

U.S. citizens in Nicaragua blast Reagan view of "freedom fighters"

by Bill Bigelow

In a recent radio address Ronald Reagan was hard put to find enough superlatives to describe the Nicaraguan contras. They are "freedom fighters" and "our brothers" — "ultimately their fight is our fight."

A few days later, testifying before the House Foreign Affairs Committee, Secretary of State George Shultz proclaimed that the U.S. had a "moral duty" to support the contras in their fight against a Nicaragua which had fallen "behind the Iron Curtain."

The Administration's strategy is shifting. No longer is Reagan pushing aid to the contras by claiming that his real goal is to interdict the supposed arms flow to El Salvador. But with that — always flimsy — pretext gone, Washington needs a new story. Thus we will be hearing a lot more from the Reagan team about the new red, white and blue freedom loving contras.

From Nicaragua, however, comes a portrait of a quite different reality. Recently the Committee of U.S. Citizens Living in Nicaragua (CUSCLIN) put together a profile of contra activities by collecting testimonies from Americans throughout the country. Below are some excerpts.

Sandra Price, Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur: "I am a pastoral worker of the Catholic church in Siuna, in the department of North Yelaya. I work with a priest and a small group of Nicaraguan religious women in the formation of lay religious ministers (Delegados de la Palabra) and leadership training with peasant women. Since November 20, 1984, we have had in our care a small infant who survived a massacre by the counterrevolutionaries.

"The child was six days old when a band of counterrevolutionaries arrived at their isolated mountain home in the night and opened fire on the house. The four year old brother and eighteen year old aunt died immediately. The father, mother, uncle and eight year old brother were wounded. The contras entered the house, took out the injured men, shot them, slit the throat of the father whom they accused of being a Sandinista, and left.

"The surviving four children picked up the baby and fled to an uncle's house, leaving the injured mother in agony. Three children returned to the home in the morning and found the mother dead. They returned to the uncle's house and, a few hours later, made a second trip

to their home. This time, all of the bodies had disappeared. They were later found in the river. The women had been stripped of their clothes and the mother's face had been flayed."

Sister Joan Uhlen, Maryknoll Sister, and Sister Rachel Pinal, Presentations Sister and Maryknoll Associate: "On June 1, 1984, the contras attacked Ocotol, a northern town of about 21,000 people, killing 14 and wounding 34. We are two Maryknoll nuns who live and work in Ocotol, and we walked around the town immediately after the attack.

"We began at the lumber yard; it was bleak and shocking. At the sight of it, physical pain clutched at Rachel's stomach. Words can begin to

describe the horror of each place we visited, but they cannot tell the whole story. The pain in people's eyes tells more of that story, that what was done here was not an attack against military powers. It was an attack against people: men, women, and most sadly, children.

Ellen Moore, member, CUSCLIN: "A close friend of mine, Marvin Ramirez, a 21 year old communications technician who works with the government Telecommunications and Postal Service (TELCOR), volunteered to pick coffee this year with a group of co-workers as he had for the past three years, but knowing that this year it was even more dangerous.

"I was at home on December 4

when I heard that a group of TELCOR volunteers had been attacked by counterrevolutionaries while traveling on a truck. Survivors said that the contras had loaded 21 of their dead and wounded victims back onto the truck, doused the truck and bodies, many still alive, with kerosene and set it on fire. I checked with the union and found that Marvin wasn't among the victims.

"The next day, I was told that my friend was in a hospital in Managua, in critical condition.

"While waiting outside the intensive care unit to visit my friend, I was able to talk to other wounded Nicaraguans. His face had been shot off, and they had to remove his entire

lower jaw. He talked to me, but he's difficult to understand, partly because he has no jaw and partly because he tries to cover his mouth with his hand, trying to hide his disfigurement. After about a half hour, he said suddenly, 'I saw myself in the mirror for the first time yesterday — look at what they did to me.' As he started to roll away, another man, who, after 11 months in the hospital, had just been told that they would amputate his leg, said, 'Wait a minute friend. Before you go I want to say one thing. What they did to you, what they did to all of us is horrible, but even if they take away your uppers or all the bones in your face, they can't take away what we fought for. They

will never take the revolution from us."

The CUSCLIN report goes on to catalogue the horrendous toll of the contra attacks in 1984 alone. Last year, 1890 teachers were murdered, 15 schools destroyed and 138 schools abandoned due to repeated attacks.

To express your opinion on the upcoming vote for renewal of U.S. aid to the contras, write:

Sen. Bob Packwood, 259 Russell Office Bldg., Washington, DC 20510.

Sen. Mark Hatfield, 322 Hart Office Bldg., Washington, DC 20510.

Rep. Ron Wyden, 1440 Longworth Bldg., Washington, DC 20515.

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Campbell's boycott

(Continued from Page 1, Column 3) end up with a subminimum wage, according to FLOC. The committee is also concerned about the return of child labor to the fields.

Campbell's has responded to the boycott with an aggressive public relations campaign, which FLOC organizers say includes a school promotion where children bring Campbell's soup labels to class to save up for cassette recorders, movie projectors and American flags for their classrooms. But the cost of the soup represented by the labels adds up to three times what the items would cost in a store, they say.

FLOC is asking for a boycott of Campbell's products and the products of companies owned by Campbell's: Campbell's soup, Swanson TV dinners, V-8 juice, Franco-American products, Pepperidge Farm products, Pietro's and Engine House Pizza, Herfy's restaurants, Mrs. Paul's frozen fish, Prego Spaghetti Sauce and other products.

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