

# Aloof Broomfield snubs El Salvador concern

**T**HE PHOTOGRAPH of protesters in front of U.S. Rep. William Broomfield's office in last Monday's newspaper brings uncomfortable memories for many of us. Change the slogans of the signs from El Salvador to Vietnam, and we're right back where we started nearly 20 years ago.

Let us reserve the debate over whether El Salvador is another Vietnam for another time. Really, that hardly is the point for today. I'm not sure Vietnam was the Vietnam its critics and supporters painted it to be.

But what eerily is the same is the aloof attitude of many public officials over the concern of the American people. An attitude exists among the Washington elite that only they know what options are available for the United States in the Central American crisis.

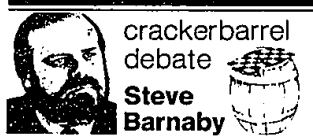
WHETHER THEY support or oppose President

Ronald Reagan's stand, their attitude is the same. We are unable to be concerned with the entire membership of the U.S. Congress. But we do have our congressional representative, Broomfield, whose attitude toward the electorate is something less than open.

While the protesters marched in front of his district office, he was somewhere else. The protesters certainly never had the opportunity to talk with him. The media had to be content with talking with an assistant.

That, we have found, is standard procedure for Broomfield. Talking with the veteran member of Congress apparently is a privilege, reserved for very few.

MY COLLEAGUES who have covered Broomfield for years, although annoyed, have reluctantly resigned themselves to talking with an assistant. After all, deadlines are deadlines, and waiting for a



crackerbarrel  
debate  
**Steve Barnaby**

week or two for a response does more than strain that deadline.

But some of us are used to a congressman (former U.S. Rep. William Brodhead) who made a point of getting out and talking with his constituents and returning phone calls.

His retirement and our redistricting did away with that kind of responsiveness. By the luck of the gerrymandering draw, we now have William

Broomfield with whom to deal, or find, or sniff out. Unfortunately, Broomfield's conduct is the rule rather than the exception among congressmen of long standing. Those first couple of terms, they are all ears, listening to those who elected them, and even returning home often for a visit.

But about the third term, the typical congressman begins his exodus into Washington exile. Flying home becomes inconvenient. The voters ask the same old dumb questions. No use talking with the reporters. They just want to make you look bad.

WELL, MR. BROOMFIELD, we think your constituency is concerned enough over this El Salvador question for you to come out of your enclave and hear what they have to say.

Your assistant has said you're down the line with Ronald Reagan's stand. But maybe the people of your district have something to tell you of which Reagan is unaware.



**Nick Sharkey**

## Catholic history full of debates

AS THIS is written, Sister Agnes Mary Mansour has yet to begin confirmation hearings as the state's new director of social services.

On Saturday her religious order, the Farmington Hills-based Sisters of Mercy, supported her candidacy. This action came as an apparent rebuke to the Most Rev. Edmund Szoka, Catholic archbishop of Detroit. Szoka demanded Feb. 23 that Sister Mansour leave the job because she had not publicly opposed Medicaid-financed abortions.

Sister Mansour's state Senate hearing started Tuesday. Tuesday was also the day the Archdiocese of Detroit officially began celebrating its 150th anniversary with a Mass in St. Anne Church in Detroit. It is fitting that the hearing and the 150th anniversary are linked for Sister Mansour's saga tells us much about the Catholic Church.

Approximately 35 percent of the people living in the six-county Detroit archdiocese are Catholics. About 25 years ago, 50 percent were Catholics.

MANY NON-CATHOLICS believe the Catholic Church is a monolithic, authoritarian organization in which every person thinks the same. That's not true. Roman Catholic church history is full of debates since the days of Peter and Paul.

The Catholic Church holds that the conscience of the individual is supreme. It requires that conscience be "informed," meaning that it must be based on research and study. This philosophy was endorsed during the most important meeting of church leaders in recent years, the Second Vatican Council of 1962-65.

Recent surveys have indicated that the majority of Catholic married couples practice a form of birth control not approved by their church. Yet these couples are members of good standing in their faith and regularly receive the sacraments.

How? These couples in good conscience believe they are acting properly by practicing birth control.

Few Catholic tenets are a matter of dogma Catholics must believe. Most rules can be changed. For example, many persons remember when Catholics were prohibited from eating meat on Fridays.

It is in that environment that Sister Mansour's superiors defy the wishes of the archbishop. They argue that the work of the Department of Social Services furthers the efforts of their religious order. They also note that Sister Mansour has stated her opposition to abortion, and "Medicaid funding of abortions would continue . . . even if Sister Mansour were to resign."

HOW WILL THE matter be resolved? I hope the bishop withdraws his opposition and lets Sister Mansour serve. In her new duties, she will help the sick and the poor — consistent with her religious mission. She has also clearly stated her objections to abortion.

It would be disappointing to see this matter decided by the Catholic Church's governmental structure in Rome.

Whatever happens, persons outside the church know that debate over important issues is alive in the Catholic Church.

As the Rev. F. Gerald Martin writes in the current issue of the Michigan Catholic, the archdiocesan newspaper, "It is in faith and love that we are united, not in our opinions about everything, not even in our opinions about how best . . . to witness to that faith and to exercise that love."

Remember that as you contemplate the 150th anniversary of this Catholic archdiocese.



