"Land for the Peasants; Urban Settlements for the Workers"¹
Squatter Settlements in Nicaragua

Dinamarca is surrounded. To the west is INE, the National Electric Utility, along with INAA, the National Water Utility; to the east, IMPESCA, the National Fisheries Industry, and MINVAH, the Ministry of Housing and Human Settlements; to the north, Batahola Norte, an older neighborhood²; and to the southeast, the American Embassy... They all want to kick us out of here. Why don't they leave us in peace? We're not asking for a palace. All we want is a little house that we can build ourselves.

All we want is a place to live.³

More than 100,000 people or 11% of the population of Managua, the capital of Nicaragua, live in "asentamientos espontáneos" or squatter settlements⁴, which since the 1979 Sandinista Triumph, have arisen on the expanses of vacant land in the city. These settlements are facing opposition from a variety of official antagonists such as the national electric and water utilities and, most notably, from the Ministry of Housing and Human Settlements (MINVAH). In addition, the settlements have all encountered hostility, distrust, and suspicion from their adjacent older and more established neighborhoods. Their precarious situation is, in part, a product of the U.S. war against Nicaragua and the deleterious economic effects the war has had on this nation. Dinamarca, which celebrated its first year of existence in May, 1986, is one of Managua's 62 illegal urban settlements. It is surrounded by the physical manifestations of these opposing forces, including the embassy of the United States of America. Thus, by virtue of its peculiar location, Dinamarca graphically symbolizes the political, economic, and social realities confronting the inhabitants of all the squatter settlements.

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Like the other spontaneous settlements in Managua, Dinamarca poses both a problem and a solution for the revolutionary government. It is a problem because its very existence interferes with the urban planning objectives of the MINVAH. The MINVAH formulated "Plan 2000" to rebuild the capital which had been levelled by the 1972 earthquake and had never been renovated during the Somoza dictatorship, and had been further damaged during the fighting that led to the Triumph. The MINVAH hopes to complete the plan by the year 2000, hence its name. Plan 2000 allows for greater centralized administrative control by relocating the population to the suburbs and building up the center with business, commercial, industrial, financial, and administrative offices and installations. None of the spontaneous settlements are included in Plan 2000, and they conflict with the implementation of its goals. As far as the MINVAH is concerned, it doesn't matter how well the settlements are organized, how well they conform to government health and building regulations and codes, or how supportive of the government they are; the settlements are still a nuisance, and the MINVAH maintains that they are illegal and destined for eventual uprooting and relocation.

But the settlements are also a solution for a government faced with the problem of defending the nation from constant external aggression and the resulting need to divert scarce resources into a costly war effort. Since the destruction of Managua by the earthquake, the population has suffered from a severe housing shortage. Although large tracts of land remained vacant, attempts to occupy it were subject to severe repression by the Somoza regime and its National Guard. Immediately after the overthrow of Somoza, the population of Managua began to occupy the vacant land, creating new urban settlements. The new settlements were suitably located on lands adjacent to industrial and commercial activity, i.e., near employment opportunities.

These initial attempts at grassroots solutions to the housing shortage were aided and abetted by the Junta for National Reconstruction. The new government also responded to the housing crisis by planning and constructing a housing project "San Antonio," in the former center of Managua. San Antonio is a standard tract development with approximately 200 prefabricated houses. Due to the economic crisis, an enormous foreign debt, and the scarcity of resources, all of which have been exacerbated by the war, the new government has built only this one housing project. And, as the war has continued to escalate and the economic crisis has deepened, the government has been unable either to build new housing or to contribute to or support further local grassroots efforts to create new settlements.

Publicly, the government claims that the squatters are recent migrants from the countryside who have abandoned their productive responsibilities in the agricultural sector in search of potentially higher incomes from illegal speculative activities in the urban economy. There is a widespread notion throughout the government that the squatters are a sort of parasitic underclass, in short that they constitute an "undesirable element" in the capital city. However, the majority of the squatters are relatively long-term residents of Managua and represent a diverse and productive cross-section of the urban population. Squatters are factory workers, teachers, nurses, civil servants, busdrivers, merchants, and soldiers.

In spite of the fact that the official government position toward the squatters has become one of opposition and hostility, the squatter settlements have increased in number. It would seem that under the circumstances, the local initiative and mobilization involved in the construction and organization of the settlements constitute a reasonable solution for both the residents of Managua and the government. For the squatters, they are the only viable housing alternative, while for the government, they are an efficient and low-cost alternative to centrally planned and delivered services. The situation of the squatter settlements is thus a crucial one for the Nicaraguan government in terms of policy and planning.

The significance of the squatter settlements for the Nicaraguan revolution is the central focus of this paper. We discuss the complex roles of the CDS organizations at both the grassroots and mass organizational levels, and the role of the Ministry of Housing in planning and executing policy. Finally, we consider the process involved in the development and implementation of the government's agrarian reform policy as a possible model for urban policy and planning. A comparison of the urban and rural sectors in Nicaragua suggests a positive solution to the problem of squatter settlements.
Research Methodology

In the spring of 1986, the Urban Studies section of the Instituto Nicaragüense de las Investigaciones Económicas y Sociales (INIES) initiated a survey of the squatter settlements in Managua. They were interested in creating a typology of the settlements based on their organizational structures. They identified a total of 71 asentamientos espontáneos and selected 17 settlements consisting of over 5,000 families, for extensive research.10

We collaborated with INIES on this project but focused our research on relationships between the squatters and the institutions and organizations of the wider society, the extent of grass roots participation within the settlements, and on policy issues, specifically, the significance of the squatter settlements for the revolutionary process.

After reviewing INIES's preliminary reports on the 17 settlements, we selected three settlements for in-depth analysis: "Villa Bulgaria," "Dinamarca," and "Madres de Heréos y Martires de Pantasma." The three settlements represent the diversity of squatter settlements in Managua (particularly of those established during the period 1984-85) in terms of size, numbers of inhabitants, geographical location, and organizational history.11 (Detailed descriptions of these settlements appear in the Appendix to this article.)

"Villa Bulgaria" is a relatively small settlement (240 families) and was very well organized prior to and during the land take-over. It has remained well organized, and boasts a high level of community participation in the decision-making process.

"Dinamarca" is a medium sized settlement (500 families) and was basically disorganized at the time of the land take-over. In its first phase, it experienced difficulties and set-backs which resulted in incoherent organizational structures that grew and developed through subsequent phases as the community expanded. More recently, it has consolidated its leadership, although it continues to grapple with the problem of fluctuating levels of community participation.

"Madres de Heréos y Martires de Pantasma" (hereafter, "Madres") is one of the largest settlements (nearly 800 families), sprawling somewhat anarchically over a large tract of land. It developed through a piecemeal process of individual settlement, based primarily on self-appointed (and perhaps, self-serving) "leadership." Having experienced a succession of leadership crises, "Madres" has recently shown signs of creating viable organizational structures with a somewhat higher level of democratic participation.

