

# Of Nicaragua

## Nicaraguan Reforms Give Hope

"People in Nicaragua who had lost hope seem to have regained a sense of direction and self-confidence from this (Sandinistan) government, despite its obvious deficiencies and defects," said Sol M. Linowitz, former American ambassador to the Organization of American States.

This new hope can be attributed to the widespread success of social reforms despite the destroyed country and \$1.6 billion debt inherited from the Somoza regime. Since 1979, illiteracy has decreased from 50 percent to 12 percent. Its award-winning health program has vaccinated more than one million people, eliminated polio, decreased cases of malaria by 50 percent, decreased infant mortality by 33 percent, and doubled health care centers.

Through land reform, more than 40,000 families own land for the first time. Agricultural production for export and domestic consumption has increased. According to the Overseas Development Council, the "physical quality of life" index has risen 25 percent, compared to an average rise of 9 percent in the other Central American countries.

wartime. Ironically, some of La Prensa's editors oppose U. S. aid to the contras as malevolent intervention in Nicaraguan affairs. If America were facing the same opposition Nicaragua now faces, the proportionate losses would be as severe as the deaths of the entire population of New York City.

The contra armies were formed by Somoza shortly after his regime was overthrown. Under Reagan, the United States became the principal coordinator of contra efforts, including direct participation like CIA bombing of oil facilities and mining of harbors. A former contra leader resigned in protest of U. S. influence. "You never hear the U. S. press refer to the contras as terrorists," says LaFever, "but that's all they are." The contras concentrate their attacks on economic and human targets. The CIA published a manual instructing contras on terrorist tactics. LaFever laments that "Americans hardly knew what was happening and were not very concerned so 'el pobre' were being brutally terrorized with no protection and no hope."

"Then Americans began going to Nicaragua. They made corn tortillas, they hoed gardens and they buried the dead. They see the massacred. They live with the aftermath. Suddenly, these Americans had no more apathy toward Nicaragua. They began to speak and campaign for el pobre."

"The Sandinistan party isn't perfect," says LaFever, "no political system is." But the quality of life has undeniably improved under the Sandinistas.

Contra terrorism, says LaFever, jeopardizes this progress. They attack teachers and community leaders, precisely the people who are most desperately needed to help "el pobre," she adds. She describes a typical scene. A community is slated for construction of a school. Hope abounds as construction begins on their first-ever school building. Prayer is infused with spirit as people experience cooperation for mutual benefit. The contras come and explode the school.

LaFever feels that a peace treaty, as proposed by Nicaragua, is the only solution to end the carnage. It prohibits foreign military participation in Central America, including Soviet and Cuban advisors. The U. S. opposes the treaty on the grounds that it does not guarantee internal "democratic" reforms in Nicaragua. The treaty would also prohibit U. S. military aid to El Salvador which has kept the current centrist regime in power.

### You Can Help

LaFever discusses her stay at St. Andrews. "While I was here, I was so pleased to find so many people who cared. In Chapel Hill, they would

have the same number of people show up to hear my story, but they have thousands of students. I spend so much of my time relating the story of Nicaragua, I had little time to suggest ways in which people could become involved."

At a recent Pax in Terra meeting LaFever outlined some means of involvement. Some students are going to participate in a "Tar Heels for Wheels" walk-a-thon to raise money to renovate old cars to use as ambulances in Nicaragua. For more information about Witness for Peace one can write Witness for Peace, 1414 Woodland Drive, Durham, NC 27701.

However dramatic LaFever's visit to St. Andrews may have been, hers are not the only eyes that have seen the innocent die horrible deaths; hers are not the only ears that have heard the cries of people that mourn; hers is not the only voice that asks "Why?" here is not the only dream that that the Nicaraguans may live in peace; and hers is not the only conviction that Americans have an obligation to act on behalf of "el pobre." She says, "the Americans in Nicaragua have become the people's voice and their hope. Their stories can be told and their anguish can be heard."

Photo by Inanna LaFever



"El Pobre"



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