

as deference to US policy — “listening too much” to US Secretary of State George Shultz (*The Citizen*, November 1). Mr. Chrétien stated that every effort should be made to encourage democracy in Nicaragua, and sending an observer team as witness would provide an opportunity to assess the fairness of elections. Recalling an earlier decision to send official observers to elections in El Salvador, Mr. Chrétien added that “by being there, we confirmed that it was as democratic as possible under the circumstances.”

With a large victory accorded Daniel Ortéga and the Sandinista regime in the November 4 elections, opinion was divided among foreign observers on the significance to be placed on the results (despite the generally well-run aspect of the voting procedure). While the Heap-Caplan team from the NDP indicated that, despite a few reservations, the benefit of the doubt should be given the Sandinistas with regard to the electoral process, Canadian Ambassador to Costa Rica (with concurrent accreditation to Nicaragua), Francis Filleul, was more pessimistic. According to Mr. Filleul, it was difficult to speak of an election with the “absence of an opposition party worthy of the name” (Radio Canada program, November 6). The Ambassador added that foreign observers had not been present during the early hours of vote counting, and that in several regions the polls had been entirely supervised by the Sandinista army. However, said Mr. Filleul, despite the fact that the exercise was worth trying as a plebiscite rather than as an election, the “rather cordial” relations between Ottawa and Managua would not change because of it.

Writing for the *Toronto Star* November 18, Gerry Caplan, having observed the elections for the NDP, stated his conviction that the process had not “been a sham.” “The election certainly was free,” he said, and although the country is not perfect, “an overwhelming consensus emerged” among the foreign observers. Firmly critical of US policy on Nicaragua, Mr. Caplan called for a greater Canadian role in the area, including the establishment of a Canadian presence in order to reduce Canada’s dependence on “systematic and deliberate US misinformation.”

### **Invasion Scare**

The prospect of a US invasion of Nicaragua loomed in mid-November, as President Reagan threatened retaliatory measures should it be discovered that Nicaragua was receiving MIG fighters from the Soviet Union (which the US administration alleged was the case). As fears of an invasion increased, Nicaraguan Ambassador Casimiro Sotelo called upon Canada during an Ottawa press conference November 13 to assist in averting such a move by the US. Mr. Sotelo noted increased US military activity in the region — including US reconnaissance flights of Nicaragua, the positioning of US frigates off the coast, and the addition of US troops to those already stationed in neighboring Honduras — as sound reason for concern on the part of his government (*The Citizen*, November 14, *La Presse*, November 15). Quoted by CBC television November 13, Ambassador Sotelo said that he was “making a call to the Canadian people to denounce, to condemn any military action that the Reagan administration will take against Nicaragua” (External Affairs transcript, November 16).

Responding in the House of Commons November 13 to a question from Dan Heap (NDP, Spadina) about Canada’s support for Nicaragua and the Contadora draft peace treaty, External Affairs Minister Joe Clark stated that the government continued to “have some very serious reservations about the effectiveness of the verification procedures in the . . . agreement as it now stands.” However, said Mr. Clark, Canada firmly supported the Contadora process, and the Government would be “delighted” to meet with Ambassador Sotelo. “We very much want to have his assessment of the situation in Nicaragua,” he concluded, in order to effectively exercise a Canadian influence to bring stability to the region.

When questioned in a scrum outside the Commons that same day about possible Canadian assistance to Nicaragua, the External Affairs Minister added that in addition to meetings with the NDP election observation team, he would be involved in discussions with representatives of NGOs present during the elections and with Ambassadors from the Contadora countries (November 26). Mr. Clark stated that the government saw “no ideological reason” not to proceed with aid projects in Nicaragua, and that on the political side, he was “very much interested in getting as much information from as many sources about what is going on in Nicaragua and what it would be useful for Canada to do.” Mr. Clark stated at that time that he did not “anticipate an invasion,” seeing more “tension in the newspapers than there [was] in fact.” He added that contacts with US officials had indicated that no intention of invading Nicaragua existed. When asked what contingency plans the government had for evacuating Canadians resident in Nicaragua in the event of invasion, Mr. Clark stated that he “assumed” the existence of one (External Affairs transcript, November 14).

Pressed further, Mr. Clark told reporters in a scrum outside the Commons November 14 that Canadians would have to rely on US assistance should evacuation prove necessary. Without diplomatic offices in Nicaragua, Canada would “have to rely on Americans to get Canadians out,” he said (*Globe and Mail*, November 15). While maintaining that fear of an “imminent invasion” was an “artificial state of crisis,” Mr. Clark urged Canadians in Nicaragua (with an official count of forty-five and many more undocumented) to register with officials at the embassy in Costa Rica. Without wishing to have his comments “construed as any suggestion of Canadian concern,” Mr. Clark pressed for registration “in the unlikely event there was some need for us to consider some kind of evacuation.” As Mr. Clark pointed out, “it is more difficult for us to deal with emergencies with regard to people who aren’t registered.” When reporters noted the difficulties encountered during the 1983 US invasion of Grenada, Mr. Clark responded that he believed no difficulties in evacuation would arise with regard to relying on US assistance. With some Canadians stationed in Nicaragua having expressed concern about their safety if forced to rely on US protection in the event of an invasion, Mr. Clark added that the government would “take into account that there is some apprehension, for reasons that I think have less to do with safety than with other considerations . . . and we will see if it is possible to put in place some other kind of arrangement” (External Affairs transcript, November 15).