In all three settlements, we visited with squatters and their families and met with their local CDS organizations. We also interviewed MINVAN officials to learn about the Ministry's policies and individual points of view regarding the squatter settlements.
The CDS mass organization\textsuperscript{12} is a perfect example of the appealing needs for (and hence, the apparent contradiction between) grass roots mobilization and bureaucratic administration in the ongoing revolutionary process. In the first three years after the Sandinista Triumph, the Sandinista Defense Committees (CDSs)\textsuperscript{13} collectively represented the largest (in membership) and the most dynamic of mass organizations. CDSs continued the tradition of the civil defense committees formed by the FSLN to combine local defense and organization during the Insurrection. Located primarily in urban areas, CDSs functioned as block organizations aggregated into zones, providing a source of new cadre and enabling the rapid implementation -- with massive grass roots participation-- of numerous health, educational, and basic welfare campaigns such as literacy, food distribution, and vaccination.

As things "returned to normal," the CDSs' original role was gradually altered in the direction of implementing government programs, petitioning for services and utilities, and generally serving as the neighborhood administrative body. Participation and organization were greatest in the working class barrios where residents had lived under conditions of extreme poverty and where expectations for a better standard of living had been raised by the revolution. However, since 1982, the CDSs' range of activities and responsibilities has been drastically reduced due to a number of factors, particularly the institutionalization of the revolutionary process in the form of new or restructured bureaucracies, and the increasing impact of the counterrevolutionary (contra) war with its attendant exacerbation of the scarcity of resources, and the growing economic crisis.

The centralization and control imperative (i.e., bureaucratization), is a "natural" tendency which in the case of Nicaragua has been accelerated by the U.S. sponsored war and the economic crisis. The scarcity of resources, especially growing food shortages, led to a short-circuiting of CDS functions. The State increasingly took direct control of the distribution of rationed commodities, taking this role out of the hands of the CDSs. The new investment policies promulgated by the government in 1984, virtually pre-empted public investment in Managua and redirected scarce resources to the countryside in support of the war effort and food production. Since no physical improvements in the urban areas were forthcoming, the CDSs lost much of their popular support, along with their raison d'être.

However, at the grass roots level, the emphasis is on democratic participation, empowerment, and meeting immediate needs through small-scale, low technological input, and low cost investments. Since grass roots mobilization and participation continue to provide the major justification for the revolution and legitimate the emerging State, the new government encourages, but tries to shape, the grass roots organizations for greater efficiency and control. Thus, on the one hand, the forces underlying grass roots mobilization and bureaucratic organization contradict each other, while on the other, they complement each other.

CDS: Grassroots Organization in the Asentamientos

Revolution involves mobilizing large numbers of people to rise up against an oppressive political, economic, and social system, and some means for organizing and channeling their participation in and support of the revolutionary process. While mobilization of the people is generally coordinated by a disciplined revolutionary party/movement, victory can be achieved only when there is a high level of spontaneity and autonomy at the grass roots. Thus, what makes a revolution possible to begin with, and ultimately successful, is the complementarity of legitimate leadership with genuine widespread grass roots participation.

The transition from an oppressive existence under the old regime to the promise of a better life under the new one, actually marks the beginning of the revolution. Social, economic, and political life must be reorganized in a very short time, and an effective new order must be established to realize the goals of the revolution. Requisite to implementing these goals is the redistribution of scarce resources. Both the flight of human resources and the scarcity of material resources are typical in the aftermath of a revolutionary triumph. It is within this context that the revolutionary government must plan and administer policies that will get the economy back on its feet, satisfy both the immediate and long-term needs of its people, deal effectively with foreign-sponsored subversion and resist counterrevolution. The imperative to plan and control generally materializes in the form of centralized, hierarchical, bureaucratic organizations, institutions, and large-scale, capital-intensive development programs that emphasize authority and efficiency.

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In the asentamientos there are echoes of these major themes. The most frequent complaint among the squatters we spoke with concerned the high prices and lack of supply of essential goods and materials. However, the majority of squatters recognize that these conditions are in large part due to the contra war and the top priority given to national defense. Even in a context of material scarcity, much can be done by the residents on their own to improve living conditions; everything from housing improvement by adding permanent roofs, to providing basic sanitation by digging latrines. The CBSs in the asentamientos are not very amenable to external control and they derive much of their legitimacy from their ability to meet the basic needs of their communities by going outside of "normal channels." These political and economic factors tend to promote cooperation, participation and grass roots democracy. Since the asentamientos are "starting from scratch" and there is largely a self-help endeavor, and because of their extralegal status, the spontaneous, grass roots aspect of the revolutionary process remains very much alive in the squatter settlements.

The impact of wider economic and political forces on the asentamientos thus differs from their impact on other barrios in Managua. Since they are "spontaneous" and extralegal, the asentamientos have to be self-governing in order to establish themselves as viable communities and to survive in an environment of scarcity and hostility. However, levels of community participation and delegate involvement vary considerably from settlement to settlement as evidenced by the three settlements we studied. Many of the asentamientos have not yet achieved the level of organization necessary for solving their problems at the community-wide level, and are therefore generally unable to mobilize resources to meet the basic needs of their constituents, as in the case of "Madres."

At the other end of the spectrum, there are communities that have a solid base of democratic participation and organization. The CBS of "Villa Bulgaría," for example, has managed to acquire the political vitality that was generally characteristic of CDSs during the early years following the Triumph. It provides vital links with the FSLN and serves as an institutional vehicle for negotiating with the State. Like the other asentamientos, Villa Bulgaría started from a lower material base compared to the older, more established neighborhoods. However, unlike many of the other asentamientos, and unlike the more established barrios, the CBS in Villa Bulgaría has been better able to mobilize resources and solve some of the crucial problems related to the basic needs of its constituents.

Although many CDS leaders recognize the importance of creating a strong organizational structure based on a high level of community participation, they face significant obstacles when attempting to achieve it. The relatively marginal position of the asentamientos necessitates a higher degree of political consciousness on the part of CBS cadres, and a concomitant willingness on their part to do more political education and consciousness-raising than generally has occurred in other barrios. The position of CDS coordinator is complicated by dual accountability -- to the communities and to the government. And although this is as much the case in the "legal" barrios as in the asentamientos, the stresses on CDS coordinators in the asentamientos are somewhat greater because the problems confronting illegal settlements are so numerous and the solutions are so difficult and elusive.

"Dinamarca" is a good example of a community that has just begun to build a strong organization and to realize its potential. Recently, both "Dinamarca" and "Madres" have received considerable guidance from their CDS zonal committees, and owe much of their current "success" in organizing their communities to having held well-run elections resulting in both legitimate and respected leadership. The asentamientos therefore, potentially represent a continuation of grass roots revolutionary mobilization -- the "continuing revolution," but this legacy persists in part, from the willingness of some segments of the revolutionary state (e.g., the CDS mass organization) to "aid and abet" them in their efforts.

