



Gus Newport Photo by Richard Brown

Berkeley Mayor Visits

by Bob Lothian

Gus Newport, mayor of Berkeley, California, visited Portland last week to talk about his trip to El Salvador and report on Berkeley's "experiment" in progressive city government.

Newport spent eight days behind rebel lines in El Salvador in March, 1985. He was there with a delegation from the Bay Area to visit Berkeley's Salvadoran sister city, San Antonio Los Ranchos.

As they approached San Antonio on foot, the delegation and their Salvadoran guides were threatened by an air attack.

"For 45 minutes we huddled near the floor of the small adobe house as the plane circled above firing rockets which shook the ground when they exploded around us," Newport said. "We saw every expression from weariness to fear to comforting smiles directed at us by the Salvadoran men, women and children who shared the meager shelter with us. For perhaps the first time we really understood the impact for Salvadoran civilians of the U.S.-sponsored air war." Luckily, no one was hurt in the attack.

Newport spoke in Portland at a benefit reception for New El Salvador Today, a group which sends aid to civilians in the war zones. He spoke later to an audience of 100 at Koinonia House near PSU.

The mayor criticized Reagan Central America policies, especially U.S. backing of the air war in El Salvador which Newport said is killing and

maiming civilians, and destroying their homes and villages.

Newport said that San Antonio, for example, was "practically destroyed through aerial bombardments." Although the Bay Area delegation was unable to visit Berkeley's sister city due to the air attack and nearby army activity, Newport said a delegation from the town walked out to visit them.

They told him that most of the town's former population of 14,000 has left due to the bombing. Some residents retreated further into the mountains for protection. "Everybody slept outside because all the houses in that area had been destroyed."

Newport said the delegation walked all the way to the Honduran border and witnessed the effects of the air war on civilians the entire time.

Though Salvadoran president Duarte has said he has a policy against attacking civilian targets, Newport said the delegation witnessed bomb-scarred villages, destruction of crops and livestock, and they met and talked to civilians with shrapnel wounds.

"It was just like the Vietnam War," Newport said. "Our tax dollars are being used for indiscriminate bombing of the civilian population. You begin to realize, in fact, that we do have another Vietnam in El Salvador."

Newport said he will return to El Salvador next week, bringing with him food and medical supplies. He announced that Congressional hearings on the bombing may begin next month.

The mayor said his visit to the rebel zones was in line with what he called Berkeley's foreign policy — people-to-people outreach to Third World liberation movements. He has also visited Angola, Nicaragua, Cuba and Mexico, in addition to Sweden, Finland, Austria, Spain and Germany.

Newport's interest in helping "our Third World brothers and sisters" goes back 20 years or more. In 1965, while living in Harlem, he helped organize an effort to send aid to the Dominican Republic, which had been invaded by the U.S. after its dictator was overthrown.

Before that, Newport had been friends with Malcolm X, who he said greatly influenced his life. "Malcolm had more charisma and was more sensitive than any other person I had ever known."

Newport moved to the Bay Area in 1974, and became a leader of Berkeley Citizen Action, the progressive coalition dating from the 60s which helped elect Congressman Ron Dellums and which later helped insure his election as mayor.

Now the BCA controls eight out of nine seats on the city council. The council voted for South Africa divestment, made Berkeley a sanctuary for Central American refugees, passed a progressive rent control measure, approved a moratorium on new office space and restricted development not sensitive to ecology or the city's needs, and changed election procedures so that local and national elections occur at the same time, encouraging voter turnout.

Newport reported 84% voter turnout in Berkeley for the last election. "I understand that may be unprecedented for American cities."

He also reported that a police-citizen

review board "has created a real good citizen-police atmosphere." The city has experienced only one police shooting in ten years, he said.

When the council discovered that there was one administrator for every three officers in the police department, "We cut a million dollars out of the police budget and put it into social services. That was all the message they needed."

When asked about the police attack on an anti-apartheid demonstration at the University of California, Newport said that in that instance, the police were under the emergency control of the county sheriff. He and religious leaders visited the university to protest, he said.

Newport admitted that Berkeley's experiment in progressive city government was one of "very few" in the country now. But he was still optimistic that a mass movement could be built, possibly using Berkeley's coalition for a model, "to serve people, not contain people."

"We should stop giving this territory to Reagan and whoever else calls themselves the moral majority," he said.

Newport also met with Mayor Bud Clark and visited Jefferson High School. His Portland visit was sponsored by the Rainbow Coalition, the Portland Central America Solidarity Committee, American Friends Service Committee and the city Office of Neighborhood Associations.

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