

Beyond revolution: A new unified Central America

By Thomas Brom

Managua, Nicaragua (PNS) -- Less than a year after nationalist guerrillas forced Anastasio Somoza into exile, domino theories preoccupy the thinking of both U.S. and Nicaraguan officials here. But the Sandinista view envisions a return to Central American unity -- not the facturing of regional stability so feared in Washington.

"This is my dream," says Fr. Miguel d'Escoto, a U.S.-educated Maryknoll priest who is now the Nicaraguan foreign minister. He pulls a treasured keepsake from his pocket, a large silver coin from the short-lived Central American Republic of 1824-39.

"We are a common people with a common history," he says. "We regard ourselves as a single state in the process of reunification." D'Escoto's vision is as much religious as political, drawing on the long history of Catholic Church participation in the governments of Central America.

The first Central American Republic disintegrated under a British naval blockade of the Nicaraguan coast in the 1840s. As a result, Great Britain assumed control of the lucrative tobacco monopoly in the country. The strategy of divide and conquer eventually produced a chain of "banana republics" that was never entirely docile, but until now was easily exploited.

The new Sandinista government bears a keen sense of historical injustice, from conquering Spain and Britain as well as from more recent U.S. support for Latin American dictators. Yet the Central American internationalism that remains is truly remarkable. "We look upon the people of El Salvador as our brothers," d'Escoto says. "We are no longer Nicaraguans; we are Central Americans."

Free Nicaragua is preoccupied with the daily battles in El Salvador and Guatemala, guerrilla wars that could lead to Central American unity under a non-aligned banner in the 1980s. But d'Escoto also fears that the bloody civil war in El Salvador will mean the greater likelihood of direct U.S. action in Central America.

"What I fear is that the U.S. may be planning direct intervention in El Salvador," he says. "The result would be the vietnamization of Central America. We are six states but regard ourselves as one nation. We would respond."

U.S. ambassador to Nicaragua Lawrence Pezzullo dismisses the possibility of U.S. military involvement in the region. "The Scandinistas are unusually sensitive to the threat of invasion," he says from the heavily-guarded U.S. embassy in Managua.

Sandinista internationalism begins with the unique blend of Church and revolution that marks the new government. In a typical policy statement, minister of culture Fr. Ernesto Cardenal, a Trappist monk, says the recent assassination of Archbishop Oscar Romero was "a redemptive death for the people of El Salvador."

At the request of the Sandinista Front and the Nicaraguan government, the archbishop of Managua held a memorial mass for Romero in the Plaza of the revolution that drew 40,000 people on just eight hours notice. Priests working with peasants in El Salvador have so angered the right wing parties there that one leader recently promised on local television that "Jesus blood will flow."

Nicaraguan support for the revolutions next door, however, is more than spiritual. Young volunteers, or muchachos, have reportedly joined the fight in El Salvador, prompting the U.S. government to loan neighboring Honduras ten helicopters to patrol Nicaragua's northern border. At the same time, approximately 7,000 rightist troops of the former national Guard have base camps in Honduras and Guatemala and are ready to fight for the present military leaders in those countries.

"The presence of muchachos in El Salvador worries us," Pezzullo says. "The evidence is now very sketchy -- the secret session of Congress during debate of the Nicaraguan aid bill included a CIA briefing about the matter."

"Numbers are of no great concern at this time. What does concern us is whether this is a conscious action by the Nicaraguan government, or just national feelings of solidarity."

Central American solidarity led by Nicaragua apparently is the last thing Washington -- or the Vatican -- wants. Pezzullo's fears of a wider leftist revolution are echoed in the U.S. Congress, which attached 16 amendments to the Nicaraguan aid package. They include provisions terminating assistance if "Nicaragua is aiding, abetting, or supporting acts of violence or terrorism in other countries," or if Soviet or Cuban troops are stationed inside Nicaragua.

The U.S. also pledges to support other Central American governments against "terrorism and external subversion." Last month the House of Representatives added fuel to the controversy by eliminating \$5.5 million in military sales and training funds for Nicaragua by a wide margin.

