

## PACKAGING THE ACTIVITY

BY 1985 IT WAS COMMON KNOWLEDGE in the United States that Nicaragua was suffering under the yoke of a Marxist-Leninist tyranny which, among other depravities, had: been “exporting revolution” to neighboring democracies; betrayed the revolution against Somoza by breaking a solemn promise to install democracy; arbitrarily suppressed freedom of religion and the press; committed massive human rights abuses against its citizens; and generally assumed the fearful aspect of a “totalitarian dungeon”, as one would expect of a Soviet-Cuban vassal.

None of which was true. But no matter: These and related themes were twisted into the dominant frame of reference within which to view Nicaragua; it was done by the same folks who brought forth the Reagan administration.

That enterprise operates according to the logic of the sales campaign, exactly like those employed to sell soap, cigarettes, feature films and presidential candidates. “Ronald Reagan is governing America by a new strategic doctrine — the permanent campaign. He is applying to the White House the techniques be employed in getting there. Making more effective use of media and market research than any previous president, he has brought into the White House the most sophisticated team of pollsters, media masters and tacticians ever to work there.”<sup>157</sup>

### Staging and sequencing

That formidable array of marketing expertise was early brought to bear on Central America, when opposition to administration policy in the region began to grow in Congress and among the U.S. general public.

While the assault on Nicaragua was still secret, the White House had turned its first visible attention to the socialist insurgency in El Salvador, with discouraging results. The right-wing government tottered on the verge of collapse, and many in the United States became anxious about the possibility of the Reaganites mirroring the country in another protracted military adventure — that darn post-Vietnam syndrome again.

“What was wrong with El Salvador was the packaging of the activity, in terms of policy and presentation to the public,” concluded a key manipulator in the White House. “It wasn’t well-staged or sequenced.... The whole issue of running the Presidency in the modern age is control of the agenda. We deal with what ought to be the buildup of things six to nine months out. It’s a process question.”<sup>158</sup>

The answer was a propaganda campaign, at home and abroad, of staggering proportions and mendacity. It would be aimed almost entirely at Nicaragua, and perform several inter-related functions:

- engineer consent to military intervention by emphasizing the threat of communist expansion in the region
- cover up the failure of administration policy in El Salvador, blaming it on subversion by Russia and Cuba via Nicaragua
- divert attention from the extraordinary brutality of the U.S.-sponsored regimes in El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras
- elicit support for the CIA-*contras*
- neutralize opposition to the *contras* while at the same time making it politically impossible to approve, or even condone, the Sandinistas.

In peddling these deceptions, the administration has resorted to the classic Big Lie technique of a few simple ideas, endlessly repeated to the accents of loaded phrases such as “Marxist-Leninist... totalitarian dungeon... communist beach-head”. The similarity of this procedure to the methods of Josef Goebbels in Nazi Germany, and to the nightmare world of

George Orwell's *1984*, has been noted by many — including the human rights organization, Americas Watch, which has observed that a typical State Department attack on Nicaragua “would do justice to Orwell's Ministry of Truth”.<sup>159</sup>

## **Bully's pulpit**

Well before the advent of the TV satellite, Teddy Roosevelt had exulted in the “bully pulpit” of the U.S. presidency. Now, that office is one of the most powerful indoctrination facilities on earth, as a result of its almost unlimited access to national and international news media. Indeed, the richest prize of the presidency is its mediated power to define reality for a large segment of the nation's populace, and for those abroad who look to the U.S. for guidance.

That power to define is especially pronounced with regard to international events, about which relatively few U.S. citizens know very much and even fewer seem to care. The United States is the “developed” country with the lowest rate of foreign language facility, where a significant portion of college students locate “Africa” in the area of the globe that cartographers try to reserve for Canada, and 80-90 percent of the citizenry is “on an extended vacation from citizenship”.<sup>160</sup>

In this context of ignorance and neglect, it is not terribly difficult for a U.S. president to influence the vague and often confused notions that pass for common knowledge. As noted above, the Reagan administration has invested heavily in the

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*“Corruption of language was central to Orwell's terrifying vision in 1984. President Reagan on the subject of Nicaragua sounds more and more these days like something from the pages of Orwell. His disregard for facts has become hallucinatory. His rhetoric rings with hate. ‘Somoza was bad’, he said the other night, but ‘the Sandinistas are infinitely, worse’. There are no words adequate to convey the insult that statement does to history and to the victims of 40 years of Somoza pillage. “*

— Anthony Lewis<sup>161</sup>

manipulation of public opinion. For that purpose, it can draw on the enormous propaganda resources at its disposal, of which the foremost are: the White House staff, the State Department, the CIA and, most disturbingly, the mainstream press.

### **Official stories**

The White House and the State Department have been deeply involved in the propaganda business for decades. Much of that business is handled directly, as with the mountains of slick publications cranked out by the State Department on nearly every aspect of U.S. foreign policy. Given the source and its dishonorable history, this stuff tends to arouse scepticism; it is of interest primarily to true believers in search of an "authoritative" citation for some right-wing diatribe.

Far more potent is the constant stream of messages conveyed through the legitimating offices of the "free and independent press". Since they are privately owned and often critical of some aspects of government policy and conduct, news media are generally regarded as more credible sources of information than are official pronouncements.

Consequently, presidential image-makers devote most of their energies to shaping the headlines and TV images that influence public opinion. In doing so, they pay meticulous attention to the mechanics of news-making; White House press officers frequently know as much about deadlines and the quirks of editors as do the reporters through whom the news is initially filtered.

The news that goes out from the executive branch is carefully attuned to the current mood of the White House, and frequently contradicts more even-handed reports of subordinate officials who fail to meet doctrinal standards. Again, Americas Watch:

"The misuse of human rights data has become pervasive in officials' statements to the press, in White House handouts on Nicaragua, in the annual Country Report on Nicaraguan human rights prepared by the State Department and, most notably, in the President's own remarks. When inconvenient, findings

of the U.S. Embassy in Managua have been ignored; the same is true of data gathered by independent sources.”<sup>162</sup>

The Reaganite line on Nicaragua has been marketed in numerous presidential speeches and by numerous government agencies, including two especially created for that purpose. Operating from the White House, the Outreach Working Group on Central America has concentrated on inflaming passions in the U.S. It has published a series of tortured “White House Digests” denouncing tyranny and the like, and for several years hosted weekly anti-Sandinista pep rallies:

“The speakers addressing those meetings make up a Who’s Who of the right.... Last April [1984], the evangelists who filled the room to hear a panel discussion of religious persecution in Nicaragua called out ‘Amen!’ after every anti-Sandinista pronouncement.”<sup>163</sup>

## Relch-speak

Somewhat less hysterical is the State Department’s Office of Public Diplomacy on Latin America and the Caribbean which has concentrated on influencing reporters, with considerable success. Its director, aptly named Otto Reich, has followed a

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*“Over the past 10 to 15 years, the presidents and their aides have been fine-tuning a press manipulation strategy that seldom fails in any momentous way. It is executed by teams of sophisticated media specialists who swarm through the White House.... There are spokesmen who give the impression of saying a lot while actually saying a little; pollsters whose fingers are constantly on the public pulse; image merchants who strive to design impressions that will convince the public it is getting what it wants; television experts who stage news events and turn popes and monarchs into presidential props; media monitors who maintain a continuous watch on the press, spot trends, and provide early warnings of trouble; ‘enforcers’ who use a variety of techniques to cow recalcitrant reporters and their sources.”*

— Joseph C. Spear, *Presidents and the Press: The Nixon Legacy*

practice of releasing information which tends to confirm administrative conceptions while withholding any which does not. "To be less partisan," he has explained, "would be to do the job of the other guy."<sup>164</sup>

A typical example of Reich's handiwork is a front-page *Washington Times* story about a reported massacre of 50-60 political prisoners by Sandinista troops. The article was based on a "classified U.S. government document", which turned out to have been a cable from an embassy official asking whether or not he should bother to investigate a single informant's unsubstantiated allusion to the alleged massacre.

Lifting a page from the CIA, Reich paid and otherwise encouraged various "experts" to submit anti-Sandinista articles for publication in the mainstream press. Naturally, the relationship between such authors and their State Department benefactor was never voluntarily disclosed, lest the experts' *bona fides* be called into question.

It was just such a Reichian scholar who persuaded the *Wall Street Journal* to print his alarming assessment of Nicaragua's Soviet-built helicopters as deadly offensive weapons that threatened the balance of power in Central America. That was news to the U.S. Defense Department, whose own experts have described Nicaragua's armaments as primarily defensive — a point of view somehow omitted from the *Journal* article.

A favorite device of administration propagandists is the carefully edited Damning Quotation. The State Department has repeatedly used the words of Tomas Borge to substantiate Nicaragua's aggressive designs on neighboring countries. In the U.S. version, Nicaragua's Minister of the Interior is made to say only that, "The revolution goes beyond our borders. Our revolution was always internationalist." Invariably omitted are the words that follow in the full quotation: "This does not mean that we export our revolution. It is sufficient that they follow our example."

By itself, each instance of this chicanery would probably have little lasting impact. It is the incessant repetition from so many different sources — including all those formally outside

the administration, but co-ordinated by it — which eventually produces the desired effect. Contradictory evidence is of no consequence; it is simply ignored and official doctrine is repeated once again, most often in a slightly louder voice.

Inexorably, U.S. public opinion is led to a conception of world events that mirrors the administration's. There may be some differences of opinion about appropriate responses, but seldom about fundamental definitions. Thus, the Reaganites have successfully demonized the Sandinistas, while masking the stench of the CIA-*contras* with such verbal deodorants as "freedom" and "democracy".

### **Unfathomable resources**

While the State Department and the White House take care of the propaganda business at home, the CIA makes sure that the rest of the world gets a proper slant on things. Several former agents have indicated that at least one-third of CIA expenditures are dedicated to planting and manipulating information of every description. It is impossible to calculate the total investment in such activities, since the agency's expenditures are concealed under seemingly innocuous headings of several departmental budgets. Also, it derives income from the many profitable business fronts it operates worldwide, and receives cash payments from corporations seeking a little help from their friends.

Consequently, it is entirely possible that even the CIA's director does not fully comprehend its total budget and sources of income. But some hint of their scope emerged from congressional hearings in the mid-1970s.

Those hearings revealed that the CIA operated wire services to which over 30 U.S. newspapers subscribed. It also owned some 200 newspapers, magazines and book publishing companies. Hundreds of scholars were paid to incorporate agency viewpoints into their published works, including one Harvard professor who received \$105,000 for his book on the Middle East. Several hundred journalists, including some

very big names, were enlisted to write articles criticizing such infidels as Fidel Castro and Ho Chi Minh. A major conspirator was a *New York Times* reporter who recruited European journalists to extol the virtues of the neutron bomb.<sup>165</sup>

## Useful statements

Many other devices of a similar nature were exposed during the hearings. It seems that little has changed since then, although some duties are now farmed out to other agencies or to the “private sector” in the interest of prudent obscurity. An example of the latter is illustrated by a National Security Council document, “Plans to Provide the Facts to the International Community”, concerning the 1984 elections in Nicaragua. It outlines a program in which European and Latin American journalists were urged to write editorials challenging the legitimacy of the elections, and U.S. labor leaders were instructed to solicit appropriate criticisms of the Sandinistas from their international brethren.

“We will approach significant and knowledgeable national leaders, in and out of government, to encourage public statements condemning the Nicaraguan elections as they are now set up. Useful statements should come from government officials, political party leaders... intellectuals, church and labor leaders.”<sup>166</sup>

As usual, many of these denunciations eventually returned home via the U.S. press, in an established pattern of complicity.

Another government agency spreading the White House word abroad is the United States Information Agency (USIA). Under the direction of an old Hollywood crony of Ronald Reagan, the USIA has lately been debased into a peddler of political dreck. It often works in tandem with the CIA on such projects as an anti-Sandinista horror film distributed via West German television, the U.S. Public Broadcasting System and other respectable outlets. Entitled “Nicaragua Was Our Home”, the film purports to document the terrible abuse of Nicaragua’s Miskito Indians by the Sandinistas. The thing was apparently slapped together with USIA funds by CAUSA,

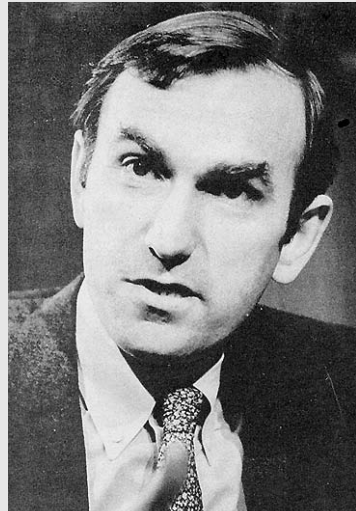


the political arm of Rev. Moon's World Unification Church, which operates some of its aggressively anti-communist missions in Honduras.<sup>167</sup> The film is a typical CIA catalog of lies, half-truths and distortions, and has been exposed to millions of unsuspecting viewers, with no hint of its origins.

Despite such occasional successes, efforts to drum up fear and loathing of the Nicaraguan demons have not fared very

## Minister of Propaganda

After the president, himself, the Reagan administration's most prolific and effective liar has been Assistant Secretary of State Elliott Abrams, designated "point man" on Nicaragua. Author of numerous broadsides in the mainstream media and a frequent presence on TV news programs, his viperous debating style has earned the admiration of right-wing ideologues.



Abrams' disregard of the truth finally strained even

the elastic standards of Congress in 1987, when he was barred from testifying before the Senate Foreign Relations Subcommittee on Latin America. That extremely rare sanction was applied only after Abrams had loftily acknowledged giving false testimony to Congress.

On one occasion, explained Abrams, he lied in order to preserve the privacy of the Sultan of Brunei, from whom he had extracted \$10 million with which to subvert congressional restrictions on funding of the CIA-*contras*.

well in Europe. Grassroots moral and financial support for the revolution remains strong, even in those few countries whose governments officially oppose the Sandinistas.

This doubtless has much to do with the fact that in most European nations, socialists either hold power or comprise the main opposition. Also, the press is less uniform in outlook than in the United States. Most journals are affiliated with political parties, and are disinclined to adopt parallel attitudes toward the projection of U.S. power. The typical consumer of news in this country would very likely be astonished to discover how routinely the United States is depicted overseas as an “empire” — and not an especially benevolent one, either.

### Diverse perspectives

In fact, nothing more clearly illustrates the generally conformist nature of mainstream U.S. journalism than the rich diversity of perspectives available to European newspaper readers. A leading critic of the U.S. mainstream press notes that, “Every other developed country has a national press and a relatively unimportant local press. In those countries, the dozen or more national papers, headquartered at the national capital, are the only ones to carry serious political and economic views. They are available in every locality, and they compete with each other politically and economically. All readers have a choice of papers that cover their political views and social backgrounds.”<sup>168</sup>

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*“For us to answer that it is not true about the [Soviet] missiles is to put ourselves on the defensive, because the Reagan administration makes us justify something we are not doing. And we know that this is interminable, because even if we deny it, no matter how much we deny it, within a week Shultz, Kirkpatrick, any of them will repeat that Nicaragua is willing to install nuclear missiles, and we will have to say once again that it is not true.”*

— Nicaraguan Vice-President, Sergio Ramirez<sup>169</sup>

The implications of this for reporting on events in Nicaragua are clear. For example: "The Nicaraguan elections and dialogue had a different effect in Europe, and specifically in the Socialist International, than they had here. We're dealing with alternative perceptions of reality. I was stunned by the extent to which social democratic opinion in Bonn, Amsterdam and London, also in France and Scandinavia, was buoyed by the elections.... We met with a group of German Social Democrats, including Schmidt's former finance minister, who are planning all sorts of things, from youth brigades in the event of an intervention, to ways of getting aid from socialist unions."<sup>170</sup>

This suggests that the CIA will have to work a little harder to get its point across in Europe, and that the chief value of its efforts there to date consists of "blowback" to the U.S. That value can be quite substantial, however, as evidenced by the widespread credit granted to its "Miskito genocide" hoax.

### **Relentlessly one-sided**

A rich diversity of journalistic perspectives is something that the CIA definitely does not have to worry about in Latin America generally, and in Central America particularly.

In Costa Rica, for example, the sole exceptions to a right-wing monopoly on news are two small weeklies, the English-language *Tico Times* and a university paper. Everything else is burning with an elitist terror that Costa Rica's poor might one day try to emulate their counterparts across the northern border.

Notes a U.S. observer, "It would be hard for North Americans to comprehend how relentlessly one-sided the Costa Rican newspapers are. When I lived in Costa Rica in 1985, I read continual accounts of alleged Sandinista incursions, bombings, and murders of Costa Ricans. To my knowledge, there was never a story about *contra* incursions, bombings, or murders committed in Nicaragua.... All the newspaper coverage of Nicaraguan-Costa Rican relations was designed to make the Sandinistas look like criminal psychopaths, with the Costa Ricans their defenseless victims."<sup>171</sup>

Apparently not satisfied with right-wing domination of the Latin American press, the CIA has taken extra pains to ensure that its message gets across. In Costa Rica, at least three leading editors and five other journalists have been paid generous sums to publish “stories, commentaries or editorials attacking Nicaragua and sympathetic to the *contras*”. A former CIA-*contra* information officer told the World Court that, “Approximately fifteen Honduran journalists and broadcasters were on the CIA’s payroll, and our influence was thereby extended to every major Honduran newspaper and radio and television station.”<sup>172</sup> As an added benefit, stories planted by these agents often find their way into the U.S. and European press.

The state of the art is much the same in other parts of Central America, and deviations from right-wing orthodoxy are severely punished. “To cover the largest story in Guatemalan history [i.e., the ongoing slaughter of unarmed civilians by the army], journalists risked being killed. In El Salvador, there were

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*“Our picture of reality, does not burst upon us in one splendid revelation. It accumulates, day by day and year by year, in most unspectacular fragments from the world scene, produced mainly by the mass media....*

*“Despite 25,000 media outlets in the United States, twenty-nine corporations control most of the business in daily newspapers, magazines, television, books and motion pictures.... The chief executive officers of the twenty-nine corporations that control most of what Americans read and see can fit into an ordinary living room. Almost without exception, they are conservative Republicans....*

*“While it is not possible for the media to tell the population what to think, they do tell the public what to think about. What is reported enters the public agenda. What is not reported may not be lost forever, but it may be lost at a time when it is most needed....*

*“[It is] continuous emphasis and repetition that creates high priorities among the general public and in government.”*

— Ben H. Bagdikian, *The Media Monopoly*

simply no left-wing opposition reporters around. Almost all have either been assassinated in recent years or have fled the country.”<sup>173</sup>

### Angry airwaves

Since plenty of cash is usually needed to buy a newspaper, and literacy is either limited or non-existent in much of the region, radio and television assume a special significance for the dissemination of “news”. Again excepting Nicaragua, the broadcast view of the world is almost entirely what the Reaganites and the ruling elites prefer it to be.

“Radio operations have been a key element in political overthrow operations,” notes a lapsed CIA agent,<sup>174</sup> and the assault on Nicaragua is no exception. Several *contra* radio stations broadcast anti-Sandinista messages daily from Honduras and Costa Rica, which between them account for 44 of the 75 foreign radio signals penetrating Nicaraguan airspace. There is also a new Voice of America installation in Costa Rica; the signal from its 50,000-watt transmitter saturates Nicaragua with the truth according to the Reaganites.

The CIA radio network emits a steady stream of bad news about the Sandinistas, coupled with visions of how sweet life will be when the *contras* take over. The broadcasts have probably helped to spread anxieties about religious persecution and forced collectivization to the more remote areas of the nation, and have been credited with some conversions to the *contra* cause; but the total effect is unclear.

The results among Nicaragua’s neighbors have been much more gratifying, however. Fed a steady diet of journalistic carrion and deprived of any alternative, residents of surrounding U.S. client-states have acquired a distaste for the Sandinistas.

Not surprisingly, the propaganda offensive against Nicaragua has achieved its greatest success in the USA, where the current occupant of the White House is treated with remarkable deference by the general public and the mass media.

*“The information about Nicaragua which is reaching the majority of the American public is, for the most part, slanted against the Nicaraguan revolution and the Sandinista government. By focusing inordinate attention on the criticism voiced by the Reagan administration, with very little independent coverage of the advances which undeniably have been made in the interests of the great majority, the mainstream press perpetuates a distorted picture of reality....*

*“Disinformation about Nicaragua in the American media is widespread and pervasive.... Coverage of the October 15, 1985, State of Emergency decree in Nicaragua provides [one example].... Many papers and networks immediately turned to the White House for the Reagan commentary.... It is interesting to note that the New York Times, only a few weeks later, commended Argentina for imposing a state of siege, arguing that such action was appropriate, while Nicaragua’s wartime state of emergency was not; indeed the Times editorial failed to even mention the existence of the war going on in Nicaragua!”*

— Freedom of Expression in Nicaragua,  
National Lawyers Guild

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Particularly since the spread of television, a symbiotic relationship has evolved which entwines the projects of the presidency with the hectic daily process of the major news media. In many respects, the press has come to serve as a *de facto* extension of the White House, an unseemly function that was finally acknowledged after the Contragate/Iranganate scandal erupted in 1986 (see page 106).

As journalist Robert Parry has noted: “In the first six years of this administration, the press seemed to have lost its determination to hold the government to hard facts. The press seemed to be almost as entranced as was most of the country. The press also seemed to be a little fearful that if it wrote stories that were perceived as tough on this president, the public would not like it.”<sup>175</sup>

That observation has been echoed by a number of Parry’s colleagues, and it highlights two key factors in the triumph of

White House propaganda: the natural insecurities of journalists, and the myth of Ronald Reagan's invincible popularity. No less than are politicians, journalists and — especially — publishers both influence and are influenced by public opinion. Perhaps the greatest achievement of White House image-makers has been to persuade the mainstream press that Ronald Reagan is the object of unparalleled adoration by the United States citizenry.

In fact, reliable data indicate something quite different. "While the media were trumpeting the president's phenomenal skills as a communicator, the polls were telling a far different story — namely, that Reagan was not a hit with the public; he was, in fact, one of the least popular presidents in the post-World War II period...."

"A look at press coverage... during the first two years of the Reagan administration shows that the press consistently assumed a degree of popularity that was not reflected in the polls.... Might it be that Reagan had been a communicator not so much in speaking on radio or TV to the general public, but in establishing genial relations face-to-face with the Washington political and media establishment?"<sup>176</sup>

*"I ceased long ago to be amazed that American television stations and newspapers continue sending people down to my country who have no knowledge of its language or its history. What still surprised me, though, is how the U. S. ambassador or his press attaché can make a statement based on an assumption or premise manufactured in Washington, and the reporters proceed from there.*

*"For instance, I watch how your administration has so beautifully moved the argument to where it is now a 'given' that Nicaragua is threatening and subverting its neighbors, so that's why the contras are necessary. Very rarely do I hear the reporters say, 'Wait a minute. It's Nicaragua that's being threatened and subverted from those neighbors by U.S.-allied forces.'*

*"I would say that your government officials are very, very good at their jobs, but the U.S. press not so much, huh?"*

— Central American employee of U.S. embassy<sup>177</sup>



*Jim Eitel*

*Paramedics sort through remains of village pharmacy destroyed by CIA-contras. Civilians and the facilities set up to serve them are the main targets of terrorist attacks, but it is nearly impossible to learn that from the U. S. mainstream press, which has consistently ignored or understated contra brutality.*

The precise origins of Reagan's mythification remain obscure; but there is no doubt of its disastrous consequences for Nicaragua and other hapless objects of Reaganite aggression. The sturdy souls in Congress, reminded daily by the *New York Times* and network TV news of the jovial president's presumptive stranglehold on public opinion, were palpably afraid of incurring his regal displeasure. The feeling was very strong that he could at any time, with a spot of Great Communicating, turn the folks back home against their elected representatives in Congress.

Likewise, as noted above, the mainstream press was nudged by the myth of its own devisement to lay down a



royal carpet of ink and broadcast time for just about anything that Reagan was given to read.

In short, the myth of Reagan's popularity eroded the confidence of politicians and journalists in their abilities to independently assess the public mood. In a variety of explicit and implicit formulations, the question was repeatedly asked: How could such a profoundly ignorant and shallow human being even be considered for president? But there seemed to be no arguing with the election results, and nobody was paying attention to the contradictory polling data. It was not a terribly distant journey from there to the reluctant concession that maybe this "amiable moron" knew something they did not. It was a humbling and disconcerting thought.

All of which goes a long way toward explaining the general servility of Congress and the press in recent years. But there are other factors contributing to the abysmal treatment of Nicaragua. One is the Cold War's pervasive sense of great peril lurking just beyond, and sometimes within, the nation's borders. Another is the occupational culture of mainstream journalism.

### **The cult of objectivity**

It often seems to publishers and editors that everyone has a complaint or three about the press. Chided from all points of the political compass for their variously defined "bias", journalists console themselves with the notion that if their work is criticized equally by the more extreme regions of the political spectrum, they are probably close to The Truth, which "always lies somewhere in between".

This is a complacent formula which rescues its adherents from any responsibility for exercising independent judgment. But it offers distinct advantages, career- and otherwise, and it has a dignified name: "objectivity". It can also be a comfort to passive readers and viewers who, secure in the presumption that the news they consume is "value free", are spared the pangs of base uncertainty and the perplexing task of analyzing incomplete or conflicting reports.

In practice, journalistic objectivity tends to settle on a lowest common denominator of political discourse, heavily weighted toward the White House. Indeed, it seems to be nothing more nor less than another name for “common knowledge”; and so, the crucial question has to do with how knowledge comes to be common enough to be treated respectfully by the mainstream press.

For most U.S. citizens, The Truth about places like Nicaragua is not something learned at mother’s knee. While there may be a variety of voices speaking out on such issues, surely the loudest and most insistent belongs to the chief executive. By sheer repetition from the bully pulpit provided by the mass media, and from the honor accorded his office, much of the president’s conception of faraway places seeps into the national consciousness. It is almost impossible to avoid, unless one has some special reason, training or motivation to do so.

In recent decades, it has become something of a blood sport among right-wingers to denounce the “liberal bias” of the media — by which they mean a failure to confirm their prejudices. Their sense of indignation has been strengthened by the Reaganite ascendancy, and all the noise they make has evidently been heard and noted by the press.

At least with regard to Nicaragua, there is very little need for right-wingers to fret. On the contrary, they can probably take a great deal of credit for the surrealistic picture of that beleaguered nation painted by

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*The principal “debate” conducted in the mainstream press is whether the U.S. should stomp on Nicaragua, or leave it to rot in totalitarian squalor.*

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major news media. It is possible to wade through a sea of newspapers and endure countless hours of newscasts without suffering a single kind word for the Sandinista revolution, except for the odd letter-to-the-editor or opinion piece.

The principal “debate” conducted in the mainstream press is whether the U.S. should stomp on Nicaragua, or leave it to rot in totalitarian squalor. As if such casual arrogance were not enough, the U.S. reporters dispatched south of the border

are usually ill-equipped to do anything but recycle embassy handouts. "Roughly 80 to 90 percent of American journalists covering Central America either don't speak Spanish fluently or don't bother to get out in the countryside and talk with ordinary folk."<sup>178</sup>

In addition, the enthralling premises of the Cold War continue to cast their spell over the news. A review of the editorial stances adopted by such "liberal" publications as *The New York Times*, *Newsweek*, and the *Washington Post* discloses an uncritical acceptance of the United States' "right" to attack any nation that excites the displeasure of a sitting president — as long as it is first labeled as communist or "Marxist-Leninist".

### Utilitarian bent

To the extent that the Reaganite assault on Nicaragua is criticized at all, it is primarily on utilitarian grounds: First, "there's the likelihood that the scheme just isn't going to work.... A second major worry for these critics is that the whole operation may backfire.... As a corollary to their first two objections, liberal doubters suggest that the current tactics may harm U.S. strategy throughout the isthmus." The final objection raised is that "Somocista incursions are only going to strengthen the Sandinistas."

For those whose criticism is based on such concerns, the Reaganite onslaught is objectionable, "Not because Nicaragua is a sovereign nation entitled to follow whatever political course it thinks appropriate. Not because the Sandinista revolution is a just and popular response to decades of poverty. And certainly not because the victorious rebels are striving, against increasingly awesome odds, to create a distinctively Nicaraguan form of socialism."<sup>179</sup>

The limited perspective of mainstream journalism is continually on display, as even the most prestigious publications apply a not-so-subtle spin that tends to validate official distortions.

