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## Film shoes plight of Nicaragua

By Dan Feldstein

The film *The Dirty War* succeeds in presenting at full force the trials, aspirations, and dilemmas faced by the Nicaraguan people as well as exposing to the public the practices of the Contras and their United States backers.

The 60 minute film was directed by Daniel Lacourse and Yvan Patry and produced by Alter-Ciné Inc. with assistance from the Société Générale du Cinéma du Québec and the National Film Board of Canada. It is distributed locally by OXFAM Canada.

The film starts out depicting scenes of war enveloped in a fuzzy mist and accompanied by fast-paced Central American revolutionary music, as if to invite the viewer to further explore the subject matter of the film and to serve as an introduction.

In the film from the very beginning a contrast is made between the destruction caused by the omnipresent war faced by the Nicaraguan people, and their determination to survive their current predicament and rebuild their war-torn country into a new and just society. Indeed the contrast is between progress; the progress of the

revolution; and destruction; the destruction of the Contra war.

A scene of people burying war dead, dark, gloomy, and interspersed with slow-paced, "dark" music, is interrupted by a scene inside a new infirmary wherein civilian militia and first-aid crews are being trained.

Scenes of a destroyed power plant and a destroyed coffee dryer at Ocotal and Bluefields respectively flash to scenes of factory workers in re-built tobacco factories and power plants, and again the music changes from "dark" to revolutionary and hopeful.

Another interesting feature of the film is the vast array of viewpoints sought by the filmmakers in order to create a wider overview of the situation. The viewers share the first-hand experiences of foreign volunteers, women tobacco workers, factory workers, representatives of the indigenous Miskito population, the vice-president of Nicaragua, a US admiral, a writer and campesinos, among others. All of them have one thing in common: they have all been affected in one way or another by the Contra war.

The film succeeds quite well in eliciting emotional responses through the use of many close-up shots of people (mostly campesinos) who have been affected by the war, and capturing their responses to sensitive questions.

"It really hurts losing a son, but I won't hold my other one back. We must never forget the blood that's been shed," says a distraught woman whose son had been killed by the Contras. As this goes on the camera focuses closely on the crying woman's face and tries to capture her emotions. Appropriately, this scene takes place in cemeteries for victims of Samosa's National Guard.

In another situation, an old woman proclaims "it's all Reagan's fault," expressing her sorrow at herself having lost a son and at the same time expressing sorrow's sister emotion, anger.

In still another case, the president of an agricultural cooperative, in reference to a question about how the crop is protected, states "we work with our rifles on our shoulders."

This is contrasted sharply with the insincerity of Contra leader Emillo, who states (smiling nervously) "how could we kill people who support us? We are fighting to obey God's word against the athiest Sandinistas." Oddly enough, the majority of people shown in high states of emotion, such as crying, are women. Very few men are shown in this situation.

The film does have its pitfalls. For one, it lacks originality, which is characteristic of a political documentary film industry stuck in a stylistic rut. It proceeds in the usual interview style, which bores the viewer, detracting from the emotional impact. In spite of this, the emotional impact remains sufficiently strong.

Another problem with the film is that many of the interviewees are not named. The directors saw fit to name the "important" people interviewed in the film, such as the Nicaragua vice-president and a retired US admiral, but the campesinos and peasants who make up the majority of the interviews remain anonymous.

Giving names to the most important people would serve to make the scenario more realistic, more personalized. And no doubt, the campesinos are the most important people in the film for it was they, as the film so aptly points out, who built the revolution.

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