

Religion & Democracy

A Newsletter of the Institute on Religion and Democracy

January/February 1986

Sandinista Crackdown Tests U.S. Church Ties

An indisputable verdict has now been rendered on Nicaragua's "Christian-Marxist" revolutionary regime. The past few months have brought a sweeping government crackdown on civil and religious freedom. Some U.S. church leaders have felt compelled to protest; others have fallen into bewildered silence; while yet others continue to defend the Sandinista Front. Rare indeed is the spirit of Hebrews 13:3 -- "Remember those who are suffering as though you were suffering with them."

Sandinistas Escalate "Ideological War"

On October 15, 1985, Nicaraguan President

In This Issue

Another article on Nicaragua? Is the IRD obsessed?

We can understand the impulse to flit away from Nicaragua to new political scenery. What is happening there is not a cheering thing to watch. Perhaps this has something to do with the impulse of the church social action network to change the subject by turning so much attention to South Africa. But we find ourselves riveted to the Nicaraguan saga by a religious and intellectual fascination. One of the great dramas of our time is being played out there: the drama of Christian-Marxist collaboration.

In Nicaragua before the 1979 revolution, many religious workers took up the slogan "despues de Somoza, cualquier cosa" ("after Somoza, who cares what"). Most Nicaraguans now realize that what comes after matters quite a lot.

Not so church radicals in the U.S. They are refusing to stand behind fellow Christians in Nicaragua in what is now a life and death struggle to preserve independent Christian witness in that country. And, having abandoned Nicaragua to "cualquier cosa," they are eagerly tendering church support to such groups as the African National Congress in South Africa and Christians for National Liberation in the Philippines -- groups which are heavily influenced by Communists and eager for violent confrontation.

Nicaragua today is South Africa and the Philippines tomorrow -- if the church Left continues to have its way.

Also in this issue, we announce the IRD's new Executive Director (see page 2) and introduce a regular feature on religious liberty (page 8).

Daniel Ortega declared a national state of emergency. Almost all constitutional guarantees were suspended. In the weeks that followed, the intent of these measures became clear. They were designed to suppress not the armed resistance (the "contras") but unarmed civilian organizations.

Interior Minister Tomas Borge, in an interview published in La Prensa in November, confirmed the Sandinistas' fear of domestic dissent. Borge worried that the Sandinista Front, while winning the "military war," might lose the "ideological war." He identified "the enemy" as the Catholic Church, La Prensa itself, and the opposition political parties. These groups, he explained, "do not fire bullets. They fire ideas, but that is a dangerous arsenal." Borge even complimented the "superior ideological organization" of these antagonists, who had succeeded in "confusing the masses" with "reactionary propaganda." By contrast, he complained, the Sandinista Front was defending a revolution so "complicated" that "we have not been able, and we may never be sufficiently able, to achieve popular understanding of all this complexity."

So the Sandinistas, having failed in their efforts to win the Nicaraguan people through persuasion, turned instead to repression.

The Catholic Church: The Preeminent Target

The Catholic Church, the strongest independent voice in Nicaragua, was the first target of this campaign. On October 12 the Ministry of Interior denied the Catholic magazine Iglesia a license to publish. Ministry officials confiscated 10,000 copies of the

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Miguel Cardinal Obando y Bravo, Archbishop of Managua, conducts Sunday Mass (RNS photo)