For instance, the government of Nicaragua is almost never referred to as such. Instead, its legitimacy is implicitly questioned with such stock phrases as “the Marxist-Leninist government of Nicaragua” or “the leftist Sandinistas who rule Nicaragua”. Yet, one never encounters a U.S. equivalent such as “the AdamSmithist-AynRandist government of the United States” or “the rightist Republicans who rule the U.S.”

A senior editorial writer of the *Wall Street Journal* once confessed that, “I don’t have the foggiest idea what Marxism-Leninism is”. Yet, the *Journal’s* editorials and news columns hardly ever fail to attach that label to the Sandinistas and to other groups in disfavor with the White House.<sup>180</sup>

### **Routine errors**

Among the worst casual offenders are wire services such as the Associated Press and United Press International, which are responsible for most of the international news reaching U.S. citizens in printed form. Here is a 1987 example:

Managua, June 18 (UPI) — Daniel Ortega warned today that if the Central American summit, scheduled to take place this month in Guatemala, is postponed, he will not attend another meeting.

What Ortega really said had been reported the previous day by the Nicaraguan News Agency:

Managua, June 17 (ANN) — Daniel Ortega today reiterated that his government continues to believe that the meeting of Central American presidents, scheduled for the 25th and 26th of this month, is urgently needed.

The difference is as clear as that between petulant intransigence and anxious concern.

*(Continued on page 188)*

## “Dangerous Self-Delusions”

William A. Dorman

AMONG OUR COUNTRY'S more dangerous self-delusions is the notion that because its press is vigorous, privately-owned, officially non-ideological, and free of overt government control, Americans get a clear, unhindered view of the world. Furthermore, it is widely believed that insofar as press bias *does* exist, that bias serves as a check against the power of the state rather than as an instrument of it...

Knowledge of foreign affairs actually comes to us from a system of news-gathering deeply flawed by the subtle interplay of ideology, ethnocentrism, dubious professional practice, and economic forces. As a result, U.S. journalism is not the proudly independent institution it believes itself to be, but instead defers all too often to the established perspectives and formulations of the national security state. This virtually precludes any possibility of a serious debate on the conventional premises of U.S. foreign policy....

The American press devotes less space and time to the Third World than the press of any other major power.... Beyond this tendency to slight the developing world lies the more serious problem of mainstream journalism's tendency to distort social reality.... U.S. public opinion is far more negative toward the Sandinistas than it ever was toward the Shah of Iran. Allende was subjected to close and constant scrutiny, while the problems that fester under Pinochet's dictatorship are the subject of only occasional mild concern....

American journalists strongly believe that the U.S. press is beyond ideology — that the news media are autonomous models of civic truth-seeking, serious auditors of the state, because of a number of professional rules and

practices that, if routinely followed, supposedly ensure non-biased coverage of events. Ironically, these conventions can actually serve to perpetuate the ideology and ethnocentrism that distort reporting from the Third World.

Take, for example, the prevailing assumption that objectivity is best achieved when the correspondent uses only direct or indirect quotations from all *authoritative* sides of an issue, letting assertions of fact stand on their own without interpretation or comment. [As a result] officials are given chance after chance to sway the jury of public opinion to their way of thinking.... The tradition of journalistic objectivity, as it has come to be practiced in America, substitutes a passive and reassuringly safe routine for the "disciplines of documentation and critical judgment".

Most foreign news reaches the mainstream press through routine channels that are hardly disinterested and are likely, in fact, to be officials or agencies of the U.S. government... Generally, such expressions as "left-wing", "communist", "Marxist", and "Soviet-supported" appear regularly without justification or explanation. These pejorative phrases act as buzzwords; they are short, they have high emotional content, and they are widely accepted as having an understood meaning....

It is at the level of internalized restraints that ideology operates most effectively. Ideology as used here simply means a well-ordered world view.... This is not to say that a journalist necessarily holds a set of doctrinaire, highly systematic, rigidly-imposed categories that cause him to shape his writing toward a particular political end, but that he has a particular, characteristic *perspective* that subtly affects all his work. Take the example of the reporter who recalled covering Chile under Allende: "I didn't 'interpret' the Allende regime as being against the best interests of the U.S. government. I *knew* it."

These types of widely-shared ideological assumptions — about the threat posed by the Soviet Union, about the nature of politics, economic development, and rebellion in the Third World — have caused the news media in many cases to follow the cues of official Washington.... Developing countries are perceived and portrayed merely as stakes in a zero-sum game between Washington and Moscow....

Ideology also has much to do with setting the news agenda, with determining what qualifies as news. The result for the Third World is a pronounced double standard. The economic failures, human rights violations, and abusive treatment of minorities on the part of those Third World countries that oppose U.S. interests are treated as newsworthy, while similar behavior in client regimes goes relatively ignored....

Equally troubling, policymakers' strategic assumptions are largely left unexamined and unchallenged; only tactics come in for a critical view. This tendency reflects a general deference to the national security state, which is as much a world view as a set of institutions.... Rarely do the media question the conventional wisdom about, say, the nature of the communist threat in the Third World. And the press almost always falls into step with the government at the first sign of a confrontation between America and hostile or uncooperative forces in the developing world. In other words, the press has tended to perform during the Cold War as journalism always has during hot ones.... Is a fish aware of water?

Journalists working in the mainstream media often fail to realize that they have adopted a particular ideological perspective.... In fact, it is precisely because journalists believe they are above and beyond ideology that they are most susceptible to its effects. Journalists have

*(Continued...)*

*“Dangerous Self-Delusions” (cont.)*

been trained to think that by scrupulously following the narrow rules of objectivity they will remain free of ideology’s clutches. They are encouraged to believe in a state of innocence that simply does not exist...

To argue that the American press has served the interests of the national security state is not to claim that anything close to a conspiracy exists, or that deference is the same thing as abject submission. Moreover, the news media cannot be thought of as a monolith. Like any set of institutions, the press is rife with contradictions. The work of individual reporters and, at times, larger elements of the national press may display sufficient flashes of independence as to convince policy-makers that they have no ally in the media....

The press may have grown less trusting toward the presidency in domestic affairs, but there is little or no evidence of a similar trend on national defense or foreign policy issues....

Reagan has certainly not suffered at the hands of the press for his interventions in Lebanon, Grenada, Central America or Libya. What has confused many observers of the press is that, while the press usually goes along with the White House on strategic and foreign policy matters, it can be exceedingly tough on the president in other situations: when tactics come into question; when contradictions in rhetoric or policy become overwhelmingly obvious, at which point it is usually too late to correct the damage done; when the policy consensus breaks down or a new one forms, as happened with the Philippines; when a president seems unsure in his actions; or when there is evidence of some sort of cover-up or scandal. The important thing to note about all these situations is that the press usually does not create them; it simply exploits them....



The news media frequently ignore, underestimate, or denigrate the political aspirations of Third World people.... Ethnocentrism plays an important part in this process. The press' cultural myopia has often served official Washington's interests, especially by convincing the American public that Third World peoples are incapable of self-governance, that the best they can hope for is life under a Westernized ruler. In this view, developing countries do not have politics, only fates....

All societies, of course, are prone to feelings of cultural superiority. One of the press' tasks, however, is to restrain these tendencies, not to allow them to be manipulated by the state to justify its ill-conceived policies. On this count, the U.S. media have fallen short....

The Reagan White House has constructed a sophisticated and sustained public relations campaign, based on fear-mongering and appeals to moralism.... The rules of what passes for objectivity, particularly the dependence on established authority and the requirement that news be reported largely in the form of quotations, make it difficult for journalists to refute administration statements — much less to effectively challenge policy-makers' underlying assumptions. By quoting ideologically charged and often factually misleading statements by such an authoritative figure as the president, without at the same time providing substantive contrary evidence, reporters end up validating official positions. For journalists not to take sides when doing so is warranted is, in fact, to take sides....

Right-wing critics may well be correct when they argue that the national press' values are more liberal than those of the general population. But that liberalism does not necessarily mean that the press is hard on Reagan and other conservative officials. Though Reagan is sometimes scolded in editorials and on op-ed pages, journalists

*(Continued...)*

(Continued from page 182)

Perhaps the most instructive examples of those “dangerous self-delusions” to which William Dorman refers (page 183 ff.) can be found in a notoriously “liberal” publication like *Newsweek*, since its coverage of Nicaragua has been among the least

*“Dangerous Self-Delusions” (cont.)*

still pretty much give him his own way in the news columns, which is where bedrock opinion about events in the Third World is formed....

Acutely sensitive to the charge of being overly liberal and soft on communism, journalists (like the leadership of the Democratic party) feel compelled to outflank conservative criticism. One way is to scrupulously observe journalist conventions of “objectivity”, which are inherently biased toward established power. Another is to ignore the left’s analysis of events. A third is to respond only to media criticism that comes from the right. A press that is concerned with dodging conservative criticism is certainly not going to be able to do an adequate job as watchdog. Present events bear eloquent testimony; the media have done little or nothing to restrain the Reagan administration’s resurgent militarism....

Unfortunately, the U.S. press seems unlikely to try to break the national security state’s hold over public discourse. It remains for countervailing forces outside the news industry to make the attempt. In the absence of an organized left, such an effort can only come from elements of the general public, activist organizations and the academy.... The American press seems in desperate need of its own reality check if it is adequately to perform as such for the rest of us.

*Excerpted from “Peripheral Vision: U.S. Journalism and the Third World”, World Policy Journal, Summer 1986*

conformist of the mainstream press. It has embarrassed the White House on several occasions, first with its 1982 exposé of the “secret war”, then later with stories about CIA-*contra* ineptitude, U.S. financial support for Cardinal Obando, and the murderous suppression of press freedom in the administration’s Central American client-states.

But look what *Newsweek* routinely does to the Sandinistas. A fairly typical treatment is the 31 August 1987 piece entitled, “Should the Sandinistas Be Trusted?” Among its numerous misstatements are these: “In 1979 the Sandinistas assured the Organization of American States they would protect civil liberties and a pluralistic political system; since then they have shut down opposition news media and harassed the Roman Catholic Church on their way to essentially one-party rule.”

As indicated elsewhere in these pages, *Newsweek*’s depiction of events is far from accurate. The business about the OAS is one of many White House lies that have been refuted. “When Mr. Reagan first started playing the ‘broken promises’ card in 1983, an OAS official said he was entirely mistaken.” It is the U.S. that has repeatedly violated the OAS charter, with its assaults on Nicaragua and other member states.<sup>181</sup>

As for the rest: Nicaraguans enjoy the greatest degree of civil liberty in Central America, with the possible exception of Costa Rica. Political pluralism was institutionalized in the new constitution and with the 1984 elections, certified as among the most honest in Central American history.

The “opposition news medium” shut down, *La Prensa*, is a self-confessed ally of the CIA-*contra* terrorists. The “Roman Catholic Church” has never been harassed — only those clerics who have openly supported an attempt by a foreign power to overthrow the government by force; note that there is no mention of the popular church. By “one-party” rule, *Newsweek* apparently means the large majority that the Sandinistas won in the fair and open 1984 election. By that standard, countries such as France and Canada are also suffering under the yoke of one-party rule — although the level of voter support for the governments of those countries is considerably smaller.

Note also that, with all the talk of news media being shut down and churches being harassed, there is not a single reference to the national emergency occasioned by the U.S. assault, nor to the fact that U.S. governments have imposed equal or more severe "repression", in far less perilous circumstances.

The *Newsweek* article also cites an "opinion survey sponsored by the U.S. Information Agency and conducted by the Costa Rican affiliate of The Gallup Organization" which found widespread fear of the Sandinistas throughout Central America. Whatever the *bona fides* of the "Costa Rican affiliate of The Gallup Organization" may be, there is no doubt concerning the interests of the USIA, which has been debased by the Reaganites into a crude propaganda apparatus worthy of the Soviet Union.

Furthermore, a *Newsweek* article published one year previously (28 July 1986) had documented the near-total control of right-wing elites over the news reaching the surveyed populations, but there is no mention of this.

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*The article provides a not unusual example of a news organization ignoring the obvious implications of its own reporting.*

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So, here is a not unusual instance of a mainstream news organization ignoring the obvious implications of its own reporting.

Finally, the article relies heavily on the perspectives of "senior administration officials". Elliott Abrams is given yet more space to berate the Sandinistas; as usual, his remarks go unchallenged, even though he had long before acquired a well-deserved reputation for prodigious mendacity. Conversely, *Newsweek* granted the Nicaraguan government no opportunity to respond, nor did it publish a response from any of the many knowledgeable U.S. observers within walking distance of its offices who might have uttered a word or two in the Sandinistas' defense.

Again, this example has been chosen because it is typical of a publication that represents the best, not the worst, of U.S. mainstream reporting on Nicaragua.

## What's fit to print

As the unofficial official newspaper of the United States, the *New York Times* has a powerful voice in the conduct of foreign affairs. Its influence on opinion leaders at home and abroad is legendary, and its wire service distributes the *Times'* view of the world to many other organizations — including the TV networks that are guided by it in preparing their influential nightly newscasts.

The *Times'* reporting on Latin America has often betrayed a distinctly Cold War perspective. Its coverage of Salvador Allende's Chile was particularly icy, diverging very little from the truth according to Kissinger/Nixon.

Its empathy with the Reaganites' conception of Central America became apparent in 1982, when the editors yanked Ray Bonner out of their bureau in El Salvador because his impolitic snooping into army and death squad barbarities had offended right-wing sensibilities. "The attack from the right was fierce. The *Wall Street Journal* in a blistering editorial, accused Bonner of being 'overly credulous' in the face of what had clearly been a propaganda exercise'....

"A co-author of the editorial, George Melloan, went further during an appearance on the *McNeil-Lehrer Report*, claiming that 'obviously Ray Bonner has a political orientation in covering El Salvador' which, in the context of the broadcast, could only be taken to mean that he was a Marxist.... Bonner's articles predictably did not go down well with the U.S. government, either. Thomas Enders, then Assistant Secretary of State for Inter-American affairs, attacked the stories before congressional committees.... By the summer of 1982, Bonner was *persona non grata* at the embassy." He was taken out by *Times* editors that August.<sup>182</sup>

The people of El Salvador thereby lost their most helpful ear in the United States, and the balance of the press corps received a clear message. Indeed, the residual effects of Bonner's fate were probably more significant than his actual expulsion, as suggested by a former editor of the *Washington Post*: "Every year there is a distressing list of reporters and

editors of newspapers and magazines who are fired or demoted because they stumbled on the private politics of their owner.... The worst damage is not in one particular incident, but in the long-lasting aftermath in which working professionals at the editorial level behave as though under orders from above, although no explicit orders have been given."<sup>183</sup>

### Lesson learned

It appears that the present staff of the *Times* has learned from the example of Ray Bonner. He has been replaced by the likes of Shirley Christian and Stephen Kinzer, who have not exactly added further distinction to their profession. "A rapturous apologist for Latin American fascism",<sup>184</sup> Ms. Christian has written favorably about the brutal military rulers of Chile and Argentina.

Christian's pro-*contra* book, *Trouble in the Family: Inside the Nicaraguan Revolution*, has become a standard text for Reaganites seeking to document the perfidy of the Sandinistas. The subtitle is a misnomer, since the book's perspective is entirely from outside the revolution. As a distinguished historian points out:

"Christian gives a glowing and optimistic report of the *contras*, while suppressing everything that is abhorrent about their activities.... She barely mentions the brutal ex-guardsmen of the former dictator.... She ignores the numerous atrocities which the *contras* have committed [and] plays down as much as possible the role of the CIA.... Equally one-sided is Christian's treatment of the Nicaraguan government. Nowhere does she make it clear that the Sandinistas have instituted free universal health care and free universal education.... She does allot two or three paragraphs to land reform. By contrast, 20 pages are allotted to the *contra* leaders."<sup>185</sup>

This, it seems, is the style of "objective" reporting which the editors of the *New York Times* feel appropriate for their coverage of Latin America.

In recent years, most of the news about Nicaragua in the *New York Times* has been gathered by Stephen Kinzer, who

seems to have encountered enormous difficulty in locating Nicaraguans who tolerate, let alone support, the revolution.

Articles carrying the Kinzer by-line tend toward favorable assessments of CIA-*contra* capabilities, complaints by pro-*contra* business and church elites, peasants frustrated by shortages of seeds and fertilizer, accusations and intimations of Sandinista misdeeds, etc., etc. It is truly a marvel that the government has managed to survive, given the oppressively grim reality that Kinzer has portrayed.

Clearly, there is much more to Nicaragua than Kinzer chooses — or is allowed — to report. Observers from the U.S. who have witnessed events subsequently reported in the *Times* frequently remark on the disparity between the actuality and the printed word. Relates a Seattle teacher and her engineer husband:

“The new constitution was proclaimed and signed by President Ortega at a big public rally in Managua. We were there and saw close to 200,000 people. The *New York Times*, however, saw only ‘thousands’. What its coverage stressed was not the national celebration we witnessed, but several demonstrations the opposition staged on that day.... The *Times* referred to ‘thousands’ at one [opposition] demonstration. But a visiting political science professor from the University of South Dakota was there and said, ‘There may have been a hundred’.”<sup>186</sup>

The *Times*’ editorial spin was also noted by a journalist from India who visited Nicaragua in 1986: “The *New York Times*, in [an editorial], had just called the Sandinistas ‘Stalinists’. Stephen Kinzer, the paper’s man in Managua, had belatedly filed a report (without visiting the scene) on the most recent *contra* atrocity, the mining of a road in northern Jinotega Province, near Bocay. The mine had blown up a bus and killed thirty-two civilians, including several schoolchildren. Kinzer’s report suggested that the FSLN could have planted the mine itself, in a bid to gain international sympathy.”<sup>187</sup>

The resulting impression of Kinzer among many of those living in Nicaragua who lack a proper journalistic upbringing

is that, “Evidently the *Times* keeps him on a short leash. The scuttlebutt among North American residents is that Kinzer is only allowed to write one article favorable to Nicaragua out of three. Even the generally favorable articles usually feature at least one low blow.”<sup>188</sup>

Not surprisingly, *Times* editors dismiss such accusations as preposterous. And, in fact, there is no need to postulate anything so gauche as an editorial command in order to explain the distinct odor of the Reaganites wafting through the pages of the *New York Times*. As noted above, the specter of Ray Bonner’s fate and other “objectivity” lessons are probably sufficient to inspire the appropriate attitude.

### Entertaining president

The elevation of entertainer Ronald Reagan to the presidency has eliminated the last vestige of any doubt that television has become a major force in U.S. politics, although there is some debate over the precise nature of its influence.

One thing is certain, however: The impact of television derives primarily from visual images and juxtapositions, and very little from systematic debate. Public apprehension of the Vietnam War is a case in point. Opposition to the war sharpened on a procession of powerful images — a Buddhist monk consumed by the gasoline flames of his own enlightenment, a South Vietnamese police official blowing out the brains of a

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*“I would say it is a fundamental taboo in the major media — in print, or on television or radio — to say good things about the Sandinistas. Instead, Sandinista-bashing has become a media way of life.... We recorded 85 lies, on Central America alone, that the administration has told Congress, and I’m sure we didn’t get them all. The record shows that most of these were let go by the press, even the press that knows better. And when I asked a reporter, ‘How come you didn’t report that?’ he said, ‘Ahh, what’s the use of it? No one’s interested in that stuff.’”*

— Saul Landau, *Institute for Policy Studies*<sup>189</sup>





Jaime Perozo

*Four faces of the Nicaraguan army. The Reaganites have attempted to portray the few thousand CIA-contras, many of them kidnapped, as heroes of a popular uprising; but they are opposed by the vast majority of the Nicaraguan population. The government has armed a citizens' militia of over 100,000 citizens and has announced plans to increase that number to 600,000 as a deterrent to U. S. invasion. That clearly suggests a high level of trust between the government and the people, and a lack of support for the CIA terrorists, but U. S. news media have generally followed the administration's lead in characterizing the civil defense plan as a dangerous "military build-up" that threatens the peace of the entire region.*

handcuffed prisoner, a young girl screaming naked down a road in agony from the burns inflicted by a U.S. bomb, etc., etc.

Subsequent administrations have learned from that experience, and have taken pains to engineer more reassuring poses. With precious few exceptions, the major networks have been all too eager to comply. In the world of TV news, the most important event of the day can be the Leader of the Free

World chopping wood at his California hideaway, or perhaps dispensing grandfatherly smiles to the Girl Scouts' champion cookie salesperson at a "photo opportunity" in the White House Rose Garden.

Concerning Nicaragua: We get an "in-depth report" which shows flashes of U.S. entertainers in Managua, impales them on snide commentary about their support of the revolution, and then zooms away without a single word of response from the presumptively ridiculous celebrities. On the evening news there are snippets of Soviet military equipment thundering down the streets of Managua; nothing about the U.S. aggression which has necessitated it. Dedicated young "freedom fighters", duded out in U.S. Army togs, liberate the Honduran countryside while yearning to be free. Elliott Abrams emits another barrage of anti-Sandinista invective and an earnest hymn to Democracy.

At an international conference of parliamentarians held in Managua, the network camera lingers on seating plaques for the delegations from Hungary and Bulgaria, while somehow failing to notice those for Spain, France and Norway. A CIA-*contra* leader conducts a chorus of cheers at the White House for a steadfast president with cries of "Viva Reagan! Viva Reagan!".... You get the picture.

Pictures you don't get: an old woman being taught to read by a teen-aged volunteer; an infant having its life preserved at one of the new dehydration treatment centers; peasants receiving title to the first land they've ever owned; a factory worker participating in a company board meeting; a farmworker being trained in the use of biological pest controls; a young man with his testicles stuffed in his mouth and his guts wrapped around a tree; Rosa with her breasts cut off....

Two independent video producers experienced at first hand the methods by which the major TV networks capture their images of Nicaragua, after taking some footage of a civilian relocation project. *Voice of America* and the *Washington Post* portrayed the operation as a cruel and arbitrary dispossession, but the videographers didn't see it that way. "We were surprised, because the people we'd met had said they'd been

terrorized by the *contras*.... There was only one woman that was dissatisfied with moving....

"The CBS producer saw our footage and said, 'Oh, this is really beautiful housing. I didn't know they were building housing like that. This is fantastic; I'm really amazed.' And then he said at the end, 'We can't buy any of this.... Unless you can bring us footage of the Sandinistas burning down houses, we don't want to buy any.' Everybody seemed to be after that story.

"We did sell footage of the evacuation to ABC. But in the story, ABC used the voice of a man who they said refused to be interviewed on camera, who told them he hadn't been allowed to bring his animals. They didn't use any of our footage which showed that, in fact, people were bringing their animals and saying that they wanted to leave... ABC really went out of their way to get a negative story."<sup>190</sup>

## Under control

As must employees everywhere, journalists operate within the confines of an occupational culture which imposes limits on the realm of the permissible. That culture is transmitted and enforced through the usual mechanisms of social control: "In the real world of the newsroom and the board room, the news is fiddled with by management, either crudely through direct intervention or more subtly by picking editors who know what is expected of them."<sup>191</sup>

While it should be obvious, for example, that Ronald Reagan fits the definition of "war criminal" as much as any Nazi leader hung or imprisoned by the Nuremberg Tribunal, anyone who says that sort of thing out loud is extremely unlikely ever to become editor of the *New York Times* — or of the *South Succotash Sentinel*, for that matter. Best not even to think about it.

Worse, the regulation journalistic mind-set is becoming regressively more narrow as a result of corporate agglomeration. "The seeming cultural pluralism provided by thousands

of newspapers, magazines, radio stations and TV channels is belied by their near-total absorption into giant media combines. The consequence is a national discourse that is increasingly one-dimensional.”<sup>192</sup>

Barring interference from countervailing forces, that single dimension is most likely to be charted by White House media managers, and we can expect news reports increasingly to resemble this example:

“LONDON. December 26, 1776 — Ragtag leftist colonists assaulted a German-oriented group of His Majesty’s loyalists today in Trenton, N.J., in what is ‘clearly a terrorist attack’, sources here said.

“The sources, who declined to be identified for fear of reprisal, said the attack on the Hessians, mounted by radical rebel commander George Washington, probably could not have been carried out without secret arms shipments from France.

“The Paris regime is said to be aiding the subversive American independence movement, which is allegedly seeking to unseat duly-established representatives of the British Crown.

“The Crown has long contended the purported rebellion could have been brought to a speedy close months ago were it not for the insurgent mobs’ refusal to negotiate, and their access to weapons from leftist nations abroad, unidentified Parliamentary spokesmen said.

“There was no comment from the increasingly disheveled American rebels, who claim to be fighting for ‘freedom’ in the 1½-year-old ‘dirty war’ that so far has taken the lives of 1097 of the Crown’s smartly dressed crack troops. Insurgent casualty figures are unavailable.”

This illustration was provided by Emmett Murray, a copy editor for the *Seattle Times* who is fluent in Spanish and worked for many years in Latin America. His employers have in the past nominated him for the Pulitzer Prize; but in 1987 he was prohibited from dealing with any news relating to Latin America, after being found in possession of a “liberal bias” in such matters.<sup>193</sup>

*"Most people assume that the United States is free from overt censorship, but a San Francisco-based media group has discovered the opposite to be true. Neighbor to Neighbor, a national television campaign to broaden public understanding of the conflicts in Central America, has been refused the right to air its television special, 'Faces of War', in all but three of the nations top twenty-two TV markets....*

*"Neighbor to Neighbor Director Nick Allen asked, 'If a station is selling time to TV evangelists like Jerry Falwell who preach for increased U.S. military intervention in Central America, why won't they sell us time to present our views?'"<sup>194</sup>*

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## Shill game

Since the mainstream media are willing to transmit just about anything the White House wants the public to see and hear, it only remains to provide reporters with something to report. Speeches and interviews by administration officials are usually a safe bet; they have made "Sandinista Evil" one of the top political tunes of the 1980s.

To enliven the performance, the Reaganites have employed an assortment of skills in Nicaragua and at home. One of the more bizarre was the guy who was paid \$2500 to dress up like a priest and tell a Congressional committee that the Sandinistas themselves dress up like CIA-*contras* and commit atrocities in order to discredit the president's freedom fighters.<sup>195</sup>

The pro-*contra* opposition within Nicaragua performs a similar function, but on a much grander scale. The angry business leaders, the CIA press, and the reactionaries in the Catholic hierarchy have been very effective at provoking the government into responses which can then be trumpeted to the world as outrageous acts of repression.

The anti-communist fervor of fundamentalist churches has also been put to good use. Likewise, the cult of Reverend Sun Myung Moon, whose World Unification Church has established "missions" in Honduras that cater to Miskito refugees from Nicaragua. In addition to collaborating with the USIA

on the production and distribution of a propaganda film about those refugees, the Moonies have sponsored an endless parade of anti-Sandinista speakers in the U.S., and in countless other ways have worked with considerable success to spread myths of Miskito "genocide" religious persecution, etc.

Many of these phony stories first come to print in the Moonies' own *Washington Times*. It has become the daily newspaper of choice for the Republican Party's right wing — and the racist government of South Africa which gives it almost a million dollars annually. The chief editor is a frequent guest at the Reagan White House. "What the *Washington Times* has come to resemble... is the closest thing to a government-sponsored newspaper that the United States has seen in modern times."<sup>196</sup>

### Sanitary engineering

After the secret war and the brutality of its *Guardia* perpetrators came to light, the Reaganites performed a little sanitary engineering by setting up a political front of exiled Nicaraguans in Miami. As one of them later testified to the World Court, the CIA "explained to me that the [CIA-*contra* operation] had a bad image in the United States, and particularly among members of the Congress, because it was perceived as an organization of ex-national guardsmen. He told me that in order to maintain the support of the Congress for the CIA's activities it was necessary to replace the political junta with a group of prominent Nicaraguan civilians who had no ties with the National Guard or the Somoza government."<sup>197</sup>

These respectable citizens in sober business suits thus became the public face of the CIA-*contras*. Their job was to recite the standard text to television cameras and Congressional hearings. And so it came to pass that the likes of Aldolfo Calero and Arturo Cruz achieved the transient status of mini-celebrities in U.S. political life.

This public drama ran into difficulty, however, when some of the players began to take their roles seriously and tried to impose modest financial and ethical restraints on the terrorists.

That was not in the script, and the resulting failures to communicate led to frequent resignations. Consequently, the administration has been forced to play a frenetic game of “Musical Leaders”, with substitutes usually recruited directly from the road show run by COSEP in Managua.