"The vote on the amendment was no accident," said sponsor Rep. Robert Bauman (R-Md.). "We have got nothing back from all the aid we have poured into Nicaragua but bile."

Foreign minister d'Escoto is particularly resentful of the U.S. attitude toward the 2,000 Cuban teachers and doctors in Nicaragua. The \$75 million specifically forbids spending for any school "which would house, employ, or be made available to Cuban personnel."

"U.S. Congressmen think that someone else will now control us," d'Escoto responds. "But they are wrong. We are not a political harlot to be sold to the highest bidder." After months of lobbying in Washington for the much-needed assistance, several Nicaraguan officials now say their government may turn down the \$75 million if the amendments are not dropped.

"It is a mystery to me," sighs Fr. Fernando Cardenal, the Jesuit priest who leads the Nicaraguan Literacy Crusade, "how the U.S. can continue to make the same mistakes throughout Central America."

The Vatican too has tried to blunt the Nicaraguan drive to spread the Sandinista revolution throughout Central America. The seven Nicaraguan bishops who endorsed socialism in 1979 recently traveled to Rome for a meeting with the Pope. They were followed shortly by Fr. Ernesto Cardenal, who was summoned to explain himself. The Pope's recent directive against priests serving in public office may have been intended more for Nicaragua than for Congressman Drinan of Massachusetts.

Ambassador Pezzullo seems baffled by the Sandinista crusade drawing the Church and revolutionaries together in Latin America. "Certainly there is a Central American sense," he admits. "There should be closer ties, and reactivation of the Central American Common Market. But this should not be a unity of movements that might threaten some nations."

D'Escoto, fingering the old coin of the Central American Republic, says with Christian certainty, "At the level of the people, Central America is one. It is not yet one at the level of governments."

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Bits and Pieces

By Ruth Spencer

James A. Loving, son of Mrs. Vesia Loving and Mr. James Loving, is an architect at ABC studio in Hollywood, California. James, age 24, designs sets for movie stars.

Ronnie Herndon, Co-chairman of the Black United Front is attending a conference of the National Black United Front convention in Brooklyn, New York.

People are amused at Mrs. Jeanette Gate's statement before the Portland School Board that the district is 30 years behind in organization and specialization, and at the same time, pleading with the Board to retain the person responsible.

Ms. Freddye Petett will attend the Delta Sigma Theta Regional Conference in San Diego, June 26-28. Ms. Petett will also attend the National Urban League Energy Symposium, in Philadelphia, June 29 - July 1.

Mrs. Lois Renfro is recovering from Surgery at home. The Oregon Association of Colored Women Clubs is having its 68th annual meeting, June 28, 1980, 12:00 noon, at Mt. Olivet Baptist Church, 116 N.E. Schuyler.

Dr. Bill Little, Director of Black Studies, P.S.U., will attend a meeting of the National Council of Black Studies convening at Princeton, N. J., June 29th.

Council of black Studies convening at Princeton, N.J., June 29th. Mrs. Susie Patterson is vacationing with friends in Las Vegas.

Louis Plummer, a retired attorney, and Mrs. Lelia Watson, a retired teacher, were the house guests of Mr. Herman Plummer, their brother, while visiting their ill sister, Mrs. Lois Renfro.

The Reverend Herbert Daughtry, chairman of the New York Black United Front said, "The condition of our people have reached genocidal dimensions. In subtle and blatant ways, individually and collectively, we are being killed all day long."

Lynda Thompson, Santa Cruz, California is visiting her parents Mr. and Mrs. Vernon Thompson. Mrs. Beverer Anderson escaped the ash fall-out from Mt. St. Helens by vacationing in Durham, North Carolina where she visited relatives and friends. Mrs. Anderson teaches a fifth grade class at the Martin Luther King Primary School.

In a landmark ruling, Judge James H. Meredith ordered school officials of St. Louis Mo. to exchange students from the predominantly Black city with the predominantly white county and to desegregate the entire metropolitan region.



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