IRD Board Names

Kent Hill Executive Director

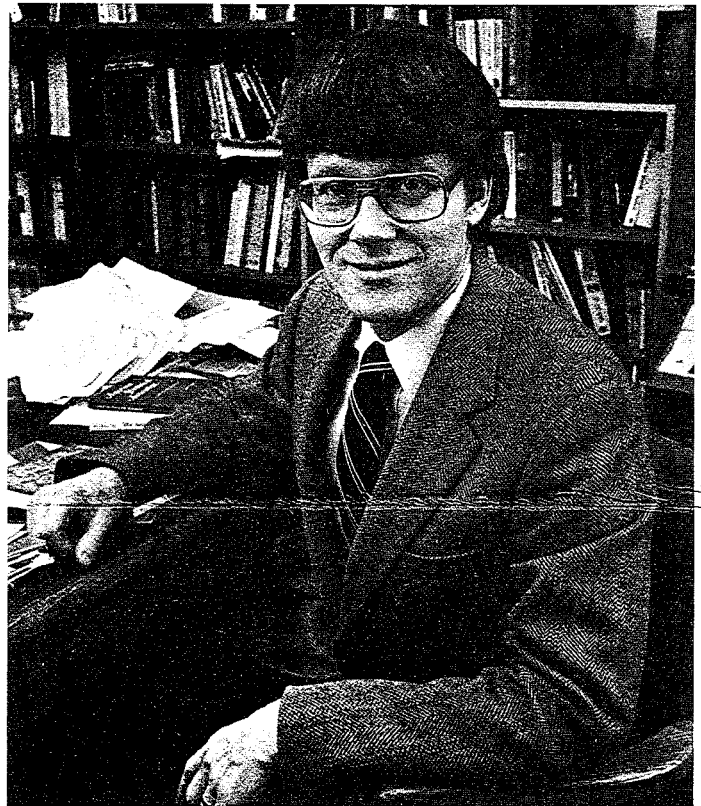
The new Executive Director of the Institute on Religion and Democracy will be Kent R. Hill, Associate Professor of History at Seattle Pacific University, Seattle, Washington. The IRD's Board of Directors voted to offer Dr. Hill the position at its meeting in Washington in early December. The 36 year old Dr. Hill, who specializes in Eastern European and Soviet History, will assume his new post in June.

The IRD board also elected as a new board member the Very Rev. Dr. John H. Rodgers, Jr., President and Dean of Trinity Episcopal School for Ministry in Ambridge, Pennsylvania. A systematic theologian, Dr. Rodgers taught at the Virginia Theological Seminary before joining the faculty at Trinity when it was founded in 1976. Edmund W. Robb, Jr. and Carl F.H. Henry were reelected as chairman and first vice-chairman of the IRD board. Michael Novak, Resident Scholar at the American Enterprise Institute, was elected second vice-chairman.

"We are pleased to have attracted as Executive Director someone with Kent Hill's qualifications and gifts," said Ed Robb. "Dr. Hill is a respected scholar in Slavic and East European studies, and his knowledge of the situation of the churches in those countries will make him a strong voice in the debate within our own churches over Christianity, Marxism and revolution. He has also published in the areas of Christian apologetics and church history, and combines these interests with an aggressive commitment to Christian activism."

From 1978 until 1983, Dr. Hill served both in this country and in the USSR as a liaison figure for the "Siberian Seven," two Russian Christian families who took refuge for five years in the basement of the American Embassy in Moscow. He met frequently with Soviet and U.S. officials, testified before U.S. congressional committees, assisted the Vaschehenko and Chmykhalov families with the press after their emigration, and translated the families' extensive documentation of religious persecution in the Soviet Union.

"During its first five years the IRD has played a crucial role in challenging dangerous and highly questionable church positions on international affairs," said Dr. Hill. "But much remains to be done in the struggle to call the church to a more responsible social witness -- one which reflects more accurately the conscience of church members, a renewed appreciation for the democratic experiment, and an understanding of the central importance of religious liberty. It is my firm conviction that the IRD is on the threshold of an even more significant contribution in



Kent R. Hill

(photo by Jerry Gay)

broadening the debate over church involvements abroad."

In addition to serving on the Board of Advisors of the Institute on Religion and Democracy, Dr. Hill is a member of the Board of Directors of Keston College - USA; the Board of Directors of the World Without War Council of Greater Seattle; and the National Advisory Board of the "Peace, Freedom, and Security Studies Program" of the National Association of Evangelicals. He has been a board member and Contributing Editor for Religion in Communist Dominated Areas and is an active member of the First Church of the Nazarene, Seattle.

Dr. Hill worked as a Russian language translator while serving in the U.S. Army 1971-1974. He completed his doctoral work in 1980 at the University of Washington, where he specialized in Slavic studies as well as European intellectual history. He has taught at Seattle Pacific University since that time and was selected Seattle Pacific's Professor of the Year in early December, 1985. Dr. Hill and his wife, Janice, have two children, Jennifer, 5, and Jonathan, 3.

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first issue and the press on which it had been printed. Norman Talavera, the editor of Iglesia, was later arrested and held without charges for one week. On October 15, the day the state of emergency was declared, State Security agents occupied the offices of the Social Services Commission of the Managua Archdiocese, and remain there to this day.