The pathetic illusions of this tragicomic opera, which in one of its several versions performed under the title of “United Nicaraguan Opposition” (UNO), were recently disabused by a desperate act of its producers. In an attempt to short-circuit a Central America peace initiative in late 1987, the Reaganites rushed their counter-proposal to the U.S. public’s attention without the slightest pretext of consulting the collaborating heroes of Nicaraguan democracy. They were summoned to the White House *after* the fact, and given a few minutes to study the proposal before declaring their enthusiastic support at a prearranged press conference.<sup>198</sup>



*The White House*

*At a White House pep rally, head cheerleader Ronald Reagan proclaims his devotion to his ‘freedom fighters’. Immediately to his left, Adolfo Calero is shouting, “Viva Reagan! Viva Reagan!” At the far right of the photo is Arturo Cruz, who later resigned from the CIA-contras’ political front because, as he put it, “UNO never had anything more than a paper existence, and the Reagan administration never wanted it to be anything more than that.”*

It was that sort of thing which led Arturo Cruz to resign months later, despite strenuous efforts by the administration to retain his services. Although the pay was good — he was receiving at least \$84,000 a year — the work was not satisfying: “My basic mistake was agreeing to join UNO in the first place. UNO never had anything more than a paper existence, and the Reagan administration never wanted it to be anything more than that. UNO was born dead, and for that reason today it is a corpse.”<sup>199</sup>

But it has been a useful corpse. With characteristic objectivity, the mainstream press has faithfully reported its every rattle of anti-Sandinista protest and still treats it as though it has a life of its own.

### ***Contra* rights**

There has been so much indisputable evidence of CIA-*contra* atrocities that it has been necessary on occasion for the administration to impeach or divert attention from it. One proven technique is simply to make counter-accusations against the Sandinistas; there is no need to substantiate such claims, because everybody is presumed to know what them Marxist-Leninists are like. Since the other side is just as vicious as ours, the argument goes, so what’s the big deal?

Then there’s the one about the Sandinistas putting on *contra* suits and molesting the peasantry under false pretenses. Ronald Reagan really likes this one and, though they may not openly endorse it, U.S. news media can usually be relied upon to pass it along uncritically.

The cleverest trick has been to set up competing “human rights” organizations which ignore *contra* depravity while vilifying the government. One such is the Permanent Human Rights Commission (“CPDH”) in Managua. It was originally established by the traditional opposition to Somoza, but now receives its funding from the U.S. and “has become a virtual instrument of the right-wing Social Christian Party, acting as an apologist for National Guard prisoners.”<sup>200</sup> The CPDH pretends to know nothing about the CIA-*contras*, but reports



every rumor of government abuse as fact, without bothering to investigate. It is frequently cited by U.S. news media, which invariably refer to it as a legitimate “Nicaraguan human rights organization”.

There is another human rights organization in Managua, directed by a Catholic nun, which *does* investigate reported abuses by both the army and the CIA-*contras*. It is hardly ever mentioned by U.S. news media.

Back home in the USA, the main problem is: What to do about Amnesty International and Americas Watch, two organizations with respectable credentials that have sounded repeated alarms about CIA-*contra* brutality?

That problem seems to have been addressed by setting up one fresh alternative and, quite possibly, corrupting another.

## **In league with the League**

The International League for Human Rights is an established U.S. organization with a reputation of no particular distinction. In 1986, shortly before a crucial vote in Congress on CIA-*contra* military aid, the League sent a four-person team to Nicaragua. One of the “investigators” was Robert Leiken, a former consultant to *contra* spokesman Arturo Cruz. Leiken’s notoriously misleading reports on events in Nicaragua have been rubbished by journalists who witnessed them first-hand. Another delegate was Nina Shea, an ideologue with connections to the Heritage Foundation, a right-wing “think tank” deeply implicated in the campaign to destabilize Nicaragua.

The final report bore a striking resemblance to the accusations of the pro-*contra* CPDH — probably because it was based almost entirely on the unsubstantiated gossip of that CIA front. The “investigators” did not bother to look into the behavior of the CIA-*contras*, nor did they invite the government to respond to the accusations made against it.

“The report invokes ‘patterns of abuse’ and ‘methods of torture’, which duly translated into headlines in the U.S. press.... Primed with this grab bag of rumor and unsubstantiated

assertions, the League team raced back to the United States to inject its report into the *contra* debate... exaggerating even its bogus numbers, even though the report was not to be published for another four months.”<sup>201</sup>

One of the four “investigators”, a human rights official in the Carter administration, has since disowned the fabricated report. But it is still being cited as solid evidence of Sandinista depravity.

The fingerprints of the CIA are all over the Puebla Institute, another “human rights organization” that has emerged in recent years to excoriate the Sandinistas. A self-styled “Catholic lay organization”, its director is Nina Shea (see above). According to a former official of the CIA-*contras*, the Puebla Institute was first created in 1983 as a publishing front for an anti-Sandinista book, and was later transformed into its current manifestation as a defender of human rights.<sup>202</sup> It has been yet another CIA success story, frequently cited by the mainstream press as an impartial observer of Nicaraguan government abuses; needless to say, CIA-*contra* brutality holds little interest for the Pueblogues.

Hardly worth mentioning, were it not so casually referred to by the mainstream press from time to time, is the “Commission on Human Rights” grafted by Congress onto the bloody corpus of the CIA-*contras* as a bone of humane invention. It is supposed to investigate complaints against the president’s terrorists and institute necessary reforms. An official of Americas Watch has described its accomplishments to date:

*(Continued on page 206)*

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*“Journalists, like politicians, don’t want to be labeled as leftists or as being ‘soft on communism’.... Many reporters are familiar with the way that the New York Times’ Herbert Matthews was vilified for having reported too sympathetically about Castro in the 1950s. If Nicaragua should go communist, journalists who have written anything favorable about the Sandinistas will be treated harshly.”*

— Raymond Bonner<sup>203</sup>

## **“I believe there is very strong control”**

The *contras* are a creation of the U.S. government and are accountable to it. They don't make their own decisions. So, in the end they will have to do what the Reagan administration decides to do.... It's totally irrelevant what a *contra* leader wants to do. If he wants a cease-fire, the U.S. will replace him. He's not there to make an accommodation with the Nicaraguan government, but to enforce the interests of a foreign country....

[As regards U.S. news media] I believe that there is very strong control, in the sense that the United States, through the wire services and the State Department, sends so much news to the press that the press has no choice but to repeat what the administration says. The administration has the capacity to stage press conferences, orchestrate situations, invite people to special events, send out statements and news releases constantly and in such a way that people working in different media have to rush and just repeat. They have no time even to check the truth of such information....

Very often they are edited, and they can't see what happens, particularly when they are syndicated....

And sometimes the administration creates news stories to cover for things it wants to neutralize, or hide, or play down. It has a great capacity to create parallel events to distract attention from something it doesn't want people to remember. Or even to create parallel institutions — like the *contra* human rights organization — which will neutralize, or obscure, or confuse, so people will not know which is the true one....

I have been surprised since I [came to Managua]. I've seen very little militarization, even with that huge crowd last night. At least you would expect to see some water cannons, like in other countries, in case the crowd got unruly or panicked. They didn't have anything!

*(Continued on following page)*

(Continued from page 204)

“The commission’s performance in monitoring *contra* abuses, its failure to denounce violations when they occur, and its near-total inability to prosecute and punish *contra* offenders reflects the irrelevance of UNO’s civilian leadership. Since [its] creation, *contra* abuses have proliferated.... The lesson for Congress is that \$3 million worth of ingenuously appropriated conscience money will neither buy effective monitoring of *contra* human rights abuses nor transform the practices of the *contras* and their commanders.”<sup>204</sup>

### Bipartisan partisanship

For harried executives everywhere, a time-honored public relations remedy is the “blue ribbon commission” assigned to study a problem and, if all goes well, issue a set of recommendations which reinforce the position of its creator.

To soothe congressional anxieties about its not-so-covert operations, the Reagan administration in 1983 cobbled together something called the National Bipartisan Commission on Central America. It was headed by Henry Kissinger, the

*“There is very strong control” (cont.)*

Perhaps one of the explanations is a deep sense of equality; nobody pushes anybody. I think that’s one of the accomplishments of the revolution, that a simple worker feels as much dignity as a bigshot....

I don’t see hungry people here. In the United States you read that people are dying of hunger. Here, I could not see it. Most people look very healthy, strong, alive — they don’t act like hungry people. I only saw a few beggars — not like in Tegucigalpa, or even in city streets in the U.S....

— Former CIA-*contra* leader; accepted amnesty in 1986<sup>205</sup>

former Secretary of State respected among U.S. conservatives as the nation's most astute foreign policy expert — and one of the chief architects of U.S. policy toward Latin America.

The commission was styled “bipartisan” because it is a buzzword often used to legitimate a contentious policy by implying a consensus around it. To be sure, both Democrats and Republicans were included, but none of the twelve carefully selected commissioners was likely to rock the ship of state. All were considered to be manageable; they did not disappoint.

The closest thing to a potential opponent of Reaganite doctrine was Henry Cisneros, the Spanish-American Mayor of San Antonio, Texas. He did, in fact, issue a modest dissent that recommended disbanding the CIA-*contras*, but it was lost in the sea of blue-ribbon complicity.

The loudest voice belonged, as intended, to the imposing figure of Kissinger, who had been responsible for the infamous “Christmas bombing” and similar acts of diplomacy against Vietnam some ten years previous.

Kissinger was also a principal instigator of Chile's ongoing nightmare. His appreciation of Latin America was distilled in these 1969 observations to Chile's foreign minister: “You come here speaking of Latin America, but this is not important. Nothing important can come from the South. History has never been produced in the South. The axis of history starts in Moscow, goes to Bonn, crosses over to Washington, and then goes to Tokyo. What happens in the South is of no importance.”<sup>206</sup>

Forearmed with this profound and humane perspective, Kissinger led his fellow commissioners on a whirlwind tour of Central America, including an eight-hour stopover in Managua. Their encounter with the Sandinistas did not go smoothly, partly because it came just five days after the devastating CIA attack on Corinto, and partly because the objects of bipartisan scrutiny understood full well the nature of the enterprise: “We see in this commission the fundamental purpose of opening political space for Reagan within the U.S.”<sup>207</sup>

Furious at being lectured to by little brown men who do not make history, Kissinger returned to home base and, as his first order of business, had the U.S. ambassador to Nicaragua transferred for insufficient antipathy toward the Sandinistas.

The commission's report soon followed and, as pre-ordained, supported administration policy. It made passing reference to the region's poverty and recommended an economic assistance program identical to the Kennedy administration's "Alliance for Progress", which had years before served to solidify the economic and political dominance of ruling elites.

But, inevitably, it emphasized The Threat of Communist Expansion, which was apparently so obvious that there was no need to document it: "The report charges — with an argument built on assumption rather than evidence — that the Soviet Union is the manipulator of indigenous revolution in the area.... No coherent argument is presented for the assumption that the revolutions represent a threat to U.S. national security. Lacking evidence and analysis, the report's case is reduced to the assertion that there is a 'Soviet-Cuban thrust to make Central America part of their geostrategic challenge'.... The report makes much of the domino theory that suggests that revolutions spread like communicable diseases. [But] the principal 'dominoes' of the region for whose sake the security policy is ostensibly pursued — Mexico and Panama — oppose the military course of U.S. policy."<sup>208</sup>

The commission's majority also absolved the United States of any responsibility for the mess in Central America, and tacitly endorsed the CIA-*contras*, warning that "Nicaragua must be aware that force remains an ultimate resource."<sup>209</sup>

Despite the political weight of its chairman, the report was not a complete success. Several congressmen even had the temerity to point out that its assertion of Soviet influence lacked supporting evidence. The report's patronizing attitude also had the effect of intensifying resentment of the United States throughout Latin America.

Thus, the Kissinger Commission fell short of the hopes that launched it. It has been used mainly to rally the faithful and,

with some success, as a sacred text to be cited years afterward whenever the administration tries to persuade some gullible audience that its policy has “bipartisan” support. And, it did fill many column inches of newspapers and precious minutes of network air time with anti-Sandinista messages.

## **Garbage threshold**

Presidential speeches, shills in Congress, provocations in Managua, phrases of the Moonies, the Kissinger commission, posturings of the UNO-ites, ersatz human rights organizations — these are all grist for the nation’s propaganda mills, witting and otherwise, and all have been used as vehicles for the Big Lie campaign against Nicaragua.

Even were it prepared to do so, the national press would likely encounter great resistance from its clientele if it were to systematically counteract White House propaganda. Public opinion polls and readership surveys indicate that a clear majority of U.S. citizens has a low threshold of tolerance for bad news about the presidency, especially if it is suspected of being true. So fast and furious is the barrage of intellectual garbage spewed forth by the White House that the news media could easily exhaust their entire resources in trying to mop it up, and it would be a thankless task.

Of course, the media could simply refuse to dignify such rubbish with their attention. But that would not do; for, “If the president says it, it’s news.” And so, most of what he and his minions proclaim slips by unchallenged. If they repeat something often enough, it stands an excellent chance of becoming common knowledge.

For justifying aggression, there is nothing more efficacious than a few scary messages, endlessly repeated in such a way as to draw attention to the victim and away from the aggressor — much as Hitler blamed fictitious threats from Poland for his 1939 invasion of that country. Through the application of selective evidence and double standards, by distilling complex reality into simplistic notions of good vs. evil, and by launching

all attacks through a fog of patriotic claptrap, the Reaganites have labored to promote hatred of Nicaragua. Here are six of their favorite themes....

### **“COMMUNIST BEACHHEAD”**

According to a typical tirade delivered by Ronald Reagan, “Nicaragua has launched a campaign to subvert and topple its democratic neighbors. Using Nicaragua as a base, the Soviets and Cubans can become the dominant power in the crucial corridor between North and South America. Established there, they will be in a position to threaten the Panama Canal, interdict our vital Caribbean sea lanes and, ultimately, move against Mexico. Should that happen, desperate Latin peoples by the millions would begin fleeing north into the cities of the southern United States, or to wherever some hope of freedom remained.”<sup>210</sup>

No one in his or her right mind seriously believes this, least of all the military planners of the Defense Department. But the Reaganites have been mouthing such claims since they first took office. They have encountered a good deal of scepticism: In 1982 a Congressional committee “inquired about statements by administration officials... which reportedly indicated that ‘detailed outlines’ of Soviet and Cuban plans in Central America had been obtained.... In a written response, the CIA clarified that... no ‘detailed plan’ had been obtained.”<sup>211</sup>

So much for the quality of the evidence used to document the domino theory for the Western Hemisphere. But mere facts never get in the way of a Reaganites’ story, and they have continued to repeat this one as received wisdom; the baseless assertions of the Kissinger Commission are a case in point.

In an effort to strengthen its case for communist expansion, the State Department commissioned a study on “Soviet Attitudes towards Aid to and Contacts with Central American Revolutionaries”. Usually referred to as the Jacobsen Report,



after its principal author, it has not been widely disseminated by the administration — probably because it arrives at exactly the opposite of the desired conclusion:

“The Nicaraguan revolution caught Moscow off-guard,” states the report, which notes that the Moscow-aligned Socialist Party of Nicaragua won only 1.3 percent of the votes in the 1984 election. According to Jacobsen, the Soviets have been willing to provide Nicaragua with limited economic and military support, but are decidedly *not* interested in bankrolling another Cuba, or provoking a shooting war with the U.S. over Central America. Its Latin American interests lie elsewhere — in Brazil, Peru and Argentina, for example .

“The bottom line was that the Sandinistas would indeed have to defend themselves. Finally, one must note that Moscow apparently expects to benefit whatever the course of events. She appears to calculate that the political-ideological PR harvest that would accrue from an all-out U.S. invasion would outweigh the loss of immediate advantage.”<sup>212</sup>

The administration’s professed alarm at the growth of Nicaragua’s military strength is also discounted by independent analysts. Data from the International Institute for Strategic Studies in London show that “Nicaragua is no match for its neighbors.... The combined regular forces of El Salvador, Honduras and Guatemala are twice as large, have superior firepower and, more importantly, air forces capable of dominating the skies.... Their total population is more than five times that of Nicaragua, a substantial manpower margin in any strategic equation.”<sup>213</sup>

The disparity is especially pronounced with respect to air power. Nicaragua’s small collection of aging planes is no match for the sophisticated modern fighters issued to U.S. client-states. The country’s inability to defend its own airspace is so complete that the CIA makes routine supply drops to its *contra* bands in Nicaragua with hardly any interference. A supply plane does occasionally get shot down, but from the ground.

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## Sifting through the Mainstream News

ANYONE WHO HAS TAKEN the accompanying critique of mainstream news at all seriously may be forgiven a certain consequent despair. If so, take heart: It is, in fact, possible to extract a great deal of useful information, even from such voices of the establishment as the *New York Times* and the *Wall Street Journal*, as long as suitable precautions are taken.

It doesn't come without effort, however; a steady investment of time and energy is required in order to become reasonably well-informed. It is also necessary to tolerate a high degree of uncertainty, in recognition of the fact that all knowledge is provisional; news reporting, as with all human endeavors (including this one), is subject to the perils of omission and inaccuracy. The rest is almost easy. With respect to gathering information about the Third World, here are a few suggestions....

### **Be a media critic, not a passive consumer**

Understand that perfect objectivity is exceedingly rare — and for any organism more complex than an amoeba, probably non-existent. Develop the habit of questioning every item of information you encounter, especially the buzzwords and stock images that lodge surreptitiously in the mind. The second or third time you see anyone or anything labeled as “Marxist-Leninist... radical... freedom... democracy”, etc., ask for precise details. When national leaders employ such words, it is nearly always for purposes of manipulation. No need to get nasty about it; but persistent scepticism is especially helpful with international news, since there are fewer checks on misleading information than with the domestic variety.

As for TV news, which for some reason seems to enjoy a degree of public trust equal to or greater than that of

print media, don't expect too much. TV news tends to emphasize fleeting impressions with a high potential for distortion. Time constraints, alone, make it impossible to present anything like a comprehensive picture. Be particularly alert to the subliminal effects created by the juxtaposition of images; one way to become more sensitive to that problem is to turn off the sound from time to time and study the images that flash by. At most, TV offers visual impressions and alerts viewers to important issues they ought to read more about.

### **Distrust your government on principle**

This is a disturbing thought to many citizens, even those inclined to sharply criticize their leaders. But the question here is how to become well-informed, not comfortable. As the Reagan administration has demonstrated, your leaders are not trying to provide you with a first-rate education. Rather, they are trying to engineer your consent to their projects, and will say or do anything for that purpose — or, failing that, to get you so confused that you will be disinclined to interfere. The president will never lie to you unless he feels it is necessary or convenient to do so; when it comes to attacking other countries, it is never necessary, but almost always convenient.

Never forget that we live in the Age of Maximum Marketing, and that the White House operates in much the same fashion as any other powerful organization seeking to influence public perceptions. Regard pronouncements of the president and his associates quite literally as advertisements that have been planned days or even months in advance, often to coincide with some other event for maximum effect. White House operatives now refer shamelessly to the “packaging” of “products” to be “sold” to the public....

### *Sifting through the Mainstream News (cont.)*

So, when you hear the president utter phrases like “protecting democracy... defending human rights... confronting the Evil Empire”, think in terms of “Ride the High Country with Marlboro cigarettes... Better Living with General Electric... Bedtime for Bonzo... Rocky Mountain Fresh Coors Beer”, etc. This may seem excessively cynical, but it merely reflects the need to erect barriers against the cynical manipulation that has become standard procedure for the White House.

The issues, themselves, remain vitally important. What needs to be challenged is the government’s typically self-serving approach to them. One simple reality check on administration policy toward another country is to compare it with others and try to discover a general rule. If the U.S. should attack any Latin America country that receives support from the Soviet Union, why not start with Argentina and Peru which receive much more of it than Nicaragua? If the abuse of human rights is an appropriate pretext for assault, why didn’t the U.S. invade Chile or Guatemala long ago? If economic sanctions will only make South Africa more intransigent, how can they inspire democracy in Nicaragua? Etc., etc....

### **Seek alternatives to the official version**

The symbiotic relationship between mainstream news media and the White House has resulted in the establishment of something very like an official press, one that is all the more influential due to its subliminal operation. This is a condition that places a premium on alternative sources of information, including many that slip into mainstream newspapers. Although they remain subject to the discretion of editors, guest articles and letters-to-the-editor often provide assessments and

snippets of information that may be ignored by the paid employees of the same journal. They also provide a lot of nonsense, but in this they differ little from editorials and the reports of foreign correspondents.

Accordingly, it is a good idea to treat letters, columns and guest articles (at least initially) with as much respect as any front-page article. Some of the best reporting on Nicaragua to appear in the *New York Times* has come in letters from people like Edgar Chamorro, a former CIA-*contra* leader, and George Wald, a Nobel laureate who is active in the international solidarity movement. Likewise, columns by Anthony Lewis and John B. Oakes have offered well-informed rebukes to the Cold War inanities of Times editorials.

Nevertheless, it is essential to sample the smorgasbord of non-establishment news sources, many of which are referenced in the "Notes" section of this book. Particularly informative on Third World issues are publications of a mainline religious persuasion, e.g. *Sojourners* and *Christianity in Crisis*. They often present foreign points of view, and a correspondingly instructive contrast to the chauvinistic discourse of the White House. (The same cannot be said of the diverse media outlets going forth and multiplying from the thriving fundamentalist movement/business, which desecrates a Godless Commie lurking behind every burning bush. Gladly would its acolytes smite the infidels; for that and other purposes, they have forged an unholy alliance with the Reaganites.)

Apart from their immediate value, alternative publications should be supported to the fullest extent possible by everyone desirous of preserving informational choices, since the mainstream media are becoming ever more conglomerated and homogenous.

It is impossible for anyone to study the entire range of international issues, but attention to one often yields

### *Sifting through the Mainstream News (cont.)*

knowledge that can be applied to others. For instance, an understanding of the CIA's activities in Nicaragua will very likely be useful for following events in El Salvador and the Philippines in the years ahead.

### **Know thy editor**

Newspaper editors and their TV/radio counterparts are the principal gatekeepers of news from the outside world. In the absence of any other information, it may as well be assumed that most are men and women of good will and dedicated to their work. But they are no wiser or less fallible than other human beings with comparable training and aptitude, and it is healthy to *continually* ask two questions of their presentations: Why are you telling me this? And more importantly: What are you *not* telling me?

It is difficult to evaluate information or ideas that are never disclosed, which is why it is crucially important to seek out other-than-mainstream news sources whenever possible, and to treat them with as much initial respect as anything that appears on TV or in the pages of the *New York Times*. Above all, be not impressed by technical wizardry; dazzling graphics and pretty pictures have about as much to do with accurate reporting as does a Pepsi-Cola commercial with sex or nutrition. For the rest, there is much to be learned — or at least inferred — by paying careful attention to the proceedings.

For one thing, all news of any significance should be checked for internal consistency. To take a not-unusual example from a daily newspaper in the generally dreadful Hearst chain: The headline reads, "Full democracy returns to Philippines"; but the lead paragraph states that the president had issued decrees "... establishing a

citizens' army and stipulating penalties of up to six months' imprisonment for membership in the Communist Party". Now, this sobering glimpse of "full democracy" may result from simple incompetence; more likely, it is yet another expression of the prevailing ethical blindness toward anything that smells of communism. In either case, it raises obvious questions about this particular article and the newspaper that published it.

Mainstream reporting on Nicaragua is replete with similar examples, some of which have been noted elsewhere in these pages. Fortunately, such deviations are there for all to see; usually all that is required to spot them is the same level of alertness one would bring to the problem of crossing a busy street.

The strange calculus of editorial priorities also bears close watching. Our overall impression of the world outside, and our sense of the relative significance of any particular event, are very much influenced by the choices of editors — headline size and placement of articles, total column inches devoted to a particular subject, length and sequence of broadcast items, etc.

Such decisions are almost invariably made in deference to the received traditions of mainstream journalism, and not as the result of anything resembling a careful analysis. The tendency of TV news to feature the president riding the range or chopping firewood, while the mayhem he has ordered goes largely unmentioned, has already been noted. Newspapers devote headlines and oceans of ink to the dishonest pronouncements of the Prevaricator-in-Chief, while ignoring knowledgeable critics. Meanwhile, such trivialities as the life-on-earth-threatening "ozone hole" in the upper atmosphere, or the alarming implications of world population growth, are typically compressed into five column inches and buried at the bottom of page nine, to the extent that they are mentioned at all.

*(Continued...)*

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The Reaganites ignore these factors and point instead to Nicaragua's superiority in tanks and attack helicopters. But military analysts from both inside and outside the government have demonstrated that the tanks would be almost useless for an attack against a neighboring country; the helicopters would be easily picked off with anti-aircraft missiles available to U.S. client-states.

A U.S. intelligence report in 1984 concluded that, "The overall buildup is primarily defense-oriented, and much of the recent effort has been devoted to improving counter-insurgency capabilities."<sup>214</sup> The report also reveals that Soviet

### *Sifting through the Mainstream News (cont.)*

Nevertheless, the odd article or editorial occasionally penetrates the fog of Cold War presumption which normally enshrouds the mainstream news. Such rare gems should be seized upon as points of comparison with the general run of things. For instance, it has slipped out once or twice that Nicaragua's Foreign Minister is a priest, and that many other priests are serving in the government. Typically, these fleeting revelations are glossed over in a mere line or two, and drowned in a sea of anti-Sandinista cant. To the sharp of eye, however, an obvious question suggests itself: What's all this about the Catholic Church being persecuted?

Finally, with respect to any Third World country of interest to the U.S. government, a general rule applies: News reports which fail to mention the machinations of the CIA have not even begun to scratch the surface of the story. Hardly any do.

Above all, it is essential to eschew passive consumption, and to engage the news in active dialogue. That takes work. But since when is it supposed to be easy to understand other societies and their inter-relations?



*"The truth is that the only Central American country in danger of invasion by regular forces is Nicaragua. The only country likely to do that is the United States."*

— Council on Hemispheric Affairs

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aid has increased in direct proportion to the CIA-*contra* onslaught. As the *Wall Street Journal* has reported, "Soviet military aid to the Sandinistas began as a \$5 million trickle in 1979, and rose slightly to \$7 million in 1980. In 1981, when Congress authorized covert support of the *contras*, Soviet-bloc aid soared to \$45 million."<sup>215</sup>

The chief cause of Nicaragua's arms build-up is the threat of a U.S. invasion, which would be far from the first in the nation's history. The White House has taken pains to feed those anxieties: "The Reagan administration has intentionally reinforced those fears, senior administration officials confirmed.... From the start, administration officials have said [that the military maneuvers in Honduras] were intended to intimidate Nicaragua. 'One of the central purposes is to create fear of an invasion,' a senior Administration official said. The American troops 'push very close to the border, deliberately, to set off all the alarms' he added."<sup>216</sup>

It certainly came as no surprise, then, that Nicaragua has tried to increase its defensive capabilities. In fact, that was part of the White House plan. It was also part of the plan that Nicaragua be forced to get its military equipment from the Soviet bloc, in order to accent the "communist beachhead" motif.

