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What's ahead for human rights?

Panelists' predictions conflict

By SALLY HODGKINSON
Of the Emerald



Photos by Erich Boekelheide
Richard Nokes

"I'm an optimist by nature. Like Martin Luther King, I have a dream. The time has come to right the wrongs in Latin America."

Predictions for human rights in Latin America ranged from "a dream to a nightmare" in the closing panel of the human rights conference Friday night.

"I'm an optimist by nature," said Richard Nokes, editor of the Portland Oregonian. "Like Martin Luther King, I have a dream. The time has come to right the wrongs in Latin America."

Although other panel members emphasized the need for human rights in Latin America, they said reality and dreams sometimes don't mix.

"When it comes to Latin America and the United States, I'm a pessimist," Council on Hemispheric Affairs director Larry Birns told the crowded EMU Ballroom audience.

Birns said military regimes in Latin America are gaining power after establishing order, and there is little hope for a strong stand on human rights from the Reagan administration.

"I have rarely seen such a collection of cheerless, drab and intellectually absurd people."

One of the fallacies of the new administration is its plan to establish friendly relations with countries that are the United States' "traditional friends."

With the present repressive governments in some "traditionally friendly" countries as Argentina, Chile and El Salvador, establishing relations with those countries is like being friendly with Hitler's Germany or Lenin's Russia on the basis of "traditional friendship," Birns said.

"These Reagan folk, who are intellectually not smart, expect their judgments to be unexamined. One of our jobs is to examine their presuppositions."

But state department representative John Blacken said former Pres. Jimmy Carter understood human rights, but he couldn't reconcile the United States' power with its principles. Reagan will do better, Blacken predicted.

"I think you can expect consistency from the new administration."

Although the crowd was generally well mannered, many of the questions ranged from political statements to verbal attacks on Blacken. "How do you sleep at night?" one person asked him. "When is the next time you expect to spend time in the unemployment line?" another asked.

Blacken and Rick Rolf, an aide to Sen. Mark Hatfield, cautioned the

Continued on Page 3



Laurence Birns

"When it comes to Latin America and the United States, I'm a pessimist." Reagan's administration is "cheerless, drab and intellectually absurd."

Media pros rap El Salvador coverage

By JEFF BAKER
Of the Emerald

American media coverage of Latin America was graded Friday afternoon.

It received a "six or seven out of 10" from the Oregonian's editor, "a better press than we deserve" from a Latin American expert, and "extremely ill-prepared" from the director of Interlink Press Service.

The panel discussion, "The Role of U.S. Media in Shaping U.S. Perspectives in Latin America," featured Oregonian editor Richard Nokes, Council on Hemispheric Affairs director Laurence Birns, and Interlink Press Service director Brennon Jones.

El Salvador was the focus of the discussion and criticism.

Nokes said The Oregonian has published more than 200 articles on El Salvador, many reflecting the "heavy weight given human rights" in Associated Press coverage.

Most AP coverage of El Salvador comes from Mexico City, where five staff members rotate two-week tours inside the war-torn country, Nokes said.

AP and Oregonian coverage "could be stronger, I hope it will be," he said.

The Oregonian will send a correspondent to El Salvador if the conflict continues. Nokes said he would "go myself, but I'm getting a little long in the tooth to dodge bullets from leftists, rightists and centrists."

Nokes annoyed the EMU Ballroom crowd by observing that there has been "direct propaganda from your side, and plenty of it. There's a game of civil war that's being played."

"The communist government will never be on top of the problem. The (now-governing) junta has a better chance of changing things than the left or right," he said.

Nokes concluded by saying human rights "should be on page one of The Oregonian. It is on page one of our hearts."

Crowd favorite Laurence Birns, fresh from a morning grilling of state department aide John Blacken, said the U.S. press "is not a monolith. It is the most pluralistic of institutions."

Birns explained how "conspiracies of information dissemination" in Latin American coverage persist.

The AP often has only one correspondent in each country who must not only report news but sell the AP service to newspapers within the country, Birns said. This creates a "built-in conflict" that often is resolved by emphasizing sports, he said.

El Salvador coverage has been "generally good," Birns said. Unfortunately, American reporters who vigorously pursue stories become "prime candidates for right-wing death squads." New York Times reporter Alan Riding has received a death threat and was afraid to return to El Salvador, Birns said.

Interlink director Jones told the crowd "several years ago El Salvador didn't exist in the American press. It was just another disaster on page 15."

"Trouble spot coverage" hurt the press because they realized too late that a crisis exists, Jones said.

"We're extremely ill-prepared to face the crises that exist in Latin America," he said. "What's missing in the American press is a sense of history."

Activist condemns Guatemalan government

By MIKE RUST
Of the Emerald

During the first 11 months of last year, 300 Guatemalans were seized and murdered by government security agents, the national campus coordinator for Amnesty International said.

Craig Rock, who was on campus Thursday to help organize a University AI chapter, discussed the contents of an AI report on Guatemala released last week.

"The human rights issue that dominates all others in Guatemala today is that people who oppose or are imagined to oppose the government are systematically seized without warrant, tortured and murdered," Rock said.

"These tortures and murders are part of a deliberate and long-standing program of the Guatemalan government."

Rock said the deployment of official forces for extra-legal operations "can be pinpointed to secret offices in an annex of Guatemala's National Palace under the direct control of the president of the republic."

Gen. Lucas Garcia became president of Guatemala in July, 1978. Since then, AI estimates 5,000 people have been killed by government security forces. AI also estimates more than 20,000 people have been murdered or disappeared from 1966 to 1976.

Rock said the report includes tran-

scripts of two "unique interviews." One is with a peasant who AI believes to be the only survivor of political imprisonment in Guatemala last year and the other with a former soldier who served as a plainclothes army agent.

Amnesty International, the international human rights association that won the 1977 Nobel Peace Prize, has 123 campus chapters in the United States. Campus chapters concentrate on projects suited to a nine-month academic year, Rock said.

In a later interview, Rock said the human rights situation around the world will improve as popular knowledge increases.

"With American students, I don't think

it's a question of apathy. It's more a lack of knowledge," he said. "Youth are still a very moral people in this country."

Rock said his goal is a time when "human rights will come before foreign policy." He opposes economic or military aid to violators of human rights.

Rock suggests that "if they want to," Third World countries will be able to play an increasing role in promoting human rights because of their economic power. AI supports "prisoners of conscience" regardless of their political stripe.

"We're more effective by not being political," Rock said. "By taking the human rights side of the issues, we attack the roots of the problem that creates violence everywhere."