

METROPOLITAN

Textile union leader joins Nicaragua tour

by Robert Lothian

Nita Brueggeman worked her way up from a seamstress to become Northwest board manager of the Associated Clothing and Textile Workers Union.

ACTWU has been in the forefront of struggles for peace, justice and human rights since its beginnings as one of the founding unions of the Congress of Industrial Organizations, the CIO.

Brueggeman's own involvement reflects the tenor of her union. She campaigned for JFK as a teenager, she was active in her union's protests of U.S. involvement in Viet Nam, she lobbied for plant closure legislation in Oregon to make corporations more socially responsible, and last month, she attended the Democratic convention in San Francisco.

In September, she will take her first long trip outside the country to visit Nicaragua with a delegation of labor leaders from the West Coast.

It is not without some trepidation that she embarks on the trip, she said, because the war being waged by CIA-financed "contras"—coun-

terrevolutionaries—is escalating. A friend who visited the country recently witnessed a harbor bombing. "It's scary," she said.

But in spite of the danger, Brueggeman still feels the trip is necessary so that the labor leaders can investigate the facts and report to union members and the public when they return.

"I'm just interested in going down there and finding out something," she said. "I'm not willing to believe everything I read in the newspapers."

Brueggeman said the members of her union are aware of the exploitation and violence suffered by workers in Latin America, and Nicaragua under the dictator Somoza. Regarding what she called Reagan's "commie plot" theory of the cause of revolutions in Central America, "They're not buying into that one," she said of ACTWU members. "They're not supporting dictating to another government and they feel that our government is doing that in Nicaragua."

Many union members are concerned that their draft-age sons might



Nita Brueggeman
(Photo: Kris Altucher)

be sent to Central America, she added. "What ACTWU is saying is that we don't want any more Viet Nams," she said.

A Mondale supporter like many union people, Brueggeman feels adamantly that "We need to do everything we can to make sure that Reagan isn't re-elected. I think Reagan needs another Granada...and I don't want it to be Nicaragua or El Salvador."

Brueggeman hopes that the labor leaders who participate in the tour will contribute to a groundswell that

can move the national leadership of the AFL-CIO to take a stand on U.S. involvement in Nicaragua, which it hasn't done yet, she said.

"There's not a clear-cut policy towards Nicaragua right now among organized labor—it's a little flakey," she said.

The labor leaders will tour Nicaragua for nine days, visiting prisons, hospitals, factories, community organizations and church and elections officials. The unions involved are the United Farm Workers, the Communication Workers of America, Machinists, the American Federation of Teachers, the American Federation of State County and Municipal Employees, the United Food and Commercial Workers, Longshoremen, and the Service Employees International Union.

Brueggeman said besides "getting home safely," her concerns on the tour will be to learn about the involvement of Nicaraguan women's organizations in the trade union movement, and to look into the issues surrounding Nicaragua's upcoming elections.



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Herndon makes Libya trip

by Nathaniel Scott

Ron Herndon, one of Oregon's delegates to the National Democratic Convention, has been invited to participate in the fifteenth anniversary celebration of Libya's revolution. The invitation to the conference, which will be held in Tripoli, was extended by the International Preparatory Committee, Herndon said.

The International Preparatory Committee invited different American Blacks, peace groups and anti-nuclear representatives, Native Americans, and other groups to participate in the four-day conference, Herndon said. Four areas of concern will be addressed. One, we will be looking at Libya's progress; the strides and accomplishments it has made during the past 15 years; two, its non-alliance policy, the North African nation's firm commitment to remain an independent nation; three, the problems that exist between Libya and the United States; and four, what can be done to resolve those problems.

The conference is scheduled to be held the 28th through the 31st of this month, he said.

Herndon is the founding father of Oregon's chapter of the national Black United Front (BUF). He shares the local chapter's chairmanship with Rev. John H. Jackson, minister of the Mount Olivet Baptist Church.

In 1979, when the local chapter was formed, Herndon said, "Rev. Jackson and I were commissioned co-chairmen." Since, the two have served as spokespersons for the local BUF chapter. But what about Herndon? What about the man from Coffeerville, Kansas; the immigrant who came to Oregon to complete the last two years of a bachelors degree in history at Reed College? What about the man who set up (the now defunct) Black Student Union at Reed College? What about the often called activist, radical, non-printable name person, who among other things has been accused of "creating a confrontation between the BUF organization and the Portland School Board? What about the man?"