Nicaragua's provisional government had first tried to obtain arms from the U.S., but was instantly rejected. It then turned to the Netherlands and France, and from those two allies of the U.S. acquired a small supply of defensive weapons. The Reaganites described this commerce by its friends as a stab in the back and applied "intense political and economic pressure.... Delivery of the equipment to Nicaragua faced long delays, and there have been no further arms sales.... Washing-

ton's choice to pursue policies designed to isolate Nicaragua politically and militarily have contributed directly to Nicaragua's dependence on the Soviet Union for military equipment."<sup>217</sup>

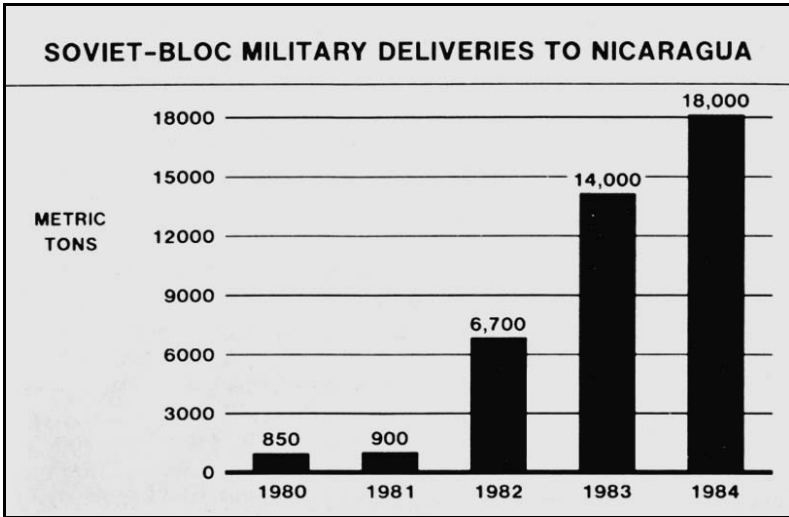
The resulting escalation has followed the pattern established by the U.S. in Vietnam; every fresh wave of matériel has been met with a somewhat smaller response from the Soviet bloc. Any doubt that the U.S. was primarily responsible for the escalation in Central America was eliminated in the wake of the "Reagan-Gorbachev summit" in December 1987. One element of that meeting was an offer by the Soviets to sharply reduce military shipments to Nicaragua if the U.S. would do likewise with its *contra* terrorists and its client-states in Central America. "The offer was rejected out of hand. The White House spokesman... called it 'absolutely unacceptable' and 'ludicrous'."<sup>218</sup>

There is a ludicrous footnote to these proceedings: The White House has arranged for the CIA-*contras* to get military supplies from both communist Poland and "Red" China.<sup>219</sup>

## Phantom troops

When the available evidence does not meet its requirements, the administration has shown a characteristic zeal for inventing facts that do. Its public assessments of Nicaraguan troop strength have been especially expansive. In 1983, for example, a key State Department official told a Congressional committee that, "The current — and growing — 138,000 man armed force in Nicaragua stands in sharp contrast to the 33,000 man armed force in El Salvador." But a subsequent Congressional study estimated that Nicaragua could only "field about 40,000 well-trained men."<sup>220</sup>

Through the modern miracle of satellite photos, the Reaganites have also counted 36 new military bases in Nicaragua, recapitulating one of the main introductory themes of the Grenada invasion. But according to the Jacobsen report, "One of the sites mentioned, Tipitapa, has been visited by a number of Western journalists; the construction in question is



*American Friends Service Committee*

*The Reagan administration blocked efforts by Nicaragua to obtain defensive arms from the U.S., France and the Netherlands. Data published by the Defense Department reveal that Nicaragua did not receive its first shipment from the Soviet bloc until many months after the first CIA-contra attacks.*

that of a very large sugar plant." At another site, a retired U.S. Army colonel found "two open tin-roofed sheds on each side of the custom house which were empty except for piles of dirt and debris on the floors. From their appearance, these sheds had not been used for a very long time."<sup>221</sup>

With few exceptions — invariably milked for maximum publicity by the White House — top U.S. military leaders in the region have failed to discern the same communist threat that so agitates the Reaganites. The prevailing view is that, "Guerrilla uprisings, no matter how anti-American or how dependent on Soviet assistance, spring largely from genuine economic and political grievances that can't be swept away by U.S. troops."<sup>222</sup>

## Modest commitment

So much for the military argument. With equal cogency, the Reaganites have also pointed to economic assistance and trading relationships as evidence of Soviet influence in Nicaragua. But as the Jacobsen Report (cf. page 210) indicates, "Aid from Western Europe and UN agencies has been even more substantial, and hence crucial. Furthermore, it must also be said that in the context of her overall aid to Third World nations, Moscow's commitment to Nicaragua is modest.... There were a total of 95,685 Soviet and East European 'economic technicians' in Less Developed Countries in 1981; of these, only 930, less than one percent, were in Latin America. Nicaragua hosted 200, barely over one-fifth of the Latin America number, and one five-hundredth of the overall total."

The same pattern holds for something like educational assistance. There are many Nicaraguan students receiving technical training in the Soviet Union; but there are more from Colombia, and a proportionately greater number from Costa Rica, which is so often cited by the U.S. as a paragon of Central American democracy.

The U.S. State Department reports that fifteen other non-communist nations of Latin America, including Argentina and

### Nicaragua: 1984 Trading Partners

EXPORTS	PARTNER	IMPORTS
12%	U.S.A.	16%
29%	E.E.C. (Europe)	12%
6%	Soviet bloc	26%
12%	Latin America	27%
25%	Japan	3%
16%	Other	16%

Source: *Central American Historical Institute*<sup>223</sup>

Peru, have preceded Nicaragua as recipients of substantial Soviet aid. If such aid is to be used as a pretext for destabilization, then the CIA is going to be very busy in the years ahead.

Trading relationships also reflect the Sandinistas' oft-stated commitments to diversification and non-alignment. The long-term goal is for trade to be distributed in roughly equal portions of 25% to the Soviet bloc, Europe, Latin America and the United States. Progress toward that goal has been impeded by the U.S. trade embargo and forced dependency on Soviet bloc armaments. In 1984, the last year before the embargo, the trade figures were approximately as shown in the diagram on the preceding page.

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*"While Soviet military aid to Nicaragua is crucial to the revolution's survival, the USSR has shown caution. Weapons deliveries are closely geared to the ups and downs of the contra war, and advanced fighter aircraft that might trigger a U.S. attack have been withheld...."*

*"Motivated largely by mundane commercial concerns, Moscow has built economic ties irrespective of ideology. Politics has taken backstage to the desire to meet domestic consumer demand with Latin American products, and sell Soviet goods for much-desired hard currency.... Among non-socialist developing countries, Argentina had by the early 1980s become the USSR's second largest trading partner after India.... Soviet arms sales to Peru, over \$1 billion since 1974, have been even more important than large development projects in the overall trade between the two countries, yet have attracted little attention...."*

*"Most Latin American countries now have a variety of relations with the USSR and many look to Moscow, not so much for development models, but for opportunities to enter fresh markets and acquire new sources of industrial goods and development assistance. Perhaps most importantly, Latin American governments interested in limiting North American influence have turned to the Soviet Union and its allies."*

— North American Congress on Latin America<sup>224</sup>

The first United States ambassador to Nicaragua's revolutionary government was certain of its independence from the Soviet Union and all other nations. No fan of the Sandinistas, Lawrence Pezzullo nevertheless assured Congress in 1979 that the revolution "is very much a Nicaraguan phenomenon. There is no question about that. Sandinismo, whatever its opportunities ought to be, is a Nicaraguan, home-grown movement. Sandino predates Castro.... The nature of this thing is that you have to see it take its own form, rather than make prejudgments about it."<sup>225</sup>

This display of ambassadorial heresy was noted by the Reaganites, and Pezzullo departed his post after the CIA-*contra* campaign started to heat up. His successor arrived at similar conclusions and, with an imperious shove from Henry Kissinger, suffered a similar fate.

## "EXPORTING REVOLUTION"

As a corollary of Communist Beachhead Theory, Nicaragua is said to be exporting revolution to neighboring countries, most threateningly to El Salvador.

This is an ancient theme, as old as empires, which have difficulty acknowledging the possibility that the impulse to rebellion might arise spontaneously from the oppressed people of their outlying dominions. Had they any sense of their own country's history, the Reaganites might experience an instant or two of embarrassed recognition that their complaint about Nicaragua mirrors the posture of King George III and his court, who blamed the French for inciting the otherwise contented American colonies to riot.

But the Reagan White House is noticeably lacking in both a capacity for embarrassment and a sense of history. Its standard text recites that revolution is exported when one country provides military assistance to a dissident group in another. Such a definition raises delicate questions about what the United States has been up to with its vast shipments of arms all over the world; and it rather begs the question of why dissident

groups ask for them in the first place. But such quibbles are surely not the stuff to jostle the certitudes of the Reaganites. For them, the only important question is whether or not Nicaragua is "exporting revolution" to El Salvador. The answer, they declare, is self-evident.

The Sandinistas have never tried to disguise their sympathy for other revolutionary movements in the region. Tomas Borge expressed a common view in Latin America when he argued that, "These revolutions are a necessary and inevitable step in the historical process of countries such as ours, where injustices are immense, where everything is yet to be done, where it is a crime to be young.... Don't think that the Nicaraguan revolution is the result of happenstance. Those same conditions are accumulating in the rest of Central America, and their inevitable result is revolution."<sup>226</sup>

But Nicaragua has its hands full trying to preserve its own revolution, and it has been careful to limit direct military assistance to other movements. In this, it has shown much greater restraint than several of its neighbors.

Conspiring in the overthrow of nearby governments is something of a tradition in Latin America. The Sandinista revolution was itself supported by Costa Rica, Panama, Mexico and Venezuela, among others. The revolutionary Farabundo Marti Forces of National Liberation (FMLN) in El Salvador also contributed, and the Sandinistas returned the favor after coming to power. FMLN leaders were offered refuge in Managua — just as CIA-*contras* are sheltered in San Jose, Tegucigalpa and San Salvador. For a brief period after the fall of Somoza, modest shipments of arms and other supplies were smuggled to FMLN units in El Salvador.

The Carter administration was aware of this traffic, and demanded its halt as a condition for continued assistance to Nicaragua. Eager to remove this excuse for U.S. hostility, and further persuaded by growing disarray within the FMLN, the Sandinistas chose to comply. There has been no valid evidence of arms shipments after April 1981.

But it was just then that the Reagan administration began its campaign to blame an undocumented Nicaragua-Cuba-

Soviet Union axis for the ongoing struggle in El Salvador. One of its first efforts in this regard was the 1981 "White Paper on Communist Interference in El Salvador". It got some big headlines at first, but then came in for some hard knocks as more careful readers noticed that, among other deficiencies, its principal conclusions were contradicted by its own evidence.

A former high-ranking official of the State Department has written that the White Paper "became a source of acute embarrassment to the administration, primarily revealing shoddy research and a fierce determination to advocate the new policy, whether or not the evidence sustained it. Some of the supporting documents turned out to be forgeries. Others were of such vague origin as to be worthless."<sup>227</sup> It is a general critique that can serve for most information provided by the Reaganites, especially that relating to Nicaragua.

The next fiasco was a press conference in March of 1982 featuring a Nicaraguan youth who was supposed to have confessed to gun running into El Salvador for the Sandinistas. Instead, he told the assembled press corps that his confession had been extracted under torture, and

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*"Intelligence officials claim they can 'hear a toilet flush in Managua', yet they have not been able... to produce a captured van, or downed airplane."*

— *Jacobsen Report*

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that he only agreed to co-operate in order to escape the prison where he had been held captive for a year.

Meanwhile, evidence kept accumulating that the FMLN was getting most of its weapons by taking or buying them from the Salvadoran army. "U.S. officials in fact acknowledge that most of the arms in the guerillas' arsenal are captured, stolen or bought within El Salvador itself." A well-placed congressman concurred: "We are the principal suppliers of the rebels."<sup>228</sup>

The *coup de grace* was administered by a former CIA analyst of data from Central America. David MacMichael quit the agency in 1984, disgusted with the misrepresentations employed by the Reaganites to support their preconceived



notions. He has since become one of the administration's harshest critics and has testified on behalf of Nicaragua before the World Court.

According to MacMichael, "There has not been a successful interdiction or a verified report of arms moving from Nicaragua to El Salvador since April 1981.... The administration and the CIA have systematically misrepresented Nicaraguan involvement in the supply of arms to Salvadoran guerrillas to justify efforts to overthrow the Nicaraguan government."<sup>229</sup>

But who pays attention to the proceedings of the World Court? Undaunted and unashamed, the Reaganites pressed on. In 1986, they concocted a plan for Panama's military dictator, who was collecting hundreds of thousands of dollars on the CIA payroll, to frame the Sandinistas. The plan was for General Noriega to order a shipment of arms from a Soviet bloc country; it would then be seized just off the coast of El Salvador, and linked to Nicaragua with the use of phony documents.

The deal fell through when the general and the White House had a falling out over other matters. There is evidence that Noriega then supplied sophisticated weapons, including U.S. anti-aircraft missiles, to the FMLN in El Salvador.<sup>230</sup>

In short, the Reaganites have stumbled more than once in their efforts to blame the Sandinistas for the revolt in El Salvador. That has not dissuaded them from endlessly repeating the charge, of course. But it has become much more fashionable, instead, to lament the supposed "betrayal" of Nicaragua's own revolution.

## **"REVOLUTION BETRAYED"**

To hear Ronald Reagan tell it, nobody was more eager for the overthrow of Somoza than he and his pals. Although there is no record of Reagan ever uttering a peep of interest in the insurrection, and though his political allies were all die-hard fans of Somoza, he has since waxed inconsolable over the "betrayal" of the revolution by the wicked Sandinistas:

“Theirs was a communist organization, and their support of the revolutionary goals was sheer deceit. Quickly and ruthlessly, they took complete control.”<sup>231</sup>

To embellish this dismal tale, the president’s speechwriters invented the phantom “commitments to the Organization of American States” which were supposed to have been conveyed in a telex letter of 12 July 1979. There was such a letter, in which the provisional junta outlined an eight-point peace plan. But it is slender thread on which to hang a foreign policy, since it is neither a formal treaty nor a proposed constitution. According to an OAS official, it was merely “a telex sent by a group trying to reach power, to the secretary-general, which he communicated and made public to the member states... for no other reason than that it was interesting.”<sup>232</sup>

It may be inconvenient for the Reaganites to acknowledge, but the fact is that the Sandinistas have most assuredly kept faith with the stated objectives of their revolution. As one U.S. journalist discovered: “Many Nicaraguans consider the charge [of betrayal] laughable, if not completely beside the point.... To Anibal Fonseca, a physics professor and dean of the School of Sciences at the National University of Nicaragua, the charge of betrayal is a ‘completely phony issue’, raised by those who forget there is always resistance to change. Fonseca cites university education as one promise the Sandinistas have kept. ‘It was available before only to those who could afford it,’ he says. ‘Now, it is open to everybody’.”<sup>233</sup>

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*“I believe that if we had and would keep our dirty, bloody, dollar-soaked fingers out of the business of these nations so full of depressed, exploited people, they will arrive at a solution of their own.... And, if unfortunately their revolution must be of the violent type, because the ‘haves’ refuse to share with the ‘have-nots’ by any peaceful method, at least what they get will be their own, and not the American style, which they don’t want crammed down their throats.”*

— David M. Shoup, U.S. Marine Commandant (ret.)

## Fraudulent opposition

Another promise kept is that of broad-based participatory democracy, most significantly through the labor unions and mass organizations, but also through the electoral process. In fact, the 1984 elections posed such a threat to the plans of the Reagan administration that it took extraordinary steps to undermine their integrity and legitimacy. Its actions were so outrageous that a Swedish parliamentarian on the scene stated that, "If U.S. officials had acted similarly in Sweden or in any Western European country, they would have been expelled from the country."<sup>234</sup>

That view was corroborated by most of the international observers who monitored the election. One of the most thorough investigations was conducted by the delegation of the U.S. Latin American Studies Association (LASA) which reported several attempts by the U.S. to sabotage the elections and to impeach their legitimacy abroad.

While the CIA-*contras* busied themselves with killing election officials and scaring peasants away from the polls, the U.S. embassy staff concentrated on creating the impression that opposition parties were excluded from participation. One party leader was offered a substantial wad of money to withdraw and claim unfair treatment. He refused, but his campaign manager did accept a similar offer.

The presidential candidate of the strongest opposition party was solicited personally by the U.S. ambassador and other embassy officials on several occasions. "There was a well-beaten path to his door," notes the LASA report. He eventually succumbed to these entreaties, reportedly for a promise of the presidency after the Sandinistas were defeated.

As its *pièce de résistance*, the U.S. patched together a coalition of opposition parties for the specific purpose of withdrawing in protest from the campaign. Dubbed the *Coordinadora Democrática* (Democratic Coordinator), the operation was run by the CIA through COSEP. Almost as an afterthought, Arturo Cruz was selected as the official non-candidate for president.

"The administration wanted the opposition candidate, Arturo Cruz, either not to enter the race or, if he did, to withdraw before the election, claiming the conditions were unfair.... 'The Administration never contemplated letting Cruz stay in the race,' one official said."<sup>235</sup>

Not in on the joke, the Sandinistas made concession after concession to the *Coordinadora*, but to no avail. "Cruz spent the last few weeks before the election in Washington, participating in staged media events.... The overwhelming weight of evidence available to us suggests that the *Coordinadora* did not, in fact, intend to run; it chose, instead, to pursue its political goals in 1984 outside the electoral process."<sup>236</sup>

The mainstream press in the U.S. carried out its part of the operation with customary complicity. As the LASA report observes: "The Reagan administration effectively focused attention on the participation or non-participation of Cruz as the litmus test of free elections in Nicaragua. While there was never any credible evidence that Cruz and the *Coordinadora* had a broad popular following in Nicaragua — Cruz himself had lived in Washington, D.C. since 1970, returning to Nicaragua only for a year during 1979-1980 — the Administration successfully portrayed them as the significant opposition force, without whose participation any election in Nicaragua would be meaningless."<sup>237</sup>

The mainstream press followed the White House script almost verbatim. The big news was Arturo Cruz and his noble struggle for democracy, with the *New York Times* running headlines like "Election Plan in Nicaragua Is Criticized by Opposition" and "Going through the Motions in Nicaragua".

Such distortions formed a mirror image of mainstream reporting on El Salvador's fraudulent elections months earlier. A review in *Quill*, published by the Society of Professional Journalists, concluded: "While many individual stories showed balance and understanding of the complexity and context, the overall tone of the coverage echoed the Reagan administration pitch: the elections in El Salvador were an expression of imperfect democracy; the election in Nicaragua was a sham."<sup>238</sup>

## MiG madness

Pre-packaged as a sham, the actual results of the election were trivialized or ignored by the press. To make sure that they were, the White House contrived its infamous "Mystery MiGs" hoax. For several days surrounding the Nicaraguan election, the news was full of anxious reports that a shipment of powerful Soviet MiG fighter planes was on its way to Nicaragua. Supposedly, this presaged a major Soviet-Nicaraguan military expansion in the region.

### Harassed and bullied by 'Land of the Free'

*From the report of Lord Chitnis,  
1984 election observer from Britain's House of Lords*

All the normal features of campaigning were covered, but there were some unusual and particular provisions. For example, the state made available to each of the registered parties, irrespective of their national strength, approximately \$900,000, which must make some parties in this country green with envy....

Parties were free to buy time on radio and television up to a maximum. In addition, time was assigned to the parties both in radio and television in a way similar to, though greatly in excess of, that used in Britain....

Voters could not be said to be under any visual or psychological pressure to vote in any particular way.... The only complaint of harassment received was from a leading Conservative who said that their supporters were being harassed by the *contras* not to vote....

As American harassment of the Nicaraguan government continues, as it certainly will, more people throughout the world will realise that what is happening is that the democratically-elected government of a sovereign nation is being quite unjustifiably harassed and bullied by those who claim to come from "The home of the brave and the land of the free".

The U.S. government, however, knew very well that there were no MiGs on the way. The authoritative British military journal, *Jane's Weekly*, reported that, "Crates appearing to carry MiG fighters and said by U.S. officials to be destined for Nicaragua were in fact off-loaded from a Soviet freighter in Libya. This information was known to administration officials before they leaked the story."<sup>239</sup>

But most folks don't read *Jane's Weekly* or anything like it, and it took several days for the hoax to peter out in the press; it was never exposed as such. The benefits to the administration were substantial. For starters, the Nicaraguan election results were blown even further into journalistic oblivion.

The manufactured incident also provided an excuse to publicly threaten Nicaragua with a "preemptive strike", forcing the Sandinistas to prepare for an invasion at a time when they had expected to bask in the glory of their impressive electoral victory. The very real threat was emphasized by a barrage of spy-plane sonic booms which reminded the populace of the 500-pound bombs that Somoza's planes used to drop on them. The MiG scare also served to alarm the U.S. public about the "massive arms buildup" in Nicaragua, while greasing the political skids for future attempts to destroy the non-existent weaponry.

It was yet another triumph of White House marketing. A National Security Council briefing paper gloated "We have succeeded in returning the public and private focus back on the Nicaraguan elections as the key stumbling block to prospects for national reconciliation and peace in the region.... The PLI [opposition party] withdrawal from the elections has left the Sandinistas holding a near-worthless hand."<sup>240</sup>

## Constitutional guarantees

The Reaganites may have succeeded in pinning the epithet of "Marxist-Leninist" on Nicaragua, but a description of its conduct and a reading of its new constitution suggest something else, entirely.

The constitution establishes several fundamental principles that are anathema to communist regimes, including political pluralism, mixed economy, separation of powers, international non-alignment, and judicial review.

### **Mixed economy**

Critics of the Sandinistas assert that these and other constitutional provisions are just so much worthless scribbling. But after eight years, the economy bears a closer resemblance to those of Norway and the Netherlands than to Cuba and the Soviet Union. Approximately 60 percent of Nicaragua's economy remains in private hands, while in "free enterprise" Costa Rica the ratio is just the opposite — 60 percent under government control and 40 percent in private hands.

To COSEP complaints of excessive government control, a small rancher responds, "That's resentment talking. They do not have the privileges they once had. The robbery of this country is definitely over." Adds a wealthy businessman: "I have reached the conclusion that old-fashioned capitalism is going out of style, and should go out of style. It ends up putting too much power in the hands of the few. I think we are living in a mildly socialistic society. There are a great many capitalists in Nicaragua and the government is protecting us. But the freedom to do anything to your workers — no. That, happily, no longer exists."<sup>241</sup>

Despite extensive land reform, there are still plenty of large plantations intact, even though many have become suspiciously inefficient. Government administrators receive training from a Managua outpost of the Harvard Business School. Some 40 multi-national corporations, including Exxon, Hertz and IBM "have survived, grown, and generated profits, despite the foreign exchange shortages that continue to obstruct the repatriation of their earnings."<sup>242</sup>

Obviously, the accusation of "Marxist-Leninist betrayal" has been used by the Reaganites' as a smokescreen for their

*(Continued on page 235)*

## The Group of 12 and “Betrayal”

The Group of 12, or “*Los Doce*”, was comprised of those prominent Nicaraguans who in late 1977 declared their open support for the FSLN in an advertisement that ran in the pre-CIA version of *La Prensa*. Their declaration conferred legitimacy on the revolution, and attracted a large portion of the middle and upper classes. They were soon joined by three other influential citizens, and most of the fifteen spent the next two years in Europe or the Americas, gathering support for the struggle against Somoza. Although their numbers are small, they retain close links with key sectors of Nicaraguan society, and are especially well-qualified to address the charge that the Sandinistas have “betrayed the revolution”.

Only one of the fifteen has turned against the Sandinistas. Another moved to Mexico before the fall of Somoza and remains there. The remaining thirteen continue to work for the revolution.

The lone defector was Arturo Cruz, who served briefly as the provisional government’s Central Bank President and as Ambassador to the U.S. He resigned in 1981, claiming disagreement with the government’s socialist policies and its “antagonism” toward the United States. Cruz was subsequently recruited by the CIA to shill as the *Coordinadora Democrática*’s candidate-who-would-not-run for president in 1984, and soon afterward joined the CIA-*contra* political front at a salary of \$84,000 per year and other considerations. He resigned from that post in 1987, charging that the organization “never had more than a paper existence”.

Among the thirteen who remain are: Enrique Baltodano, a large coffee producer who became Nicaragua’s Comptroller-General; Miguel D’Escoto, Maryknoll priest, now Foreign Minister; and Ricardo Coronel, cattle rancher and Vice-Minister of Agricultural Development.<sup>243</sup>



(Continued from page 233)

assault on Nicaragua. That is a dubious rationale for aggressive warfare under any circumstances. David MacMichael, the lapsed CIA agent who testified against the United States at the World Court, feels that in this case it was a hoax from the beginning: "Of course there are a few true believers in the government who think the Soviet Union is behind everything, but for the most part they're a pretty cynical bunch who thought they could win easily in Nicaragua and publicize this as a defeat of the evil empire."<sup>244</sup>

### "TOTALITARIAN DUNGEON"

"The Nicaraguan people are trapped in a totalitarian dungeon," Ronald Reagan has proclaimed on many occasions. Things really got out of hand, it seems, after the Sandinistas invoked a national State of Emergency in 1985, "suspending virtually all civil liberties" as the White House would have it.<sup>245</sup>

True to form, this report on the death of freedom in Nicaragua was greatly exaggerated. The State of Emergency was, in fact, a limited response to the escalating attack by the United States and its lackeys. As Amnesty International observed, "These measures were relaxed by the legislature in November, 1985. The restriction on freedom of expression was

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*"In the conduct of internal politics, the 'communist threat' has frequently served as a pretext for suppressing social reform movements calling for improved living standards, a more just distribution of wealth, and participation of the masses in the government of the country. Those who resist any change in the traditional structure of society have recourse to the simple expedient of identifying popular protest with communism and the legitimate demands of the underprivileged classes with Marxist subversion."*

— Enrique Rivarola, Argentinean diplomat<sup>246</sup>

*"We were told that the government had arbitrarily seized the land of Enrique Bolaños, the current President of COSEP and largest landowner in the Masaya region, simply because he is an opponent of the government. When we looked further into the story, however, we discovered that this incident began with two attempts by the government to clear militant squatters from Bolaños' land...."*

*"After the first of these two occupations, the government persuaded the peasants to leave; after the second occupation, the peasants refused. It was only at this point that the government offered to buy Bolaños' land at a fair market value or, if he preferred, to give him two acres of land outside the immediate area for each acre of land that was in dispute. Bolaños refused both offers, and then claimed that the government had ruthlessly confiscated his land."*

— Freedom of Expression in Nicaragua  
National Lawyers Guild<sup>247</sup>

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was limited to censorship of matters concerning military and economic affairs considered prejudicial to national security. The restriction on freedom of movement was limited to war zones; and public meetings, demonstrations and strike actions were permitted with prior authorization."<sup>248</sup>

## **Lively debate**

By 1988 over 60,000 U.S. citizens had visited revolutionary Nicaragua. With few exceptions, they have reported an atmosphere of lively debate, with no restraints on non-violent opposition to the government.

The human rights organization, Americas Watch, points out that, "Any Nicaraguan and any visitor to Nicaragua can walk into a score or more of offices in the country's capital and encounter the officers and employees of various independent institutions who will not only voice their opinions freely in criticism of the state, but will also do so for attribution. Some will hand out literature expressing those opinions.

"This is inconceivable in any state appropriately described as totalitarian. Moreover, it is inconceivable in many of the

countries vigorously supported by the United States. While a visitor to nearby El Salvador, Guatemala or Haiti, for example, may encounter criticism of the government, if it is criticism that is as strong as one regularly encounters in Nicaragua, the speaker will ordinarily request anonymity. Similarly, it is impossible to find independent institutions speaking so freely in more distant allies of the United States such as Turkey, Saudi Arabia, Indonesia, Zaire and Morocco."<sup>249</sup> Not to mention Chile, which has endured a suffocating State of Emergency since 1973 with the full support of the United States.

An important index of trust between the people and their government is the size of the national militia. Over 100,000 ordinary Nicaraguans have been armed to help fight off the CIA-*contras* and discourage a U.S. invasion; there are plans to increase that number to 600,000, more than one third of the population over fifteen years old.

A journalist from India has raised the obvious question: "If the [pro-*contra*] opposition were correct, and the Sandinistas were so unpopular, how was it that the government could hand out all these guns to the people and be confident that the weapons would not be turned against them? There wasn't another regime in Central America that would dare to do the same — not El Salvador nor Guatemala, not Honduras, not Costa Rica. While in tyrannical, 'Stalinist' Nicaragua, the government armed the peasantry and they, in turn, pointed the guns, every one of them' against the counter-revolutionary forces. Could this mean something?"<sup>250</sup>

## Censoring the CIA

The censorship and suspension of *La Prensa* has also been used as evidence of totalitarian dungeonism. The facts tell a different story. For one thing, censorship applies to all newspapers, including *El Nuevo Diario*, founded by the bulk of *La Prensa's* original staff. Though difficult to condone, Sandinista censorship is considerably more benevolent than the assassination and expulsion which the U.S. freely tolerates in client-states such as El Salvador and Honduras.

