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The Intelligence War

GUERRILLA QUEST FOR U.S. SUPPORT

By ROBERT MOSS

SOME of the most revealing documents on the foreign connections of El Salvador's guerrilla Left were withheld by the State Department from the inch-thick dossier it made public last month.

Through Congressional sources in Washington I have obtained a photographic copy of a captured document that contains a 22-page report by Senor Farid Handal, brother of Shafik Handal, the Salvadoran Communist leader, on a visit he made to the United States in the spring of last year to mobilise support for the guerrilla cause.

In the report Farid Handal describes meetings with Cuban intelligence officers based in New York, with a Palestine Liberation Organisation representative, with networks of radical Latin-American exiles, with Congressmen, and with individuals from the Institute for Policy Studies and the National Council of Churches.

Web of committees

Handal's report details contributions made by these and others—notably the Communist party, USA — to the creation of a web of "solidarity committees" and lobbying caucuses that have since been at the forefront of the campaign to sabotage the Reagan Administration's intervention in support of the present Government of El Salvador.

The report also contains some startling revelations about the role of the Mexican Government and a senior State Department official who has since been removed from his job.

Setting off from San Jose, Costa Rica, in February last year in the guise of a spokesman for the Salvadoran National Democratic Union party, Farid Handal visited New York, Washington, Chicago, San Francisco, and Los Angeles, and created joint solidarity committees in several of these cities — although he frequently complains in his report about the bickering between rival Salvadoran Leftist groups.

In Washington, he notes, Senora Isabel Letelier (widow of the exiled Chilean Socialist leader who worked as a Cuban agent before his murder in Washington) organised a seminar for him at the Institute for Policy Studies.

The seminar was used to assemble members for a new "International Committee of Solidarity with the People of El Salvador."

However, as Handal notes, there were only two Salvadorans on this committee at the outset.

The other members came from Chile, Argentina, Bolivia, Ecuador, Uruguay, the Dominican Republic, and Cuba.

Council of Churches

In San Francisco, according to Farid Handal, his meetings were attended by "three priests from the National Council of Churches."

Of them he says: "They completely supported our plans. They made known that they had initiated approaches and co-operation previously, but had withdrawn because of the division between the groups and the lack of a single directorate."

Two more priests from the National Council turned up in the course of Handal's working discussions with Communist, Trotskyite, and Maoist organisations.

The Church in the United States continues to play a leading role in opposing American involvement in El Salvador.

In New York, Farid Handal says, he met officers of the Cuban secret service, the DGI, who are operating under cover at the Cuban mission to the United Nations, at the home of Senor Alfredo Garcia Almeida.

Significantly the Cuban intelligence officers gave him his main support in developing contacts on Capitol Hill — further confirmation of the intensive efforts of the DGI and the American department of the Cuban Communist party to recruit agents of influence in Congress.

In Farid Handal's own words: "with regard to my stay in the United States and the work I should accomplish there, they (the DGI men) recommended that I should carry out work of an informational nature about the situation

benefit of progressive Congressmen, for the purpose of making the rest of my work appear more natural, and in that way protect my visa."

Handal's report continues: "They offered to facilitate contacts in Washington. And they did that."

In New York, Handal also had meetings with leaders of the Communist party, USA.

He got off to a bad start with them, but in the subsequent course of his trip — thanks largely to the efforts of Mr Sandy Polak, a member of the American Communist party central committee and "solidarity co-ordinator" for the United States Peace Council — the party gave him important backing.

He was contacted in Washington by "Veronica," a Chilean-born party member, who arranged later meetings.

"The comrades of the Cuban mission," Handal reports, "had recommended Juan Ferreira, from Uruguay. I contacted him at WOLA (Washington Office on Latin America). He helped me at WOLA and at the National Council of Churches."

On his return to Washington, Farid Handal met Rep. Ronald Dellums, a liberal black Democratic Congressman, and his staff, and they also helped to broaden his network of contacts, he said.

In preparation for a meeting with other members of the black caucus on Capitol Hill, Handal notes, "the offices of Congressman Dellums were turned into our offices. Everything was done there."

The meeting with the black caucus, he states, "took place in the liver of the monster itself" — a reference to the committee meeting room on Capitol Hill that was made available, and an interesting reflection on Farid Handal's attitude to democratic institutions.

National conference

It becomes apparent from Handal's report that many of the most productive proposals for the expansion of the Salvadoran "solidarity campaign" in the United States

came from the American Communist party and the Cuban intelligence station in New York.

Mr Sandy Polak, of the Communist party, for example, "proposed a national conference under the auspices of the United States Peace Council (American arm of the Soviet front organisation, the World Peace Council), the National Council of Churches, Amnesty International, WOLA and various important unions."

Mr Polak also suggested means by which radio and television programmes could be "financed" under the public broadcasting system, according to Handal.

Another of Handal's interlocutors was a PLO representative who is not named in the report but was apparently a member of the Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine.

The Palestinian promised that the PLO "could give us very valuable help."

However, Handal was cautious. "The truth is," he reports, "that he seemed very strange to me, and I thought it more prudent to listen only. It was very tiring because the guy talks more than I do."

Washington meetings

One of the most fascinating sections of Handal's report describes his meetings in Washington with Senor Guillermo Manuel ("Memo") Ungo, the Salvadoran revolutionary front leader, and Dr Jorge Sol Castellanos, said to be the head of a private support network in the American capital.

Senor Ungo is said to have been having conversations in Washington with senior State Department officials, and to have quoted Mr Robert White, then American Ambassador to El Salvador, as saying he was "optimistic" there would be no American intervention and as "agreeing with what 'Memo' had said."

Dr Sol Castellanos is said to have described a conversation he claimed to have had with ex-President Oduber of Costa Rica after he had talked with President Lopez Portillo of Mexico.

According to this second-hand account, the Mexican leader had expressed sympathy with the Salvadoran revolution and had suggested that, while there was little he could do to give direct support, he could "guarantee that the Guatemalan Army would not intervene."