

Nicaraguan delegation files statement

Editor's note:
The following is a reprint of the statement of findings issued by a recent fact-finding delegation to Nicaragua composed of labor leaders. The tour delegation included Portlanders Nita Brueggeman and Roger Auerbach.

We are a delegation of national, state, and local trade union leaders from the West Coast. We visited Nicaragua this past week, September 8-15, 1984, to investigate firsthand the situation in that country.

During our stay in Nicaragua, we traveled freely throughout the country, visiting several factories, a rural agricultural cooperative, the port of Corinto, a hospital, and other workplaces. We spoke with industrial workers, farm workers, community and service workers, and people on the street. We met with the leadership of all the major Nicaraguan trade union federations, the national women's organization, and the Supreme Electoral Council. We met with those who support the Nicaraguan government and those who are some of its fiercest opponents. And while we will be issuing a full report of our findings in a few weeks, what follows is a summary of what we

learned and what we experienced on our trip.

Findings:

We found Nicaragua to be a country at war, besieged by a military and economic attack from the U.S. government that has murdered thousands of its youth, disrupted its fragile economy and brought hardship and suffering to its people. In the midst of this overwhelming assault on its 3 million people, Nicaragua is conducting its first election since the overthrow of the Somoza dictatorship in 1979 and the establishment of a popular revolutionary government. We were deeply moved by the spirit, intelligence, and sacrifice we found in the Nicaraguan people — their determination to defend their revolution at all costs and their commitment to building a just and lasting future.

Our investigation focused on issues we knew to be of great concern to U.S. workers and the U.S. labor movement. We wanted to learn what life has been like for Nicaraguan workers under their new government, what freedoms they have to organize and express themselves, and what impact the aggressive policies of the U.S. government was having on their lives.

The results of our investigation, stated most concisely as follows:

1. Since 1979, the workers of Nicaragua have made tremendous gains in the areas of health and education, trade union organizing, improved working conditions, and in the exercise of democracy.

- Illiteracy has been reduced from 50% to 12%, the lowest in Central America. Polio, malaria, whooping cough, and measles have been virtually eliminated. Hundreds of schools and clinics have been built.

- The right to organize — brutally suppressed under Somoza — has been guaranteed, and the trade union movement has undergone unprecedented growth. Union membership, including industrial and farmworkers unions, has increased from 27,000 to over 250,000. Even unions that strongly criticized the government admit to this growth and sight an expansion in their own membership. Eleven major union and trade union confederations now exist, reflecting great diversity and pluralism within the trade union movement. Of the many strikes that have taken place since 1979, we heard of none which was suppressed by police or the courts.

- In spite of Nicaragua's fragile economy, significant improvements have been scored in the working and living conditions of Nicaraguan workers. We noted large salary

increments, liberal sick leave provisions, fully paid maternity leave, subsidized meals, paid educational leave, workplace childcare centers, and equalization of salaries between women and men. Moreover, we found trade unions extensively involved in the administration of production, especially in the state-owned industries confiscated from Somoza.

- Nicaraguan workers are actively involved in the life of their unions, in the women's and community organizations, and as candidates of many different political parties in the upcoming elections. They freely expressed themselves to us on all issues, including, in some cases, strong criticisms of the government.

- The November 1984 elections represent a broad democratic expression of the Nicaraguan people. 1,560,000 people have been registered to vote — an estimated 94% of those eligible. Seven political parties are running candidates for President, Vice President, and the National Assembly, in accordance with an electoral law that guarantees all parties, no matter what their size, 9 million cordobas (\$300,000) in election expenses and equal access to T.V.

- 2. The gains that have been made by Nicaraguan workers are being undermined by U.S. aggression against their country, and the war is creating tremendous economic hardships and making the democratic process more difficult.

- The effect of U.S. aggression was everywhere to be found. Over 7,000 people have been murdered by contras. Crops, storehouses, centers of production, and oil storage facilities have been destroyed, disrupting an already underdeveloped economy. Maintaining an army on the front with Honduras has depleted the labor force, creating difficulties in maintaining production. Scarce resources must be diverted to the defense of the country.