The Sandinistas did not dare touch the person of Miguel Cardinal Obando y Bravo, but they have greatly obstructed his ministry. He was prohibited from holding open-air masses on his tour of provincial towns. Townspeople were not allowed to greet him with processions. When he celebrated mass in La Libertad on October 27, buses carrying over 2,000 worshippers were stopped several miles outside of town. Those who wanted to hear the Cardinal had to walk the rest of the way to and from La Libertad.

Catholics less eminent than Cardinal Obando suffered more directly. According to Msgr. Bosco Vivas, Auxiliary Bishop of Managua, the Sandinistas have temporarily detained over fifty priests since October 15. These include groups of priests from Managua, Masaya, Carazo, Rivas, and Granada who were summoned to local police stations in early November. Police officers treated them as if they were under arrest, taking fingerprints and photographs. Then the priests were dismissed with harsh lectures threaten-

ing them with severe consequences if they engaged in "political activity" of any sort.

Bishop Vivas also estimated that at least 100 Catholic lay activists have been detained. Among them were Marvin Caldera, a leader of Catholic charismatics, and groups of parishioners from two Managua churches. All eight members of the committee which organized a November 10 welcoming procession for Cardinal Obando in Chinandega were arrested and held for several days. The Catholic radio station has been closed twice: once after inadvertently broadcasting a censored phrase ("Liberty is the most precious blessing that God gave to mankind") from a sermon by Cardinal Obando; once after neglecting to transmit parts of President Ortega's New Year's message. At last word Radio Catolica is still off the air.

A Broad Crackdown

The Sandinista government quickly expanded the crackdown beyond the Catholic Church. Reports from the various political parties and two major trade unions indicate that their national leaders, as well as scores of their local activists, have undergone arrests, interrogations, physical attacks, and confiscations of personal papers.

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Oscar Bolioli: Sandinista Apologist at the NCC

One wonders if the Sandinista government has a truer friend than the Rev. Oscar Bolioli, Director of the Latin America-Caribbean Office of the National Council of Churches. Although admiration for the Sandinistas has sharply declined, Bolioli has steadfastly defended them.

In October the NCC faced the difficult task of coming to terms with the crackdown on the churches in Nicaragua. When the IRD asked the NCC to protest, Bolioli, responding on behalf of General Secretary Arie Brouwer, declined comment. Not until after an early November trip to Managua, during which Bolioli consulted with government leaders and pro-Sandinista religious activists, was the IRD able to discover his assessment of the Nicaraguan situation.

That assessment, given in press interviews and in a letter to a member of the IRD Board of Advisors, was curiously similar to the official Sandinista line. Bolioli termed the emergency measures "mild," asserting that the Nicaraguan government had followed constitutional procedures in instituting them. He maintained that action was taken only to address "situations that threaten the national security of Nicaragua," and not to "restrict the civil liberties of the regular citizens."

While Bolioli admitted that the state of emergency might "lead to some excesses," he did not seem to feel that any had yet occurred. He suggested that those who had been detained and harassed deserved such harsh treatment. He joined the Sandinistas in describing their victims as people known "to be in a long history of opposition to the revolution," who are now "actively working in favor of the contras."

The unprecedented measures taken against Nica-

raguan Protestants even received a specific endorsement from Bolioli. He told the United Methodist Reporter in December that Sandinista officials had "persuaded him the Nicaraguan government has legitimate concerns that evangelical pastors being detained are opposing the draft and helping people evade it." There is no evidence that he checked these charges with the accused church workers, who refute them firmly. Although Bolioli conceded that many NCC denominations have opposed conscription in the United States, he argued that the civil war in Nicaragua justifies its government's refusal to tolerate objections to compulsory military service.

Bolioli also identified himself with the Sandinista charges against the IRD. He mentioned to the Reporter that his early November discussions with Nicaraguan officials had touched on the IRD. He reported, with apparent approval, the Sandinistas' perception of the IRD as "a very real threat to the security of Nicaragua." It was, curiously, shortly after Bolioli's visit to Nicaragua that the Sandinistas commenced their series of fabrications about the IRD and Christians in Nicaragua.

Religion and Democracy readers may recall our report (May/June 1985) on Bolioli's involvement in a controversial attempt to intimidate Nicaraguan Christians. Disturbed by an IRD briefing paper in which journalist Kate Rafferty exposed the NCC-backed CEPAD as a tool of the Sandinista Front rather than representative of Nicaraguan evangelicals, Bolioli sought to attack her sources. He wrote CEPAD advising it to pressure the Nicaraguan Council of Evangelical Pastors, some of whom had talked with Rafferty, into repudiating her and the IRD.

