

ARTICLE APPEARED  
ON PAGE 15

NEW REPUBLIC  
15 April 1985

Where did d'Aubuisson's pal come up with \$6 million in cash?

## INSIDE DOPE IN EL SALVADOR

BY CRAIG PYES AND LAURIE BECKLUND

ON FEBRUARY 6 several U.S. Customs agents stopped a sleek white Sabreliner jet as it was fueling up at the Kleberg County Airport, 60 miles outside of Corpus Christi, Texas. They suspected it was carrying the cash profits from a series of major drug deals. The plane had made two suspicious flights to Panama and El Salvador in the previous three weeks. There were four men traveling on the plane, all of whose names appeared on police computers as suspected narcotics smugglers. When customs agents attempted to search the men's luggage, the apparent leader, a self-possessed 34-year-old businessman from Central America named Francisco Guirola, resisted. "It would cause trouble," he warned the agents in near-perfect English.

He swore he was not carrying drugs or arms. He insisted that he was entitled to diplomatic immunity, and he showed a Costa Rican diplomatic passport to prove it. Customs officials checked with the State Department and learned that, although Guirola's passport was genuine, he was not protected by diplomatic immunity. The agents opened Guirola's eight large suitcases. Each one was stuffed with thousands of \$20 and \$100 bills. There were 650 pounds of unmarked bills, a total of more than \$5.9 million. Guirola and two of the men with him are now awaiting trial on charges of violating federal regulations restricting the removal of money from the country.

In El Salvador, where Guirola lives, he was quickly nicknamed "the six-million-dollar man." He had been known in Salvadoran political circles as one of a group of wealthy young businessmen active in right-wing activities. Since 1979 he had served intermittently as a quiet and effective fund-raiser for his close friend Roberto d'Aubuisson, the leader of the Arena party and a man repeatedly charged with organizing death-squad activities. Arena is the

country's largest and most extreme right-wing political organization. (See "Mi Asesino, the Freedom Fighter," page 19). In March 1984 d'Aubuisson ran unsuccessfully for president against the Christian Democratic candidate, José Napoleón Duarte. During the campaign, he used Guirola's home in San Salvador as his personal headquarters. In their search warrant affidavit, the customs agents cited Drug Enforcement Administration files that state, "Guirola in March 1984 was reportedly involved in Cocaine and arms smuggling in El Salvador and Guatemala."

Guirola clearly belongs to d'Aubuisson's inner circle. Last spring the United States heard of a plot among d'Aubuisson associates to assassinate U.S. ambassador to El Salvador Thomas Pickering. U.S. authorities believe that Dr. Antonio Hector Regalado, a dentist who is d'Aubuisson's personal security adviser and who is known as "Dr. Death," was behind the plot. His private phone number was found in Guirola's address book. President Reagan dispatched special envoy General Vernon Walters to inform d'Aubuisson personally that the United States would not look kindly on the murder of its ambassador. Only four men are known to have attended the meeting: Walters, Pickering, d'Aubuisson, and Chico Guirola.

D'Aubuisson was reportedly in no condition to meet with anyone. One knowledgeable source recalls, "He's known to take anything—full glasses of alcohol, cocaine, you name it. He scares the hell out of people when he goes on a bender. He goes crazy. For this meeting with Pickering, [they] had to stand him in a shower and pour coffee down his throat. He took Chico Guirola [to the meeting] as his witness. It was real South Italian—Guirola was the *hombre de confianza* to say d'Aubuisson didn't rat on anyone."

The credentials and papers that Guirola was carrying at the time of his arrest testified to his political connections.

Continued