- The war, combined with the U.S. economic blockade, is resulting in tremendous shortages. Medicines, paper, and machine parts are in critically short supply.

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The Ethiopian Community Cultural Organization introduced itself to Portland with an affair to celebrate the Ethiopian New Year at St. Andrews Church Saturday evening. The organization was formed to foster better relations between Ethiopian

cultures, other African cultures and Americans. Pictured are (l-r) Zewdu Turunell, Fejiso Kabeto, Assefash Melles-Hazen, Amha Merse-Hazen, Endayenu Kende and Kidane Telkle.

(Photo: Richard J. Brown)

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"A man ought to read just as inclination leads him, for what he reads as a task will do him little good."
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Alzheimer's conference

"As we get older, many of us wonder if we are losing our minds," said Liz McKinney, director of the Alzheimer's Disease and Related Disorders Association (ADRDA) of Columbia-Willamette. "But forgetting where we left the car keys is normal. The Alzheimer's patient forgets what the keys are for."

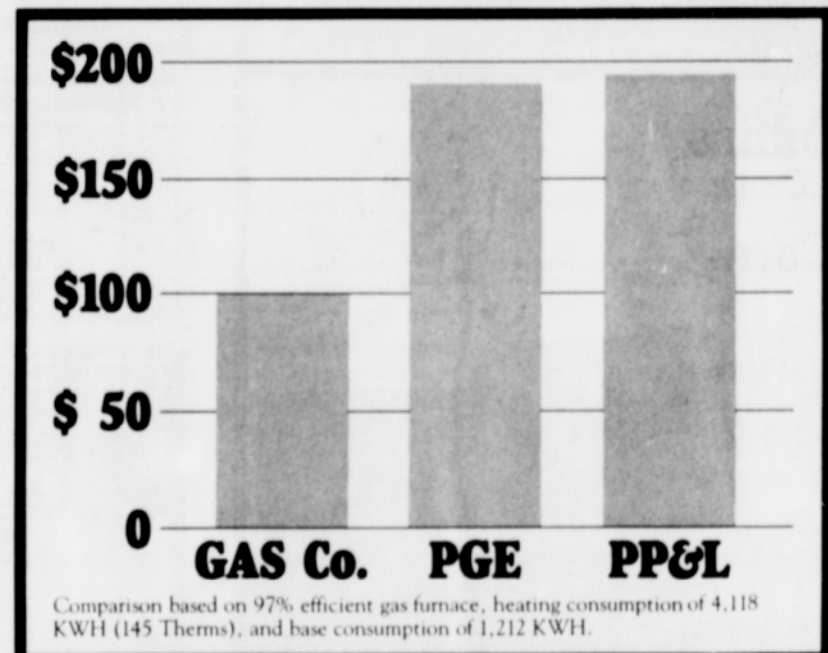
On October 11-13 a conference on "Alzheimer's Disease: A Common Concern" will be held for family members and health professionals, sponsored by ADRDA and Good Samaritan Hospital's Neurological Sciences Center.

Addressing the conference will be Sen. Mark Hatfield, who will talk about the federal government's \$50 million commitment to research on Alzheimer's disease. Also, Dr. Peter J. Whitehouse, director of the Brain Resource Center at Johns Hopkins University, and Dr. Pierluigi Gambetti, director of neuropathology at Case Western Reserve University, will lead a panel discussion on "Research: The Facts and the Future." They will be joined by Good Samaritan Chief of Neurology Dr. Oscar Marin and the co-authors of the highly-acclaimed book on Alzheimer's Disease (The 36 Hour Day) Dr. Peter V. Rabins and Nancy Mace, both of Johns Hopkins University.

Although doctors have known about Alzheimer's disease for over 75 years, there has been no effective treatment for the disease other than supportive care. Some 2 - 2 1/2 million Americans are affected (20,000 in Oregon).

For more information about the conference (it will be held at several locations over the three days) please call the Neurological Sciences Center at Good Sam, 229-7348.

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