

# Portland teacher describes realities of life in Nicaragua

by Millie Thayer

MANAGUA — It's late afternoon in a makeshift schoolhouse in the mountains of Nicaragua. Clutching the pencil awkwardly and biting his lip in concentration, the old man slowly forms the letters in his notebook as his young teacher looks on. His muddy boots and stained clothes speak of the long workday behind him. But though the room is dim, neither he nor the rest of the dozen or so students in this adult education class show any sign of tiring. For them, learning to read and write is the fulfillment of lifelong hopes.

This scene might surprise those who have only heard President Reagan describe Nicaragua as a "totalitarian dungeon" and a "brutal dictatorship." But the Administration's view of this Central American country does not square with the reality I have experienced here in the last seven months. Nor does it reflect the varied perspectives of the Nicaraguans I have met.

"What is your president's conception of democracy?" asks Payita, a white collar worker in the capital city of Managua. "For us, democracy includes the right to an education, to free health care, to land or work, the right to participate in decision-making at all levels."

The country has made great strides in education since its 1979 revolution overthrew the dictator Anastasio Somoza. Illiteracy dropped from 52 percent to 13 percent after a concerted campaign; approximately one-third of the population is now enrolled in some kind of education.

For the country's elections last November, Payita was named to the electoral board in her middle class neighborhood. "Do you know that of all the domestics in the precinct who came to vote, only one could not sign her name? Before the revolution, most of them would have been illiterate."

Similar advances have been made in health, and a land reform has benefited one-third of the peasants in the country. The wide margin of victory for the Sandinistas in the fall election — hailed by foreign observers of many political perspectives as both free and fair — demonstrated the continued popularity these policies have earned them, particularly among the poor majority.

Complaints are heard, of course, most often from those of some means who now find their opportunities for profit making and consumption more limited. Mario, a large scale rice grower, finds it hard to adjust to the new government priorities on importing basic necessities for the majority rather than the luxury goods he used to buy.

He also complains about the uppity behavior of his workers who demanded back pay for overtime after the overthrow of the old regime. For many in his position, the new protection of workers' right to organize — which has resulted in nearly ten-fold increase in union membership — has been threatening.

Victor is a driver for an urban office who first went to work with a machete when he was eight years old. "In the old days," he says, "we workers had no right to speak out against mistreatment or to demand vacations or overtime. Because there was little work, we had to submit. . . As a worker, I have gained a lot with this revolution." He describes the new seeds of workplace democracy he has experienced. "When they wanted to fire three drivers we were able to demand reasons and conduct our own investigation. In the cases where it was unjustified the union stopped the layoff."

Though the Nicaraguan press censor often cuts more than just news related to military matters, the three major papers still cover a broad spectrum of political views. The opposition paper, *La Prensa*, prints daily vitriolic diatribes against government policy, consistently gloomy or sensationalist news and admiring articles

about U.S. culture and proposals for the region.

Rosalia, a young cleaning woman, tells me, "I feel free to speak my mind now. It's not like under Somoza when if you spoke out you'd be found dead next day on Lead Hill."

It's the popular organizations — community, women's, youth and workers' that are beginning to make freedom of expression really effective. As Marta, a librarian and active member of her neighborhood organization, told me, "As part of my Christian education I learned you get to heaven by bus, not by motorcycle. In other words, you can only build a better

world with other people, not alone."

But Nicaragua is far from perfect — and daily, people remind each other of the fact. The Sandinistas are attacked for the runaway inflation, the lack of imported car parts, the shortage of buses, even the high price of toilet paper. And, in fact, government mismanagement is often a cause. But for most people the fundamental cause of economic difficulties is the war being waged against Nicaragua by U.S. funded counterrevolutionaries — *contras*.

In a mere four years, the *contra* war has caused several hundred million dollars in damage, forced the

country to divert 40 percent of its meager budget to defense and cost more than 8,000 lives.

Even as the U.S. Congress debated whether to support counterrevolutionary forces with "humanitarian" aid these forces continued to demonstrate their inhumanity. American Maryknoll Sister Nancy Donovan, who has worked in Central America 29 years, described a typical attack. "They surrounded the village of Platanares, machine gunned the peasants' houses and forced people out of their homes. Some of them were still sleeping. They kidnapped women, burned houses and pillaged them, robbing

money and even children's clothes. Now no one lives in Platanares. Who's going to harvest the coffee and corn. . . So many people have been murdered that we're lacking coffins, space in the cemetery and sheets to wrap the bodies."

By the support of these terror tactics President Reagan proposes to assist in the overthrow of the Nicaraguan government and the destruction of what — with all its failings — I have found to be a fascinating and unique experiment in democracy and social justice.