Given *La Prensa's* central role in the CIA's destabilization campaign (cf. "Bad news", page 153), a great many Nicaraguans have argued for years that it should be shut down altogether. As early as 1982, a Jesuit research institute in Managua reported that, "More and more groups and persons within Nicaragua are protesting the reporting of *La Prensa*. Some of the groups which have protested in recent weeks include: Mothers of the Heroes and Martyrs, the Nicaraguan National Journalists Union, unions affiliated with the Sandinista Workers Central, the Bishop of the Atlantic Coast and the Ecumenical Center."<sup>251</sup>

Publication of *La Prensa* was finally suspended by the government in July of 1986, after the U.S. Congress approved \$100 million of open military assistance to the CIA-contras. Days before that vote, the nominal director of *La Prensa* had argued for approval of the funding in a *Washington Post* guest article.

The CIA's paper was allowed to resume publishing again in October 1987, in compliance with the regional peace initiative led by Costa Rica's President Arias. Its first issue included a front-page editorial denouncing the "totalitarian communist" regime of the Sandinistas, and much more in the same peaceful spirit.

An analysis of its first six weeks of resumed publication concluded that "*La Prensa* has continued to faithfully reflect U.S. policy for the past seven years. The paper also continues to misrepresent the economic and military situation, at times with flagrant lies. The misrepresentations can only have the effect of destabilizing the government, rather than contributing to a peaceful solution."<sup>252</sup>

The government's knowledge of Latin American history, especially the fate of the Allende regime in Chile, informs its perspective on freedom of the press. "After the death of Chile," notes the editor of the Sandinista newspaper, *Barricada*, "a generation of sociologists — French, English and North American — have done excellent analytical work explaining the political errors that Allende committed, and one of these

was his maintenance of abstract freedom of the press. We are not disposed to having our revolution reversed, and we do not want another generation of sociologists saying we made the same mistakes as Allende." <sup>253</sup>

Unfortunately for the people of Nicaragua, the U.S. public and mainstream press lack a kindred appreciation of Allende's fate and the misery suffered by Chileans since. As a result, the Reagan administration has been able to exploit the censorship and suspension of *La Prensa*, with considerable effect, as a prime example of Sandinista oppression. It is therefore necessary to "promote democracy" with the grisly inducements offered by the CIA-*contras*. It is a dubious argument, as Americas Watch has pointed out: "If it were true... this would, of course, contradict everything that is known about the way that nations behave when they are at war. Even the freest nations radically circumscribe liberties under such circumstances." <sup>254</sup>

### **"Communist indoctrination"**

A common complaint of pro-*contra* critics is that the government is carrying out a project of communist indoctrination. Even sympathetic visitors from the U.S. can be taken aback when they hear the Sandinista anthem's reference to vanquishing the "Yankee invaders". But the term, Yankee, in this case does not equate with North American generally. It refers only to the imperialists who have exploited Nicaragua for most of the 20th century.

The Catholic hierarchy is particularly upset by what it regards as corruption of the education process. The Church has reason to be dismayed; for, although the government continues to subsidize most private Catholic schools, the bishops are no longer as free to determine the curriculum as they were under Somoza. Since few of his subjects went to school in the first place, it mattered little to the old despot what they learned there. Indeed, the greater the religious content, the better for instilling the habit of obedience to authority.

There is still ample provision for religious instruction. But according to Cardinal Obando and his supporters, it is not enough; and the rest of the curriculum is said to be reeking of you-know-what.

For the church hierarchy, even the Literacy Crusade is an example of the new “pedagogy of oppression, indoctrinating students in Marxist-Leninist dogma and Sandinista ideology.” These attacks never mention that the basic text of the Literacy Crusade is that subversive tract, the Christian Bible.



*Jaime Perozo*

*Free totalitarian dental check-up*

The question of political indoctrination was the subject of a 1986 report by Jesuit researchers. They investigated specific charges, for instance that pictures of hand grenades were used to illustrate math lessons. Noting that “Nicaraguans see soldiers every day”, the researchers found that “rifles and grenades appear on only one page [of all text books reviewed], and most examples were objects such as bananas, baseballs, chairs and trees.” Nor must Nicaraguan parents defend their offspring against the steady bombardment of televised cartoons and advertisements for war toys to which U.S. children are daily subjected.

The Nicaraguan Association of Parents of Christian Schools has charged that the Ministry of Education limited private schools to two hours of religious instruction per week. The Jesuit investigators found this to be untrue: “One principal, Fr. Xavier Llasera, added that his problem is the same as his U.S. counterparts — trying to find time in a busy academic schedule for religious studies.”

The Christian Parents group also charged that, “The Sandinistas have excessively influenced Nicaraguan education

in favor of their own political interests." The proof includes a history lesson which takes a critical view of the Spanish conquest of the New World, a sex education program for teenagers, and statements such as "General Sandino was born in 1895.... the anti-imperialist struggle began in 1926.... General Sandino was assassinated in 1934.... the FSLN was founded in 1961."

By way of comparison, the Jesuits' report quotes a high school history teacher who recalls the not-so-good old days: "Beginning with the first history books written in Nicaragua, history was completely distorted.... The Somozas were presented as 'progressive' and 'democratic', etc., while the treatment of Sandino was totally distorted....

"In every society, education is related to the overall goals and purposes of society. In Nicaragua, the government requires that some general educational norms be followed. The same is true for El Salvador and Costa Rica and elsewhere. This does not deprive anyone in any way of the right to criticize in the classroom. There is complete academic freedom. The teacher can also present material in addition to the minimal requirements."<sup>255</sup>

This may be compared with another teacher's account, on page 148, of the educational atmosphere during the Somoza era.

### **Suffering statistics**

As final proof of Sandinista oppression, Ronald Reagan's speechwriters have poignantly invoked the hordes of refugees said to be fleeing their totalitarian dungeon: "As the refugees come flooding out of Nicaragua, it becomes harder and harder not to hear their cries of anguish, not to see the suffering of their shattered lives."<sup>256</sup>

Administration officials and their confederates toss out alarming statistics on freedom-loving Nicaraguans huddled in the refugee camps of Central America. By 1987, the totals were said to be 100,000 in Costa Rica, 250,000 in the other three countries of Central America, and 150,000 in the U.S.

*“There is virtually not a single Third World or developing country which can truly boast a free press.... In Fiji, journalists are arrested and put in sewer tanks if they anger the military regime. The two national dailies were twice shut down [in 1987]. They are now operating under strict censorship. Similar tactics, with slight variations, are applied in developing countries in Africa, Asia and the Pacific....*

*“American newspapers have their own problems. They are very naïve about the world outside of the American continent. As a result, many readers know very little about the rest of the world.... They rely a lot on the three major wire services.... From personal experience, I know that these wire services often get their facts mixed up. Maybe they think no one in the United States will challenge their ‘facts’ on something that happened in a distant part of the world.”*

— Umendra Singh, reporter for the *Fiji Times*<sup>257</sup>

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and Mexico. When pressed for a source for those figures, administration spokesmen usually cited the U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees.

But as of October 1987, the High Commissioner’s office in Washington, D.C., was reporting that the total number of Nicaraguans in Costa Rica was 15,505; in Mexico and the rest of Central America, 27,131. There were another 50,000 or so in the U.S., for a grand total of less than 100,000. Asked about the oft-cited total of 350,000 in Central America, the UNHCR official replied, “We have no idea where that figure came from.”<sup>258</sup>

The total volume of refugee anguish was also greatly diminished in a 1985 report of the U.S. Census Bureau, which disclosed a net *in-migration* to Nicaragua during the first five years of the revolution. “On balance, since the Sandinistas came to power, despite the military conflict and the hardships resulting from it — deaths, forced relocations, economic shortages and an unpopular draft — Nicaragua has absorbed more former refugees than it has created new ones.”<sup>259</sup>

Needless to say, mere facts are of little or no interest to the Reaganites. On those rare occasions when they are confronted with indisputable evidence of their errors, they typically



respond by changing the subject and inventing some new disinformation. If that doesn't work, they can always sound the alarm about the communist thrust of Sandinista "tendencies".

Like so much else about U.S. policy toward Nicaragua, this has a familiar ring to it. A prominent Chilean editor and publisher recalls that the same notion energized right-wing anxieties about the doomed government of Salvador Allende: "You know, we were so caught up in the right wing's propaganda that we freely lent our media to echoing the image of Allende as a devious man of ill will who was about to drastically curtail freedoms. It wasn't until after the shock of the military coup that we realized he had never actually done any of it."<sup>260</sup>

### "RELIGIOUS PERSECUTION"

"Like communist governments everywhere," recites Ronald Reagan, "the Sandinistas have launched assaults against ethnic and religious groups. The capital's only synagogue was desecrated and fire-bombed — the entire Jewish community was forced to flee Nicaragua. Protestant Bible meetings have been broken up by raids, by mob violence, by machine guns.... Cardinal Obando has put the matter forthrightly: 'We want to state clearly that this government is totalitarian. We are dealing with an enemy of the church'."<sup>261</sup>

When specific allegations of persecution are investigated, however, they are invariably found to be completely false or grotesquely distorted. Elliott Abrams, for example, once informed readers of the *Washington Post* about "some of the major incidents of the last few weeks alone". One was the arbitrary detention of the bishop of the Atlantic Coast region "who has been harassed repeatedly". Another involved "the unfortunate priest who was forced to disrobe at gunpoint by Sandinista police and was marched naked through the streets of Managua to jail"<sup>262</sup>

Not quite. When the Atlantic Coast bishop learned of his alleged persecution, he emphatically declared that he had never been arrested, but that he had once consented to be

flown out of Puerto Cabezas when a large unit of CIA-*contras* threatened to attack it. As for the alarming case of the naked priest, a reporter from the *Philadelphia Daily News* witnessed the event and gave this account:

“The police did not force Carballo to disrobe. He was in that state when they found him. But what the police did do is save his life from the outraged, pistol-wielding boyfriend of the young woman Carballo was visiting.”<sup>263</sup>

The police covered the priest up, and removed him from the area for his own safety. Only later was he discovered to be a priest — the same Rev. Bismarck Carballo who was expelled from the country in 1986 after lobbying in Europe and the U.S. for military assistance to the CIA-*contras*. Expelled from the country at the same time for the same reason was Bishop Pablo Vega (cf. page 151).

Naturally, the two exiled clergymen instantly became pathetic symbols of Sandinista oppression. The Pope expressed his shock and outrage, and all over the world politicians with Catholic constituents joined in the chorus of the Vatican nag.

Those religious leaders best equipped to make judgments in the matter were not so quick to condemn the government, however. The Ecumenical Committee of U.S. Church Personnel in Nicaragua, with 35 Protestant and Catholic members, issued a statement which argued that, “Bishop Vega, by his public words and actions, was involved in what we Americans would call ‘advocating the violent overthrow of the government’ and treason in war time. The bishop had gone beyond the prophetic, critical stance which characterizes the church at its best in Latin America, and had entered into behavior which any government would have to consider illegal.

“From our own experience, we know that the government is serious when it affirms its respect for religious freedom. Many Christians rejoice that their government is helping them to build a new society based on gospel values and principles of sharing, love and respect for the dignity of every person.”

There were many in Nicaragua who felt that Vega and Carballo should have been grateful to have evaded prison.

The Sandinista leadership was under strong pressure from its constituency to prosecute them; their expulsion was ordered as the least troublesome option.

A U.S. Jesuit working at Managua's Central American Historical Institute reflected afterward, "I never thought I would be defending a government's decision to deport a bishop. [But Bishop Vega] is aiding and abetting the enemy by supporting the U.S.-funded *contras* and is guilty of treason, as the people put it plainly.... It is entirely unfair and unwarranted to accuse the government of persecuting the church simply because it took normal punitive action against someone who had clearly gone beyond the law."<sup>264</sup>

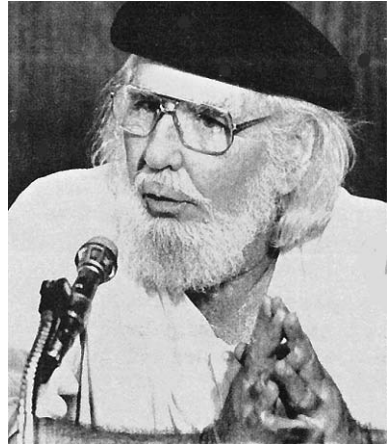
### **Papal rebuke**

The most well-publicized instance of alleged anti-Catholic persecution had occurred three years prior to the forced exile of Carballo and Vega, on the occasion of the Pope's 1983 visit to Managua. The Sandinistas had actually been looking forward to this papal visit, assuming that it would imply a rebuke to the CIA-*contras* and confer a blessing on the revolution, which they felt to be a profound expression of Christian values. A case of naive presumption, that, compounded by bad timing.

The Vatican was just then in the throes of a mission to quench the fires of liberation theology and the popular church, which were viewed as grave threats to traditional authority (cf. "The *contra* cardinal", page 146). Coached by the reactionaries of the Nicaraguan hierarchy and the Vatican court, the Pope arrived in a mood to preach church discipline and very little else.

One of his first and most significant gestures after exiting his plane at Managua Airport was to publicly rebuke one of the revolution's living icons, Rev. Ernesto Cardenal, the Minister of Culture and a charismatic leader of the popular church. As nearly all of Nicaragua watched, in person or on television, Cardenal knelt before the Pope in anticipation of a

*Ernesto Cardenal, poet, priest and Minister of Culture, is one of many leaders of the popular church who are very much "with the process" of the revolution. They have been almost completely ignored by U.S. news media, which have instead promoted Cardinal Obando as the only legitimate voice of Roman Catholicism in Nicaragua.*



blessing, but received instead an admonishing finger and the command that, "You must regularize your situation with the Vatican."

A distinguished Irish observer later explained the implications of that public scolding: "In the eyes of many Nicaraguans, Ernesto Cardenal is something more important than a minister or even a priest. He is a poet... in a land where poets are esteemed to an extent, I think, unknown in any other part of the world.... When the Pope snubbed Ernesto, many Nicaraguans — all those who were 'with the process' and probably quite a few others as well — felt themselves snubbed, in the person of this admired and beloved Nicaraguan... It seemed gratuitous, petty — a needless piece of humiliation."<sup>265</sup>

The remainder of the Pope's 12-hour visit was imbued with much the same spirit. The culminating event was an open-air mass in Managua, with some 650,000 Nicaraguans in attendance. Coming at the end of an exceedingly hot and hectic day, shoving and shouting matches began to break out in the crowd between adherents of the traditional and popular churches, and there were accusations from each camp that the other had packed the gathering.

To this ecclesiastical disharmony the Pope added a stern warning: "Church unity is put into question when the power-

ful factors that build and maintain it... are brought up against earthly considerations, unacceptable ideological commitments, temporal options, or concepts of the Church which are contrary to the true one."

Noticeably lacking from papal discourse all day was any reference to the advances of the revolution, or to the suffering caused by U.S. aggression. When he referred to the popular church as "an absurd and dangerous project" some in the crowd began to cry out, "We want peace! People's power! They shall not pass! *He's* not a Pope of the poor; look at his dress!" and so on.

"Silencio!" cried the Pope.

Then fifty "Mothers of Heroes and Martyrs" took the stage and begged for a blessing: "The blood of our boys is crying out!... We want a prayer for our martyrs!" None was forthcoming, whereupon many in the audience began to boo and call out insults.

A nun later recalled the Pope's visit: "I love him, and the *campesinos* I work with here were very happy to have him visit. But he was poorly advised. Sixteen Christian boys from the *milicia* were buried the day before the Pope came. Their mothers asked the Pope to say a prayer for them. He refused. Something for these young *compañeros* killed on the border fighting *los contras*. Just one word. No. In Costa Rica he said he came to listen to the cries of the people. Here he spoke only of the need for unity in the church."<sup>266</sup>

In short, the papal visit turned out to be a fiasco for both principal parties. The Pope not only failed to subdue the popular church, but his intransigence served to strengthen it; he has since, publicly, softened his stance on liberation theology. For its part, the government ended up without a blessing, and with a reputation as an irreligious and ungracious host.

There were some clear winners, however. One of them was Archbishop Obando, since the day's events appeared to confirm that the Sandinistas and the popular church were every bit as dangerous to Vatican authority as he had warned — his elevation to cardinal two years later was very likely a direct consequence.

The Reaganites could barely conceal their lust to capitalize on the episode; here was a propaganda feast handed to them on a papal platter. They have been gnawing on the carcass of that dog day in Managua ever since.

Elements of the "Israel lobby" in the U.S. have been involved in the assault on the Sandinista government from its inception. The well-publicized hoax about the persecution of Managua's Jews and the desecration of their synagogue had its origins in a 1983 pronouncement of the B'nai B'rith Anti-Defamation League.

Those charges have since been investigated by the American Jewish Committee, the World Jewish Congress and the Organization of American States, among others.

They all found the charges to be false. Even the pro-*contra* Permanent Commission on Human Rights in Managua has refuted them.<sup>267</sup>

The synagogue was damaged during the insurrection against Somoza, and had been abandoned by the time of the Sandinista victory in 1979. It was then appropriated by the government for use as a children's center. "When the government in 1983 offered to return the building, and made plans to move the children's association elsewhere, Managua's remaining Jews stated that they could not afford to keep it up. It may be put to another use supportive of the Jewish community if funds can be raised."<sup>268</sup>

The government, itself, includes many officials of Jewish descent, including the current ambassador to the U.S. As with so many other countries, however, there is a tradition of anti-Semitism in Nicaragua. It may be aggravated by the fact that



Rachel DaSilva

*The CIA-*contra* cardinal's unenviable reputation is limned by this angry message in the ruins of Managua: "Cardinal Obando walks with Calero. Death." (Adolfo Calero heads the *contras'* political front.)*

Israel was one of Somoza's strongest supporters, supplying him with arms even after the U.S. had ceased to do so; it has since become a major supplier of the CIA-*contras* and the genocidal government of Guatemala.

## Christ killers

There are other sources of anti-Semitic sentiment, as well. One of the most vehement practitioners is that champion of religious tolerance, Cardinal Obando. His homily of 7 October 1984 was printed in *La Prensa* and includes this display of Christian charity: "The leaders of Israel... mistreated [the prophets], beat them, killed them. Finally, as supreme proof of his love, God sent his Divine Son; but they... also killed him, crucifying him.... The Jews killed the prophets and finally the Son of God.... Such idolatry calls forth the sky's vengeance."<sup>269</sup>

The issue of religious freedom has been addressed by the Protestant churches, whose members comprise 10-15 percent of the Nicaraguan population. A delegation from the U.S. National Council of Churches investigated administration charges of persecution in 1984 and found them entirely groundless. On the contrary, the Protestant community had grown from 80,000 to 380,000 since 1979. The greatest concern of all the Protestants interviewed — including members of the Moravian Church, to which most Miskito Indians belong — was the constant threat of CIA-*contra* attacks. Witnesses also criticized the Catholic hierarchy for "transfers and forced isolation of priests and communities who openly sympathize with the Nicaraguan political process".

Adds Dr. Gustavo Parajon, President of the Evangelical Committee for Aid to Development in Nicaragua (CEPAD), which provides support to 46 denominations: "Anyone who lives in Nicaragua knows that all churches are carrying out their respective ministries. *Ondas de Luz*, the evangelical radio station, operates 18 hours a day, freely preaching the Gospel. Church rallies, evangelistic campaigns, spiritual retreats are

held frequently.... Anyone who lives in Nicaragua or comes to visit will find out that there is freedom to worship and to proselytize.”<sup>270</sup>

## “HUMAN RIGHTS ABUSES”

As one might expect of a totalitarian dungeon, the human rights situation in Nicaragua is perfectly dreadful to behold when viewed through the distorted lens of the White House.

The Sandinistas’ most horrific crime against humanity is supposed to be “their campaign of virtual genocide against the Miskito Indians”, as Ronald Reagan has so movingly recited on numerous occasions. It has been explained elsewhere that this is a hoax, and will no doubt be recorded in the annals of the CIA as one of its greatest propaganda triumphs (cf. “Native resentments”, page 158).

Initial efforts at promoting the myth of “Miskito genocide” were extremely successful, partly because there were few journalists or other observers in the region to question CIA propaganda. Subsequent operations have been subject to closer scrutiny and have thus been somewhat less convincing. In early 1986, for example, the Reaganites set out to manufacture timely reports of Sandinista cruelty, in order to generate support in Congress for a forthcoming vote on military aid to the CIA-*contras*.

As luck would have it, representatives of Americas Watch and reporters from both the *Boston Globe* and the *Philadelphia Inquirer* were on hand to witness most of the ensuing theatrics. First, elements of the dwindling reserves of the Miskito-*contras* based in Honduras returned to Nicaragua and rounded up a fresh batch of “victims”. Villagers were frightened into becoming refugees with tales of the Sandinistas running amok in neighboring villages; those who remained unconvinced were subjected to more forceful persuasion. Eventually, about 2000 anxious souls were herded across the border into Honduras, where they were coached for several days on what to say to the reporters.



What reporters? Why, the 60 that the U.S. Embassy was planning to fly from Tegucigalpa in order to record the plight of the pitiful refugees. There was even talk of bringing Vice President Bush in from the Honduran capital of Washington, D.C., to lend his heartfelt sympathy to the proceedings.

But those preparations came to naught as a result of transportation difficulties; only a U.S. Army medical team and some officials from international relief agencies made it to the staged event — and when they arrived, there were no refugees in sight. It seems that the Miskito-*contras* had taken longer than scheduled to instruct their new comrades-in-suffering in the horrors they were supposed to have endured; as a result, they did not make it to the joyous rendezvous in time.

“The colonel [of the medical team] was very angry.... He said, ‘Where are the refugees?’.” One of the relief agency officials said, “It was the worst public relations job I’ve ever seen.”<sup>271</sup>



*Agencia Nueva Nicaragua*

*A Miskito fishing village at Pearl Lagoon. About 60% of all new investment for social services has gone to the sparsely populated Atlantic Coast region. That has caused some resentment among the Spanish-speaking majority, but the government justifies it on the grounds of historical neglect and strategic significance.*

Fiasco or not, it was good enough for the Reaganites, and they set to the work of exploiting it. This latest installment in the ongoing Tragedy of the Miskitos played well among the faithful, and applied another martial nudge to swing votes in Congress. It was not a total loss.

But it had little bearing on actual events in Nicaragua, where the Sandinistas have reversed their early setbacks in the Atlantic region. There remains a residue of mutual distrust between the Miskitos and the government, deriving from two main factors: the pre-Sandinista, Spanish-speaking majority's historical contempt for indigenous peoples; and the threat to national security posed by the CIA-*contra* factions of the Miskito population.

But the tension that reached its height during 1981-82 has steadily diminished as a result of efforts by the government to address Indian grievances.

Those efforts have been led by the sole surviving founder of the FSLN, Tomas Borge. The Minister of the Interior has immersed himself in the Miskito language, and has employed his considerable prestige among the Spanish-speaking majority to promote an appreciation of indigenous cultures.

## Regional autonomy

Previously neglected by Managua, the Atlantic region has received over 60 percent of all new investment in health and social services. This has caused no little resentment among the 90-percent majority of the Pacific region. But the government justifies the imbalance on the basis of historical neglect and strategic significance, arguing that the best defense against the establishment of a phony CIA-*contra* "government" in the Miskito region is the incorporation of the native population into the revolutionary process.

That goal came a great deal closer in 1986, when regional autonomy was embedded in the new constitution. A commission dominated by native representatives has been set up to work out the details.

Autonomy is consistent with the revolution's emphasis on empowering national minorities. A London-based human rights organization contends that, "As a contribution to the literature of human rights, the Nicaraguan Constitution is already something of a landmark, with its embellishments on the standard clauses [concerning human rights], its specific incorporation of the international law of human rights, its repeated acknowledgement of the demands of women, its novel solution to the problem of ethnic minorities.... It will be — indeed, it is already being — studied by drafters of other constitutions."<sup>272</sup>

### Widespread support

Vernon Bellecourt of the American Indian Movement, who has witnessed the evolution of the autonomy process in the course of several visits to the region, reports that, "Nearly 100 percent of the Miskitos and their leaders support the revolution and feel they are benefiting from it. They completely support the autonomy process."

Adds his colleague, Bill Means, "Our delegation also witnessed a tremendous change in the attitude among the Atlantic Coast people. This change was obvious in many areas, but was most profound in the determination and commitment of the people to defend Nicaragua. [They] now recognize the true enemy of the people to be United States policy in the region... Because of the history of relations between national governments and Indian peoples in this hemisphere, we view this autonomy project as a revolutionary step towards creating an honorable relationship with a national government."<sup>273</sup>

There is still a wait-and-see attitude among many in the region, but doubts have been gradually dispelled, as the government consistently honors its pledges. One result is that the number of Miskitos in armed opposition had dwindled to no more than 500 by the end of 1987, down from several thousand in 1982. Some have returned to their villages, and now help defend them against CIA-*contra* attacks. Others have

joined the Sandinista army; still others have taken advantage of government grants for study at home or abroad.

Another result of the autonomy process is that growing numbers of refugees have returned from Honduras, to which they had fled in panic from the CIA terror campaign or had been abducted by Miskito-*contra* organizations such as "KISAN".

The UN High Commissioner of Refugees estimated that over 5000 made their way back home in 1986, despite strenuous efforts to prevent them from doing so: "In the last year, some 1700 Miskitos have returned to Nicaragua through the UNHCR repatriation program. Moreover, UNHCR representatives estimate that between 3500 and 4000 persons who went into Honduras during the KISAN-induced exodus of Easter 1986 have gone back spontaneously. Returning refugees say that more would have returned by now, but for KISAN's actions in Honduras preventing them from doing so."<sup>274</sup>

By the end of 1987, the total number of returnees was estimated at 18,000. It is expected that virtually all Miskito exiles will return as word of the autonomy process and the Central America peace initiative penetrates the informational barriers erected around the refugee camps in Honduras.

As of early 1988, however, the CIA was not quite ready to close out its Miskito project. Fourteen leaders from the Atlantic region were each offered \$3000 per month — a very large sum for a Nicaraguan — to join the *contras*. They refused, and one of them later reported that they were told by a CIA agent, "We need to take you all to Washington and have your photos taken with Reagan in order to win new *contra* aid."

At least three clergymen mediating the peace process were targeted for assassination. A plot was also hatched for a Cuban-American CIA operative to kidnap the three-year-old daughter of one of the three meddlesome clergymen; but he was tipped off in time, and managed to send his daughter and pregnant wife back to their home in the United States.<sup>275</sup>

As with all CIA-*contras* it has been difficult for alienated Miskitos to learn details of the peace process. "Contras who

have taken amnesty report that talking about amnesty among *contra* troops is forbidden, and that listening to the radio is restricted.... Those who mention amnesty 'no longer count' and may wind up with their throats slit."<sup>276</sup>

### Reported abuses

The two pre-eminent human rights organizations that have issued reports on Nicaragua, Amnesty International and Americas Watch, have both issued sharp rebukes to the Reagan administration and its outrageous propaganda. But both have also found the Nicaraguan government wanting in some respects.

The 1986 Amnesty International report cites "prolonged incommunicado detention, denial of fair trials, and harsh prison conditions [and a] pattern of short-term detention as an attempt to intimidate and harass its critics."

The report also objects to short-term detentions under the State of Emergency, but notes that "authorities release most of these prisoners before bringing them to trial and frequently pardon prisoners of conscience convicted in unjust proceedings. Nicaraguans who suffer this form of harassment include opposition leaders, lawyers, and trade unionists. Numerous political detainees have been held incommunicado for periods ranging up to several months.... The organization has, however, welcomed a recent pattern of investigation into alleged

*(Continued on page 259)*

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*"The greatest violator of human rights in Nicaragua is neither the Sandinistas nor the contras, but the U.S. government. In order to make the Sandinistas 'say uncle', in order to re-establish unchallenged U.S. control over a region which it regards as its backyard, the U.S. government has sacrificed over 20,000 lives, most of them contras, and caused untold suffering. "*

— *Catholic Institute for International Relations*  
 Right to Survive: Human Rights in Nicaragua. London, 1987

## **'A concerted effort to distort the facts'**

*Excerpts from Human Rights in Nicaragua  
Americas Watch, February, 1987*

The fact that the government of Nicaragua faces a serious, violent challenge to its stability complicates the effort to make a balanced assessment of its performance in the realm of human rights because, like any government, this government has the right under international law to suspend certain rights as a means to counter that challenge. International law authorizes such suspensions....

Ordinarily, we do not take pains to state the abuses of which a government is not guilty. In the case of Nicaragua, we feel called upon to do so because the Reagan Administration has engaged in a concerted effort to distort the facts....