Colombian Terrorists Honored at Managua Mass Officiating Priest from Mainline-Backed "Popular Church" Center

Last November a Colombian guerrilla group, called M-19, seized hostages in a bloody attack upon the Colombian National Palace of Justice. When the Colombian Army attempted to retake the building, the guerrillas killed as many hostages as they could. Approximately 120 died in the incident, including several justices of Colombia's Supreme Court.

As Colombia and Nicaragua exchanged diplomatic notes about evidence that the Sandinista government supplied arms to the M-19 guerrilla movement in Colombia, it emerged that M-19 has also received some comfort through ecclesiastical channels.

On November 10, three days after the incident, an unusual memorial mass was held in Managua, with Nicaraguan Interior Minister Tomas Borge in attendance. The person commemorated was purportedly Enrique Schmidt, a Sandinista comandante killed in combat a year earlier. But honor was also paid to some of those who had died in Bogota -- not the scores of innocent victims, but the terrorists who had butchered them. A spokesman for M-19, allowed to speak at the service, described his comrades as "martyrs" and delivered a harangue against Colombia's democratic government. Photographs published in a Colombian magazine show an M-19 banner over the altar as its representative was speaking.

The Catholic priest who celebrated the sacrament was identified as Franciscan Father Uriel Molina. A longtime close friend of Borge, Fr. Molina is a leader of the Antonio Valdivieso Ecumenical Center, a nucleus of the "popular church," which frequently supports the Sandinista Front against the Catholic hierarchy. The Valdivieso Center has received generous funding from mainline Protestant churches abroad, including: \$65,000 from the World Council of Churches (1985); \$19,500 (1983), \$6,000 (1984), and \$5,000 (1985) from the United Methodist

Church; and \$8,500 (1983) from the National Council of Churches. The Presbyterian Church (USA) supplies two staff members to the Center, James and Margaret Goff (the denomination's estimated average cost: \$45,000 per couple).

Fr. Molina's Franciscan superiors responded promptly to his reported activities. They summoned him to appear in Rome in January. It remains to be seen whether any of Fr. Molina's Protestant sponsors in the U.S. will reconsider their support for the Valdivieso Center.

Valdivieso Center's Father Uriel Molina, left, celebrates Mass with altar draped with M-19 banner (photo by Thomas Watkins--Revista Guion--Colombia)



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La Prensa, the only Nicaraguan newspaper not tied to the Sandinista Front, has been put under increasingly tighter censorship. Sixty percent of the material submitted to the Interior Ministry is now excised, according to editor Jaime Chamorro. Moreover, the Ministry has now imposed the same kind of prior censorship on reports by the Permanent Commission on Human Rights, the only non-governmental monitor of human rights abuses.

New Victims: Nicaragua's Protestants

Most evangelical Protestants initially saw little to fear in the state of emergency. The early victims of the emergency measures had criticized the government on occasion, while the evangelicals -- aside from the pro-Sandinista Evangelical Committee for Aid to Development (CEPAD) -- had carefully steered clear of politics. They stressed their total dedication to evangelism and pastoral ministry.

On October 30, however, the Sandinista crack-

down began to strike at the evangelical community. Over the next two weeks State Security arrested dozens of the most prominent evangelicals in the country, many of whom were involved in youth and children's ministries. Among them were: Felix Rosales and Saturnino Serrato of the National Council of Evangelical Pastors (CNPEN), Ignacio Hernandez of the Nicaraguan Bible Society, Juan Simon Videia of the Assemblies of God, Guillermo Ayala of the Pentecostal Baptist Church, Gustavo Semilla of the Pastors Council of Managua, Boanerges Mendoza of the First Central American Church of Managua, Modesto Alvarez and Maria Teresa Madrigal of Child Evangelism Fellowship, Jimmy Hassan of Campus Crusade for Christ, and Rolando Mena and Eduardo Gutierrez of the radio station Ondas de Luz.