The MINVAH: Bureaucratic Administration of Policy

The urban planning and development policies of the Nicaraguan government have been developed and implemented by the Ministry of Housing and Human Settlements (MINVAH). The MINVAH operates as a bureaucracy par excellence responding mainly to the dictates of "rational" planning and cost effectiveness. Rational planning is at the top of MINVAH's list of priorities, while the people's needs for housing are at
The MINVAH has developed its plans and has executed government policy in an authoritarian and secretive fashion. For instance, the "Plan 2000" for the city of Managua (which we discussed with the Chief of Planning), was essentially a classified document prepared by professional planners without consulting the residents of the city whom it directly affects. According to the plan, by the year 2000, the residents of the squatter settlements would be relocated to the outskirts of the city, as much as 10-15 kilometers from their current places of employment.

In their dealings with MINVAH officials, the residents of the asentamientos have encountered a stone wall. The Ministry not only presents a false image of the squatters and their settlements, but also refuses to negotiate in good faith (including frequent absence from scheduled meetings with the squatters). Squatters -- illegally tapping public utilities and occupying land destined for nonresidential uses -- are at best, considered "a nuisance," and at worst, "an obstacle that must (and will) be removed." The Chief of Planning for the MINVAH stated, "As far as we're concerned, the asentamientos don't exist... the political costs of legalizing the asentamientos would be too high to risk. We don't want to encourage tomas de tierra and other similar political actions and forms of organization."15

A CDS coordinator in Dinamarca stated that the bureaucratic attitude of the MINVAH is the major obstacle to obtaining legal title to the occupied land, and that they were well aware of the government's intention to relocate them. "But we are negotiating, which is much more than we could have done under Somoza." Indeed, the squatters are engaged in an ongoing process of improving relations with everyone from the MINVAH to the police. "We can't just cross our arms and wait for the MINVAH to legalize the settlements."

This attitude is typical of the residents of the squatter settlements and their CDS representatives. They recognize and accept the position taken by the government and the motives for its policies. However, there is an unwavering recognition on the part of the squatters that they have legitimate needs and the right to organize in pursuit of their interests. Even though there is a conflict of interest in the short term, the residents of the asentamientos see themselves and the MINVAH as part of the same
revolutionary process. They maintain that their position is no less legitimate than the one taken by the government and that the differences between them can be negotiated.

As was affirmed by one of the CDS coordinators in Dinamarca, for the urban population, the asentamientos represent the people's right to land, which was promised by the revolution: "... Esto (el asentamiento) es para el pueblo. La revolución ha sido un triunfo... al campesino, la tierra, al obrero, el asentamiento. (The asentamientos are for the people. The revolution has been a victory. Land for the peasants, urban settlements for the workers.)

This same campesino (who unknowingly provided the title for this article) described the asentamientos as part of the revolutionary process — a transition by which "our children will reap the benefits of our struggle."

Agrarian Reform: A Model for Urban Policy?

Nicaragua's agrarian reform might serve both as a model and an inspiration for the urban squatters in Managua. For example, after the Triumph, the Sandinistas attempted to reverse the land take-overs carried out by campesinos during the Insurrection. This was done in the interests of "rational" planning and to win the confidence of the bourgeoisie by maintaining "respect for property rights" as the basis for promoting a mixed economy. But because of the strength of peasant organization, a complete reversal proved unfeasible. A massive demonstration of 30,000 campesinos and landless laborers organized by the Agricultural Labor Union (ATC), a Sandinista mass organization, prevented the return of some of these lands to their original owners. Moreover, additional land take-overs were forestalled by the promise of future land reform and redistribution.

This political pressure from the base (which was in fact supported and encouraged by the Sandinistas) also provided the new Revolutionary Government with a great deal more leverage in carrying out a fundamental redistribution of wealth and power in Nicaraguan society. In fact, the militancy of the agricultural workers exercised through the ATC is what made it possible for the government to enforce laws against decapitalization, sabotage, and underutilization of land. Large producers who failed to maintain production or attempted to defraud the government sometimes found their lands subject to spontaneous confiscation by the ATC. These actions led to the adoption of effective confiscation measures in the Agrarian Reform Law, replacing the cumbersome legal procedures of the first two years.

Similarly, the pace of land reform accelerated after the end of 1983, in part because of pressure from the contras and the resulting need to consolidate power in the regions adjacent to the Honduran border. By July 1984, 45,000 families (32% of all peasant households) had received titles to land. By the end of 1984, the total was over 50,000 families. Increasingly the land handed over to households and cooperatives was transferred from the state sector. Furthermore, much of this land consisted of former cattle grazing and cotton lands on the Pacific coast, and its conversion to food production represented an important step in the rationalization of the land use pattern in Nicaraguan agriculture.

Thus, we observe a marked difference in the ability of the rural population, compared with the urban population, to influence the outcome of policy and to promote its interests. Unlike the urban labor movement, which has been brought firmly to heel by the government in the interests of "maintaining production and controlling inflation," the ATC has remained vociferous and militant in the pursuit of rural workers' needs. The leadership of the ATC has maintained considerable organizational autonomy from the FSLN. Similarly, the shift towards a more peasant-based orientation in the Agrarian Reform with greater emphasis given to individual ownership and family titles and a rapid acceleration in the pace of redistribution, has been influenced by the National Union of Farmers and Cattle Ranchers (UNAG).

UNAG represents the interests of the Nicaraguan peasantry with 80,000 members accounting for 50% of agricultural production. It is an active, effective and autonomous organization which sprang from the grassroots. It was founded by top FSLN cadres from the ATC in response to the organizational needs and the political demands of the peasants. Some of the founders of UNAG, such as Daniel Nuñez, were themselves campesinos. UNAG could well serve as a model for revolutionary mass organizations in terms of its effective advocacy for its members, and the level of involvement of its membership. In addition to its impact on the agrarian reform, UNAG has also been influential in changing food pricing and distribution policies.
The ATC and UNAG have been effective in maintaining the grassroots, democratic and mass organizational aspects of the Nicaraguan Revolution. CDSs and other mass organizations such as the Sandinista Trade Union Federation (CST) have succumbed to the centralizing and controlling bureaucratic tendency in the revolutionary process. However, it is reasonable to expect that those in the key (and most populous) production sector of the economy, namely agriculture, will be in a position to exert greater bargaining power and to articulate their own interests in an effective manner.

The difference between rural and urban levels of mass organization in Nicaragua stems in part from the more effective Sandinista presence in the countryside and its large rural mass base prior to the Insurrection. The ATC was the first and largest Sandinista mass organization. To this day, the most experienced and dedicated cadres tend to be in the countryside. In Managua, the FSLN cadres are often recent "conversos" with little organizational experience or revolutionary background. Many of the CST cadres are not Sandinistas; they are members of the Nicaraguan Socialist Party (PSN), Nicaragua's pro-Moscow Communist Party, and tend to favor a rather hierarchical and authoritarian relationship with their union membership.

