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Nicaragua: Update On Former Contra-u.n.o. Mayors' Protest

by Deborah Tyroler

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Nov. 14: The Sandinista National Liberation Front (FSLN) issued a statement in support of the former contra protesters' demand for land as promised in May by the government of President Violeta Barrios de Chamorro. (See CAU 11/07/90, 11/09/90, 11/14/90 for previous coverage of protest and related developments.) Luis Carrion, member of the FSLN directorate, said government delays in arranging land for the demobilized fighters "contributed to escalating [their] desperation," and thus, provoked a national conflict. However, said Carrion, the protest of former contras, mayors and deputies in southeastern Nicaragua "is not directly linked to the land problem," but rather has political roots. He added that certain factions within the government, the former contras and the private sector want more political power, and thus, are promoting anti-government actions. Official sources reported that a government delegation in Juigalpa is currently involved in meetings with representatives of the protesters, and that President Barrios de Chamorro and her cabinet plan to visit Juigalpa Nov. 21. During a press conference in Managua, Jose Guerrero (leader of former contras pertaining to the "Southern Front") said the FSLN must disappear to obtain "total peace in Nicaragua." Minister Lacayo and Interior Minister Carlos Hurtado were described as allies of Sandinismo. Next, Guerrero called for the "immediate" resignation of army chief Gen. Humberto Ortega as an initial step "to change the character of the armed forces." As of Thursday, the roadway to the Atlantic coast remained barricaded. Vice President Virgilio Godoy asserted that if the government quashes the "movement" by former contras and certain UNO mayors, a civil war could ensue. He then asserted that Lacayo "uses a language very close to that of Gen. Ortega and his brother Daniel Ortega." Nov. 15: In Sebaco, 120 km. north of Managua, a clash between former contras and police resulted in the deaths of four police agents, and 17 persons were injured. The Interior Ministry said former contras supported by 300 residents threw several fragmentation grenades at the police. Police had attempted to open up a bridge on the roadway to Matagalpa and Jinotega by dispersing the crowd with tear gas. In Muelle de los Bueyes, a government delegation met with leaders of the protest movement. During a police search of former contra leaders' homes in Managua, Aristides Sanchez was arrested. Police discovered radio equipment, two rifles, five fragmentation grenades, and other war materiel in Sanchez's house. Santiago Murray, representative of the UN-OAS International Verification and Support Commission (CIAV), accompanied the police during the search in Managua as an observer. Oscar Sovalbarro, another former contra leader, asserted that the police had planted the weapons in Sanchez's home. Murray told reporters that the police found the weapons inside the house. Sovalbarro said, "We will request political asylum in the US for our 22,000 demobilized fighters because it is impossible to live in Nicaragua." He then asserted that the government and the police would be responsible for "any blood spilling in the countryside" in response to the police raid in Managua. National Police chief Rene Vivas said the police search operation had the government's full authorization and support. At a press conference, FSLN directorate member Luis Carrion said a conspiracy was underway to take the government "hostage," and demanded "urgent" measures to protect the security and basic human rights of Nicaraguan citizens. He accused Godoy, Bishop Pablo Antonio Vega, the Superior Council of Private Enterprise (COSEP), former contra leaders Sovalbarro and Sanchez of promoting such conspiracy. Carrion suggested that Washington's influence was also behind the

disorder of the past two weeks in Nicaragua. He said he had "reliable information that US Embassy personnel have maintained constant contact with Aristides Sanchez and others." Next, the FSLN leader accused daily newspaper La Prensa and radio broadcasters Catolica and Corporacion of "inciting hatred, disrespect for the law, and challenges to [legally] constituted authorities." After stating that the current situation is becoming more dangerous, rather than close to resolution, Carrion called on party militants to be on alert for "an eventual escalation in anti-democratic and revanchist violence." (Basic data from AFP, 11/14/90, 11/15/90; Notimex, 11/15/90)

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