These leaders and others were interrogated at length. State Security officers accused them of engaging in subversive propaganda against the Sandinista government -- and particularly against the

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military draft. Although the evangelicals rejected all these insinuations, their interrogators demanded that they sign confessions of collaboration with the CIA. The psychological strain was increased through acts of humiliation and threats against the detainees' lives and their families. Between interrogation sessions the imprisoned church workers were kept in tiny cells one meter square, without light or ventilation. Some were stripped, doused with water, and locked in a refrigerated room for hours. Most were released within a day, with instructions to remain in Managua, to refrain from all evangelistic activity, and to report daily to State Security.

Why did the government hit the evangelicals so hard? The official allegations, including the charge that evangelicals preached against the draft, could not be substantiated. Jimmy Hassan, at a press conference in Washington on December 19, gave a flat denial: "I dedicated myself totally to the preaching of the Gospel, and I was in no way involved in political activities. . . . We evangelicals in Nicaragua respect the laws of the Republic. We conform ourselves strictly to what the law says. Never -- neither personally nor as organizations -- have we conspired against the Sandinista government." He went on to state most explicitly, "I have never preached against compulsory military service in Nicaragua, and I dare say that no evangelical leader has ever preached against compulsory military service."

But Mr. Hassan recalled receiving a more brutally frank account of the Sandinistas' motives. Just before Mr. Hassan was set free, the State Security lieutenant who had interrogated him explained that: "Your problem is that you preach to young people about Jesus Christ, and because of that they distance themselves from Marxism. And this we will never permit here in Nicaragua."

Perhaps this explains why other State Security agents condemned a scrupulously non-political Campus Crusade for Christ evangelistic tract, "Have You Heard of the Four Spiritual Laws?" as subversive literature. They seized 50,000 copies of the pamphlet, together with everything else in the organization's Managua office.

U.S. Christians Protest Sandinista Repression

The state of emergency impelled some U.S. religious groups to readjust, at least modestly, their stance toward the Sandinistas. And a few took up the cause of those being persecuted. On October 17 the IRD sent a letter to 19 U.S. church leaders, asking them "to vigorously oppose the massive restrictions on religious freedom and civil liberties imposed on the people of Nicaragua." Recounting the rising harassment of the Catholic Church by the Nicaraguan government, IRD Chairman Edmund Robb urged the leaders to "set aside their differences regarding U.S. policies in Central America to speak forthrightly for the Church in this critical period."

Bishop David W. Preus, General President of the American Lutheran Church, quickly joined the protest and registered specific objections to the shut-down of Iglesia and the breaking of an agreement exempting Catholic seminarians from the draft.



Nicaragua's Vice-Interior Minister Omar Cabezas charges CIA with financing Nicaraguan evangelical groups at a November 1985 press conference in Managua (Reuters/Bettmann Newsphotos)

Msgr. Daniel F. Hoye, General Secretary of the U.S. Catholic Conference, adopted a tone of polite disapproval in a telegram to Nicaraguan President Daniel Ortega. Hoye expressed "deep regret" at the "excessively broad" restrictions on civil liberties. He pointed out that the abrogation of constitutional guarantees would not contribute to the desired "political, nonmilitary settlement of the conflicts affecting Nicaragua."

The Stated Clerk of the Presbyterian Church (USA), James Andrews, phrased his message to Ortega as an appeal from a distressed friend. He told the Nicaraguan President: "The significant gains you have made in land reform, literacy, health care, and other human services are prejudiced by your recent restriction of civil liberties." Reminding Ortega of his denomination's opposition to U.S. aid to the Nicaraguan armed resistance, Andrews warned that the emergency measures "lend credence to those who support the contra terrorists."

The campaign against the evangelicals in early November elicited new cries of alarm. The National Association of Evangelicals issued an unusual public statement denouncing the "new level of intensity of harassment of the evangelical church in Nicaragua." Dr. Billy Melvin, NAE's Executive Director, requested prayer for "our brothers and sisters in Christ ... that these infringements of human rights be stopped." The NAE also sponsored a December press conference for Jimmy Hassan at the National Press Club in Washington, giving further public attention to the plight of the evangelicals.

The response of the NAE may have influenced the United Methodist Council of Bishops, which uncharacteristically voiced concern about Sandinista abuses. Last spring a delegation of three UM bishops had reported that there was no religious persecution in Nicaragua. But at their mid-November meeting, having heard of the arrests of some Nicaraguan

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Protestants with whom they had met (at the insistence of the IRD-related United Methodists for Religious Liberty and Human Rights), the bishops reversed themselves. The Council recognized a pattern of "increasing intimidation and restrictions by the (Nicaraguan) government on the freedom of the church to preach or publish the church's understanding of the Gospel of Jesus Christ." The bishops stated their conviction that recent Sandinista denials of freedom had been "out of proportion to the threat which these denials are imposed to address." Bishop C. P. Minnick, one of the members of the spring delegation, said that the bishops "could do no less than this ... to maintain our integrity."