Although the MINVANV argues that the population of the asentamientos is parasitic and economically marginal, this must not (however intended) be understood as an indictment of those individuals, but rather must be interpreted as a reflection of the generally underdeveloped state of the economy inherited from Somoza -- particularly the low level of industrialization. This condition of underdevelopment is being prolonged and exacerbated by the effects of the U.S. contra war and the economic embargo. Even though a large proportion of the population in the asentamientos is employed in the "informal sector," this too is a reflection of the state of the urban economy. The asentamientos in fact, contain a typical cross-section of the urban population.

A billboard in "downtown" Managua promoting the new Constitution. The text reads: "Constitution: our pledge for the future; FOR WHAT? So that the land might belong to those who work it."
There is an interesting and compelling analogy between the role of the campesinos in defining the Agrarian Reform policy and the efforts of urban workers in the asentamientos to contribute to urban development policy. Both are involved in struggles concerning the revolutionary promise of a better life for all Nicaraguans, and concerning the relationship between land and productivity. In the urban context, land is needed for housing, industry, and recreation. Just as the Ministry of Agrarian Reform responded to pressure from the rural population by negotiating changes in the Agrarian Reform policy (demonstrating responsiveness and flexibility), so too will the MINVAH eventually change its policies to conform more closely to the realities of life for the majority of Managuans. If the options are to raze the settlements or to negotiate, it is likely (based on the rural experience) that continued organization and political pressure from the residents of the asentamientos will result in negotiations.

The ATC and UNAG representing the rural population in their ongoing "negotiations" with the Ministry of Agrarian Reform (MIDINRA), suggest a viable model for urban working class organizations, particularly the CBSs in the asentamientos in their struggles with the MINVAH regarding land titles in Managua. The CST, in its negotiations with the government concerning overall investment policy and the democratic organization of production in the factories, also could benefit from the experience of the rural organizations. It would be, perhaps, no exaggeration to assert that the future of the Nicaraguan Revolution depends on the outcome of these struggles.

APPENDIX: CASE STUDIES.

Villa Bulgaria

General Description

Villa Bulgaria is located in Zone #10 of Managua, to the west of the enclosed market, "Ivan Montenegro." The settlement has a population of 1,600, and occupies an area of 4,070 square meters which is divided into 240 plots for its 240 families. Each plot measures 10 varas by 16.5 varas and has its own outhouse. (One vara equals 33 inches.) The settlement has 13 andenes or streets, with 20 houses per street. Each anden has a communal water spigot to service its 20 houses, and all the houses have electricity. As of August 1986, 225 of the houses were completed, while 15 were semi-constructed. Several houses are solidly constructed with a cement base, wood frame, and a corrugated metal roof; many houses are of wood only.

Villa Bulgaria is situated within two blocks of eleven different bus routes, and across the street from the bus terminal for traveling to the northern and eastern areas of the country. The settlement has one ENABAS outpost where rationed items and provisions (rice, beans, sugar, cooking oil, and soap) are distributed on a bimonthly basis. There are three lumberyards (one of which provides materials on credit to the people of the settlement), one pulpería (small store), two carpentry workshops, one welding workshop, eight tortilla shops, ten tailor shops, and one small business school. A community house is currently being constructed.

Children attend one of the two nearby elementary schools: Edgardo Arbizu or Rigoberto Cruz Arguello. The settlement has a large playing field and has organized baseball teams for both young men and women. Although they do not have their own health clinic, they are visited twice a month by a physician and a nurse -- sent by the Ministry of Health (MINSA) -- who attend mostly to young children and senior citizens. The health clinics in Villa Venezuela and Las Américas No.1 are open to the residents of Villa Bulgaria. In addition, a team of nine trained health brigadiers who have been active in vaccination campaigns (targeted primarily for children and canines) live in the community. Whenever solicited, the Ministry of Education (MID) has conducted adult literacy workshops in the community. Other services include electricity, running water, and garbage collection. All three are provided for with the cooperation of the inhabitants of Las Américas No. 1, the adjacent barrio.

Most of the inhabitants of Villa Bulgaria moved from surrounding neighborhoods such as Villa Revolución, Las Américas No. 1, and Villa Venezuela, though there are some from other departments in Nicaragua, particularly Bluefields, Sábalo, Juigalpa, Diriamba, and San Rafael del Sur. The majority of the people work in factories, hospitals or clinics, and in workshops such as carpentry, masonry, and tailoring. They are also office workers, soldiers, teachers, market vendors, street vendors, and domestic workers. Fifteen percent of the families consist of single women with children.
History of the Settlement

On January 4, 1984, a group of 411 families seized vacant land belonging to the Ministry of Transportation (MTRANS) which was located on the north side of "Ivan Montenegro," one of the newer enclosed markets.

On January 6, 1984, MINVAH representatives, and Zone #10 CDS and FSLN delegates met with the squatters. In that meeting it was agreed that if the squatters would vacate the land they had recently occupied, the MINVAH would help them to find a suitable place to relocate within six months (i.e., by early June). The squatters agreed to these terms and gave up the land. In July, the MINVAH stated that an area consisting of approximately 80 plots adjacent to the neighborhood "Waspan" in Zone #9, would be cleared and made available for relocation. The plots would be ready for resettlement by the third week in August.

At the end of August 1984, an article appeared in El Nuevo Diario, one of the daily newspapers, announcing that a number of families had demanded land for a new housing project and that the MINVAH had accommodated them by clearing land in Zone #9. Shortly after, inhabitants of Waspan squatted on the newly cleared plots. The Commission had another meeting with the MINVAH demanding an explanation. The MINVAH did not make any further commitments to find land for them. The Commission called a meeting with their constituents and informed them of what had happened. Collectively they decided to seize the vacant land opposite Ivan Montenegro, upholding their original plan to secure housing for the group, now numbering some 240 families. Thus, in early September 1984, Villa Bulgaria\(^{17}\) came into being.

The squatters cleared and levelled the land on their own. They hired an architect (for a fee of $35,000 córdobas) to draw up a plan of the community, and to measure out 240 plots of equal size. They laid out thirteen streets running east to west, with a row of ten houses on each side of the street. At the east end, each street opens onto the main road facing the market, while at the west end, they face Las Américas No. 1. The community collectively bought the cables for electricity and the tubes for water, and they relied on their own plumbers and electricians to install these services. Both of these services were obtained illegally by tapping into the electric and water lines of Las Américas No. 1.

Organizational Structure

Villa Bulgaria has a five member, all female Comité del Barrio Sandinista (CBS). In addition, each anden has a block committee consisting of three members. Elections are held once a year. The most recent elections were in March 1985. Villa Bulgaria is in Zone #10, and its CBS coordinators attend zonal and regional CDS meetings, each of which are held three to four times per year. In addition, the zonal CDS has provided orientation workshops and leadership workshops for the inhabitants of Villa Bulgaria as well as for the other neighborhoods within its district.

