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## **Nicaraguan Interior Ministry Arrests Economist; Temporarily Shuts Down News Programs**

*by Deborah Tyroler*

*Category/Department: General*

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On June 5, Nicaraguan Interior Minister Tomas Borge accused economist Mario Alegria of operating a secret "informants network" for the CIA. Alegria was arrested at dawn on May 31, and initially was accused of passing economic data to the US Embassy. Three employees of government economic agencies were also charged. Leaders of the Superior Private Enterprise Council, the conservative business association that sponsored Alegria's economic research, denied the charges. Last week, the Interior Ministry suspended three opposition radio news programs, charging they broadcast false reports. Radio Catolica's news hour was shut down June 1, to remain closed until June 10. The ministry objected to a report from Miami citing a claim by the contras that a contra field commander was in fact captured by Sandinista troops. The commander, code-named Alfa Lima, appeared at two separate press conferences last week in Managua explaining his decision to accept amnesty. The ministry also shut down the 6 a.m. newscast of the privately owned Radio Corporacion for the same period for reporting the same item. On June 3, Radio Corporacion's only other news programming was shut down for eight days, for having broadcast a report from an international news wire connected with the Spanish agency EFE. According to an Interior Ministry note, the dispatch said the Sandinistas had admitted having a role in the 1980 shooting death of opposition businessman Jorge Salazar and the recent killing of former contra commander Efraim Mondragon. A station employee told the Washington Post that news director Jose Castillo plans to start two different news programs on June 6 to circumvent the closings. The Interior Ministry began ordering short-term closings of radio news programs in mid-April after several opposition radios carried an unfounded report that a striking labor unionist had been killed by police. The ministry bases its sanctions on strict media legislation, which remained on the books despite the earlier lifting of the emergency censorship decree. In an interview with the Post on June 4, Deputy Interior Minister Com. Lenin Cerna, said: "If our lawmakers don't want the law, let them change it. In the meantime, this is not censorship, it's law." He rejected speculation that the recent actions are intended by Borge or the ministry to signal distrust of the peace negotiations or to undercut them. "There's no such thing as the ministry's own little policy," he said. In the Alegria case, Cerna said the economist was arrested because he passed economic information he obtained from contacts in government ministries to two US Embassy officials who the government suspects of working for the CIA. He said, "Negotiations or no negotiations, there are some things this country just can't tolerate. He gave information where information shouldn't be given." Cerna is the director of State Security and also represents the Interior Ministry at the ceasefire talks with the contras. Alegria is director of a small opposition business research center in Managua funded by the West German Christian Democrats' Konrad Adenauer Foundation. He has frequently and openly visited the US Embassy commercial section. Two other government employees arrested, Nora Aldana and Pedro Pablo Su, also visited the commercial section, a public office. (Basic data from Washington Post, 06/06/88)

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