Religious Left Rushes to Sandinista Defense

Nevertheless, the Sandinistas could still count on their most faithful sympathizers in the U.S. churches

to accommodate themselves to the new campaign of repression. Daniel Ortega's speech at Riverside Church -- just ten days after the state of emergency was declared -- drew a packed house. The audience, including dozens of church bureaucrats from nearby 475 Riverside Drive, gave Ortega two thunderous standing ovations and applauded his every denunciation of U.S. policy.

The National Council of Churches apparently has abstained from any statement of protest. An NCC delegation was visiting Nicaragua as the evangelical leaders were being arrested; however, spokesmen for the delegation refused to discuss the matter publicly. According to Jimmy Hassan, neither he nor the other detainees saw any evidence of help from the NCC. Indeed, Oscar Bolioli, the director of the NCC's Latin America Office, later made remarks clearly intended to justify the Sandinista measures (see p. 3).

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U.S. Church Protests Help Jailed Nicaraguans, Prompt Sandinista Charges Against IRD

The voices of U.S. Christians who are outraged at Sandinista infringements of religious liberty have been heard in Managua. In particular, the strong reaction to the harassment of Nicaraguan evangelicals caused the Sandinistas to ease up. Officials of the U.S. State Department singled out the appeal from the United Methodist bishops as a key factor in obtaining the release of Boanerges Mendoza, the evangelical pastor who had been held the longest. Jimmy Hassan, another of the arrested church workers, thanked concerned U.S. Protestants for "the solidarity that they have shown with the evangelical church in this time of persecution in Nicaragua." He expressed the view that publicity abroad had "helped us a great deal."

Even the Sandinistas have acknowledged, albeit in a backhanded way, the power of U.S. Christian concern. Vice-Minister of Interior Omar Cabezas, in a November 28 press conference, declared that the protests must have been orchestrated by "one of the most powerful governments on earth, the U.S. government." Unable to comprehend the strength of public opinion in a free society, Cabezas and other Nicaraguan government officials have invented elaborate stories of U.S. government manipulation of religious groups.

Furthermore, they paid the IRD the perverse compliment of depicting it as the engine of this allegedly vast conspiracy. During late November charges against the IRD issued from no less than five official Sandinista sources: Foreign Minister Miguel d'Escoto, in an interview with the Jesuit magazine America; Cabezas, at his press conference; and articles in the party newspaper Barricada on three consecutive days.

These Sandinista spokesmen labeled the IRD "a CIA-front organization," "created ... by President Reagan's administration" to provide a religious angle to "destabilization programs in Nicaragua." (Rep.

Dave McCurdy, chairman of the oversight subcommittee of the Democratically-controlled House Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence has made an inquiry into the alleged IRD links to the CIA. There is, McCurdy declares, "absolutely no evidence which suggests any truth to these assertions."

The Sandinista spokesmen further characterized the IRD's advocacy of religious freedom in Nicaragua as "a campaign to slander the revolution" drawing on "all the power and resources" of the U.S. government. According to the Sandinistas, the IRD channeled "sums of dollars" in U.S. "economic assistance" to supposedly subversive religious groups inside Nicaragua. These same sources claimed that we had also smuggled into Nicaragua documents "containing concrete plans for activities against the Patriotic Military Service (the draft)."

The IRD -- after wondering for a while what to make of these preposterous falsehoods -- decided to make a serious response, for they seemed to have threatening implications for those Nicaraguan Christians on whose behalf the IRD had spoken out.

On December 31 a letter signed by all thirteen members of the IRD Board of Directors was sent to President Ortega. The letter (available upon request) denied the exertion of any control by any agency of the U.S. government over the IRD, any receipt of funds for activities inside Nicaragua, any financial links to Nicaraguan religious or political groups, and any involvement in opposition to Nicaragua's military draft. The IRD directors branded the Sandinista charges as "a pretext for stifling religious freedom" of Nicaraguans carrying out "independent and authentic Christian witness." They reminded Ortega that "God has chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty." (I Corinthians 1:27) Their letter concluded, "We pray that your government will turn away from the cruel and dangerous path down which it has started."