OBSERVER & ECCENTRIC NEWSPAPERS

## A hard look at the water barons

DETROIT'S WATER and Sewerage Department is more than Detroit's business. The rest of us are helping to pay the bill and ought to be looking into what used to be thought of as Detroit's "internal" affair.

That thought struck me as I pored through George Kuhn's latest speech to the Detroit City Council protesting a rate increase. Kuhn, an Oakland County drain commissioner, acts as a wholesaler of Detroit's water and sewerage services to suburban communities.

"That water board," growled Kuhn, "makes the OPEC oil barons look like amateurs." Let me suspect this suburban politician of engaging in rhetorical hyperbole. Kuhn proceeded to back up his assertion.

OPEC'S PRICE increases raised our pump prices of gasoline from the neighborhood of 30 cents a gallon in the early '70s to the \$1.30 range at their peak — the price increased better than four times.

Auto companies, famed for giving us "sticker shock," have lifted prices in the same general range.

Since 1970, wholesale sewer rates in our fair region have been increased from 32.5 cents per million cubic feet to \$4.58. This means the price increased to 14 times its 1970 level.

We know, of course, that much has had to be



**Tim Richard**

spent on the Detroit sewage treatment plant since it was discovered in federal court to be the worst polluter of Lake Erie. But a price increase of 1,400 percent? One must respectfully suggest that it may be a bit steep.

A PROBLEM less visible to us in suburbia has to do with delinquent water bills.

To grasp it, you have to understand that the city of Detroit sells water and sewer services retail to its residents and wholesale to suburban blocs of communities.

Kuhn's data shows Detroit retail customers are delinquent in their water bills to the tune of \$25 million as of last Nov. 30. Detroit councilmen confess the delinquency figure now is up to \$31 million.

What happens? "Under the present system, as we understand it, the amount of unpaid Detroit retail customer balances are a charge against working capital, which is supported by the rates of all

customers, city and suburb alike," said Kuhn.

"In our district," he went on, "we pay the entire bill. If there are individual retail customers' delinquencies in one of our cities, we still pay 100 percent of the billing to us from Detroit."

"The city of Detroit, however, pays into the system only the money actually received from its retail customers. Detroit does not make up the dollar amount of retail delinquencies."

UNFAIR? Assuredly.

The argument used to be that Detroit could do what it wished because it "owned" the water-sewerage system. That argument was knocked in the head when the pollution case brought out that the system is financed by federal aid, state aid and charges to customers, with no Detroit "investment." It became abundantly clear that suburban customers had a stake in the system at least equal to Detroit's.

The horror story of how suburbia is covering Detroit's delinquent bills, however, demonstrates that, financially, the suburbs have perhaps a superior right to a voice in how the system is run.

The suburbs deserve the right to pick their own members of the water board in proportion to their population (about two-thirds) and a chance to compete for jobs.

Reform will require state legislation. Detroit will resist.

## Why didn't legislators notice red ink?

I HAVE TROUBLE with news about state government and its budget problems. With the national and international news, there is Ted Koppel and his nightly battery of experts on hand to analyze, reduce, deduce, extrapolate, theorize, postulate and prognosticate.

What we need now is a stately newsline panel of experts who, in similar fashion, can take a look at our Rube Goldberg state government and make sense out of what has happened in Lansing, what is happening in Lansing, and who is able to pull us out this mess with some kind of sensible program that will sacrifice neither state government nor our wallets.

For years, many of us have suffered under the delusion that we had an admirable state government that provided residents with quality education, helped our truly needy, preserved our parks and natural wonders, maintained a system of justice and aided local governments.

ALONG COMES 1983, and we are told by incoming Gov. James Blanchard and his supporters that we are \$900 million away from solvency and that we need a permanent 1.5 percent income tax increase to maintain present services plus a "temporary" 0.25 percent increase to do away with a deficit accumulated from past years.



**Bob Wisler**

The deficit, we are told, was caused by the deceptive accounting practices used by the minions of the administration of previous Gov. William Milliken. Various Democrats conclude that this is correct.

With the scapegoat staked out, it becomes an easier matter for 59 Democrats in the state House of Representatives to agree with Blanchard about the necessity of an income tax increase.

FORGIVE THE average citizen for wondering about the alacrity with which the representatives voted for the tax increase, even though the House added a proviso that decreases the tax rate as unemployment drops.

Did the House, the majority of whose members served during the years the \$900 million deficit was building, consider at any length other possibilities besides more revenue? There is scant evidence of it.

Forgive the average citizen also for wondering about the wisdom of footing the bill for 148 legisla-

tors (at \$31,000 per year plus their fringes, plus their travel and convention expenses, plus their retirement costs, plus their personal staff costs, plus their committee staff costs) when they fail to notice that state government is going \$900 million into the red until a new governor tells them so less than a month after he takes office.

What were the legislators during the time that Milliken was supposedly steering the ship of state onto rocky shoals?

MORE IMPORTANT, what are they doing now to work out a plan that somehow preserves reasonable state government? Where is the discussion of various possibilities, whether social services (which accounts for one-third of the budget) can be trimmed, whether further cuts to education can be tolerated? So far, we have heard mostly partisan mutterings.

Blanchard's tax package, modified somewhat by the House, has now gone to the Senate, where more partisan politicking is expected.

It would be refreshing if the Senate, unlike the House, were to use the opportunity to have an airing of the state's responsibilities in an honest non-partisan effort to determine whether the state really needs to continue all of its present programs.

It would also make us think we might be getting our money's worth.