

## Court cameras don't mean press freedom

Last Thursday, the Oregon Supreme Court voted unanimously to break an almost three-decade tradition that banned news media cameras from state trial courts. Until now, Oregon had been among a small number of states to bar news cameras from trial courtrooms.

But while we'd like to accept this decision as one more broken barrier against freedom of the press, our excitement has been tempered somewhat as it is only under several restrictions that the news media will be allowed to bring cameras and audio recording devices into trial courtrooms.

The rules allow a trial judge to deny a request for television coverage if the judge believes coverage would interfere with a fair trial or efficient administration of justice. While we obviously don't think television coverage should be allowed to interfere with a fair trial, or with administration of justice, it is well known that members of the Oregon State Bar have long voiced their opposition to allowing news cameras in the courts. Bar members also have suggested that a majority of trial court judges also oppose the use of cameras in the courtroom.

But what could stop a judge from denying television access simply because he or she didn't want it there?

Another section of the rules, with which we don't agree, states television cameras must be operated by court staff members rather than by television news personnel.

But this rule could be even more disruptive if untrained court clerks were set free to use equipment valued in the range of \$30,000 to \$40,000. This is undeniably a job for professional news photographers, not amateur camera fanatics.

For years, jurists have feared cameras in the courtroom would interfere with the judicial process. We hope this most recent step by the Oregon Supreme Court will dispel these fears and allow the public a wider examination of the courts.

But for now, it looks as though it's up to the courts to determine when, if, or what information will be distributed to the viewers.

## Dirty tactics not startling from North, trial lawyers

In the summer of 1987, we Americans were faced with a major governmental scandal and coverup scheme (the Iran-Contra hearings) that left us feeling insecure and disappointed in the nation's leaders — except for Oliver North, whom many thought to be the epitome of a hero throughout the proceedings.

Almost two years later and with the Oliver North trial set to begin, we are once again faced with coverup schemes and withheld information, courtesy of the North trial lawyers. Those old feelings of insecurity and disappointment are resurfacing. And Oliver North? Well, now he's just a regular guy trying to sell the farm to cover his tracks (and avoid 60 years in prison and \$3 million in fines).

Last week, Attorney General Dick Thornburgh and independent counsel Lawrence Walsh had hoped U.S. District Court Judge Gerhard Gesell would accept their plan to protect against unnecessary and uncontrolled disclosures of information of vital importance to national security — in effect, allowing the lawyers to protest as perceived threats to national security surface during the trial.

But Gesell showed little sympathy to this plan. He rejected it outright, saying that Thornburgh can protect national security only by filing an affidavit "scuttling the case in whole or in part."

Thornburgh, of course, is reluctant to file the affidavit protecting certain classified information, as he does not know precisely what classified information North's lawyers intend to use. (Two main charges against North — conspiracy and theft of government property — were dismissed last month following a Thornburgh affidavit.)

These tactics, of course, are justifiably lawyer-like, but they are unseemly nonetheless.

So, as the American public awaits the proceedings of the Oliver North trial, a tangled web of deceit in the governmental system, there are at least two things we can be sure of: Oliver North and the trial lawyers definitely are not heroes.

### Commentary Policy

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### Forum

## U.S. coverup racks El Salvador

By Kevin Hornbuckle

Ever wonder why our government sends \$1.5 million a day to support El Salvador's military dictatorship? If you're like most people, you spend more time worrying about which TV programs to avoid. To be sure, it'll be television that teaches U.S. citizens about our neighbor in revolt.

Such was the case during the revolution in Nicaragua that did not catch the attention of U.S. citizens until the cold-blooded murder of a countryman was broadcast on the six

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o'clock news. As his shaking partner recorded the scene, reporter Bill Stewart of ABC was made to lie on the street as one of Somoza's National Guardsmen casually parted his skull with a round from a U.S.-supplied assault rifle.

Shocked and surprised were the viewers who had no previous knowledge of the carnage their tax dollars bought daily. Those less ignorant about our government's role and Somoza's terror rightly concluded that the victim was relatively lucky: most of the Guard's victims were forced to endure long periods of torture before being allowed to die.

The mainstream media in our country are of course happy to help us quickly forget the would-be lesson of the thousands of deaths caused by our country's murderous foreign policy in Central America. After all, capitalist media is driven not by the mission to inform, but rather by the mission to profit. Embarrassing exposes do not make a consumer happy.

But imagine, for example, the audiences that would be drawn to their TV sets if they could view live coverage of El Salvador's revolution as was done with Vietnam during that war. No such luck though. To get that sort of excitement you'll have to settle for the weekly remakes of history unabashedly broadcast in the form

of the popular new Vietnam war TV shows.

The Pentagon knows from experience that if U.S. citizens knew of our country's role in El Salvador, they'd have domestic revolts for the same reason there were domestic revolts in response to the Vietnam war. Isn't it true that the average U.S. citizen is intolerant of the victimization of innocent people? The warmakers think so. For it is the Pentagon's goal and the media's duty to keep the populace ignorant of that which we would not tolerate. The Pentagon denies access to embarrassing information and reporters self-censor. Thus, reporters are rarely allowed outside of San Salvador, and most simply would rather not make reports that they know will not get past the editor's desk.

So we do tolerate the victimization in El Salvador, partially because of lack of accurate information. For example, a lie that the media dutifully reports is the assertion that the war in El Salvador is now a "stalemate." It strains credulity to attach such a label given that: the Salvadoran military receives \$1.5 million per day in addition to thousands of U.S. training hours for its officers.

The Pentagon claims that the rebel army commands fewer than 7,000 combatants. The FMLN has no vehicles or forts. Yet in nine years of fighting and more than 70,000 deaths the superiorly equipped and trained Salvadoran army loses daily more territory and weapons to the revolutionaries. The FMLN has thrice overrun some of the principal military posts, including ones inhabited by U.S. military trainers. In November amid broad daylight the rebels attacked and nearly destroyed the National Guard headquarters in downtown San Salvador. Whether born of ignorance or deceit, the characterization of the war as "stalemate" flounders hopeless for lack of support.

At the same time there is support for the case against intervention. Consider the words of Sen. Barbara Mikulski (D-

Md.), who interviewed a peasant woman who witnessed an attack on Dec. 11, 1981 by a U.S.-trained elite battalion: "Many of her family were killed. She personally saw children around the age of eight being raped, and then (the soldiers) would take their bayonets and make mincemeat of them. With their guns they would shoot at their faces ... They would slit the stomach of a pregnant woman and take the child out, as if they were taking eggs out of an iguana ..."

Little has changed since 1981. Still, some people refuse to believe that our virtuous government supports this sort of terrorism in El Salvador. Liberals who do believe it frequently cry out, "it's just so senseless." But U.S. foreign policy can be seen as eminently sensible once one sees that the U.S. policy serves a well-defined purpose as does terror. In short, it is ostensibly the "protection of U.S. interests." Reality is of course something else.

The U.S. taxpayer generously finances the profit schemes of the company stockholders that own, for example, textile mills once located in South Carolina. There U.S. workers earned less than \$4 per hour and their Salvadoran replacements are paid approximately \$1.50 a day. The company cuts its costs further by eliminating safety equipment. Workers who try to unionize for better pay and work conditions are abducted by the death squads. Thus, we are left with brutalized people in El Salvador, and unemployed people in our own country. The multinational corporations are left with higher profits. That's capitalism.

As the Salvadorans become more organized in their opposition to the economic exploration made possible U.S. foreign policy, Washington's response is increased militarism. A natural product of this is the ascendance to power of El Salvador's ultra-right wing ARENA party. A combination political-paramilitary organization, ARENA

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