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Nicaragua: Opposition Stages Protest March In Managua

by Deborah Tyroler

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On Jan. 15, members of Nicaragua's political opposition staged a march through Managua to protest government policies and programs. The number of participants is unclear. According to the New York Times (01/16/89), the turnout totaled 15,000. The Associated Press reported 5,000. On the morning of Jan. 16, a National Public Radio report stated that march organizers were surely disappointed by the turnout: persons attending a baseball game in the capital on the same day outnumbered participants in the march. NPR stated that demonstrator numbers may have totaled around 5,000. Meanwhile, "several thousand" people were on hand less than a mile away to hear a speech by President Daniel Ortega, which included announcement of a new austerity plan that will lay off many workers. Ortega cited the on-going contra war and the recent hurricane as principal causes of the current economic crisis. The demonstration began as a march commemorating the 11th anniversary of the 1978 assassination of Pedro Joaquin Chamorro, editor of the opposition newspaper La Prensa. Chamorro's death was a catalyst in the overthrow of the Somoza regime which brought the Sandinistas to power in 1979. Later, the march turned into a rally, attended by approximately 5,000. The protest was organized by the Democratic Coordinator a coalition of conservative business organizations, political parties and labor unions, was staged as a commemoration of the assassination in 1978 of Pedro Joaquin Chamorro Cardenal. The government, which issued authorization for the rally, made no effort to intervene. Only a handful of policemen were visible as the marchers proceeded over a two-mile route. They chanted slogans denouncing the government's economic policies and demanding greater political freedom. Eli Altamirano Perez, secretary general of the Communist Party of Nicaragua, was quoted by the Times as saying: "Between the war and the disintegration of the government's policies it has been a disaster here." Regarding his party's participation with business and conservative groups in the march, he said, "The Communist Party is flexible enough to work with others to solve this fiasco." (Basic data from AFP, AP, 01/15/89; National Public Radio, New York Times, AP, 01/16/89) (AP) On Jan. 13, Costa Rica's Office of Judicial Investigations said that long-time resident of Costa Rica, John Hull, was arrested Jan. 12 following a six-month investigation by a local congressional commission on drug trafficking. Hull, a US citizen, was charged with drug and arms smuggling, aiding the Nicaraguan contras, and participating in hostile activities against the Costa Rican government. Interior and Police Minister Eduardo Araya said the investigation had been prompted by the testimony of George Morales, a convicted drug trafficker, who told Costa Rican officials that Hull was involved in drug smuggling and arms trafficking to the Nicaraguan contras. Several Costa Ricans could be implicated in the case according to Araya. Court procedures have been kept secret and authorities had yet to decide whether to release Hull on bond or send him to San Sebastian to be held in prison until investigations are completed. All inquiries into the case were referred to the Costa Rican authorities by the US Embassy press office. Hull, who claims to be a citizen of Costa Rica, has been living in the Central American country for 20 years, and owns a farm, located some 81 miles northwest of San Jose near the border with Nicaragua. Neighbors reported activities that could jeopardize relations between Costa Rica and Nicaragua. Judicial Police located two airstrips on Hull's property that allegedly have been used to transport weapons into the country and smuggle drugs to the United States. A confessed supporter of the contras, Hull has admitted to

allowing them to use his property. According to F. Andy Messing, head of the conservative National Defense Foundation in Washington, Hull told him and Rep. David Dreier (R-Calif.) in December that he had stopped aiding the contras as soon as the Iran-Contra scandal broke. In 1986 Hull told reporters that authorities investigating him on suspicion of arms trafficking and drug smuggling failed to come up with any evidence on two previous occasions. (Basic data from AP, AFP, 01/13/89)

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