But the real question is, no matter what we Americans think of the kind

of society Nicaraguans are choosing to build, what right does the United States have to intervene in a sovereign country to impose its will?

My friend Victor left me with this thought, "We are all brothers born on this same earth. The earth does not belong to one person — we have to share it. I hope with all my heart that the American people can make your government understand that."

Millie Thayer is a Portland teacher working this year for CRIES, Coordinadora Regional de Investigaciones Economicas y Sociales, an independent research institute in Managua, Nicaragua.

Prices Effective 5/15 Thru 5/21/85

## SAFEWAY

Fancy  
**No. 1  
Bananas**

Plump, Golden Ripe. a Great Snack Fruit!

**25¢**

Lb.

**Save Up To 24¢ Lb., No Limit!**

**Red Ripe Watermelon**

Farm fresh and ripe. Crack one open, just taste the juicy goodness.

**Lb. 25¢**

Save Up To 24¢ Lb. No Limit!

**Fresh Hawaiian Pineapple**

Bursting With Rich, Natural Sweetness. Jet Fresh!

**Lb. 49¢**

Save Up To 20¢ Lb. No Limit!

**Med. Size Avocados**

Black Haas Variety. Slice In Salads Or Make A Dip!

**Ea. 19¢**

Save Up To 10¢ Ea. No Limit!

**Sweet Tropical Mangos**

Delicious In Fresh Fruit Salads!

**Ea. 79¢**

Save Up To 60¢ Ea. No Limit!

**Coconuts** Fresh, Large. For Fruit Salads **Ea. 59¢**

**Papayas** "Tree-Melon" With Sweet Mellow Taste! **Ea. \$1.19**

**Kiwi Fruit** New Zealand **Ea. 39¢**

**Pork Chops**

Selection Of Center & End Cuts To Bake, Broil Or Pan Fry!

**\$1.38**

Lb.

**Save Up To 60¢ Lb., No Limit!**

**Rib Steaks**

Delicious, Well-Trimmed, Guaranteed Juicy & Tender!

**\$2.98**

Lb.

**Save Up To \$1.10 Lb., No Limit!**

**Turkeys** Boneless, Norbest 3 To 5 Lbs. **Lb. \$1.79**

**Spareribs** Small Sides, Meaty Oregon Chief. Reg. Or Thick Sliced **Lb. \$1.69**

**1-Lb. Bacon** Reg. Or Thick Sliced Oscar Mayer **Ea. \$1.39**

**1-Lb. Wieners** (Beef Franks, 1-Lb., \$1.59) **Ea. \$1.49**

**1-Lb. Bologna** Louis Rich Turkey (Turkey Salami, 1-Lb., \$1.79) **Ea. \$1.19**

**Pineapple Juice**

Dole Brand, 46-Ounce Can

**99¢**

Save Up To 50¢

**Pineapple Juice**

Dole, Sliced, Crushed Or Chunk

**69¢**

Save Up To 30¢

**Cottage Cheese**

Blossom Time, Small Curd, 16-Ounce Container. Great Topped With Fresh Fruits!

**Ea. 59¢**

Save Up To 24¢. No Limit!

**Keg O' Ketchup**

Heinz 32-Ounce Bottle

**\$1.29**

Save Up To 50¢

**3-Lb. Spread**

Blue Bonnet. 33% Less Fat & Calories Than Margarine

**\$1.69**

Save Up To 40¢

**Cool Whip**

Birds Eye Reg. Or Extra Creamy

**99¢**

12 Oz. Save Up To 50¢

**Premium Saltines**

Nabisco Reg. Or Unsalted, 1-Lb. Pkg.

**99¢**

Save Up To 40¢

**Pink Salmon**

Pacific Pearl, 15.5-Ounce Can.

**\$1.49**

Save Up To 70¢

**10-Lb. Flour**

Gold Medal, All-Purpose, Regular Or Unbleached.

**\$1.49**

Save Up To \$1.10 Bag

**JACKSON'S OWL RADIO, TV & RECORD CO.**

Northwest's Largest Gospel Record & Tape Selections Authorized Zenith Color & V. Sales and Service SALES & SERVICE SINCE 1952

WEBB T. JACKSON, SR., Owner  
GARY A. JACKSON, Certified Technician & Service Manager

**4623 N. Vancouver  
Portland, OR 97217  
Office: 287-2042**

## SAFEWAY

Ad Prices Good 5/15 Thru 5/21/85 At Safeways In Lloyd Center, St. Johns, At 5920 N.E. Union & 6400 N. Interstate. Sales Limited To Retail Quantities. No Sales To Dealers.