The coordinators of the CBS hold regular meetings with the block committees, and when necessary, with the entire community; the participation rate in meetings is greater than 80%. The CBS coordinators have been meeting once a month with the zonal CDS leader to discuss the problem of land title and legalization, the building of their community house (now under construction), the possibility of building their own preschool, and other priorities identified by community members (for example, building an elementary school, a park for the children, a health clinic, etc.).

According to the coordinators, the most pressing problem they face is obtaining legal title for the land, and receiving assurances from the MINVAH that Villa Bulgaria will not be razed. They feel that they are being held back; that they could accomplish much more and work together on other communal projects to make Villa Bulgaria a model community. But without title to the land, they must be cautious; they can't afford to invest their resources into a community that is constantly threatened with the possibility of eviction.

Dinamarca

Description

Because of its location, Dinamarca represents an archetypal squatter settlement in Managua. It is situated next to a large electrical substation and the main city water works on the Laguna Asososca. It is sandwiched between halves of an older neighborhood,
Batahola Norte and Batahola Sur, is bounded by the main offices of the MINVAH and IMPESCA (the Ministry of Fisheries), and it is across the road from the U.S. Embassy. As if this array of adversaries were not formidable enough, the land on which Dinamarca was built is riven by a geological fault, the danger of which is a matter of some dispute. MINVAH uses the fault as their main pretext for not "recognizing" the settlement, insisting that nothing should be built there and that the squatters must therefore relocate. The CBS in Dinamarca independently consulted a geologist who claims that the fault is not as serious as MINVAH has told them. According to informants, the land has been slated for a military installation or a sports facility. The overwhelming majority of squatters in Dinamarca, are long-time residents of Managua, with 10% being recent migrants from areas outside of the capital city.

History

In May 1986, Dinamarca celebrated its first anniversary. One year earlier, beginning in April of 1985, several families began to occupy an old abandoned cotton plantation on which only the caretaker was living. The first families were given temporary permits to live on the land with the following stipulations: that they not build permanent housing, that they would agree to move off the land at some unspecified future date, and that they would inform the MINVAH if any other families settled there.
In early May, a massive and spontaneous land invasion occurred. In the absence of leadership, organization, and planning, the land was divided into plots and occupied on a first-come, first-served basis. Some petty speculation took place in the form of the occupation and sale of individual plots and houses. Thus a substantial section of Dinamarca (the first section that was occupied, which is now identified as Section A) has no recognizable infrastructure of streets or clearly marked lanes between the houses. Instead, it consists of randomly scattered houses and plots connected by foot-worn paths.

After defying a MINVAH ultimatum to vacate the land, the new residents set up their first work committee, but it was a provisional committee and carried out no real projects. Between May and July 1985, there was virtually no organizational structure in Dinamarca. In July, the MINVAH appeared with police and army vehicles in an attempt to dislodge the squatters. The squatters successfully resisted this attempt (allegedly with the aid of several residents of Batahola). A new work committee was established to organize subsequent phases of the land invasion, and the settlement continued to expand, gradually filling up the vacant land stretching as far as the U.S. Embassy and the MINVAH offices. The work committee met with the Zone #3 CDS to plan and establish a permanent CBS committee structure in Dinamarca. On July 13, 1985, approximately 250 residents of Dinamarca elected a five-member CBS committee to represent them.

Armed with its mandate from the community, the committee moved to put an end to speculation in lots and houses, and began the process of meeting basic needs. Volunteer labor was mobilized to clear land, tap the city water and electrical supply, deliver water and electricity to its residents, and generally to provide for the public safety and welfare. A health committee was established and a series of ongoing meetings with MINVAH, INB (National Electric Utility), and INAA (National Water Works) was begun.

By September of 1985, there was one water spigot for each of the three sections of Dinamarca, and electric wire was strung up throughout the entire settlement. By January 1986, there were 10 public water taps, plus an additional 14 taps located in individual homes, and the committee began to deal with the problem of sewage disposal by promoting the digging of latrines. An ENABAS store was opened for the distribution of state-rationed goods. Thus, with the help of the FSLN's CDS organizational structure, the residents of Dinamarca were able to organize effectively to solve their most pressing problems and meet their most basic needs.

However, there are still a number of important issues that the community must deal with. Perhaps most important, there is the need to obtain some form of official recognition as a community or legal title to the land they have occupied. There is a pressing need for educational facilities at all levels - the children of Dinamarca travel a considerable distance to attend an already overcrowded school. There is as yet no casa comun or common meeting house for the community as a whole, and there is an urgent need for a daycare center.

Organizational Structure

There is a high level of political and organizational activity in Dinamarca, which contrasts sharply with the level of activity in most established older (and legal) neighborhoods and communities. In Dinamarca, the administrative and political bodies meet regularly and elicit high (although fluctuating) levels of participation from the community. For instance, the neighborhood security watch originally had sixty active participants. This number dropped off for a time, but is again on the rise.

The early CBS leaders experienced a burn-out problem which is common among community leaders who have taken on the responsibilities of officially representing their community to the outside, and dealing with the day to day problems and concerns of their people, in addition to supporting their own families. In an attempt to deal more effectively with the pressures and responsibilities of being community representatives and leaders, the organizational and administrative structure of Dinamarca has been decentralized and rationalized. A Consejo del Barrio or community council which is completely separate from the general CBS committee, was established to take care of the day to day administrative problems (such as ensuring that there is an adequate supply of milk powder for the children). In addition, each block has its own coordinator or leader, and block meetings occur fortnightly. The Consejo meets with the block leaders once a week to exchange information and administer programs.

Cont. p. 16
FRIENDS OF NICARAGUA

A Campaign to Send Material Assistance to the People of Nicaragua

Spring - Summer 1987

Why Do We Want to Help?

We feel a moral obligation to help the Nicaraguan people, because our own government's policies have caused so much death and destruction in their country. The United States created and continues to support the contra army, whose purpose is to terrorize the civilian population, to undermine government social programs, and to prevent the success of economic development efforts. In effect, U.S. policy punishes Nicaraguans for defining their own path out of the poverty and repression of the Somoza period—almost 50 years during which the U.S. did nothing to encourage Nicaraguan democracy because the dictators served "U.S. interests." Today, our politicians justify armed aggression against the people of Nicaragua because their revolution presents a threat—the "threat of a good example" that a successful Nicaragua might offer to other impoverished people in the hemisphere.

The Nicaraguans have already shown that, when given the chance, they can achieve remarkable improvements in literacy, education, health care and agrarian reform. Friends of Nicaragua believes that Nicaraguans deserve the opportunity to build their own future, and we offer material and moral support in place of the destruction caused by U.S. policy.

What Can We Do?