A representative of the Maryknoll Fathers and Brothers refused to hold the Sandinistas responsible for their actions. Instead the Rev. John Geitner, of the Maryknoll Justice and Peace Office, shifted all blame onto U.S. policy: "We hope that a reduction in pressure on Nicaraguan society caused by border incursions and military threats from nearby foreign-supported guerrillas will lead to a resumption of peace and order in Central America which is the chief guarantee of civil and religious freedom."

On December 12 a coalition of the religious Left, calling itself "Quest for Peace," announced a drive to raise humanitarian aid for Nicaragua. Their goal of \$27 million (which precisely matches the amount appropriated by the U.S. Congress for non-lethal aid to the "contras") and their verbal savaging of the Reagan administration indicated that their purpose was to convey a gesture of political support for the Nicaraguan government. None of the Quest for Peace spokesmen, including Catholic Bishop Thomas Gumbleton (Detroit), had any but kind words for the Sandinistas.

In late October the United Methodist General Board of Global Ministries had rejected a resolution seeking an end to the emergency measures. Mission board members cited as reasons for their decision: a lack of information about human rights violations in Nicaragua, an unwillingness to speak about Nicaragua without also mentioning problems in other countries, and a sense that it would be hypocritical to criticize the Sandinistas while U.S. funds were promoting their overthrow.

But Global Ministries personnel must have felt chagrined when their own United Methodist bishops subsequently took the action the mission board had refused. So on December 14 a revealing letter was sent to all the UM bishops by four UM missionaries serving CEPAD, the favorite Nicaraguan charity of U.S. mainline churches. The missionaries argued that the bishops' description of Nicaragua "is simply not true." They parroted the Sandinistas by claiming that Nicaraguan Catholic leaders have "abused their freedoms of religion and speech to actively work in support of the counterrevolutionaries"; that the state of emergency applied only to those suspected of treason; and that the U.S. government is using religious and other groups in Nicaragua as an "internal front."

In sum, many church persons are no longer willing to go to extremes in their defense of the Sandinistas. Some denominational leaders, faced with the unavoidable facts of Sandinista repression, were persuaded to speak out for democratic freedoms. Despite their continuing underestimation of the Marxist-Leninist commitments that drive the Sandinistas toward totalitarianism, they have not let earlier enthusiasms for the Nicaraguan revolution blind them. But as long as key mainline church offices are occupied by radicals like Bolioli, who feel an ideological obligation to the Sandinista Front, and as long as the "missionaries" some churches send more readily side with the oppressor than the oppressed, it will be difficult for our churches to make a clean break with Managua.

-- Alan Wisdom

IRD NOTES

□ Over a year ago, in response to the publication of the first draft of a pastoral letter on the U.S. economy by the American Catholic bishops, a group of lay men and women issued their own "Letter of the Laity on Catholic Social Teaching and the American Economy." Two members of the IRD's Board of Advisors, **Michael Novak** and **James Finn**, served on that lay committee, and both have cited the second draft of the bishops' letter as evidence that some of the lay criticism has been heard. Nevertheless, Mr. Novak, in a carefully reasoned article in America magazine (Jan. 18, 1986), argues that the second draft displays a distorted "egalitarian impulse." The rigid commitment to an equality of condition seems contradictory to "all sense of role, difference of function and hierarchy. A hierarchical church should be wary."

□ **Kerry Ptacek**, former Director of Research for the IRD, was recently hired to serve as the Director of Planning and Projects for the Presbyterian Lay Committee, in Media, Pennsylvania. Kerry's political instincts, irrepressible wit and insightful reporting will be greatly missed. The IRD wishes him and his family God's blessings in their new home.

□ The Brookings Institution, a liberal think-tank in Washington, recently published a study which affirms the vital role which religion plays in American society. The 389-page Religion in American Public Life was authored by **A. James Reichley**, who devotes a generous section entitled "A New Center?" to the development of the IRD. "Many mainline leaders, and particularly members of denominational bureaucracies," he observes, "reacted to the formation of the Institute on Religion and Democracy like medieval clerics scenting the rise of a particularly foul brand of heresy." Reichley asserts quite properly that "if the churches become too involved in the hurly-burly of routine politics, they will eventually appear to their members and to the general public as special pleaders for ideological causes or even as appendages to transitory political factions." The report is \$14.95, write Brookings Institution, 1775 Massachusetts Ave. NW, Washington, DC 20036.

