

# Contras and McGill students clash

by Karen Valihora and Chris Lawson of The McGill Daily MONTREAL

Protestors stole the stage from Nicaraguan Resistance spokesperson Tony Ybarra when he spoke at McGill Feb. 5.

The Nicaraguan-born and -educated professor had to make two attempts to complete his address after he left the lecture theatre when hecklers and two audience members held a sign in front of him, saying "No Pasaran," became too much to handle.

Campus police were called after the two audience members refused to remove the sign, or themselves, from in front of the podium. Ybarra was taken away in a car, with police, McGill security and conference organizers around him.

Arguments started before Ybarra

took the stage. Conference organizer Tony Flanz was interrupted when introducing Ybarra. "I'm for the freedom of speech, speaking for myself..." Flanz began, but got no further.

"That's what the German Social Democrats said in 1933," one audience member shouted, interrupting Flanz. "They said, 'Let Hitler speak,' and look what happened."

A shouting match ensued between audience members arguing for and against the contras.

In a symbolic protest, about twenty people stood up and turned their backs to Ybarra as he took the podium. By the time Ybarra left, there were more than 40 people facing the opposite wall.

Central America Group members had brought placards to the speech, but had been refused admission.

"They were going to call the police if we brought them in," group member Shannon McMurphy said.

Ybarra finished his speech by accusing the protestors of adopting the "denial tactics" of the Nicaraguan government. "This policy of denial has failed, this policy of turning your backs to reality," he said, to jeers and cheers.

Ybarra stopped answering ques-

tioned back behind the sign.

Ybarra left the theatre after explaining that he did not want to ask the police to remove the two sign-bearers and invited all those who wished, to accompany him. "The question period resumed in a packed lecture hall.

Members of the audience asked whether it would be possible for the contras to use money received from the U.S. for humanitarian aid. "Instead of shooting at peasants, buying off peasants with the offer of aid might be more successful," one audience member said.

"I have never worked with the American government," Ybarra claimed. "I cannot advise the American government about how to deal with the peasants. Your suggestion is naive, to think people who have fought for 20 years can be bought off. This is not a super-market. People are not things on shelves to be sold," he said.

Ybarra said the revolutionaries in Latin America are firmly committed to their own beliefs and ideologies. "The Sandinista government's convictions are to convert Nicaragua into a concentration camp," he said, to angry jeers from the audience.

Theresa Espinosa, a Nicaraguan living in Canada, challenged Ybarra, saying, "You represent the gov-

ernment of the U.S. You want to impose the government of another country on Nicaraguans."

Ybarra answered, "I am working, the contras are working, to give you the right to be elected in Nicaragua."

"The Sandinista government is negotiating a cease-fire right now to obtain peace and stop the war. The only way to stop this war is through guaranteeing the right of free elections in Nicaragua."

"Are you expecting further installments of U.S. aid? And if not, will the contras be able to manage without American aid?" was another question.

"I feel it will be a setback to the war, but I think the war is going to end soon. The only solution to Nicaragua's problems is if the war ends. It is important to negotiate with internal opposition to establish free elections, to end the war forever," Ybarra replied.

According to Ybarra, "the Democrats' opposition to Reagan is a partisan political issue within the political process of the U.S. Questions of aid to contras have been confused with all questions referring to mercenaries receiving funds from the U.S., like the C.I.A."

Espinosa said, "If the contras go back to Nicaragua and succeed without the support of the United States, only then will you be a representative of the Nicaraguan people." Her comment was greeted with loud applause.

The audience questioned the "confrontational" tactics used by the contras, and Peter Feldstein, UQAM student, quoted Amnesty International allegations of human rights abuses in Nicaragua. According to the 1986 A.I. report, "Chief complaints about the Sandinista government referred only to 'short

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term imprisonment and detention'. The contras are accused of routine 'torture and imprisonment.'"

"How can you think the contra movement is democratic if you torture peasants to achieve your aims?" he asked.

"Do you think the movement would try to win the support of the peasant population by using torture?" asked Ybarra. "You could well call the Amnesty International report a lie, but that would be my personal opinion. I would suggest that Amnesty International is politically motivated."

Several audience members repeatedly questioned the validity of the contra "war for democracy" in light of the internationally recognized democracy of the 1984 elections. "It was the first time in Central American history that there were free, clean, open elections," said Maria Molina, a Nicaraguan.

According to Ybarra, the El Salvador elections were not democratic. "You want a second-rate democracy for Nicaraguans? They were not open to the participation of every political group, and neither did all the political forces in Nicaragua participate in the '84 elections."

"Your facts are your facts, and my facts are my facts," said Ybarra, in response to reverse information provided by hecklers in the audience.

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