It's true that we cannot hope to match the millions spent by our government on destruction in Nicaragua. But in a country with a population smaller than that of Chicago's, any amount spent constructively on building for the future goes a long way. Those of us who have been to Nicaragua know, too, that help from U.S. citizens is worth every more than the material benefits it brings—such help also brings the Nicaraguans hope that there are North Americans committed to ending the cruelty of current U.S. policy, and to establishing a new relationship of mutual respect and friendship between our peoples.

After Friends of Nicaragua decided to raise funds for material aid, we chose to sponsor a project through the Capp Street Foundation, based in San Francisco. Established in 1973, the Foundation serves as a fundraising vehicle for social change by administering charitable donations and seeking support for sponsored grassroots organizations in the United States and Latin America. Many of the projects supported by Capp Street are considered too innovative or controversial to be served by other fiscal sponsors. Since 1983, the Foundation has devoted a major portion of its resources to fundraising for projects in Central America. Friends of Nicaragua is raising money for NICARAGUA WINDMILL REPAIR PROJECT, one of the efforts that Capp Street has prioritized for 1987.
If you can't make a donation right now, please send in this form so we can update our mailing list.

Donation $______ (check payable to CRISP/CUSTAR)

Zip

Address (campus preferred)

Phone

Name

PLEASE COMPLETE AND MAIL IN THIS FORM with your completed questionnaire to CRISP/CUSTAR.

Printing and mailing costs (suggested donation -- $15/year)

We need your ideas so we can keep bringing you important, relevant information -- but we also need your contributions to cover our printing and mailing costs.

THANK YOU!

Any final comments?

Others

- C.A. Weekly Report
- The Guardian
- The Nation
- The New York Times
- NAGA

7. Which other publications do you read for information on Latin America?

6. Are you currently active in local social-political justice groups?

Yes  No
In general, do you find the newsletter articles too long? Too subparagraph too

Other:

- Caribbean
- South America
- Central America
- Nigeria

4. Which areas would you be most interested in reading about?
   - news updates
   - ML's
   - local essays/reports
   - opinion pieces
   - activities/into ML's
   - letters
   - interviews
   - articles

If the figure of each type? Would you like to see more or less of them?

3. Which types of pieces do you currently read most? None

2. In general, how much of the newsletter do you read?

1. Why do you read the newsletter?

   CUSLAR is re-evaluating the newsletter. We're curious about what you think, and your feedback is appreciated. Please take a few minutes to respond to the survey below.

   Please share your thoughts about the newsletter. You can choose to respond with one word or phrase, or write a detailed review. Your feedback will help us improve future newsletters and make them more relevant to you.

   Thank you for taking the time to provide your insights.

   - What are the most valuable aspects of the newsletter?
   - What topics would you like to see more of in future editions?
   - Do you have any suggestions for improving the newsletter's format or layout?

   Please share your thoughts in the space provided below:

   - Date:
   - Email:

   Thanks for your participation! We value your input and look forward to hearing from you.

Cuslar

6-29 Anabel Taylor Hall
Cornell University
Ithaca, New York 14853

and Social Policy (CRESP)
Center for Religion, Ethics
A project of the

CUSLAR
WINDMILL PROJECT

Nicaragua Windmill Repair Project

The first goal of Friends of Nicaragua is to raise $3,000 for the Nicaraguan Windmill Repair Project of the Capp Street Foundation. Hundreds of 50 year-old windpumps in rural Nicaragua stand idle for lack of spare parts and trained repairpersons. The windmill project will send vital tools, supplies and North American technicians to train Nicaraguans so that they can repair the windpumps themselves and make spare parts locally. Rehabilitating this source of clean water for Nicaraguan farm families will raise food crop production, improve health, and advance Nicaraguan self-sufficiency. A single Friends of Nicaragua supporter has already pledged to match every dollar raised up to $3,000. Thus your contribution is doubled, and we will actually send $6,000 to Nicaragua!

Do You Want to Help?

There are many ways you can help. The simplest way, of course, is to write a check, and to encourage family, friends, and colleagues to do the same. You can volunteer to help out at Friends of Nicaragua fundraisers, or with planning and publicity. You can join one of the working groups that will keep Friends of Nicaragua on track as an organization. Or, you can plan a fundraiser of your own -- a potluck, a yard sale, a carwash, a concert.

For more information contact:

Friends of Nicaragua
P.O. Box 4535
Ithaca, NY 14852
277-3190, 272-4033
The general CBS committee has seven elected representatives: a general coordinator, vice coordinator, and coordinators of finances, health, housing, militia (community defense), and vigilancia (community security watch). The general committee represents a true cross-section of the community and consists of an industrial mechanic, a bank employee, a university employee, a bus conductor, a military officer, and a private businessman.

Members of the general committee assert that the community is committed to the mutual assistance and self-protection of its members. The people of Dinamarca watch for economic and social abuses and they keep an eye on each other’s needs and problems. There is a common welfare fund to help the indigent and those who have lost a family member in the war. When people leave Dinamarca, their housing becomes the property of the community as a whole, and might be used to relocate those with more meager resources. Thus, the houses are upgraded gradually and the blocks are reorganized.

Madres de Héroes y Madres de Pantanera

Description

“Madres” is one of the largest squatter settlements in Managua with over 700 families and a total population of more than 3,500. It is located in Zone #8 of the city, situated alongside the commercial center “Managua” and across the street from the “Huembes” market, the “Museum of the Revolution,” the “Manolo Morales” hospital, the “Eduardo Contreras” bus terminal (with buses leaving for Esteli and points north, and buses to all points within the city), and the settlement, “Santos López.” In other words, “Madres” is centrally located with easy access to public transportation and all services. The settlement is divided into 48 streets. There are over 700 houses on lots of varying sizes (either 7 varas x 20 varas or 15 varas x 20 varas). There are two puquerías, two Evangelical churches, and one Catholic church within the settlement.

The majority of the squatters (80%) are from nearby neighborhoods and settlements. They cited the shortage of available housing or rental apartments and properties as their primary reasons for squatting. Twenty percent of the population of “Madres” is from the countryside, which is the highest percentage of rural migrants of the three squatter settlements we studied. Many of these people originate from farms in northern Nicaragua (which have been attacked by the contras) and have come to Managua seeking refuge; most of them expect to return to their farms when the war is over, which contradicts the MINVAH’s contention that rural migrants come to Managua in search of economic opportunity. For example, one young farmer and his wife had arrived in Managua about one year ago after the contras had confiscated his animals:

You can’t refuse them. The contras eat your food and kill your animals. They kill, rape, torture, and kidnap our people. We would gladly return to our home if only the aggression against Nicaragua would end.

History

“Madres” was settled over two years ago, in the latter half of 1984. The land invasion was rapid and involved a large number of people who resisted attempts by MINVAH and the police to make them leave. An additional 100 families settled in 1985.