□ **Robert Campbell**, General Secretary of the American Baptist Churches USA, writes to take issue with a July/August Religion and Democracy report which noted that his church encouraged its congregations to join the sanctuary movement. According to Mr. Campbell, the General Board of the American Baptist Church, expressed "support" and "respect" for those congregations which had joined the movement, but did not "encourage" others to do the same.

□ Presbyterians for Democracy and Religious Freedom (PDRF), a committee of Presbyterians launched by the Institute on Religion and Democracy, has moved its national headquarters from Washington to Nashville, Tennessee. Readers interested in contacting the group may write either **John Boone** or **Robert Conant** at Presbyterians for Democracy and Religious Freedom, 20th Floor, First American Center, Box 106, Nashville, TN 37238.

Religious Liberty Alert

One of the founding premises of the IRD is that religious liberty is the most fundamental of human rights. Today, this right is frequently violated by regimes on the Right and on the Left that make total demands on the individual's life and conscience. Those of us who live in a democracy which permits the greatest diversity of religious activity have a moral obligation forcefully to defend and to publicize the plight of our brothers and sisters abroad who are being persecuted for their religious beliefs. Therefore with this issue of Religion and Democracy we begin a new regular feature in which we will highlight the plight of individuals or groups which are being persecuted because of their religious beliefs.

You can: 1) write letters on behalf of the victims of persecution to the proper authorities; 2) ask your church to "adopt" an individual or group; 3) publicize the plight of individuals or groups in your church bulletin; 4) ask your local newspaper to report on instances of religious repression.

Poet, physics teacher and devout Orthodox Christian Irina Ratushinskaya has been in a Soviet hard labor camp since April 1983. Born in the Ukraine in 1954, she received a degree in physics in 1976 and taught at the Odessa Pedagogical Institute. She and her husband became active in the human rights movement when they were refused permission several times to emigrate. Ratushinskaya increasingly devoted herself to writing poetry protesting social conditions in her country and expressing her deep Christian faith.

Both she and her husband were imprisoned for 10 days in 1981 after demonstrating on behalf of Andrei Sakharov, and subsequently both lost their jobs. In September 1982, she was again arrested and, at her trial six months later, charged with "agitation carried on for the purpose of subverting

and weakening the Soviet regime." Her poems were the main evidence used against her. On March 5, 1983, she was sentenced to seven years at hard labor, to be followed by five years of internal exile. (One of her poems, written at the time she was sentenced, is reprinted below.) She was deported to Barashevo hard labor camp where conditions are reportedly very harsh.

Between December 1983 and February 1984, she spent a total of 39 days in an unheated punishment cell where she fell ill of pneumonia. In September 1983, she suffered a concussion when she resisted attempts to force-feed her following a protest hunger strike. She now suffers from kidney disease and there is grave concern for her life. Her mother and husband are not allowed to visit her.

Letters on behalf of Ratushinskaya may be addressed: General Secretary of Tsk KPSS, M. S. Gorbachev USSR, USSR, Moskva, Kreml, The Union of Soviet Socialist Republics.

-- Maria Thomas

Lord, how is life for him? Keep a watchful eye,
Lest that bare cubby-hole apartment drive him to madness.
Make his pain a dark secret and lend to his face a light
Meant for two, so the world shall perceive adversity mastered.
With a lifted cup I salute the force of Your will
(See the ease of that gesture -- my hands held high without trembling.)
But with Being's radiant armor, protect his soul
From the jeers of the rabble.
Unlike him in obscurity, I have a road so plain,
Polished smooth by the multitudes, memorizing each pebble.
I can manage this task -- just watch me! But please keep him safe
From the nooks of insane asylums with spider webbing.
Do not dispossess him, depriving him of Your strength,
Do not let Your hand fall carelessly from his shoulder.
From eternity's alloy of spirit and truth
Let him fashion a chain and manacles for our sorrow.
When we stand in Your presence in the next life,
Asking nothing -- except a companionship past all fractures,
Past the power of angelic trumpets or rending knives,
We will look at You, ready to give You our answers.

Irina Ratushinskaya, April 1983

Translated by Susan Layton

Religion and Democracy

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