"When I left Coffeerville in 1965, I was not aware of the contributions Blacks had made towards America's history," Herndon said. At that time, he had no knowledge of the tremendous role Africa played in the civilization of man; nor the legacy of Africa which can be traced to the dawn of history. Herndon's knowledge and perspective of the world began to change when he migrated to the New Jersey and New York City area, he said. He began to read and learn about Marcus Garvey, W.E.B. DuBois, Malcolm X, and many more Blacks who were, and had been, scholars and leaders. But even in Coffeerville, before he migrated to the East Coast, Herndon said, "I had no illusion about what America had to offer Black people."

Eventually, Coffeerville, that Southeastern Kansas farming and light industrial town, was left behind and Portland became Herndon's city of the future. It became the battleground where he would wage the fight for dignity, equality, and honor for Black people, he said. The instigation of the BUF in Portland grew out of a need. The primary purpose was "to try to resolve some of the major problems confronting Black people in Portland," he said.

Herndon recalls that, at that time, he was concerned about division in the Black community; that different splinter groups were unsuccessfully trying to make "a dent" in the philosophy and attitudes of the local white power structure. "We had to get together and develop a community strategy," he said. The church, which has historically been Black America's rallying point, was singled out as the place "to get a quality of leadership that would attract various segments of the community," he said.

Herndon's praise for Rev. Jackson, a man of the cloth, and co-chairman of the local BUF chapter, is vehemently respectful. "I have learned a lot from Rev. Jackson," he said. "He is the kind of person that young people should learn from."

Lockstep together, Herndon and Rev. Jackson waved the banner for dignity and pride. Together they fought the fight that precipitated change within the Black community, Herndon said. "We addressed issues about jobs, education, police brutality, politics, and political issues." However, he cautioned, he fully understood the implications of a Black person's struggle to gain freedom, equality and justice in America.

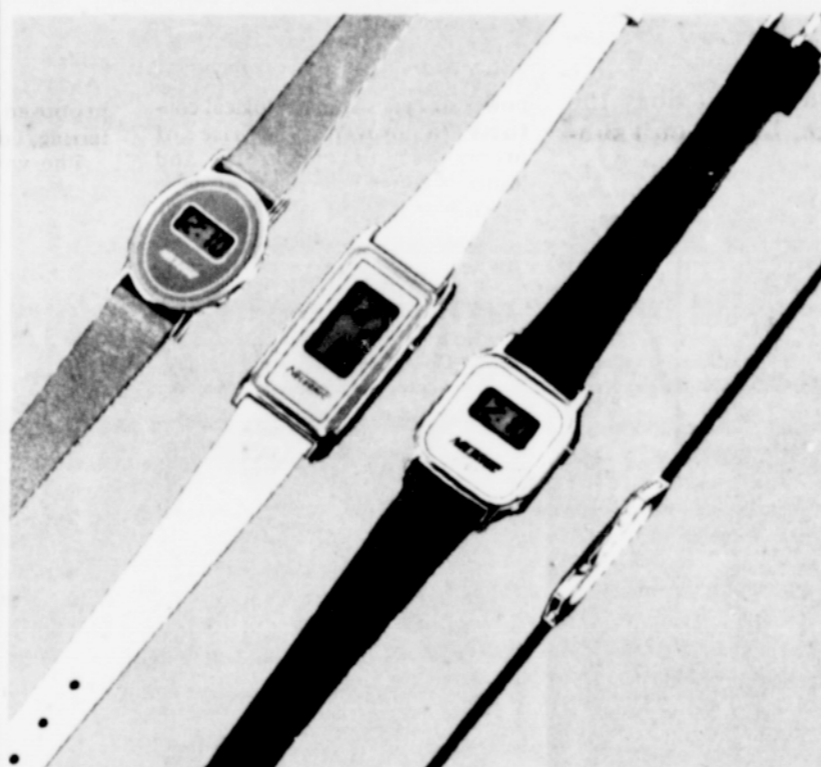
If a Black person stands up for his rights, "That can be dangerous," Herndon said. "When I see kids not being automatically bussed, that makes me feel good." He added, "Black people fought that issue, (and) we got a middle school (Tubman) too."

Next week: Herndon—the road from here.

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