Under the leadership of a four-member provisional CBS committee, the first residents of “Madres” secured and cleared the land. They tried to hire a surveyor to plan out the lots for houses and the streets between houses, but that proved to be too expensive, so the squatters measured and laid them out by themselves. With the help of the Zone #8 CDS, the squatters were able to obtain and install latrines, buy pipes and tap into the water line from neighboring “Grenada,” and buy cables and wire to provide electricity. Thus, all the houses in “Madre” have electricity, latrines, and they all have access to water on their blocks, though some have their own water supply as result of digging individual wells. The CDS zonal committee also assisted in setting up elections.

The community continues to grow in size. New families were still arriving in August 1986. As the new CBS coordinator said,

If I have a little bit of land and someone comes in from the campo and says, “Listen brother, I don’t have any place else to go,” and I have a little bit of space in my solar then I’ll tell him to stay here. How can I turn him away?
The "open door" policy or attitude expressed above by the CBS coordinator is different from the policies adopted in the other squatter settlements (where the entrance of new residents is limited) and reflects his experience as a refugee, as well as the fact that the land seized by the residents of "Madres" is quite a large parcel that probably has not yet reached its carrying capacity.

Organizational Structure

"Madres" experienced a succession of financial crises when the first few CBS coordinators collected money from the residents, ostensibly to pay for community-wide projects and expenses (for example, to pay "Grenada" for tapping their water) but then used those funds for personal gain.

The current structure consists of an elected body of CBS leaders. In addition, each block (manzana) has an elected leader. The participation rate in community meetings was noted to be somewhat higher for women than for men.

According to the general coordinator of the CBS in "Madres," the goal of the community is to become as organized as possible and to comply with and conform to all State regulations regarding housing settlements so that MINVAH will have no reason for demanding that we vacate the land. The State doesn't want to give legal title to the settlements because the State has its own agenda and its own priorities. Also, it is afraid of mass migration to the city. But we will fight for our security.

Pierre La Ramée and Erica Polakoff

Endnotes

1 The title, a translation of, "Al campesino, la tierra; al obrero, el asentamiento," was taken from a conversation with one of the local CDS committee leaders of the squatter settlement "Dinamarca," August 1986.

2 Batahola Norte was settled after the earthquake of 1972.

3 Quoted from conversations with a resident of the squatter settlement "Dinamarca," August 1986.

4 Squatter settlements are communities based on the illegal occupation of land. Land take-overs may be organized or disorganized, massive or gradual. The squatter settlements in Managua, unlike their counterparts in other Latin American countries, have arisen in the "center" of the city and not on the periphery or outskirts. Also unlike settlements elsewhere, the settlements in Managua have been established primarily by the residents of older neighborhoods and not by rural-urban migrants.

5 Somoza had, in fact, received millions of dollars in international aid for the purpose of rebuilding the city after the earthquake. His failure to invest that money in the reconstruction of Managua and his appropriation of funds for personal gain, created a great deal of distrust and opposition among former supporters and eventually contributed to his downfall.

6 Shortly after its "unveiling," Plan 2000 was scrapped due to pressures from CDS leaders and the mayor of Managua, Moises Hassan. This decision reflects recent concerns among high level government officials and party cadres regarding the state of the urban economy and the growing unrest and frustrations among the urban population.

7 The Junta for National Reconstruction (JORN) initially functioned as the Executive of the revolutionary government. With the 1984 elections, a presidential system with a Legislative-Constituent Assembly was established.

8 When Somoza fled the country in 1979, he pocketed a then recent IMF credit of $33.2 million, drained the Treasury of all but $3.5 million, and left behind a total foreign debt of $1.5 billion.
Twenty percent or fewer of the squatters in the three settlements we studied were from the campo.

As already noted, the MINVAH identified 62 urban settlements as illegal squatter settlements. INIBES, however, identified 71. When the chief of the planning department at the MINVAH was questioned about this discrepancy, no explanation could be provided.

There was a surge of land take-overs around the time of the Nicaraguan national elections in November of 1984.


The most basic level in the CDS structure is the "block committee," referred to as a CDS. The block committee can represent the residents of any small unit of area (block, street, or row of houses). At the neighborhood level, the CDS is referred to as a CBS (Comité del Barrio) and consists of representatives from the block level CDSs. At the wider mass organizational level (i.e., zonal, regional, national) the term CDS is used.

Such planning is in accordance with the government policy. On the list of national priorities, housing is fifth, after defense, food production, health, and education. Managua (Region III) is last in terms of national investment priorities. These priorities are in fact dictated by the U.S. contra war and the economic embargo against Nicaragua, and the consequent scarcity of resources.

The Chief of Planning pointed out that the water supply for the city was already being rationed and could not support additional housing developments.

Wasp an was an older community settled soon after the 1972 earthquake.

The name, "Villa Bulgaria" derives from the fact that the Bulgarian Embassy promised to provide material aid to the community after they have received legal title to the land and are no longer threatened with relocation.

Although the people of the neighboring Batahola Norte initially opposed the presence of Dinamarca -- fearing chaos, crime, and other difficulties -- they have since come to accept Dinamarca as a stabilizing and beneficial addition to their neighborhood.

The neighborhood security watch considers its responsibilities to include not only internal security, but also to keep an around-the-clock watch on the U.S. Embassy, noting the license plate numbers of all vehicles entering or leaving the compound. They are determined to "protect" the embassy from possible CIA attacks that may be used as a pretext for U.S. military action against Nicaragua. It has been reported, for instance, that the CIA, American mercenaries, and Colombian drug traffickers were involved in a plot to kill Louis Tambis, then U.S. Ambassador to Costa Rica, and blame it on the Sandinistas.

The CUSLAR Newsletter provides CUSLAR members and other concerned individuals with the opportunity to present information and analysis on topics relevant to Latin America and the Caribbean. The positions of the authors do not necessarily reflect the positions of CUSLAR as an organization. If you are interested in writing an article for the Newsletter please call the CUSLAR office. We also welcome letters to the editors.

The Committee on U.S./Latin American Relations (CUSLAR) is a Cornell University-based group which works in Ithaca and the surrounding area to promote a greater understanding of Latin America and the Caribbean. We are particularly concerned with the role of the United States in influencing the social, political, and economic conditions of the region.

The CUSLAR office is in G-29 Anabel Taylor Hall at Cornell (255 7293). The office is open to the community on weekdays. Weekly meetings are held on Mondays at 5pm in Anabel Taylor.
Repression in El Salvador
Sanctuary Testimonies

On November 20, four Salvadoran refugees living in Sanctuary came to Ithaca to tell why they have had to flee El Salvador and live as refugees in this country. We asked them to tell their stories for the CUSLAR Newsletter.

Roberto

My name is Roberto. Because of the persecution in my country I had to become just another of those thousands of refugees. It's not pleasant for me to remember my experiences because it's like returning to the torture chambers. But it's very important for me and for my people that the North American people become aware of the injustice and the reality of life in El Salvador.