In this regard, we again note that the government of Nicaragua does not engage in a pattern of violations of the laws of war. Nor does it engage in systematic violations of the right to life or to physical integrity of detainees, which are the clearest cases of non-derogable rights. Nor does it engage in a deliberate pattern of forced disappearances of persons, a practice that would violate those and other non-derogable rights. Some cases of such abuse do take place in Nicaragua, and we include descriptions of them in this report; our information indicates, however, that they do not reflect a governmental policy to commit them or to tolerate them.

There are other violations that the Nicaraguan government does commit as a matter of policy. The rights affected by these policies of the Nicaraguan government are among the rights considered derogable under international law, but in our view the restrictions go beyond what is reasonably required and hence legitimate in time

of emergency. Admittedly, international law concedes to governments a margin of discretion in deciding what limits are necessary....

Due process rights are one area in which we consider that limitations go beyond what is reasonably required... Prisoners held for longer than a few weeks should be held in penitentiary prisons and not in pre-trial detention centers, so as to have access to sunlight, recreation, private visits with relatives, and other benefits not currently available to them.

The government of Nicaragua engages, as a matter of policy, in abusive interrogation tactics against prisoners, including psychological pressure and threats used to secure their confessions. Recently, the government has taken some actions that may put a stop to other condemnable practices such as the use of very small cells, sleep deprivation and food and water deprivation....

Although it is arguably legitimate for a government to create special courts to deal with crimes committed by insurgents during a state of emergency, we continue to believe that the *Tribunales Populares Antisomocistas* fall far short of the requirements of due process that remain in effect even during a state of emergency....

Prison conditions in the penitentiary system have continued to improve in the period covered by this report, and they compare favorably with many prisons visited by members of the Americas Watch in other parts of Latin America... The pre-trial detention facilities remain off-limits to human rights groups....

It may be legitimate, under international law standards, for a government under armed attack to impose limited sanctions against a press organ that represents interests of its enemy. Though the issue is difficult, we feel that the indefinite suspension of *La Prensa* is excessive....

There is no evidence of government efforts to impede the individual exercise of religious preference... We note

*'A concerted effort to distort the facts' (cont.)*

that regular masses and even public religious demonstrations take place without incident....

By supporting an insurgency that engages in a deliberate pattern of violating fundamental standards of laws of war; by providing that insurgency with training, equipment, direction and public relations advocacy; by invoking human rights arguments to justify its pursuit of other interests and distorting the reality of human rights violations committed by the Nicaraguan government; and by engaging in slanderous attacks on those who oppose those policies within the United States, the Reagan Administration has not only contributed to poisoning the debate in this country, but also rendering a major disservice to the cause of human rights in Nicaragua and elsewhere....

*Contra* combatants and officers have engaged repeatedly in murder, kidnapping, various forms of brutal mistreatment, and a pattern of military conduct which deliberately endangers civilians. The conduct of war becomes more savage with time, and the conditions thus created in Nicaragua provide a rationale for government restrictions on the exercise of basic rights.

In addition to funding for *contra* activities, we note another aspect of the U.S. policy that merits discussion. It involves promotion of the conflict through rhetoric on human rights....

If anything, the efforts of the Reagan Administration to promote the *contras* do even more damage to the human rights cause than its efforts to demonize the Sandinistas.... At times, the two efforts intersect and become one.

[The State Department justified an attack on a civilian cooperative, in which five young children were killed and five residents aged 13-50 were kidnapped, by



(Continued from page 255)

abuses and prosecution of government personnel accused of committing human rights violations.... Amnesty has concluded, however, that the government has failed to investigate adequately many reported killings and 'disappearances'."

Americas Watch echoes these concerns; but its reports are more detailed, since its focus is on the Western Hemisphere. Americas Watch allows that governments are entitled by international law to modify or suspend civil rights under the threat

*'A concerted effort to distort the facts' (cont.)*

stating that] "These cooperatives — this was what was attacked in Nicaragua — often have a dual military-economic economic purpose... The inhabitants of the cooperatives are armed and receive regular military training. Unfortunately, due to the intermingling of civilian and military functions, there are sometimes civilian casualties."

The State Department statement would do credit to George Orwell's Ministry of Truth....

In the months preceding Congressional approval of the \$100 million in *contra* aid, the Administration poisoned the debate on human rights in Nicaragua by denouncing bearers of bad news about the *contras*... as dupes of communism, Sandinism, Marxism and anti-Americanism, or as closet advocates of same. The Administration's commitment to its policy could be measured not by its persuasiveness, but by its contempt for debate....

[The Reagan administration] does grave damage to the cause of human rights, itself, making other pronouncements on human rights by the United States suspect. Unfortunately, our government has come to be regarded in many quarters as using the human rights issue to promote other interests than as concerned with human rights for their own sake.

of war, but contends that the government's response has been "disproportionate" to the threat it faces. On the other hand, it concedes that there is no formula available for calculating the exact dimensions of such a threat, or of the appropriate response. In other words, its objections are based on an intuitive sense of proportion, from the perspective of its offices in New York and Washington, D.C.

### **Anti-Somocista tribunals**

Of particular concern to human rights investigators were the special tribunals set up to process war crimes. They were analogous to the special courts used by the British in Ulster, and met the requirements of a 1973 U.N. General Assembly resolution which holds that, "All nations have the right to judge their nationals for war crimes and crimes against humanity."

The government used the tribunals to process the large backlog of cases involving former members of Somoza's *Guardia Nacional*, and offenses related to the CIA-*contra* campaign. The latter were defined as activities which: submitted the nation to foreign domination or impaired its independence and integrity; revealed political or national security secrets; damaged installations, roads, bridges or public works necessary for defense; prevented local authorities from carrying out their public duties; or attacked the government, its organization or members.

That was a pretty wide net, and the stresses of the CIA's terror campaign guaranteed that innocent and relatively harmless people would be caught up in it, especially in areas of intense fighting.

Yet, an early analysis concluded that, "Initial reactions [of the populace] have been supportive of the special tribunals as an effective way of bringing to trial those who have been detained because of activities related to the war in Nicaragua's northern regions.... In Guatemala [by comparison], special tribunals established last July [1982] hold secret pro-

ceedings, can hand down death sentences, and the verdict is delivered by letter or anonymous phone call. There is no death penalty in Nicaragua and the maximum sentence is thirty years. The Nicaraguan tribunals are under civil authorities, the judges' names and backgrounds are public, trial proceedings will be open, and evidence will be available to the public."<sup>277</sup>

But the horrors of Guatemala could provide little solace to an innocent peasant improperly detained for days, weeks or months on the false testimony of envious neighbors. The risk of such inequities was eliminated in early 1988, when the *Tribunales Populares Anti-Somocistas* were disbanded by the government in its efforts to comply with the Central American peace accord it had signed the preceding August.

Other criticisms of Americas Watch include "abusive interrogation tactics" and what it considers to have been excessive censorship. There is no evidence of physical torture; but the government's refusal of access to one of the two main prisons and to pre-trial detention centers is cause for genuine concern. On the other hand, prison conditions in general have steadily improved (cf. "A dimension of forgiveness", page 66), and abuses by soldiers have been severely punished — in contrast to the U.S. and its client-states.

On balance, this is a remarkably short list of abuses for an impoverished nation under attack by a superpower, especially when contrasted with the unmolested U.S. client-states in the region. Furthermore, Americas Watch has emphasized that the

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*"There is a difference between being a political opponent within the country, and being a supporter of a group of paid mercenaries, even though they are Nicaraguans, who are outside of Nicaragua and who have no political support within the country.... We have to make the distinction between a political opponent and a counter-revolutionary. The counter-revolutionaries are not allowed. They are simply not allowed in Nicaragua; but if you are a political opponent, you have all the freedom to publicly say what your feelings are."*

— President of Moravian Synod<sup>278</sup>

Reaganites' accusations against Nicaragua could not justify aggression, even if they were based on fact:

"Allegations of human rights abuses have become a major focus of the Administration's campaign to overthrow the Nicaraguan government. Such a concerted campaign to use human rights in justifying military action is without precedent in U.S.-Latin American relations, and its effect is an unprecedented debasement of the human rights cause....

"In Nicaragua, there is no systematic practice of forced disappearances, extrajudicial killings or torture — as has been the case with the 'friendly' armed forces of El Salvador... Nor has the Government practiced elimination of cultural or ethnic groups, as the Administration frequently claims; indeed, in this respect, as in most others, Nicaragua's record is by no means so bad as that of Guatemala, whose government the Administration consistently defends. Moreover, some notable reductions in abuses have occurred in Nicaragua since 1982, despite the pressure caused by escalating external attacks."<sup>279</sup>

## COMPARED TO WHAT?

Although not successful in every particular, the Reaganites' rhetorical onslaught has fulfilled its major objectives. So much attention has been focused on the alleged deficiencies of Nicaragua that they have entered the realm of common knowledge; few governments, including that of the United States, could withstand similar scrutiny.

As it is, the Sandinistas must devote a great deal of time and energy to defending themselves against charges repeatedly disproven, yet endlessly repeated. Those charges are usually presented in a contextual void, as though Daniel Ortega just woke up one morning and said to himself, "Today would be a good day to send a bishop into exile." The treason of reactionary clerics might never have occurred, the CIA-*contras* and their internal front might never have existed.

The effect has been to invent and exaggerate sins of the Sandinistas, while diverting attention from the truly horrifying realities of U.S. terrorists and client-states. It can therefore be instructive to compare Nicaragua with its neighbors in Central America, and also with the United States.

### **To stun the senses**

“The everyday reality of today’s Guatemala is a thing to stun the senses — but only if those senses are exposed to it.”<sup>280</sup> That no such exposure has disturbed the tranquility of most U.S. minds is due largely to the apparent disinterest of the White House: As noted previously, if the administration does not choose to acknowledge a problem in another country, it does not exist.

For the people of Guatemala, however, the problem is as thick as blood and as real as a nightmare. Since the CIA replaced an elected government with a military regime in 1954, the country has witnessed an ongoing slaughter of “subversive elements”. What the indigenous people of the countryside have been subjected to has been characterized as genocide. Anyone who tries to help — agricultural adviser, priest, teacher — is also marked for death.

Since the CIA coup, a small guerrilla movement has operated with scant success; but it has offered the pretext for an assault on the entire rural population. A corporal describes standard procedure when the army approaches a village: “They flee from their homes. When they run and go into the mountains, that obliges us to kill them.... They might be guerrillas.”

On those frequent occasions when subversive tendencies have been pre-determined, there is even less restraint: “There was no mercy for anyone; in one house they burned forty people, in three others twenty-five people, and ten in another. Others were tortured, and when they could not get any more information from them, they were finished off with machetes. Angered with others that did not respond in Spanish [many

Guatemalans speak only native dialects], they decapitated them on the streets. Afterward... the soldiers rushed the people gathered at the town's chapel. For that, they used hand grenades, bazookas and machine guns."<sup>281</sup>

This has been a *routine* sort of occurrence in Guatemala.

Because the army is so violently opposed to investigation, it has been difficult to accurately determine total casualties. But estimates of the number slaughtered in the past 20 years run as high as 200,000. As many as 40,000 more have "disappeared". The army itself boasts of destroying over 440 villages; some 500,000 villagers have been herded into "strategic hamlets" like those employed by the U.S. in Vietnam.

This, in a country with a total population of less than eight million.

Any idea of a "free press" is, for the most part, a sick joke; so is land reform. Troublesome priests and nuns are labeled as "terrorists" and dealt with accordingly; likewise, teachers and labor leaders. Relatives of the disappeared formed a "Mutual Support Group" and were promptly abducted, tortured and exterminated.

The unrelenting brutality moved the Carter administration to cut off military aid. The Reaganites restored it, allaying congressional doubts by arranging for a civilian government to be elected in 1985, but the army continues to rule through a parallel structure. Not one soldier or officer has been brought to trial, and the new "president" states openly that he has no control over the military. "Few people question President Cerezo's good intentions," observes a Guatemalan political analyst. "The trouble is that he doesn't have any power."<sup>282</sup>

The response of the Reagan administration has been to simply declare that things are getting better all the time, as a result of enlightened U.S. policy. In 1982, Ronald Reagan said that Guatemala had gotten "a bum rap". As assassinations doubled and abductions quadrupled in 1983, an official of the State Department assured readers of the *New York Times* that "we see a trend toward improvement in human rights."<sup>283</sup>

*“Elliott Abrams dismissed the refugee accounts of massacres as fabrications of ‘guerilla sympathizers’; the U. S. embassy in Guatemala tried to slur Amnesty International’s reporting on civilian deaths as the product of a ‘Communist-backed disinformation plan’.... This was the second major attempt to undermine Amnesty International’s credibility.*

*“Hard as it was on those who tried to report human rights violations, the administration showed no end of indulgence for the conduct of the violators themselves.... This administration’s construct of legitimate defensive action implies that a government becomes logically incapable of performing a culpable act. Whatever it might do, the argument goes, it was provoked into doing.”*

— *Americas Watch*, With Friends Like These

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Elliott Abrams, he of the discriminating taste in human suffering (cf. page 171), defended the resumption of military aid to Guatemala on these grounds: “The price of stability in the middle of a guerrilla war is high, but I don’t think you can blame that on the government. You blame that on the guerrillas who are fighting the government.”<sup>284</sup> This tolerant point of view makes for an instructive contrast with Abrams’ fulminations against Nicaragua’s efforts to cope with the CIA-*contras*.

### **Shining example**

It is widely understood that Guatemala, with its considerable natural resources and its border with Mexico, is the proper focus of U.S. national security interests in Central America. But for a variety of reasons, the Reagan administration has made El Salvador the centerpiece of its policy, and has spent billions of dollars on what it regards as its greatest success in the region. Presumably, then, El Salvador is what the Reaganites’ have in mind for Nicaragua.

If so, it is a grim prospect. All those billions of U.S. dollars have done nothing to arrest the accelerating plunge of El Salvador’s economy. Nearly sixty-five percent of the rural

population remains landless, while two percent own the best sixty percent of the land. Six families alone control more acreage than the smallest 133,000 farms combined.

Half the children die of malnutrition and disease before reaching age five. Malaria is on the rise, and there have been recent epidemics of typhoid fever and rabies. Sixty percent of the people are illiterate.

The army has declared open season on the rural population, using aerial bombardment to obliterate entire villages in areas of suspected guerrilla activity. Nearly 50,000 of the nation's 4.8 million people have been disposed of by such means, most of them non-combatants.

The disposal of suspect urbanites is the responsibility of the many right-wing death squads, which have close ties to the CIA and include members of the Salvadoran army. There are well-known "body dumps" outside of San Salvador, where friends and relatives of the disappeared can go to seek what's left of their loved ones. Victims include everyone from the lowliest of the low to "subversive" doctors, teachers, nuns and priests — even the head of El Salvador's Catholic Church, Archbishop Oscar Romero.

Romero had displeased the death squads by publicly denouncing them, and by embracing the cause of the nation's impoverished majority. He was shot through the heart while celebrating mass, reportedly by a CIA-*contra* brought in from Honduras for the occasion.<sup>285</sup> Peasants have subsequently been

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*"If the central political act is voting periodically for candidates pre-selected by parties controlled by dominant elites, then democracy is not served. Although, in principle, voting allows people to 'throw the rascals out' in such countries as El Salvador, the real rascals in the military and oligarchy are beyond the reach of the electoral process. Institutions such as political parties and congresses primarily provide an arena in which elites can struggle over secondary issues and seemingly legitimize the overall power arrangements in society."*

— Philip Berryman, *Inside Central America*



been slaughtered for no greater offense than displaying a portrait of Romero in their hovels.

The extraordinarily courageous members of a human rights group have been abducted, raped, tortured and killed. A California church group developed evidence that the torture has been supervised by U.S. servicemen, with methods that include "violent beatings, prolonged immersion in water, hooding with a rubber bag coated on the inside with lime, suspension by feet and thumbs tied together behind the victim, electric shock, burning with acid and cigarettes, rape.... A major of the North American army put the apparatus he carried at his belt in [one victim's] back and ears, producing electrical discharges.... This torture lasted about fifteen minutes."

The church group's report, which is specific and detailed, has been ignored by U.S. government officials and news media, as have several others like it.<sup>286</sup>

Meanwhile, El Salvador's "president" has no more control over the military than does his counterpart in Guatemala. He once tried to order a Christmas truce, and the army responded by bombing a suburb of the capital; the president could feel the unquiet death of his truce through the soles of

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*"There has been more freedom and less brutality in revolutionary Nicaragua than under any recent United States-backed government in El Salvador.*

*"I don't understand how they call that government Communist, and say that this government is Christian and democratic', a senior Salvadoran bishop once said. 'They don't shoot priests and workers, do they?'*

*"In El Salvador, some 40,000 civilians have been killed there in the past four years. Women have been raped. Villages have been plundered. Yet, not one death squad member, not one officer who has carried out the massacres of peasants, not one soldier... has been convicted and sentenced for a human rights crime.*

*"President Reagan has excoriated Nicaragua as a 'totalitarian dungeon'. What does that make El Salvador?"*

— Ray Bonner<sup>291</sup>

his shoes.<sup>288</sup> Amnesty International states that “Salvadorans who violate human rights remain virtually immune from prosecution.”<sup>289</sup>

There is no indication that any of these conditions are likely to change in the foreseeable future.

After visiting El Salvador hospitals and refugee camps in 1984, four doctors from the United States returned with this perspective: “With the passive, and sometimes active, acquiescence of Congress and the American people — after six years of war, 40,000 civilian deaths, one million civilians made refugees, and \$1.7 billion in U.S. aid — has the Reagan administration, in its desperate crusade to ‘save’ El Salvador, fulfilled Tacitus’ centuries-old sarcasm, ‘They made a wasteland and called it peace’?”<sup>290</sup>

Since then, things have only gotten more “peaceful”.

## Counterfeit election

El Salvador’s 1984 elections were portrayed by the White House, and its allies in the news media, as a triumph of democracy — in contrast to the allegedly counterfeit process in Nicaragua some months later. As noted previously, the reverse is true (cf. “Revolution betrayed”, pages 227 ff.).

In El Salvador, the CIA spent several million dollars to ensure that its choice for president won. The agency’s interference was so obvious that U.S. right-wingers — most notably a Neanderthalic senator from North Carolina — protested that *their* favorite, a prominent death squad leader known as “Blowtorch Bob”, had been cheated of the victory he had earned through dedicated terror.

The death squads did manage to scare off all left-wing candidates by threatening to kill them should they dare to show their faces. Having so often demonstrated their murderous competence, it was a threat that was impossible to ignore. Consequently, the candidates most likely to appeal to the masses were not available.

The voting procedures left something to be desired, as well. International observers reported that adults were required to vote; if they didn't, officials could identify them by means of the voting register and "talk" to them later, as often happened in the past. Many had the added inducement of being herded to the polls by the army.

Nor was the voter's choice burdened with excessive secrecy. In sharp distinction to Nicaragua's election, polling booths afforded questionable privacy and the ballots were translucent, so that selections could be seen from the reverse side. But, that wasn't necessary, since the boxes into which voters dropped their ballots were made of transparent plastic.

This is only a partial list of electoral peculiarities. In his comparison of the two elections, Lord Chitnis of Great Britain concluded: "In every relevant aspect, the situation in Nicaragua provided the necessary conditions for all political parties to participate freely. This was not the case in El Salvador. In Nicaragua, the non-contesting opposition groups' presidential candidate, Arturo Cruz... was free to return to his country. He did so, for example, at the start of the campaign and held public meetings without any perceptible fear for his life. In El Salvador, Guillermo Ungo, the leader of the FMLN/FDR, would not have been able to do this...."

"Was there a political choice? In Nicaragua there certainly was. By comparing, for example, the party political platform of the Democratic Conservatives with that of the MAP on the extreme left [in Nicaragua], this seems to me indisputable. In El Salvador, such political choice did not exist."<sup>291</sup>

## **Totalitarian states**

The leader of a nation at war once warned, "I would raise the question as to whether freedom of the press is not essentially freedom to print correct news and freedom to criticize the government on the basis of factual truth. I think there is a big distinction between this and freedom to print untrue news."

Vladimir Lenin? Fidel Castro? Daniel Ortega? Nope: Franklin D. Roosevelt, at the start of World War II.

A comparison of the United States' 200-year history with the infant Sandinista revolution yields a perspective not particularly flattering to the Land of the Free. At the very least, it suggests that if Nicaragua is a totalitarian dungeon, then so is the United States, and that it has been for a very long time.

The Sandinista revolution has been notably innocent of reprisals against its opposition. Apart from those who have signed onto the CIA's destabilization campaign, no one has been imprisoned, killed or deprived of property. In most cases, even open affiliation with the CIA-*contras* goes unpunished.

Such bold opposition was unthinkable during and after the "American" Revolution, as it has come to be called. By most estimates, some 25-30% of the colonial population was of the Loyalist persuasion, and an equivalent proportion adopted a prudent neutrality until it became clear which side was likely to win. Anyone suspected of Loyalist tendencies was closely monitored by local Committees of Safety and Correspondence. Those vigilante groups operated under the legalistic veil of the Test Laws, which prescribed severe penalties for open and suspected loyalty to the British crown.

A history of the period notes that, "The wings of Loyalist freedom seem to have been very closely clipped. The Tory could not vote or hold office. He had no legal redress for his wrongs and, if he had, no Loyalist member of the bar could defend him; he was denied his vocation, and his liberty to speak or write his opinions; he could not travel or trade where he chose, and he must pray and fight for the cause he hated."<sup>292</sup>

These measures were strongly supported by the "Founding Fathers". George Washington wrote approvingly of Connecticut laws providing for the arrest of "persons inimical to us", and for the imprisonment of anyone "writing, speaking or acting against" the revolution. "Vigorous measures, and such as at other times would appear extraordinary," wrote the father of his country, "are now become absolutely necessary."<sup>293</sup>

(Continued on page 273)

## **A Loyalists' Declaration of Independence**

*Published in Rivington's Royal Gazette; New York, 1781*

WHEN IN THE COURSE OF HUMAN EVENTS it becomes necessary for men, in order to preserve their lives, liberties and properties, and to secure themselves, and to their posterity, that peace, liberty and safety, to which by the laws of nature and of nature's God they are entitled, to throw off and renounce all allegiance to a government, which under the insidious pretences of securing those inestimable blessings to them, has wholly deprived them of any security of either life, liberty, property, peace or safety....

The history of Congress is a history of continued weakness, inconsistency, violation of the most sacred obligations of all public faith and honour, and of usurpations, all having in direct object the producing of anarchy, civil feuds, and violent injustice, which have rendered us miserable, and must soon establish tyranny over us, and our country.

To prove this, let facts be submitted to a candid world.... They have, by their misconduct, reduced us all to the dangers and distress of actual invasion from without, and to all the horrors of a cruel war within....

They have raised a standing army and sent it into the field... and have actually rendered it independent of the civil power, by making it solely dependent on them.

They have combined with France, the natural and hereditary enemy of our civil constitution, and religious faith, to render us dependant on and subservient to the views of that foreign, ambitious, and despotic monarchy.

They have ruined our trade, and destroyed our credit with all parts of the world.... They have driven many of our people beyond sea, into exile, and have confiscated their estates.... They have destroyed all good

order and government, by plunging us into the factions of democracy, and the ravages of civil war.... They have fined, imprisoned, banished and put to death some of our fellow citizens, for no other cause but their attachment to the English laws and constitution.... They have involved us in an immense debt, foreign as well as internal....

In every stage of these proceedings, they have not been wanting to throw out before us specious excuses for their conduct, as being the result of necessity and tending to the public good.... Our minds have been overwhelmed with apprehensions; and as our sufferings have increased, our tears have flowed in secret. It has been dangerous and even criminal to lament our situation in public....

The unsuspecting confidence which we, with our fellow citizens, reposed in the Congress of 1774, the unanimous applause with which their patriotism and firmness were crowned... at the same time that it gave to Congress the unanimous support of the whole continent, inspired their successors with very different ideas, and emboldened them by degrees to pursue measures directly the reverse of those before adopted.... We find them contending for liberty of speech, and at the same time controlling the press by means of a mob, and persecuting everyone who ventures to hint his disapprobation....

We should fill volumes, were we to recite at large their inconsistency, usurpations, weaknesses and violations of the most sacred obligations.... We have sufficiently shewn that a government thus marked... by the enormity of its excesses, injustice and infamy, is unfit to rule a free people.

*(Continued from page 270)*

Mob violence was commonplace. The merest hint of Loyalist inclinations could incite Committees of Safety to looting and destruction of property, economic boycotts and embargos, forced relocation to areas controlled by revolutionaries, severe beatings, continual harassment, rape, tarring and feathering, rail-riding, and other diversions.

A chronicler of the times wrote of "chaining men together by the dozens and driving them like herds of cattle into distant provinces, flinging them into loathesome jails, confiscating their estates, shooting them in swamps and woods as suspected Tories, hanging them after a mock trial," and on and on.<sup>294</sup>

Prisons were grim even by the harsh standards of the day. The most notorious was located at the Simsbury, Connecticut, copper mines. The cells were converted mine shafts more than 120 feet below surface, into which "the prisoners are let down by a windlass into a dismal cavern, through a hole, which answers the purpose of conveying their food and air; as to light, it scarcely reaches them."<sup>295</sup>

Simsbury's most famous inmate was Benjamin Franklin's son, William, who had served the king as the last colonial governor of New Jersey. His father managed to negotiate his release, but not the return of his substantial estate. He withdrew to London in lifelong bitterness at the rabble in arms that had deposed him.

Many of the dispossessed spent the balance of their lives fiddling at counter-revolution, very nearly succeeding with the War of 1812. Others earned degrees in frustration by attempting to extract compensation for their suffering from a penurious Crown. All told, at least 100,000 loyal subjects of the king went or were chased into exile. About half of the total moved to Canada, where their descendants are still sufficiently numerous to populate sizable gatherings of the United Empire Loyalists.

## Acceptable speech

Outrageous hypocrisy is one of the perquisites of power, and nothing has aroused more self-righteous indignation in the United States than the Sandinistas' censorship and suspension of such pro-*contra* media as *La Prensa* and *Radio Catolica*. Emergency restrictions on mass demonstrations are not very favorably regarded, either. But Nicaragua will have to greatly augment its complement of censors, and drastically limit its tolerance of dissent, if it ever hopes to approximate the dismal record of the United States with respect to freedom of expression.

The Constitution's Bill of Rights notwithstanding, government assaults on free speech are as American as the Saturday night special. Just five years after the British retreat from the rebellious colonies, the Alien and Sedition Acts were forced through Congress by the dominant Federalist Party. The Acts empowered the government to imprison anyone who published "scandalous and malicious writing" for up to eighteen months. Several publishers were in fact jailed under these laws; to no one's surprise, all had earned their punishment with articles attacking Federalist policies and personalities.

The U.S. Civil War was marked by heavy censorship on both sides. In the North, major daily newspapers were shut down on the orders of President Lincoln, for printing "inaccurate information" or for questioning government policies. The Secretary of War assumed total control of all telegraph lines, and the dispatches of war correspondents were censored to eliminate bad military news. Lincoln also suspended *habeas corpus*, the venerable Common Law principle which helps to protect individuals from abuses of state power.

Encroachments on civil liberties during World War I were equally, if not more severe. The 1917 Espionage Act prescribed stiff fines and prison terms of up to twenty years for statements that might "interfere with the operation or success of the military or naval forces, or to promote the success" of the enemy.



It was also illegal to counsel disloyalty or refusal of service in the armed services, and the post office was authorized to refuse distribution of publications "advocating or urging treason, insurrection or resistance to the law."

This was followed by the Sedition Act of 1918, which outlawed criticism of the government or its war policies, and any expression of "contempt, scorn, contumely or disrepute" directed at the Constitution or the armed forces.

The results were inevitable. "Federal courts convicted more than 1000 persons of violating the Espionage and Sedition laws, virtually all of them for mere verbal statements. Of these, over 100 received jail terms of ten years or more — none of them for actual spying. The war-time courts sentenced one man to twenty years for distributing literature urging re-election of a congressman who had voted against conscription."<sup>296</sup>

The most infamous case was that of Eugene Debs, leader of the Socialist Party which at that time was rapidly gaining support. Debs was dealt a prison sentence of ten years for such treasonous remarks as, "It is extremely dangerous to exercise the constitutional right of free speech in a country fighting to make democracy safe in the world."

