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Nicaragua

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ding to the Sandinistas. Cardenal disagrees, saying that those who speak out are "penalized heavily" by the government. Cardenal offers no proof, but neither do the Sandinistas offer much proof to show that the dissatisfied are able to say what is on their minds.

People in the streets will speak out against the government, but also are reluctant to identify themselves. A number did not even want to be photographed.

One of the people who didn't want a name published was a prostitute who lived near what was Managua's city center until the earthquake in 1972 crumbled the area. The woman also refused to be photographed.

Ironically, at the same time the prostitute in downtown Managua was refusing to be photographed, several Oregon women from the tour were snapping pictures of former prostitutes at a Sandinista prostitution "reform" house.

The "reform" house is located in Leon, a small city about 30 miles outside of Managua. Prostitutes are taken there rather than serving time in jail. They are taught sewing skills so that they can work as seamstresses once they leave the reform house.

'THERE IS NOTHING HERE'

The prostitute in Managua said that because prostitution is illegal in Nicaragua, she could very easily end up in jail or harassed by members of neighborhood civil defense groups. She did not appear to be aware of the reform house and was convinced she would be jailed if she were caught.

The woman fit the stereotypical description of a prostitute, with a tight black jumpsuit, heavily made-up face, and a saucy disposition. She lives, with her two children, somewhere near the center of Managua.

She says the quality of life has not increased for all poor Nicaraguans. Because she has no job skills, and very little education, the woman has no choice but to make a living on the streets.

With very little interest in politics or the government, the woman says the Sandinista officials are as dangerous to her as was former Pres. Anastasio Somoza.

She wonders why anyone would travel to Nicaragua, especially from the United States. "There is nothing here," she says.

'PEOPLE TEND TO DISAPPEAR'

There also is opposition to the Sandinistas from a human rights

group established under Somoza's government. Human rights violations are not as many under the Sandinistas, but "generalized infringement" upon liberties, especially freedom of expression, still occurs, according to the NCPC (the English translation means "permanent commission for human rights in Nicaragua").

"People tend to disappear," says Marta Baltodano, the national coordinator of the NCPC. She adds there were 30 deaths that went unexplained in 1982 and that there is "reasonable suspicion to believe the government was involved." So far this year, there have been 11 unaccountable deaths, she says.

All of the 11 deaths unaccounted for happened to people who had criticized the Sandinista government, says Baltodano.

Up until 1980, Amnesty International, a worldwide human rights watchdog organization, refused to accept the statistics from NCPC. Now, because the group has better documentation, Amnesty International accepts the statistics, Baltodano says.

CPDH vs. CPPDH

But Baltodano says a bigger concern than Amnesty International was a government campaign to discredit the group by claiming it had ties to the contra guerrillas. The government also claimed CIA control of the group. Baltodano flatly denies those allegations.

The Sandinista government also went ahead and formed its own human rights commission, which yields the acronym "CPPDH," suspiciously similar to the CPDH. The official Sandinista commission is financed by the government, while CPDH is funded through private sources consisting mostly of religious and peace organizations.

But Mary Hartman, a U.S. nun in Nicaragua for the past 23 years who works with the human rights organization, says the CPDH is not entirely accurate in its reports, and that it was formed by Somoza and still follows the influence Somoza had.

The Sandinista government brings up another point. They admit some human rights violations have occurred, such as resettlement of Miskito Indians, against the will of the Miskitos, after heavy fighting on the Atlantic seaboard.

But, the Sandinistas stress, the violations have been far less severe and not nearly as often as they occurred under Somoza.



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