In April of 1981 construction workers in San Salvador went on strike in protest of our miserable salaries that didn't meet the high cost of living. In those days I was working in carpentry installing ceilings, and my pay for eight hours of work was 15 colones, equivalent to three dollars. These salaries didn't meet the cost of basic necessities; it wasn't enough for me as a single person, much less for a family.

We asked for a raise, but the response of the contractors and the government was to send the troops and the National Guard, who came to break up the strike by beating people and threatening us with death. They told us we were communists, trade unionists, troublemakers. As result of that government operation many fellow workers were beaten. Thanks to God I had the chance to flee before they got to where I was. The workers that stayed were forced to continue working. All of us resumed work out of necessity and for fear of losing our jobs.

On May first of that year we had a march on Labor Day and took the opportunity to protest once again the injustice and the high cost of living. We marched, running the risk of being massacred by government assassins.

We felt that it was necessary for someone to demonstrate and say, "Stop the murders, Stop the violence, End the misery" Our people are victims of the daily bloodshed of the death squads. From 1979 through 1983 it was common for bodies to appear daily all over the country; raped women with their breasts cut off, without fingernails and spikes stuck in their bodies. The decapitated bodies of men appeared with signs of different kinds of torture, some with their skin eaten away by chemicals like battery acid.

Because of these injustices we decided to take to the streets and shout to the government, because while children die of malnutrition due to lack of food and medical attention, adults are victims of the repressive forces of the government.

On May 8th of that same year I was coming home from work when I came face to face with one of the death squads. They were waiting for me. (After the May 1st march they began to capture people who had participated in the march.) I was on their list for the crimes of participating in a strike and demanding a salary raise. They have informers in the unions, and everywhere, people we call "sars". They are paid by the government to find out who the "troublemakers" are. Anyone who even makes a criticism of the government can be put on their lists or just for revenge or spite, too. I got off the bus and walked about 25 meters. They were all looking at me and I felt as if I were floating in the air. I walked in their direction...they all had murderer's faces. Just by looking at their gazes I could tell they would take me away. When I was about ten meters away from them the head of the group said, "Stop that guy with the suspicious face" I was terrified when one of them came at me with his rifle raised up. All I could think was, "My God, please let it be You that disposes of my life."
were kept in constant tension because we never knew who was going to be next. After I had been in the borstels a week, a soldier opened the door and saw that I was right by the door so he said, "come out here". I was extremely happy, because I thought I was going to be released. But instead he gave me a mop and a broom and said, "You're going to clean this hall because there are going to be visitors and I want the floor to be as shiny as a mirror." He also said, "You don't have to speak to anybody, not the captain or anyone else. I'm the soldier in charge of you."

As I got close to the door of the hall, I saw the same captain I had tried to talk to twice before. When I spoke to him, I felt I was risking my life, because of what the soldier had said. But I did it anyway, and he listened to me. As he heard me, we walked to a table where a sergeant was sitting and the captain told him to take down my information. Then he ordered the sergeant to free me. But while I was waiting to be freed they just gave me back my ID card. I asked for my money, my merchandise, my watch and he said, "Well, there's nothing here". I told the sergeant that I had to have these things, that I couldn't get a bus home without any money. So he stood up and said, "OK, do you want to go back in or do you want to go home?" So I said I wanted to go home and I left.

I walked to a nearby park, not knowing what else to do, and I told my story to a woman in the park. She gave me money to get home, saying that I wasn't the first to be let out and come to the park like this. And that's how I managed to get home.

When I got home I told my mother what had happened to me. It was very difficult for her because she had been looking for me in hospitals and police stations. I had to stay at home for a while because I wasn't able to work. I had to recreate my merchandise samples and I had lost checks and bills.

About five days after I returned home, three men in civilian dress arrived at my house while I was across the street chatting with a friend. These men saw me as they arrived but they went to my house and pretended to be friends of mine. After they left, my mother called me and asked if I hadn't seen my friends who had just left. I was puzzled, because I didn't know who they were and my mother said they were going to come back to do some business with me.

The next day I didn't sleep at home, I slept at a friend's house. They came back that night. The third time they arrived I was at home. It was about ten at night. I was awake and so I saw them get out of their vehicle. They had automatic rifles this time. I had to escape and I had already thought about what I would do if they came back. I jumped out the back window. The men cut up my bed with a knife. They told my mother they were looking for weapons. When my mother asked them what the problem was, they said the problem was me, not her. They asked where I was, and my mother said that I had left for California. One of them beat her and said, "That's a lie, he hadn't left the country. When the day comes that he leaves the country we'll be the first to know."

I returned a few hours after they left and found my mother crying on the floor. The man had left a message for me: I had 72 hours to leave the country. Fortunately I had the necessary funds to leave. I was able to get a Mexican visa through a taxi driver. He took care of everything for me, for a price: $3000. I had a visa in half an hour. I bought a ticket to Mexico right away.

The next day, while I was on the airplane, waiting to take off, two people with jackets on pulled me over and asked me some questions. They asked me how much money I had, where I was going and when I planned to return. I said I had enough money, that I was going to Mexico, and that I didn't know when I would return. One of them spoke into a radio and read off my name from my passport, but he spoke in English so I don't know what else he said. I was too nervous to ask them who they were but later I remembered what my mother told me, that they knew I was still in the country. "When the day comes that he leaves, we'll be the first to know", they said.
Reagan is seeking more aid for the contras

We're trying to get some countries to change. We're using the old carrot and stick approach...

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For more info: The Nicaraguan Coffee Project of Ithaca, 967 E. State Street, Ithaca, NY 14850
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Event Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>April 4</td>
<td>Sweet Honey In the Rock at Bailey Hall. Tickets $9.00 at the door, $8.50 in advance at Smedley's, Ithaca Guitar Works, Rebop Records, GIAC.</td>
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<tr>
<td>April 5</td>
<td>Benefit brunch for CUSLAR at Moosewood. Two seatings, 10:30 and 12:00. Tickets $7.00 at Moosewood, CUSLAR, and Rio.</td>
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<tr>
<td>April 12</td>
<td>Stand (Jeremy Werbin) and Iphoria at the Nines; benefit for Friends of Nicaragua (see centerfold).</td>
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<tr>
<td>April 16</td>
<td>CUSLAR Film Series. Crossover Dreams with Ruben Blades. Uris Hall, free.</td>
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<tr>
<td>April 30</td>
<td>CUSLAR Film Series. Quillomba. Anabel Taylor Auditorium, free.</td>
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<tr>
<td>April 28 and 29</td>
<td>Visit of Father Alas, formerly assistant to Archbishop Romero, and currently representing the San Francisco-based Capp Street Foundation (see centerfold). Call CUSLAR for details.</td>
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<tr>
<td>May 3</td>
<td>Benefit brunch for Friends of Nicaragua (see centerfold) at Moosewood. Two seatings, 10:30 and 12:30. Tickets $7.00 at Moosewood, CUSLAR, and other locations TBA.</td>
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