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Nicaragua: On Cubans In Bluefields

by Deborah Tyroler

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Fifteen physicians and a 300-member construction brigade are among the Cubans currently working in Bluefields and environs on the South Atlantic coast. It is unclear whether or not the Cubans will remain in Nicaragua when president-elect Violeta Barrios de Chamorro is inaugurated April 25. According to Dr. Donald Weil, the Nicaraguan director of the Sandino Regional Hospital, if the Cubans leave, "chaos" would ensue. Over half the staff at the 118-bed hospital is Cuban; only 12 Nicaraguan doctors are on staff. Cubans stayed home in the days after the Feb. 25 elections. Local Sandinista National Liberation Front (FSLN) official, Johnny Hodgson, said: "They didn't want to come out on the street because they didn't know what would be happening." After two days, community leaders went to the Cubans and persuaded them to return to work. Weil said the experience of chaos at the hospital, among other things, converted all but most fervent anti-communist in Bluefields. He added, "People changed colors like chameleons." After Hurricane Joan devastated Bluefields on Oct. 21, 1988, Cubans arrived first with aid, and were the most generous. Cubans helped the local residents dig out of the rubble. The construction brigade has built more than 100 of a total planned 1,000 homes. Late last year, the first residents began moving into their new homes, into what is now called the best neighborhood in town. According to Notimex, Cuban military advisers will leave Nicaragua when the new government takes power, but Cuban physicians and agricultural specialists will remain. (Basic data from AP, 03/18/90; Notimex, 03/20/90)

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