

# Threat of US invasion shadows Nicaragua

By ERIN STEUTER

Discussion of a blossoming Nicaraguan democracy was overshadowed by the spectre of a possible American invasion at a conference of Nicaraguan popular educators Sept. 20.

The conference, entitled "Educating for Democracy: Lessons from Nicaragua," was led by a young Nicaraguan, Adela Perez. Perez's message was translated from Spanish by Dalhousie Spanish professor John Kirk for the 100 or so listeners who packed the lecture room at the Public Archives building.

Perez began by saying that, "When El Salvadorean officials call their elections 'democratic,' one can see that the definition of democracy has been vastly distorted."

Advising the audience to "be suspicious of American media, especially *Newsweek* and *Time*," she cited the misinformation of North American media as her reason for discussing popular

democracy—Nicaraguan style.

"The upcoming Nicaraguan elections," she said, "are a genuine example of democracy and educating for democracy."

She said that in the campaign leading up to the Nov. 4 elections, Nicaraguan people have a means of communicating with their government.

"Once a week government ministers face the people on phone-in TV and radio shows where they must field questions ranging from, 'Where is the new school you promised?' to 'Why are there no eggs in the store?'" she explained.

"I know it is difficult for North Americans to conceptualize," she said, "but it is true."

Perez has no doubt that the Frente Sandinista de Liberacion Nacional (FSLN), or "Sandinistas," are the revolutionary party which, in 1979, ousted the powerful Somoza family who had maintained a dictatorship in Nicaragua for over 40 years.

"The before-and-after contrast is the greatest political primer anyone can have. The average citizen can see how much better off he is since the revolution and so he will logically vote for the party that eradicated polio, built roads, taught him to read and gave him his own land—the Sandinistas," says Perez.

Her enthusiastic delivery and obvious earnest commitment prompted one member of the audience to ask if there were other young women in Nicaragua who were equally dedicated. "Thousands," replied Perez.

But enthusiasm for the Nicaraguan democratic experiment was dampened when the conversation

turned toward the tremendous odds that are currently stacked against Nicaraguan survival.

"The United States find us an intolerable example," Perez said. She pointed out that Nicaragua is

only a small country up against the U.S. with its vast financial resources.

"We don't like being the centre of aggression for the most powerful nation in the world," she said. □

## CFS targets ministers

OTTAWA (CUP)—Four Tory cabinet ministers whose policies may have a profound impact on students are the target of the Canadian Federation of Students' upcoming lobby campaign.

Youth minister Andrée Champagne, employment minister Flora MacDonald, finance minister Michael Wilson and secretary of state Walter McLean will receive letters and phone calls from CFS congratulating them on their appointments and encouraging them to press the government for adequate university funding.

CFS representatives will meet the four ministers in their Parliament Hill offices before Nov. 5, in a bid to make student issues an important item on the Tory's parliamentary agenda.

After the warm handshakes and polite introductions, however, the student leaders will pressure the minister to take concrete steps to ensure that federal transfer payments to provinces for education are passed on to universities and colleges.

Last year, some provinces failed to pass on the full amount of money set aside by the federal government for education. The most notable example was B.C., which failed to pass on the federal government's eight per cent increase in funding, and is reducing funding by 24 per cent this year.

The federation wants the federal government to offer financial incentives to provinces that give institutions enough money, penalize those that fail to live up to stated financial commitments and come up with national goals for Canada's post-secondary education system.

"We want a national dialogue on education. We want to include business, labor, students and anyone who's interested in education in this dialogue," says CFS executive Diane Flaherty.

Flaherty says two of the ministers, namely MacDonald and McLean, presented some of the federation's concerns on education

to Parliament while they were in opposition, and she is optimistic they will do so again. Flaherty says she hopes they will encourage other Tory MPs to support the federation's campaign, called "guaranteed tied funding."

The federation's campaign—which includes lobby meetings with all 211 Tory MPs and will culminate in a national lobby Nov. 8—is similar to that of the Canadian Association of University Teachers. CAUT has also asked the government to set up a federal post-secondary act that would stop provinces from diverting federal grants away from education. □

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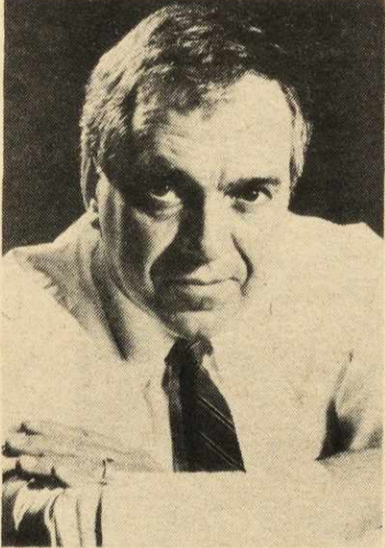
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