

'struggle continues

licly offered to meet with him. Nicaragua publicly offered to sign contadora, immediately. It's not that they don't want any relations with the United States, but rather what they would like, both the Nicaraguan people and the government, is to have relations — but on equal terms. Not relations of exploitations and oppression. Reagan wants them to sacrifice their political principles — that's not something revolutionaries do — certainly not the Nicaraguan revolutionaries.

Gateway: What is the state of relations between Nicaragua and neighbouring Central American countries?

Ammar: Nicaragua is a country with socialist tendencies trying to survive in a hostile atmosphere. Honduras is playing a very aggressive role today. The contras seek refuge in Honduras, it provides them with food, aid, and the terrain they work from.

The contras will come into Nicaragua, and the Sandinistas will go in to defend their people. The contras will then run to Honduras. The Nicaraguan government does not allow its defence to carry on operations onto Honduran territory because they don't want to give an excuse on a silver platter for the United States to invade. If it does, I think it will do so with a Latin American army, most probably the Honduran army.

"The Sandinistas want and need peace"

The language Honduras uses towards Nicaragua is very hostile. In the Honduran press the Sandinistas are called totalitarian communists that are out to conquer all of Central America—which is not true. They simply want to determine their own future. They want the revolution to advance.

Gateway: As a result of the economic blockade against Nicaragua, and the contra attacks, are there any shortages which deprive the Nicaraguan people of basic necessities?

Davies: There are shortages of consumer goods and raw materials that make life difficult for Nicaraguans. However, the government has ensured that all people have access to basic necessities through rationing and the establishment of fair market prices for basic goods.

Ammar: They speak here of line-ups. There are some line-ups, but if 30 people are lining up for eggs, then you know that the 30th person will get as many eggs as the first person.

Gateway: Has the government taken any measures to penalize the oligarchy?

Ammar: No, these elements in Nicaragua are left alone. They live freely, they're not harassed in any way—as long as they do not violate any laws, they're left alone.

Gateway: Have these counter revolutionaries disrupted the progress of the revolution?

Ammar: They will do certain things which are within the law. For example, there was a shortage of water in Managua, and they would waste the water, as they were taught in the CIA manual; and leave it on all day. They wreck public toilets by throwing in the toilet paper. They wreck office equipment. But there are measures that the Sandinistas did take to deal with that problem. If there was going to be a shortage, then they would ration it in every community, so that the ex-Somozans felt the strain as well.

Gateway: Is the manual which was published last year by the CIA widely available?

Ammar: Yes, I've read it. The manual is very specific, in every way. That is, it instructs the counter-revolutionary elements to do things that will cause damage, and put doubt into the minds of the Nicaraguans about the Sandinistas.

Gateway: Is the manual concerned only with passive means of sabotage?

Ammar: No, among the many things it states is that you should kill political leaders, and to do it in public. It is stated clearly in the manual that their intent is to overthrow the Nicaraguan government. It is psychological warfare. It is a manual that calls for all kinds of destruction—even the destruction of human life.

Gateway: Many North Americans believe that a free press does not exist in Nicaragua. Is this so, and to what degree is the press



Looking toward a brighter future

Photos by Oscar Ammar

censored?

Davies: The U.S. government accuses the Sandinista government of press censorship, while, in fact, two of the three daily newspapers are private and more than half of the radio stations are privately owned. But, Nicaragua is facing a situation of aggression that has made it necessary, at times, to prevent the manipulation of the press.

Gateway: Which is the major opposition paper to the Sandinistas?

Ammar: *La Prensa*. It is the one that constantly speaks out against the Sandinistas, which is fine. The Sandinistas are not bothered by this, but when they begin to distort the truth and begin to get involved in propaganda, then it disturbs them. For example, they will have Daniel [Ortega] on one side, and a mutilated cow on the other,

and they will link them through a story.

There is also evidence that the CIA does actually finance, and interfere in *La Prensa*; at times it has given them orders. I specifically saw documents to that effect.

Gateway: How do some factions of the media distort the truth?

Ammar: You will turn on the radio and hear them criticizing the Sandinistas openly—and distorting the facts. They actually tell outright lies on the radio. One thing that does trouble the Sandinistas, and the Nicaraguan people and it should, is when the contras attack and burn cooperatives, killing children. This took place when I was there and *La Prensa* ignored the whole thing. Instead, on the front page, they had Managua's weather—"Big Changes". It was as if it had never happened. So a Sandinista official went on televi-



Nicaraguan children protest against contra attacks

sion and he informed the people of the fact that *La Prensa* had ignored the incident, demanding publicly that they speak out about it, and that they tell the story. *La Prensa* was challenged through discussion rather than resorting to censorship.

Gateway: Reagan may claim that freedom of the press exists in Nicaragua today because of American pressure—overt and covert. What is your response to this notion?

Ammar: Ronald Reagan cannot pressure the Sandinistas into anything. No government can pressure Nicaragua into doing things they don't want to do. The Sandinistas respect freedom of the press because they want to do so. They respect certain aspects of a mixed economy—and that's because that's the best thing for Nicaragua today. They're not doing it for the benefit of the U.S. Reagan can claim victory at times, but that's absurd. They did not hold free elections to show the western world that they gave in to western pressure; rather it was part and parcel of the revolution. They wanted to further consolidate the revolution. Their own feeling is that the people voted in 1979 when they had the revolution, and the elections made it official five years later.

"It's a war; they don't want to die"

Gateway: What do you see in the future for Nicaragua?

Ammar: I think in looking at the behaviour of the U.S. today, it is important to consider the future. I have always believed that the Sandinistas are looking for a peaceful solution to Central American problems; trying to have some sort of harmony with their neighbours. One thing that must be impressed upon people in North America is that the Sandinistas want, and need, peace—but Reagan is making that impossible. There is nothing new in what Comandante Ortega said in the last few days about withdrawing foreign troops from Nicaragua, and that the U.S. should withdraw its advisors. If the U.S. does not want conflict, the first thing it should talk about is halting the contra attacks, and then we'll sit down and negotiate. Nicaragua offered, a few months ago, to sign the Contadora proposal. The U.S. rejected that offer. Contadora specifically talks about the non-shipment of arms to Central America as well as the withdrawal of troops and military attaches.

I think the Reagan administration has to realize that they can't force the revolution, they can't pressure it. He wants them to say "uncle"—well they're not going to do that. They're not going to sacrifice their aims and goals because those goals are very just. What they're willing to do is negotiate for peace if the United States is truly concerned with peace in the region—which I don't believe it is.

Gateway: What do you believe the United States should do to resolve the problems of the region?

Ammar: Now is the best time for the U.S. to act in Central America to show those people that they might be willing to negotiate with the Sandinistas to achieve a peaceful solution. It's the best time for the United States because they will have more problems if they don't. There is solidarity in Latin America with Nicaragua, and the United States can only be viewed as being more negative, more militaristic.

Look at the governments the U.S. has supported in Latin America. For the past twelve years they have been behind Pinochet in Chile. I have never heard any criticism of Pinochet by the U.S., and he's one of the biggest murderers in Latin America. He is a butcher. The U.S. has also supported Stroessner of Paraguay, the longest living dictator in Latin America. They've turned Honduras into a military base. The CIA killed Omar Torrijos in Panama because he was trying to achieve change.

Any attempt at change is halted by the U.S.—through either military means or manipulation of the system in those countries. We see that in El Salvador, Honduras and Guatemala; and the people in Latin America are waking up to this and saying no.

Fortunately, the U.S. no longer enjoys a decent image among the people of Latin America.