPUBLIC,
VIETNAM, AND EL SALVADOR**

Frank Brodhead and Edward S. Herman

How should we interpret apparent voter approval of US-backed regimes in the Third World? Should we assume that the right-wing victors have genuine popular support? Frank Brodhead and Edward Herman examine the nature and legitimacy of these US-sponsored elections, employing a six-point standard as a way of measuring exactly how democratic the election processes actually were. They find that none of these conditions were met in any of the cases under investigation, and conclude that these so-called "free" and "fair" elections are gigantic public relations campaigns used to demonstrate to the US public that the governments we support are also supported by their own people.

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National Coalition Against Registration and the Draft (CARD), 201 Massachusetts Ave., NE, Washington, DC 20002.

Last summer, after an evaluation of their resources, National CARD realized that there was a pressing need for them to shore up their dwindling membership/fundraising list. Though CARD has been continually active on issues of registration and militarism over the years, their resources were not extensive enough to support the ambitious outreach and educational campaigns that they wanted to implement. Knowing Resist's history of involvement in anti-draft organizing and funding, CARD turned to us for financial support and advice. We consulted with them on a membership/fundraising campaign and offered them the use of Resist's mailing list along with a \$500 loan to pay for printing and postage. The mailing was a great success. CARD made enough money to plan additional mailings for the fall and to pay back the loan with an extra \$40 as a gift to Resist's loan fund.

Since last summer, CARD has done substantial outreach and organizing on the Solomon Amendments and the effects of the draft, military service and militarism on women. They have also made a commitment to increase their work on the third-world and poverty drafts and to hire a third-world staff person. Since our initial loan of \$500 we have seen CARD through additional mailings and given them two small emergency grants. One grant was used to put out the September issue of the CARD newsletter, and with the other they purchased a used typewriter with which to facilitate their grant-writing process. They now have a grant proposal pending with the MS. Foundation to fund a 1/2-time staffperson for the Women's Caucus and a film/speaking tour of *Soldier Girls* and women vets.

The Southern Organizing Committee (SOC), PO Box 11308, Louisville, KY 40211.

SOC is developing a new and potentially successful strategy for uniting the peace movement with grassroots community groups. This new strategy finds its roots in SOC's Southeast Project on Human Needs & Justice which has been concentrating

on leadership development and organizing among tenants in the South. They strongly feel that the resurgent tenant movement in the Deep South is now developing into the leadership force of what can become a "new peace movement"—one that is grounded in the grass roots of many local communities, with much of its impetus and leadership coming from Third World and poor people. In early January, SOC held a conference in Birmingham called "Action Strategies to Defeat Racism, Militarism and Economic Injustice" which was attended predominantly by Black activists and women from tenant groups on the Gulf Coast and in Louisiana, Alabama and Tennessee. The purpose of this conference was to bring together these activists with peace activists from the same communities in order to begin building coalitions. The "new peace movement" won't happen, organizers at SOC believe, by grafting a constituency of Black and poor people onto existing peace organizations. Rather, the impetus has to come from the opposite direction. Workshops at the conference included discussion of racism, militarism, unemployment, housing, community organizing techniques, and voter education. Workshop leaders represented groups such as the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, United League of Holmes County, War Resisters League, Black American Network for Disarmament, Peace and Justice, and a number of southern tenant organizations. One hundred and thirty-four people turned out for the conference, 30% more than SOC had anticipated. And much of the leadership in the workshops was taken by the tenant-rights activists who attended. Resist's grant helped cover some of the costs of housing for the conference.

Joint Legal Task Force on Central American Refugees, 1613 Smith Tower, Seattle, WA 98104.

Because of the threat of persecution and death faced by El Salvadoran and Guatemalan refugees should they be deported, a group of attorneys in Seattle formed the Joint Legal Task Force (JLTF) in the fall of 1982. They have set up a system that enables them to offer free representation to every Salvadoran and Guate-

malan refugee in Washington State who is facing deportation. The JLTF has succeeded in preventing deportation in all of the cases they have represented. This record is astounding considering the INS crackdown on refugees in this country. Consequently the model that the JLTF has developed for assisting refugees is being adopted by groups in cities around the country: Washington DC, Boston and Tucson, for example.

The JLTF pairs members of the Washington Bar with paralegals who serve as the resource people for the project. Each attorney who volunteers to work on a case is given a packet which includes material on immigration law, precedent-setting cases and specifics for their community and the state of Washington. Using the packet as a resource and the paralegals as the foundation for the project, many attorneys volunteer their time, including those who aren't familiar with immigration law. Since the work involved is not time-intensive for lawyers, the JLTF has been very successful in recruiting volunteer legal help.

The biggest problem the JLTF has had to date is fundraising. Most liberal foundations feel that the project is "beyond their scope" or do not have enough funds available. The JLTF came to Resist needing funds to print a "Know Your Right" wallet sized card printed in Spanish. We gave them \$500 for this project. Since that time they have been selected as the National Lawyers Guild summer project, which means they will receive 1/2 funding for a summer law student to coordinate their work.