Debs' imprisonment was just the beginning of a massive nationwide crackdown on the Socialist Party, which never recovered from the persecution it suffered during and after the war.

Another troublesome outfit, the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW) or "Wobblies", was also destroyed on the pretext of military necessity. Nearly the entire Wobbly leadership ended up in prison, some for statements made before the war, and one for the amazing feat of violating the Espionage Act while already in jail.

All this at a time when there was not the remotest threat of invasion.

## Defense committees

The Department of Justice sponsored a privately funded vigilante organization called the American Protective League. Its 350,000 members scoured the nation for radicals, subversives, draft evaders, strange-looking foreigners and other threats to democracy. They broke up political and labor meetings, perpetrated patriotic burglaries and wiretaps, ransacked homes and stores belonging to citizens with Germanic names.

Those found guilty of insufficient loyalty were admonished with beatings, tar and feathers (another U.S. tradition), and shaved heads; others were painted all over in yellow, or forced to kneel and kiss the flag. There were at least two lynchings.

Thousands of conscientious objectors were herded into military gulags, where they received beatings and other forms of patriotic abuse. Seventeen conscientious objectors were sentenced to death, and 142 others received life sentences. The entire executive committee of the Jehovah's Witness church was sentenced to prison, because its doctrine forbids killing under any circumstances.

All telephone and telegraph messages were placed under surveillance and censorship. Likewise, the mails; millions of letters were opened and read during the two years of U.S. participation in the war. The mailing permits of 100, mostly foreign-language and socialist, publications were revoked.

The government celebrated the war's end by inciting the first major Red Scare of this century: "When peace came, the repressive measures, instead of being abolished, were used by federal, state and municipal officials... under the guise of protecting the institutions of the U.S. and the American way of life, without carefully defining the latter."<sup>297</sup>

There followed the infamous "Palmer raids" against aliens and "anarchists", supervised by Attorney General A. Mitchell Palmer. Thousands were summarily detained, and hundreds were exiled under suspicion of saying things the government didn't want the people to hear.

## Concentration camps

There was less national debate over U.S. involvement in World War II, once it commenced after the bombing of Pearl Harbor; but there was no shortage of repression.

The most severely injured parties were the 110,000 citizens of Japanese descent — 70,000 of whom were born in the U.S. — who were penned up in concentration camps for the duration of the war. Their offense was the color of their skin and the shape of their eyes; no Germans or Italians suffered a similar fate, even though the lands of their ancestors presented a far greater threat than Japan did.

Official documents released decades later reveal that the government knew that these industrious U.S. citizens presented no security threat. Their imprisonment was apparently ordered out of solicitude for the “morale” — read “bigotry” — of the majority population.

The round-up was so abrupt that the victims were forced to sacrifice much of their property, including hard-won farms, homes and businesses. Their young men became the most



*Seattle-King County Historical Society*

*Army guards transport a family of U.S. citizens from their hard-won farm on Bainbridge Island near Seattle, Washington, to a concentration camp in Idaho.*

decorated soldiers of the war, but survivors of the Japanese-American concentration camps speak of a lingering sense of shame and degradation, not unlike victims of rape. Decades later, a paltry compensation measure has been fought at every step by white-skinned patriots, and has still not worked its way through Congress and the courts.

In comparing the treatment of Japanese-Americans during World War II with that of Nicaragua's Miskito Indians, Americas Watch has noted that, "There are, of course, certain analogies between the forcible relocation in Nicaragua and the forcible relocation of the Japanese-Americans during World War II. The differences are: that the United States forcibly relocated only those from one racial group, whereas Nicaragua relocated all the residents in particular areas; the United States acted despite the fact that it was not invaded, whereas Nicaragua acted only after there had been fighting in the affected region; and the United States interned 112,000 Japanese-Americans for the duration of the war, whereas the Miskitos were never interned."<sup>298</sup>

### **"Clear and present danger" of free speech**

[There is widespread tendency] to compare the conditions in a given country with a non-existent media utopia in the United States....

All nations severely curtail dissent during times of national crisis. During every U.S. war... the government tightly controlled the range of public discussion. Take, for example, World War I. The declaration of war in April, 1917, quickly led to an anti-German hysteria in the U.S. Federal, state and local governments passed numerous laws restricting dissent, and the courts, as a rule, interpreted them as broadly as possible. Thousands, perhaps tens of thousands, of U.S. citizens were prosecuted under these laws for uttering "antiwar" remarks.

The most notorious of these laws was the Federal

*(Continued...)*

*“Clear and present danger” of free speech (cont.)*

Espionage Act of 1917. One of the many provisions of the law made interference with military or recruiting activities a crime punishable by up to twenty years in prison, and another made it illegal to mail printed material that violated any other section of the law. By conservative estimates, at least 2000 people were indicted under the law and at least 877 of them were convicted, almost all for what they said or wrote. In addition, more than 100 publications were banned from the mails....

The Espionage Act was specifically upheld by the U.S. Supreme Court in *Schenck vs. United States*. Schenck had been convicted of distributing a circular that opposed the conscription law and called on the public to resist the law in an unspecified way.... Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes wrote for the court:

“The character of every act depends upon the circumstances in which it is done. The most stringent protection of free speech would not protect a man in falsely shouting fire in a theatre and causing panic.... The question in every case is whether the words are used in such circumstances and are of such a nature as to create a clear and present danger that they will bring about the substantive evils that Congress has a right to prevent. It is a question of proximity and degree. When a nation is at war, many things that might be said in times of peace are such a hindrance to its effort that their utterance will not be endured so long as men fight, and that no Court could regard them as protected by any constitutional right.”

Given that the U.S. was a relatively mature and homogenous political system during World War I, and was not particularly threatened by the fighting, the range of public discussion tolerated in Nicaragua during the first five years of the revolution was remarkable.

— *John S. Nichols, Nicaragua: The First Five Years*

## Censorship

Another by-product of World War II was the Office of Censorship. "In addition to censoring the newspapers and radio, the Office read millions of letters, checked cables and telegrams, taped telephone calls, and established guidelines for movies. Private letters which painted a gloomy picture of the war were suppressed as bad for morale, and films which played abroad could not show labor disturbances or other signs of unrest.... The American public was 'protected' from disappointing news and, instead, given exaggerated reports favorable to the military officials of the U.S. and its allies, even when these reports were gross distortions of reality.... Even a major story like the dropping of an atomic bomb on Hiroshima was only reported in the barest outline."<sup>299</sup>

The Post Office banned seventy publications, and the assets of several newspapers were seized by the government on the suspicion that they had been funded by foreign governments. The relatively benign fate of *La Prensa* in Nicaragua makes a striking contrast.

Conscientious objectors got pretty much the same treatment as in World War I. Over 6000 served prison terms. Others were subjected to tar and feathers, beatings, even castration.

Although there were no further prospects of attack after the bombing of Pearl Harbor, martial law was declared in Hawaii. Due process was suspended; radios and newspapers were forbidden to discuss martial law or its effects.

It is thus hardly surprising that the military courts which processed all charges achieved a 99% conviction rate. Questions about this extraordinary legal efficiency were casually impaled by President Roosevelt on the horns of military necessity: "I do not worry about the constitutional question. The whole matter is one of immediate and present war emergency."

As for the "independent" media: "Correspondents went along with the official scheme for reporting the war because they were convinced it was in the national interest to do so. They saw no sharp line of demarcation between the role of the press in war time and that of the government."<sup>300</sup>

## Hunting subversives

World War II also provided a pretext for J. Edgar Hoover to intensify his Federal Bureau of Investigation's obsessive quest for "subversives" — defined by President Roosevelt as all those "opposed to the American way of life" which, of course, was not defined.

For J. Edgar and his ilk, anyone who attained notoriety by calling attention to the deficiencies of U.S. society was likely to be a communist agent or dupe. Thus, "The FBI wrote [in an internal document] that John Steinbeck's writings 'portrayed an extremely sordid and poverty-stricken side of American life', and that they had been reprinted extensively by the Nazis and the Soviet Union.... Documents indicate the FBI was interested in [Truman] Capote because he accompanied a black cast performing 'Porgy and Bess' in the Soviet Union and wrote an account of the tour."<sup>301</sup>

Next to the Communist Conspiracy, there was nothing that aroused more terror in J. Edgar's icy heart than the Afro-American civil rights movement. In fact, he could discern little distinction between the two phenomena. An inveterate racist, Hoover appears to have sincerely believed that the darkies would have been content to remain in their place if a bunch of "outside agitators" hadn't gone and got 'em all riled up.

Accordingly, he devoted much of the FBI's resources to spying on and intimidating such genteel organizations as the Urban League and the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, which were so circumspect in their conduct that angry young blacks would later come to denounce them as refuges for "Uncle Toms".

But they looked like trouble to the paranoid overseer of the FBI, and so did a great many other U.S. citizens. The editorial stance and subscription lists of *The Nation* magazine, founded during the Civil War, were subjected to sporadic surveillance for most of the 20th century on the grounds of "leftist" inclinations. Thousands of warrantless wiretaps and burglaries have been conducted in honor of national security. Some

130,000 pieces of personal mail were opened and photocopied between the years 1940-66.

Job security and family harmony are frequently threatened by visits of FBI agents to homes and workplaces, where they have been known to dispense compromising gossip about suspected subversives. The bureau is not above forging letters and sending anonymous tips in pursuit of its aims. The suicide of actress Jean Seberg has been attributed, at least in part, to an intensive FBI smear campaign she brought upon herself by forcefully denouncing the Vietnam War. Over the years, untold thousands of others have received similar, if less widely publicized, treatment on behalf of the American Way of Life.

### **Red Scare III**

The second great panic over communism in this century occurred during the Great Depression of the 1930s. The third began shortly after World War II, with the "Iron Curtain" speech of Winston Churchill and the antics of the House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC) which provided the first national forum for Richard Nixon's inquisitorial talents.

The HUAC witch-hunt steadily intensified from 1946 onward, and its malign example inspired the mutation presided over by Senator Joseph McCarthy in the 1950s.

By the time the nation's third major Red Scare was ostensibly over, scores of U.S. citizens had been imprisoned for refusing to subject their friends and associates to the inquisition, thousands had lost their jobs, tens of thousands had been harassed and intimidated at home and at work, and millions upon millions had been infected with a dread of "communist tendencies".

It was an exercise in ideological terror that intimidated an entire nation, with nightmare consequences still being acted out today — primarily with the lives of impoverished foreigners who have never lifted a finger against the Home of the Brave.



The crusade against communism meandered all over the globe, and eventually stumbled into Vietnam. After preventing the 1956 elections mandated by international treaty, the U.S. plunged that war-ravished nation into yet another ordeal, of such pointless savagery that the world recoiled in horror and disgust. The comparison with the policies of Hitler's Germany was obvious, and frequently noted; the Nixon administration broke off diplomatic relations with Sweden after Prime Minister Olof Palme said it out loud.

As opposition mounted at home — in direct proportion to white-skinned middle- and upper-class casualties — thousands of young men were sent to prison and all its horrors for draft resistance, while thousands more became refugees in Canada and other countries. There were massive demonstrations against the war, and mass jailings. Protests at the Democratic Party's 1968 convention in Chicago were brutally suppressed; a subsequent official inquiry characterized the chaos as a "police riot".

At Kent State University, unarmed students were killed and crippled by gunfire from National Guardsmen. President Nixon gloated that the dead and wounded "bums" deserved what they got. The federal and Ohio state governments deflected all efforts to bring those responsible to account.

A massive program of spying, burglary, harassment and intimidation was carried out against peace activists by the CIA, the FBI, the Army and other agencies at all levels of government.

In direct violation of its charter, the CIA developed at least 10,000 files on anti-war activists. Agents were assigned to follow and photograph suspected peaceniks, including several congressmen, and a network of agency spies penetrated anti-war groups. There were illegal break-ins, wiretaps, and interceptions of personal mail. The agency trained and financed its own goon squads to beat up anti-war protesters, attack "leftist" bookstores, and perform such other chores as their masters deemed necessary for the preservation of liberty.<sup>302</sup>

The CIA's domestic, hence illegal, "counter-intelligence" program involved spying on and disrupting the 1972 campaign

of the Democratic Party's challenger to President Nixon's re-election. That led to the electronic surveillance and burglary of Democratic offices and, eventually, to Nixon's narrow escape from impeachment.

### **Uppity preacher**

For J. Edgar Hoover, the Vietnam War presented a perfect opportunity to fill more filing cabinets and computer tapes with intimations of subversion. Anti-war protests were assumed to be the work of commie agitators and their naive "dupes".

Files stolen by peace activists from the FBI's office in Media, Pennsylvania, gave the public its first documented glimpse of just how extensive, arbitrary and moronic the bureau's records might be. The daily movements of a Boy Scout leader in Idaho were followed for over a decade, because he had once taken his troop for a ride on the Trans-Siberian Railroad. A 16-year-old girl in New Jersey became the object of a criminal investigation, because she had requested some information from the Socialist Workers Party as part of a high school assignment.<sup>303</sup>

Protests against the Vietnam War intersected with the FBI's long-standing interest in the Afro-American civil rights movement, which reached its zenith at roughly the same historical moment. More powerfully than any other public figure, Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr., articulated the view that U.S. oppression of Third World peoples abroad was an extension of discrimination against blacks and other minorities at home. This kind of talk, and its galvanizing effect on a large and increasingly restless portion of the U.S. public, made King an arch-villain in the eyes of Hoover, who set out to discredit the uppity preacher.

King and his associates were placed under continuous surveillance, authorized and unauthorized. Homes, offices and hotel rooms were wired for sound and phones were tapped. The bugging continued for at least three years, and over 5000 conversations were taped. "The surveillance was

massive and complete," later recalled a disaffected FBI agent. "He couldn't wiggle. They had him."

But it didn't seem to yield much strange fruit. Not one shred of incriminating evidence was developed from the costly electronic undertaking.

Hoover did manage to get some extra-marital sexual encounters down on tape. He used them to besmirch King's reputation and disrupt his family life. Bureau agents passed along tales of King's sexual adventures to his white liberal allies, in hopes that they would withdraw their support. An audio tape of King's hotel-room sex life was sent anonymously to his wife.

Efforts were "routinely" made to prevent King from receiving public tributes, such as honorary university degrees; FBI agents tried to discourage university officials from granting such honors by passing along tales of King's sex life, and by charging that he was skimming off funds from the civil rights movement for deposit in a secret Swiss bank account. Similar methods were used to discourage Atlanta community leaders from attending a banquet in celebration of King's Nobel Peace Prize. An agent was assigned the task of obtaining handwriting samples of King's aides so that incriminating documents could be contrived over their forged signatures (a venerable FBI technique).

"There was a consistent practice of anonymous telephone calls, sometimes to make false fire alarm reports at locations where Dr. King was to speak, and in other instances to friends and associates of Dr. King, trying to sow distrust among them." And on and on and on.... The FBI's persecution of King persisted until the civil rights leader was assassinated.<sup>304</sup>

## Crimes of war

The Vietnam War was the first in U.S. history that was not subjected to heavy military censorship. As a result, the folks back home learned from the nightly news that war is, indeed, hell. It also came to light, eventually, that U.S. warriors are no more civilized than those of other nations.

The My Lai massacre, in which U.S. troops slaughtered two villages of unarmed peasants on suspicion of supporting the enemy, was only the most notorious episode of a general pattern. Rape, torture and gratuitous slaughter were standard operating procedure, openly tolerated and often practiced by officers.

At a seminar conducted by Vietnam veterans toward the end of the war, an Army Special Forces sergeant drew these conclusions: "We find that in 1963 we were displacing population, we were murdering prisoners, we were turning prisoners over to somebody else to be tortured. We were committing murder then, and in 1970 we find nothing has changed. Every law of land warfare has been violated. It has been done systematically, deliberately and continuously. It has been done with the full knowledge of those who, in fact, make policy for this country.

"In Vietnam, we have a situation where never has there been such a disparity of power since the days when Mussolini and Count Ciano went in to Abyssinia to slaughter the spear-carrying troops of Haile Selassie.... We have used an air force against a country that has none. We have used a navy against a country that has none.... Our country has set out very systematically to kill whatever number of people is necessary in Vietnam to stop them from resisting whatever it is we are trying to impose on that country."<sup>305</sup>

Vietnam was not the first Asian country to be afflicted by the American way of death. The subjugation of the Philippines by the U.S. Marines during the Spanish-American War was a thing of such prodigious barbarity that historians refer to it as "America's first Vietnam".

As for post-war Vietnam, it continues to struggle with the legions of war casualties, the land saturated with herbicides and other poisons, the residual arsenal of booby traps and unexploded bombs. For the Vietnamese, the war goes on, and will continue to do so for generations to come.<sup>306</sup>

## **'They just blew all the kids away'**

*Testimony from The Winter Soldier Investigation  
conducted by Vietnam Veterans against the War*

"There were some Vietnamese children at the gateway of the village, and they gave the old finger gesture at us. It was understandable that they picked this up from the GIs there.... The guys got up, including the lieutenants, and just blew all the kids away."

"They didn't find any enemy, but they found a woman with bandages.... A former major [now working with USAID] ripped her clothes off, and took a knife and cut from her vagina almost all the way up, just about to her breasts, and pulled her organs out, completely out of her cavity, and threw them out. Then he stooped over and commenced to peel every bit of skin off her body, and left her there as a sign for something or other."

"A Marine had just been killed. He had been hit by a sniper, and the entire battalion, in revenge, destroyed two entire villages, wiping out everything living — and that was men, women and children."

"A woman was shot by one of our snipers [and] was asking for water. And the lieutenant ripped off her clothes, they stabbed her in both breasts and shoved an entrenching tool up her vagina. Then they took that out and used a tree limb, and then she was shot."

"The major I worked for had a fantastic capability of staking prisoners, utilizing a knife that was extremely sharp, and sort of filleting them like a fish. You know, trying to check out how much bacon he could make of a Vietnamese body to get information."

"They raped the girl and, then, the last man to make love to her shot her."

## American genocide

Of all the accusations leveled at Nicaragua by the Reaganites, certainly none is more preposterous than that it has been carrying out a policy of "genocide" against its indigenous population. Even if that were true, the United States is one of the last nations qualified to preach on the subject of native rights.

The genocide of American Indians has been so thoroughly documented that there is no need to detail it here. Suffice it to recall Chief Sitting Bull's bitter catechism: "What treaty that the whites have kept has the red man broken? Not one. What treaty that the white man ever made with us have they kept? Not one." And the bitter epitaph of a Yuma Indian woman: "We know that when you come, we die."<sup>307</sup>

The other great domestic sin of U.S. history is, of course, slavery. More than a century after its formal structures were officially dismantled, the U.S. still has not come to grips with the consequences of that grotesque institution or the system of "Jim Crow" repression which succeeded it. The often brutal subjugation of the Afro-American population was not significantly challenged until the 1950s — just one generation ago — and the human destruction left in its wake is a long, long way from being remedied. On the contrary, there remain powerful reactionary forces, currently represented by the Reagan administration, that are resisting the modest gains that Afro-Americans have made at enormous sacrifice.

## "Evil places"

Since Nicaragua lacks a similar history of genocide and slavery, it is not possible to draw a comparison. Both countries have prisons, however, and they provide an instructive contrast. Nicaragua's prisons are among the most progressive in the Third World; as noted previously, the government has been credited by human rights organizations with a genuine effort to improve conditions.

In the category of leading industrial nations, on the other hand, U.S. prisons are among the most appalling. They are

certainly no strangers to political prisoners, and they have earned a reputation for inhuman brutality. The most dreadful are the large state prisons, especially those in the South. Overcrowding, beatings, killings, sexual enslavement, etc. are taken for granted, and only rarely impeded by state officials.

The internal life of most U.S. jails and prisons is regulated not by guards, but by the strongest and most vicious criminals. The prototype is Arkansas State Prison, where in 1968 an idealistic new warden, Tom Murton, tried to reform a system dominated by “trusty” inmates. Trusties were authorized to maintain order by any means they saw fit; that turned out to include frequent beatings, torture by such means as electric shock, and murder.

When Murton began to dig up old skeletons (both literally and figuratively) and to curb the abuses of the trusties, he was fired. Things soon returned to normal.<sup>308</sup>

## Routine rape

The situation in Arkansas was far from unique. Nearly identical conditions have subsequently been reported in several other states, with nearly identical results.<sup>309</sup>

Seen from the perspective of its most defenseless victims, the method of the U.S. “justice” system is to lock up the most vicious people it can capture, then send them a continuous supply of “fresh meat” in the form of young men and women.

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*“No one seemed to be aware of the bestiality, cruelty and inhumanity that had gone on [at the state prison]. They were like the townspeople at Dachau who didn’t want to find out what caused the constant greasy smoke from the concentration-camp chimneys.... They still don’t, to this day — and that’s the whole problem in Arkansas. With a few rare exceptions, people refuse to acknowledge that their prisons are evil places, worse even than concentration camps, because they exist in a civilized country.”*

— Tom Murton, deposed warden of Arkansas State Prison<sup>310</sup>

Prison rape is so taken for granted that police use the threat of it to inspire co-operation from crime suspects, prosecutors employ it as leverage for plea bargaining, and judges have been known to cite it during sentencing as a sort of unofficial extra penalty.

Several states have adopted "scared straight" programs, in which young petty offenders are given a carefully supervised taste of prison life. The idea is to frighten the young men from pursuing careers as professional criminals. The certainty of rape in prison is a prominent theme of these programs, as illustrated by this excerpt from an account of the Georgia version: "The lieutenant picked out the smallest and made him stand at attention.... 'Do you know how long you'd last over there with the big boys?,' he roared, his mouth inches from the wide eyes of the pale young face. 'You ever been raped by a man? 'Cause that's what's going to happen to you in prison!'"<sup>311</sup>

It happens not only in prisons, nor only to perpetrators of serious crimes. Rape and other forms of assault are routine events in municipal and county jails, and they can be the consequence of nothing more heinous than a failure to pay a traffic fine or participating in a political protest. It is not unknown for young men to be raped as they are being transported from jail to a court proceeding, and back again.

This is partly the result of jail staffs that are deficient in both quantity and quality. The public may say it wants a just and efficient prison system, but has never betrayed much interest in paying for it. There is ample evidence, however, that the prevalence of rape is the result of deliberate, if unstated, policies. Rape performs several related functions: it tends to divert the hostile energies of the most violent prisoners from guards to weaker prisoners; it helps guards to maintain a psychological distance between themselves and the inmate population, by repeatedly demonstrating that prisoners are "a bunch of animals"; it nevertheless offers a vicarious release of latent homosexual interest; and it is a means to inflict extra-judicial punishment on prisoners whom guards especially dislike, e.g. "hippies" and "peaceniks".



Whatever their motives, officers of the courts know full well that when they send a young man off to jail or prison, he is very likely to be beaten and raped. As though to lubricate this official duty, there has evolved an exculpating bromide, yet another equivalent of the old favorite, "I was only doing my job." The standard cliché on prison rape is, "That's the price they pay for breaking the law."

And they do pay. One graduate of the New York state prison system summarized a common experience when he recalled, "I was in prison for three years, and I spent that entire time with one cock up my ass and another one in my mouth."

### **Sexual slavery**

It is estimated that some 26,000 men are raped every day in U.S. jails and prisons. This does not include boys raped in reformatories, and that total may be even greater.<sup>312</sup>

Many endure a condition of virtual slavery, forced by their convict masters to sell their bodies in exchange for money, drugs, cigarettes and other commodities. They may be required to shave off all their body hair and wear lipstick in order to enhance their image as feminine receptacles. Apart from the sexual gratification they are forced to provide, their purpose is to serve as objects of domination and humiliation. By one account, "Our prison population includes an estimated 175,000 Americans in some state of sexual slavery."<sup>313</sup>

There is very little that the victim can do about it. Prisoners spend much more time in the company of each other than under direct supervision by guards. The more dominant inmates rule the cell block, and rape is an integral part of the prison economy. To "snitch" on an attacker is to sign one's death warrant. There is nowhere to turn.

The ultimate consequences of all this are not very well understood. Despite its prevalence, prison rape is an ugly reality that dare not speak its name in public. Cultural myths and expectations of masculine sexuality being what they are, the vast majority of victims would rather suffer their degradation in silence than broadcast it to the world.

## **Suicide and self-esteem**

But there can be little doubt that it can have a devastating impact on self esteem. A physician who has dealt with the problem says that, "Male victims of rape in jail generally suffer a longer and deeper trauma than the female rape victims outside prison. The male inmate victim... must submit, escape or commit suicide. Once he submits, his masculinity has been devalued, he invites attacks from other prisoners, and he is locked into a 'no win' situation because, if he complains to the prison authorities, he is immediately branded a squealer and subjected to further humiliation and debasement. I would guess that for every one reported in-jail rape, ten go unreported."<sup>314</sup>

It is not surprising, then, that prison inmates resort to suicide at a frequency up to twenty times greater than the national average. For those who survive and get out, the suppressed rage they bring with them may be released on the general public, especially women.

Another consequence of prison rape is the spread of venereal disease, which increasingly carries a death penalty authorized by no court. It may be assumed that in the next few decades, thousands of boys and men will be injected with HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases as a direct result of their incarceration. Of course, "that's what they get for breaking the law".

Whatever the purely physical consequences, the psychological scars are very likely to last a lifetime. "I have nightmares about it," says an 18-year-old victim, who was briefly jailed in the nation's capital for a minor crime of which he was later acquitted. "It makes you lose your mind."<sup>315</sup>

## **Big Uncle is watching**

By any measure, the Reagan administration is one of the most corrupt in U.S. history. Over 200 Reaganite appointees have been investigated, and several have already been convicted. This appears to be the continuation of a venerable Republican

Party tradition: One historian of White House malfeasance calculates that, "If we're talking about financial corruption, 90% of it would be on the Republican side, and 10% on the Democratic."<sup>316</sup>

By another assessment, "Ronald Reagan has presided over a wider range of official misdeeds than any other president in our history."<sup>317</sup>

Any catalog of those misdeeds would have to give prominence to the administration's pervasive disregard of civil liberties. One of Ronald Reagan's first acts as president was to grant full pardons to two FBI agents convicted of numerous unauthorized burglaries in pursuit of "radicals" during the 1970s.

The Reaganites' commitment to freedom of the press in Latin America may be inferred from a 1985 raid in Puerto Rico, the U.S. protectorate and seat of an independence movement which predates the Spanish-American War. Without bothering to notify the island's governor or police, the FBI, the Attorney General and U.S. military units confiscated a left-wing journal's production equipment, and arrested a daily newspaper reporter. Disguised as a round-up of terrorists, the raid was clearly "an attack on the movement and the concept of independence, and not anything else."<sup>318</sup>

On the mainland, the trend toward protecting the public from information that might embarrass the government has been greatly accelerated. Entire realms of information have been "classified" out of sight. In 1986 "the government developed a new category of 'sensitive information' to further restrict public access to a broad range of unclassified data. This makes possible an extraordinary government censoring apparatus that could restrict access to even non-government commercial data bases, censor the information they contain, and develop programs designed to reveal who is using a data base and what data they are calling up."<sup>319</sup>

The FBI has been asking the nation's librarians to spy and report on their patrons' reading habits. Reading materials have been infected by CIA/Defense Department program

which deliberately releases misleading, incomplete and false information; this is somehow supposed to prevent other nations from acquiring news of U.S. technological advances.

