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Nicaragua: Handicapped Veterans Occupy Government Television Station

by Deborah Tyroler

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On Sept. 3 in Managua, 30 handicapped veterans and mothers of soldiers killed fighting contra rebels occupied the state-run television station, and shut down operations until the following day. Prior to the takeover at 5:00 p.m. local time, the protesters attempted to march to President Violeta Barrios de Chamorro's office, but were turned away by police. The veterans and family members are demanding larger pensions. Fernando Lopez, national coordinator of the Handicapped Revolutionaries Organization (ORD), said, "We occupied the station to pressure the government to increase the pensions. They are starving us by offering us a monthly pension of just 21 million cordobas (about \$21), while on the other hand the demobilized contras receive 50 million cordobas." Lopez was referring to payments distributed earlier in the day to hundreds of former contras by the International Support and Verification Commission (CIAV), a joint United Nations-Organization of American States commission established to oversee contra demobilization and reintegration. The funds derive from Washington \$40 million earmarked for contra demobilization, and the \$300 million aid package delivered to the Nicaraguan government. Deputy minister of the Presidency, Antonio Ibarra, said an 81.3% increase for 2,000 military pensioners, including the handicapped, was approved on Aug. 31, and that the 21 million cordoba monthly payment reflects the increase. (Basic data from AP, 09/03/90; AFP, 09/04/90)

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