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Nicaraguan Amnesty Legislation To Be Extended To Prisoners; Notes On Debate

by Deborah Tyroler

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On Sept. 9, a day after their release from jail, two attorneys said the government would have to free thousands of other prisoners to prove its intent to observe the Central American peace accord. Lino Hernandez Trigueros, director of the Permanent Commission for Human Rights in Managua, and Alberto Saborio Morales, president of the Nicaraguan Bar Association, were turned over Sept. 8 to a visiting US Senator, Tom Harkin (D-Iowa). The two men served 24 days of a 30-day sentence after being detained at an opposition rally in Managua last month. "We are waiting to see if our release is the beginning of amnesty that will lead to freedom for thousands of people," said Hernandez Trigueros. "This will be the real test for the Sandinistas. I have my doubts that they will do it." According to Saborio Morales, only a complete amnesty would be acceptable. "Everyone tried by the people's tribunals, which are completely political, should be freed," he said, "along with everyone who is detained for violating state security laws or committing related acts." Under the peace accord, Nicaragua must have an amnesty in place by Nov. 7, along with decrees ending press censorship and guaranteeing political freedom. The questions of who should be covered by the amnesty and precisely what it entails, however, are left undefined in the accord. Under the accord, a four-member National Reconciliation Commission is charged with determining what constitutes a legitimate amnesty. Cardinal Miguel Obando y Bravo, who heads the commission, repeated Sept. 8 that he favors the release of everyone convicted of anti-Sandinista acts, including more than 2,000 members of the former National Guard. The total number of prisoners in Nicaragua is not known, although the government has placed the figure at about 8,000. This week, Sandinista leaders have announced that they are preparing a list of thousands of prisoners to be released. At a Sandinista-sponsored meeting in Leon on Sept. 6, President Daniel Ortega announced the government's intention to expand the coverage of existing amnesty legislation to prisoners. Several mothers of soldiers killed in action in the war with the contras. were seated in the front row. One rose to ask Ortega not to free too many prisoners. "We do not agree that there should be a general amnesty," said the woman, Amerlia Cisne. "We don't want the people who killed our sons walking freely beside us on the street. It would make a mockery of the blood spilled by so many martyrs." In an interview published Sept. 8 in BARRICADA, Deputy Interior Minister Luis Carrion verified that the government is planning to release prisoners under the amnesty procedures. He reported that since the National Reconciliation Commission was formed in late August, 47 contras have surrendered. Carrion pointed out that Sandinista leaders continue to discuss the categories of prisoners to benefit from extension of the amnesty legislation. He said the government could not contemplate a "mass release" of prisoners as long as the war continues. (Basic data from PRENSA LATINA, 09/08/87; NEW YORK TIMES, 09/10/87)

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