Expanding on a gag order already applied to former CIA agents, the Reaganites instructed their president to sign a 1983 executive order which prevents 127,500 federal employees from making "sensitive" information available to the public for the rest of their lives. Those suspected of violating the directive may be subjected to lie detector tests; anyone who refuses is subject to "adverse consequences". The effect of this executive order is to give the administration "total control... preventing all of those in government most qualified to contradict official views and disprove official statements from disclosing any information which might do so."<sup>320</sup>

An amendment to the perversely named Privacy Act authorizes the detailed scrutiny of any citizen "suspected of being in the employ of a foreign power". For that vague purpose, the FBI now has unlimited access to the financial records and telephone logs of anyone on whom its arbitrary eye alights. There is no provision for monitoring the agency's use of its powerful new tool.<sup>321</sup>

## **KGB peaceniks**

The ever-unpopular "peace activists" are certain to remain prominent subjects of FBI curiosity. There are warehouses of files on these suspicious characters. They include Physicians for Social Responsibility, recipients of the 1985 Nobel Peace Prize, who have been under investigation since at least 1967. According to an assistant director of the agency, "The FBI was interested in determining whether or not the physicians' group was a Soviet front." Elucidates another official, "The FBI would be remiss if we didn't periodically check on the KGB and the peace movement."<sup>322</sup>

Congress has always been eager to assist in such projects. Toward the end of the Vietnam War, a congressional committee published a list of potentially dangerous "radical speakers" at colleges and universities. They included such

terrifying personalities as Dr. Benjamin Spock, the noted pediatrician, Rev. John C. Bennett, former president of the Union Theological Seminary, poet John Ciardi, criminologist Jerome Skolnick, and Nobel laureate Linus Pauling.<sup>323</sup>

One of the most far-reaching efforts of Congress to protect the nation from dangerous ideas was passage of the McCarran-Walter Act in 1952. It provided for the denial of entry visas to any foreigner whose "past, current or expected beliefs, statements or associations" suggested the possibility of leftist tendencies. Among those who have been honored by denial of entry under the act are: Pierre Trudeau in his wayward youth, i.e. before he became Prime Minister of Canada; Hortensia, widow of Salvador Allende; and authors Graham Greene, Farley Mowat, Carlos Fuentes and Gabriel Garcia Marquez.<sup>324</sup>

Other potential dupes of the KGB were born here, and no one has found a way to get rid of them yet. This category of suspect includes two Roman Catholic Bishops, Raymond Hunthausen of Seattle and Thomas Gumbleton of Detroit, who have been memorialized with FBI files containing over 165 pages. Hunthausen has been active in the anti-nuclear movement. Gumbleton is a leading critic of the administration's Central America policy.

As the foregoing indicates, the Reaganites have been consistently hostile to U.S. clerics who dare to question administration policies. The prevailing attitude was clearly stated by a high-ranking State Department official: "Religious persons should not use the credibility they enjoy to market their personal philosophical and political beliefs."<sup>325</sup> Needless to say, the State Department has not seen fit to apply this standard of comely reticence to Cardinal Obando and other pro-*contra* theologians of Nicaragua's Roman Catholic hierarchy.

## **Disaster planning**

The Federal Emergency Management Agency was established in 1978 to co-ordinate federal responses to natural disasters and nuclear wars. The Reagan administration has expanded that concept to include any major outbreak of public opposition to its policies in Central America and elsewhere.

Plans drafted by an official of the National Security Agency in 1984 call for the imposition of martial law "in the event of nuclear war, widespread internal dissent, or national opposition to a U.S. military invasion abroad." It has been reported that FEMA has already received from the FBI a list of at least 12,000 citizens to be rounded up in case of trouble.<sup>326</sup>

A former CIA agent explains what that could mean: "If your name or organization is put on this list, they could kick down your door and haul you away or kill you, without any due process of law, and search warrants, and trial by jury and all of that... The special action teams that will do the preemptive striking have already been created and trained in the Defense Department. They're building detention centers; there were eight kept in mothballs under the McLaren Act after World War II to detain aliens and dissidents in the next war.... They're building ten more...

"They wanted to do what President Reagan said many times, when he was governor [of California]. If he had been president, he said, during the Vietnam War, it would have been conducted differently, and the outcome would have been different. The dissidents wouldn't have been able to take to the streets and do the things they did. So, he's getting himself some laws, so that when he puts his troops in Nicaragua, he can take charge of the American people, and put them in jail and kick in their doors and kill them, if they don't like what he's doing."<sup>327</sup>

So far, there has been no invasion of Nicaragua and no round-up of dissidents for the waiting concentration camps. But other, less direct, methods have already been brought to bear on troublemakers. A "retired" CIA agent was assigned to dig up some dirt on John Kerry, the Vietnam veteran and junior senator from Massachusetts who has been annoyingly persistent in his pursuit of the CIA-*contras*' drug smuggling operation and other scandals.

Representative Michael Barnes of Maryland was singled out for special mistreatment during the 1986 election campaign, for two reasons: he had become an effective leader of

House opposition to the CIA-*contras*; and most of his colleagues lived within broadcast range of his district, and were therefore exposed almost daily to the well-financed attack against him. What they witnessed was one of the most vicious political hatchet jobs in recent memory, carried out by a right-wing organization at White House direction and, very likely, with funds generated by the illegal operations set up by the Reaganites for such purposes.

In a series of ridiculous, but apparently effective full-page newspaper ads and TV spots, Barnes was vilified as a dupe of the communists, and graphically associated with such arch-enemies of the U.S. as Muammar Khadaffi and Fidel Castro. Barnes was defeated, and his fate made a deep impression on the stout hearts of Congress.<sup>328</sup>

### **Mysterious burglaries**

Fame and power are not prerequisites for such attentions from the Reaganites. After testifying about CIA-*contra* drug running, human rights abuses, and financial corruption, a former CIA mercenary was accused of threatening the life of the president. The phony accusation was ordered by an official of the president's National Security Council, and it qualified the tattletale for investigation and harassment by the FBI.

Among other things, his personal papers were searched. Those papers happened to be filed at the offices of a private research group headed by the Carter administration's ambassador to El Salvador, a scathing critic of Reaganite policy in Central America. His is just one of 60 groups opposing administration policy which have experienced mysterious burglaries of their offices. Typically, nothing of value to a thief has been taken, but membership lists and other papers have been stolen or disturbed. It is a loud echo of the Counter-Intelligence Program (COINTELPRO) aimed at the Vietnam peace movement by the FBI and CIA.<sup>329</sup>

So much of the mail between Nicaragua and the United States has been opened, delayed and "lost" that the Interna-

tional Postal Union has adopted special measures to increase chances of unmolested delivery.

U.S. citizens returning from Nicaragua are searched and questioned at a disproportionate rate by customs officials alerted to their subversive potential.

### Nursing suspicion

A typical case is that of the nurse who donated eight months of her services to Nicaraguan hospitals. Upon returning to the land of the free, customs officials seized her address book, reading materials and personal notes; they also read personal letters she was carrying to U.S. citizens. The explanation: "Anything against the government, our government, is subversive."

That description apparently applied to two books, *Sandinó's Daughters* and *Women, Resistance and the Revolution*. The inspector explained that books about "revolutionary and female leaders in a revolutionary context, leaders fighting for causes" were potentially dangerous.<sup>330</sup>

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*"Every intelligence agency must at some point become a ministry of propaganda. It has to revive and freshen the fears that nourish the very life of the agency.... The classic example is, of course, Hoover's FBI. Hoover would regularly insist that the Reds were getting stronger and stronger...."*

*"The trick was to keep alive and renew mass fear of Communism, but at the same time to reassure the frightened citizenry that the Bureau had the subversives well in hand.... We have been victims, then, of deliberate, institutionalized manipulation and propaganda for a very long time...."*

*"I am doubtful about the possibility that Congress will do anything about this intelligence structure. Intelligence agencies survive through what I call the 'Barbarossa syndrome'. When things get bad, they retire to the cave and wait for conditions to improve. Then they emerge and continue their business at the old stand. "*

— Frank Donner<sup>330</sup>



To combat such dangers, the FBI has continued a venerable tradition by paying agents to infiltrate “subversive” groups. A naturalized citizen from El Salvador has testified that the FBI paid him and others to collect information on hundreds of “liberal” groups from 1981-84, in a program ordered by the President’s National Security Council.

The surveillance program first targeted the Committee in Solidarity with the People of El Salvador (CISPES), and was soon expanded to ensnare hundreds of organizations, including the National Council of Churches, the Maryknoll Sisters, the United Automobile Workers, the American Federation of Teachers, the National Education Association, OxFam America, Amnesty International, the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, and the Sisters of Mercy.

One product of the extensive spying project was a “terrorist photo album” which included the Bishop of Cuernavaca in Mexico, a former U.S. ambassador to El Salvador, numerous priests and nuns, and two U.S. senators.

The program may also have been used to seal the fates of refugees picked up in the U.S. for deportation back to El Salvador. The FBI exchanged information on those unfortunates with El Salvador’s murderous National Guard; the agent who turned them in “is tormented by the possibility that he may have fingered people who have since died or disappeared”.<sup>332</sup>

At home, “FBI agents investigated nuns, union members, and college students; checked up on church forums and Knights of Columbus dinners; photographed protesters at peaceful rallies; and distributed what they deemed offending articles from student newspapers and People magazine.”

Wiretaps were placed on peace activists, and right-wing groups were asked to report on “leftist and liberal activists”. Thousands of demonstrators were photographed, as were the license-plate numbers of citizens attending meetings. This information was distributed to other government agencies, and added to the FBI’s bulging files.<sup>333</sup>

This sort of institutional abuse was supposed to have been outlawed by Congress after the scandals of the Nixon admini-

stration. But the FBI, CIA, DIA, Army and other government spookeries have finessed the restrictions by intoning the “national security” password — i.e. suspicious individuals and groups must be investigated because they might be fronts for or dupes of A Foreign Power.

## Neutrality Act

That’s how this most recent mass surveillance of peaceniks was rationalized by the FBI Director who ordered it. William Webster, who has since moved on to the CIA, said that it all began when the Bureau received a tip that CISPES might be violating the U.S. Neutrality Act, by providing military assistance to Salvadoran guerillas. (Apparently, the FBI has not received similar tips on the hundreds of groups and individuals who have openly acknowledged violating the Neutrality Act in support of the CIA-*contras* in Nicaragua.) The thousands of other individuals and groups caught up in the investigation, he soothed, were all somehow connected with CISPES.

The plausibility of such bland assertions is somewhat compromised by FBI documents that have since come to light. One sounds the alarm that, “It is imperative at this time to formulate some plan of action against CISPES and, specifically, against individuals who defiantly display their contempt for the U.S. government by making speeches and propagandizing their cause.”<sup>334</sup> The “plan of action” continued for years after it became evident that CISPES was not violating the Neutrality Act.

In fact, the crusade against opponents of the Reaganites’ Central American policy was so blatantly political that several FBI field agents balked at participating in it.

The head of the Denver office went so far as to admonish his superiors that, “In spite of attempts by the bureau to clarify guidelines and goals for this investigation, the field is still not sure of how much seemingly legitimate political activity can be monitored.”<sup>335</sup>

In a rare display of integrity, a 21-year veteran of the FBI refused to investigate two Chicago peace groups on the grounds that such action would violate constitutional protections: "I believe that in the past, members of our government have used the FBI to quell dissent, sometimes where the dissent was warranted. I feel history will judge this to be another such instance." He was immediately fired, and stripped of his pension.<sup>336</sup>

A principal target of the Reagan administration's domestic spy effort has been the sanctuary movement. Operated primarily by mainline churches and other religious groups, this modern equivalent of the slavery era's Underground Railway provides clandestine shelter to Latin America refugees. Most have fled from the horrors of Guatemala and El Salvador, and have ample reason to fear for their lives if they return.

Under U.S. law, they qualify for status as political refugees. But since the Reaganites have invested so much political capital in the proposition that the refugees' homelands are models of democratic virtue, very few of them have been permitted to remain legally in the United States.

Those who provide sanctuary are, therefore, obnoxious to the current administration. A series of tenacious federal prosecutions of sanctuary workers has yielded several convictions. One of those convicted has been adopted by Amnesty International as a prisoner of conscience.

*Beneath a portrait of martyred  
Luisa Amanda Espinoza,  
indignant inmates of the  
"totalitarian dungeon"  
protest against CIA-  
contra aggression.*



*Jaime Perozo*

## Ronald the Vigilant

The foregoing summary merely scratches the surface of a lengthy tradition of repression and brutality in the United States. But it should serve to demonstrate that even a relatively “advanced” nation can be made to appear irredeemably wicked by focusing on the most negative aspects of its past and present. That method is, of course, the anti-intellectual basis of the Reaganites’ preposterous moral arrogance toward Nicaragua.

Some abuses of human rights and civil liberties in the U.S. occurred long ago, some within memory of the living, and some persist to this day. It seems likely that many will continue well into the future.

As though to dispel any doubts, the Leader of the Free World recently confided to his favorite newspaper, the Moon empire’s *Washington Times*, that his countrymen have lately relaxed their vigilance against subversion, most likely as a result of growing commie influence in Congress and the mass media: “There is a disinformation, we know, worldwide,” explained President Reagan, “and that disinformation is very sophisticated and very successful, including with a great many in the media and the press in America...”

“Remember, there was once a Congress in which they had a committee that would investigate even one of their own members if it was believed that that person had communist involvement or communist leanings.

“Well, they’ve done away with those committees. That shows the success of what the Soviets were able to do in this country with making it unfashionable to be anti-communist.”<sup>337</sup>

*Actor Ronald Reagan’s career as an ardent anti-communist, which eventually carried him to the White House, began in earnest during the great red-scare that replaced World War II as a source of external enemies.*



## COMPLEXITIES OF NICARAGUAN SOCIETY

White House propaganda has remained true to its numerous antecedents by focusing solely on the shortcomings of the Sandinistas, while ignoring their many achievements and clearly honorable intentions. It has deliberately oversimplified the complex social reality of Nicaragua, hacking it into false dichotomies such as church vs. state, freedom vs. repression, democracy vs. totalitarianism — in short, good vs. evil.

Ironically, the word from the White House on Nicaragua resembles nothing so much as the impression one gets of the United States from a daily reading of *Pravda*. It appears that the two superpowers have much in common, after all.

The following summary attempts to outline major interests and organizations in Nicaragua. Obviously, there is a great deal of overlap among categories; a Catholic may also belong to a labor union, a political party, etc. At best, this outline can only suggest the range of interests, and not their distribution among the population; Nicaragua lacks an effective statistical apparatus, and remains comparatively innocent of opinion polling. Most of the issues touched on here are discussed in greater detail elsewhere in these pages.

### Political parties

The national election of 1984 remains the best available index of political affiliation. The FSLN received 67 percent of the votes in an election certified by numerous international observers — including many from NATO allies of the United States — as comparatively honest and efficient, and as having offered a broad range of political choices. Approximately 70 percent of eligible voters participated, which compares favorably with the 53 percent that turned out for the 1984 U.S. election. Thus, Daniel Ortega's "mandate" from eligible voters is proportionately twice that of Ronald Reagan's.

There is little doubt, however, that popular support for the Sandinistas has declined since 1984, partly from the disappointment which inevitably overtakes the inflated hopes that greet all revolutions. But it is the destruction and unending hardship of the CIA destabilization campaign which probably accounts for most of the attrition. Exactly how much support it has cost the Sandinistas probably won't be known until the national elections scheduled for 1990.

In the meantime, there are many indications of continued faith in the revolution. A Jesuit priest from the United States reported in 1987 that, "Eighty percent of the people may be complaining about rising prices, growing shortages, maddeningly inadequate transportation, and so on. But according to studies done by the Sociology Department at the Jesuits' Central American University, the majority of the people see these problems as attributable to the war, the economic embargo, the drop in prices for Nicaragua's exports, and other causes beyond the control of the government... which still has the support of the majority. That is clear in our studies, and also in our experience with local-level Christian communities, which can mobilize thousands of Nicaraguans in public expressions of support for their government and rejection of U.S. aggression."<sup>338</sup>

As a result of the 1984 vote, the FSLN holds 61 of the National Assembly's 96 seats. Two seats are held by each of the three "leftist" parties — Socialist, Communist, and Marxist-Leninist. They represent small constituencies of workers and peasants, with a combined vote-share of less than four percent. Their general critique of the government is that it has sold out the revolution to "bourgeois interests" with, among other things, controls on wages and strikes, and a land reform program which they regard as inadequate to the needs of the peasantry.

The elected center-right bloc also consists of three parties, but their positions are much less homogeneous than those of the left. The largest is the Conservative Democratic Party with fourteen seats, followed by the Independent Liberals with nine, and the Popular Social Christians with six.

The Conservative Democrats have asserted that the land reform program has unnecessarily promoted class conflict, and have called for greater privatization of the economy. It is strongly opposed to "U.S. aggression against Nicaragua".

The Independent Liberals have been in a state of confusion since the U.S. instructed its presidential candidate to withdraw from the 1984 election process; he was removed as party leader in late 1987. The party's right wing has called for a U.S. invasion, while its center-left opposes CIA-*contra* aid. The factional conflict had still not been resolved as of early 1988, and the party's program remained in dispute.

The Popular Social Christians support the revolution, but have called for greater worker control through co-operatives, and a larger role in the economy for private enterprise.

Between them, the center-right bloc accounted for 29% of the 1984 votes. Although they attracted some urban and rural workers, their main strength comes from professionals, farmers and business people with small-to-modest resources.

So much for the elected opposition which, as far as the U.S. is concerned, does not exist. These parties, which tested their popularity in the 1984 election, have been almost completely ignored by mainstream U.S. news media. On those rare occasions when they are mentioned, it is usually to be dismissed as the "pro-Sandinista opposition", or some such formulation.

One of the Reaganites' most impressive marketing triumphs has been to establish the *Coordinadora Democratica* as the true political opposition. That was the name given to the three parties that followed U.S. instructions to withdraw from the 1984 election in order to discredit the outcome. In reality, as they well understood, the only thing against them was the vast majority of the voting public. Since they had no hope of earning political influence, their masters in the White House elected to use them as an instrument of propaganda, and the U.S. news media have co-operated at every step.

The *Coordinadora* represents the wealthiest, most reactionary landowners and business interests. It is essentially the political front of COSEP and the CIA-*contras*. One indication of

its popularity is the turnout at the August, 1987, open house for its new Managua headquarters — about 200 people showed up. They tried again a few months later, with a rally attended by a contingent of right-wing U.S. congressman; that was a relative triumph, attracting some 500 people.

An instructive comparison is provided by the June, 1986, re-enactment of the FSLN's tactical retreat from Managua to Masaya during the final stages of the insurrection in 1979. For that far more arduous celebration, 50,000 people joined in the 20-mile overnight march. A November 1987 Sandinista rally in Managua drew over 100,000.

Of course, such details hold little or no interest for the U.S. mainstream press, which has preferred instead to concentrate on the fiery rhetoric of *Coordinadora* leaders. Their ravings have been both augmented and complicated since the August 1987 Central America peace initiative touched off a chaotic re-shuffling of political alliances. By early 1988, there were at least fourteen political parties jockeying for advantage in the fluid aftermath of the peace agreement. It has resulted in some odd contortions; the Communist Party, for instance, wound up in the same political bed as the extremely right-wing *Coordinadora*.

But these maneuvers have greatly enhanced the elected opposition's prestige in the United States. Now that they are associated with the *Coordinadora* and other unrepresentative bodies, the White House and the mainstream press treat them as champions of democracy.

Oblivious to their disharmonies and slender constituencies, U.S. news media refer approvingly to the "fourteen opposition parties" as though their mere aggregation somehow confers legitimacy. After all, the Sandinistas have only one party, but the opposition has *fourteen*. This somehow suggests to the mainstream press that the splintered opposition must therefore represent the true will of the people.

More discerning observers are not so sure. According to information provided by a Jesuit research institute, "Since the Central American peace initiative, none of the opposition



party rallies has drawn more than 3000 people, and most have drawn less than 2000, even though the parties have bussed people in from other cities." Adds a former CIA-*contra* leader who returned to Nicaragua under amnesty in late 1987, "You know, the other parties [all those opposed to the FSLN] can't even fill two blocks.... They are minority parties, parties in name only; they don't have a constituency."<sup>339</sup>

## Churches

Nicaragua is approximately 85 percent Roman Catholic, with the balance of the population distributed among some fifty Protestant denominations. Jews number less than one hundred. Agnostics and atheists are not much in evidence.

The Catholic Church has been sharply divided on the question of support for the Sandinista revolution. Members of the "popular church", including many priests and nuns, allied themselves with the FSLN during the insurrection.

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*"A priest says the Sandinistas who control Nicaragua are trying to crush the Church; a nun says she found God in the revolution. One industrialist says the government stifles free enterprise, another claims the revolution has been good for business.... The cast of characters might be from one of those Renaissance canvases that seem to include everyone in Florence. The Jinotega coffee grower who pays the state more taxes than it requires because he wants the country strong for the anticipated U.S. invasion. The union organizer from Rivas, giving the revolution credit for rescuing Nicaragua from serfdom. The banana plantation owner who sees in the revolution the death of democracy. The chemical executive who sees the Sandinistas as Nicaragua's determined greenhorn saviors.... The textile worker whose misery under the old regime has been transformed into something beyond hope; he talks of a revolutionary sunrise that gives him and his family anticipations as fond as their memories are bitter."*

— Peter Davis<sup>340</sup>

Their support, which is based on the precepts of liberation theology, remains very strong. There is a great deal of overlap between the popular church and other revolutionary organizations, particularly the Sandinista Defense Committees.

The church hierarchy, led by Cardinal Obando, has been opposed to the Sandinista government from the start. Obando says his opposition is aimed at the "totalitarian tendencies" which he and other members of the pro-*contra* opposition discern. His critics in the popular church argue, however, that Obando is locked in reactionary commitment to Nicaragua's traditional elites, and that he resents losing the greater influence he enjoyed during the Somoza years.

Whatever his motives, Obando and the majority of his bishops have harshly criticized many aspects of the Sandinista revolution, while finding nothing to commend it. They have also associated themselves openly with the CIA-*contras*, whose well-documented brutality they have refused to acknowledge, even going so far as to blame it on the Sandinistas.

Although statistics on the schism in the church are non-existent, it is evident that large portions of the middle and upper classes have cast their fate with the cardinal. Many of the nation's poor also gravitate to the hierarchy out of devout tradition and an ingrained suspicion of anything labeled "communist". Doubtless there are many who remain neutral, siding neither with the hierarchy nor the popular church.

But there are clear indications that a majority subscribes to the philosophy of the popular church. There is widespread loathing of the CIA-*contras*, whose cause the hierarchy supports, and the cardinal's denunciations of military conscription have been ignored by the 80 percent of draft-age youths who have chosen to submit to it.

As for the priests, "Most of them are with us", states Foreign Minister Miguel D'Escoto of his clerical colleagues. His faith is bolstered by the fact that all but a handful of Nicaragua's 75 Jesuits, the largest contingent of priests from any single order, have been actively supporting the revolution.

Support for the revolution is also strong among Protestant denominations. Most of them are represented in CEPAD, the Evangelical Committee for Aid to Development in Nicaragua, which has repeatedly testified to the revolution's climate of religious freedom and its genuine efforts to assist the most disadvantaged.

The major exception to Protestant support for the revolution has been the Moravian Church, which has been accorded a significance far in excess of its reach due to the CIA's success in focusing international attention on the Miskito Indians. Early conflicts between the government and the Miskitos led some Moravian ministers to denounce the Sandinistas. But that criticism has diminished as relations have improved in recent years; progress toward regional autonomy has converted many former Moravian critics into supporters.

Protestants in general have benefited from the Catholic Church's loss of quasi-official status, which may be another source of Cardinal Obando's displeasure. Membership in Protestant churches has grown by nearly 500% since 1979.

## **Labor unions**

Approximately 88% of organized labor supports the government. The principal associations:

- Sandinista Workers Confederation, with a broad base in manufacturing, construction, transport, and commerce; 112,700 members.
- Association of Farm Workers; 43,000
- General Confederation of Labor – Independent; 17,200
- Confederation for Action and Trade Unity; 2000
- Nicaraguan Health Workers Federation; 19,000
- National Union of Public Employees; 45,000.

Only two labor organizations have consistently opposed the government. The Nicaraguan Workers Confederation has a

*“The trade union movement in Nicaragua is young, dynamic and expanding. An appropriate analogy is to the early organizing drives of the CIO during the 1930s. Nicaraguan workers eagerly joined trade unions in large numbers during the revolution. Under these circumstances of rapid growth, rivalry between competing unions is intense and, at times, violent....*

*“The relationship between the two largest pro-Sandinista unions, the Sandinista Workers Confederation (CST) and the Association of Farm Workers (ATC), and the government is not unlike that of the AFL-CIO and the Democratic Party.... Both the CST and the ATC opposed the government’s suspension of the right to strike. Yet, they accepted these restrictions as the necessary cost of fighting the war against the contras. Their attitudes were not dissimilar to those of the AFL-CIO in its acquiescence to the U.S. government’s request in World War II not to engage in strikes in order to assist the war effort.”*

— Report of U.S. labor lawyers<sup>342</sup>

small base in manufacturing, agriculture and commerce; it had 2700 members in 1984.

The Confederation of Trade Union Unity (CUS) was permitted to organize in many Somoza-owned businesses. It is now closely affiliated with the pro-*contra* business organization, COSEP, and has close links to the “AFL-CIA”; its membership in 1984 was 1700. Because or in spite of the fact that CUS represents less than one percent of organized labor and is associated with the CIA-*contras*, the U.S. mainstream press refers to it as the only legitimate union association in Nicaragua.<sup>341</sup>

## Mass media

There are three main daily newspapers. *Barricada* is the official Sandinista newspaper; its editor is Carlos Chamorro, son of the murdered patriarch and former editor of *La Prensa*, Pedro Joaquin Chamorro. *La Prensa* is now fronted by Pedro’s widow, Violetta, with funding and direction from the United

States; it is associated with COSEP and the CIA-*contras*. *El Nuevo Diario* was founded as a co-operative by over 80 percent of the staff who worked at *La Prensa* until it was taken over by the CIA. *El Nuevo Diario* is edited by Pedro Joaquín's brother, Xavier Chamorro, and supports government policies. But it frequently criticizes incompetence and corruption; the relationship is analogous to that of the *New York Times* with the U.S. government.

Probably more important to the majority of the population, with its marginal literacy, are the many radio stations. Approximately 45 broadcast from within Nicaragua, and many others from Costa Rica and Honduras. The latter include the powerful Voice of America and numerous CIA-*contra* stations that emit a steady stream of anti-Sandinista propaganda.

Anti-Sandinista messages are also a staple of *Radio Católica*, operated by the church hierarchy, which refuses access to members of the popular church. Some fifteen local stations are organized into a network similar to the U.S. National Public Radio system. The Sandinistas have two stations at their disposal, and there are about 25 independents.

Observers have noted that censorship of radio broadcasts is less thorough than that applied to newspapers, and that all political viewpoints — short of open encouragement of the CIA-*contras* — have ample opportunity to be heard.

## **Business organizations**

The most influential *outside* the country is the Higher Council of Economic Enterprise (COSEP). Its influence derives not from its numbers or its contribution to Nicaraguan society, but rather from its usefulness to the CIA. It functions as an internal front of the CIA-*contras* and as a reliable source of anti-Sandinista quotes for the U.S. mainstream press.

Most of the largest plantation owners are represented by the National Union of Agricultural Producers, which is very annoyed with Sandinista land reform policies. It has about 4000 members, many of whom also belong to COSEP.

*“Well over half of the economy is in private hands. Big businesses, some amazingly big, continue to thrive in spite of all the problems. One example is the Pellas family. They are the largest sugar cane growers in Central America... [They] produce some 90% of the rum and close to half the beer consumed in the country, are one of the main machinery importers, used to be the dealers for General Motors (no GM cars can be imported under the U.S. trade embargo) and, as Toyota dealers, handle most of the cars being imported now.... As long as they obey the laws and don’t overtly work against the revolution, it doesn’t seem to matter how rich they are.”*

— U.S. teacher living in Nicaragua<sup>343</sup>

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The National Union of Farmers and Cattlemen has about 124,000 members, representing 60 percent of the nation’s total production. It supports Sandinista agricultural and land reform policies, and is therefore seldom mentioned by U.S. news media.

### **Mass organizations**

Voluntary organizations of workers, professionals, students, women, neighborhood residents, etc. have been the principal vehicles of grassroots democracy since the first days of the revolution. Although not formally affiliated with the FSLN, they provide vital channels of communication with the government — in much the same way that, say, the World Anti-Communist League communes with the Reagan administration.

By far the most important organizations are the Sandinista Defense Committees which provide vital security and social services to 15,000 neighborhoods. Nearly one-quarter of the populace participates in these committees; about 60 percent of the members are women.

Women and their needs are the *raison d’être* of the Luisa Amanda Espinoza Women’s Association (AMNLAE) which has about 85,000 members. It lobbies for improvements in the

living and working conditions of women, and has also been instrumental in the success of national health and education programs.

Other organizations include: the Sandinista Youth Organization, whose 35,000 members have donated substantial free labor to education, health and agricultural projects; the Union of Nicaraguan Journalists; Popular Education Collectives; the National Association of Nicaraguan Teachers; Centers of Popular Culture; Sandinista Popular Militias; Revolutionary Christian Students; National Association of Engineers and Architects; and the Mothers of the Martyrs and Heroes.