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A DUBIOUS AWARD

---Elliott Abrams may be "changing America," but in the wrong direction

In the December issue of Esquire, on sale tomorrow, Assistant Secretary of State for Human Rights and Humanitarian Affairs Elliott Abrams is presented as one of over 270 men and women under the age of 40 who are "the best of the new generation" and who "are changing America." Abrams, who switched from being a Democrat to Republican in 1980, is profiled in Esquire by William F. Buckley, the conservative columnist, as a person whose "views reflect his conviction that the U.S. is a national incorporation of an ideal; the ideal of human rights." Buckley goes on to say that "accordingly, our policies need to express that ideal and should be informed, always, by that ideal."

While Abrams, and for that matter the Human Rights Bureau, may be changing America, there is little evidence in his public record to suggest that "his views reflect his conviction that the U.S. is a national incorporation of an ideal; the ideal of human rights." As demonstrated by his bureau's consistent excusive language towards the human rights excesses of Chile, Abrams has converted the bureau into being a prime supporter of the Reagan administration's concept that regional disputes can be solved militarily, rather than diplomatically. Abrams has helped to enshrine the principles of double standards and hypocrises on human rights issues, while his office has been all but silent on questions of press censorship, repression of the church, political disappearances, and absences of civic guarantees in Guatemala, Uruguay, Honduras, Chile and El Salvador. It has conducted a massive campaign against the Sandinista regime in Nicaragua, whose violations have been far less extensive in nature than those by countries that are looked upon with favor by Washington.

Abrams has all but swept his office clean of staunch human rights advocates. During his tenure, field reports on human rights performances coming from U.S. embassies throughout Latin America have been altered in

order to reflect the Reagan administration's philosophy of talking softly on violations by Washington's allies and exaggerating those of its foes. In a real sense, the Esquire award to Abrams is a caricature of what it should be. No national figure identified with human rights questions has more ill-served the cause of basic rights than has Abrams, and no individual is less sympathetic to its concepts.

Under previous administrations, the Bureau of Human Rights and Humanitarian Affairs was responsive to those suffering repression throughout Latin America and was an institution that really cared about their fate. Today, under Abrams, the office is held in complete contempt throughout the hemisphere for its Cold War rhetoric and indifference to human rights violations.

RELATIVE INDIFFERENCE TOWARD CHILE

Chilean dictator Augusto Pinochet's reimposition of a state of siege in the country Nov. 6 -- which brought about detentions of nearly 200 political leaders, as well as of 2,000 others following a series of raids of political organizations and shanty towns -- produced only a predictably weak and guarded criticism from the State Department. In a Nov. 7 statement issued by spokesman John Hughes, State declared that "It is clear from events of recent days that there is a growing terrorist problem, but the question is whether this problem is of such dimensions [as] to justify the extreme measures associated with a state of siege." The almost gracious statement, under the guise of "quiet diplomacy," not only accuses "terrorists" of having a role in bringing about the state of siege, but also treats Pinochet's drastic action as an isolated incident, rather than an expected event consistent with the dictatorship's 11-year history of violence.

The Bureau's double-standards approach to rights violations in Latin America applies to its treatment of church harassment in, respectively, Nicaragua and Chile as well. State was highly vocal in its criticism of the Sandinistas' expulsion of 10 foreign priests last July 9, terming the action "consistent with a long pattern of harassment and intimidation against the Catholic Church" in Nicaragua. But the Department has been all but silent towards the more severe restrictions on the church in Chile, recently including the killing of a French priest, Andre Jarlan, on Sept. 4, shutdowns of the Catholic Church-operated radio station in Chile, and the exile of the head of the church's human rights mission in the country, Ignacio Gutierrez, a Spanish-born Jesuit priest.

Official censorship of the Chilean press has reached new heights in recent weeks, with several bans on coverage of the series of national days of protest being levied against opposition broadcast and print media outlets. On Nov. 1, the Inter-American Press Association released a report condemning the lack of press freedom in Chile over the past 11 years, adding that in recent months the situation has deteriorated. For its part, the Reagan administration issued a long-overdue, if heavily guarded criticism in a Nov. 9 advisory, stating that "the imposition of press censorship and extensive arrests of opposition political figures can only exacerbate the situation," and that "there is a serious terrorist problem that needs to be dealt with, but we believe that a closed political system provides a more fertile ground for political terrorism than a democracy." The advisory added that although State is "concerned," it "won't comment daily" on the Chilean situation.

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