

government. Its provisions calling for a multiparty electoral commission, and a timetable and procedures for new elections within 90 days, were designed to force the Nicaraguan government into sharing power with the contras.

Nicaragua's president Daniel Ortega termed Reagan's plan «a publicity stunt» and immediately called on Washington to start direct, bilateral negotiations. Ortega's call was quickly rejected by the US administration. Secretary of State Schultz said that «...there is no way the United States would want to sit down with Nicaragua to decide what is right for Central America» (*International Herald Tribune*, August 7, 1987). This response clearly exposed Washington's real intentions of continuing its war against Nicaragua. In fact, Reagan's intent was to introduce a plan unacceptable to the Sandinistas, in order to use their refusal as a prelude for gaining congressional approval for more aid to the contras.

Faced with a Central American consensus, Washington initially seemed to respond positively to the Guatemala peace plan. However, Reagan's August 24th speech which was broadcast on the contras' clandestine station, Radio Liberacion, added new evidence of the US administration's intentions. Reagan said that the US would continue backing the contras until the Nicaraguan government lived up to its promises under the peace plan. The US's real position on the Guatemala plan was further revealed by a senior official who stated that: «The Reagan administration has decided that a regional peace plan for Central America cannot work unless the United States provides long-term support for the rebels in Nicaragua perhaps even months after a ceasefire» (*International Herald Tribune*, August 20, 1987).

BLOCKING US INTERVENTION

The most significant aspect of the Guatemala plan is that it establishes a consensus against foreign intervention in local conflicts. This constitutes a major barrier to US imperialism's strategy in Central America, and a major gain for Nicaragua. For years, the Nicaraguan government has worked hard to establish reasonable relations with its neighbors in order to head off US intervention. It is well known that without US support, the contras cannot

continue their war against the gains of the Nicaraguan people. Ending the contras' sabotage would allow the Sandinista government to channel more of its resources into development projects for increasing the people's welfare. Due to such considerations, President Ortega termed the new plan «a first, great, transcendent and historic step.» He also noted, «We still have major steps to take before there is peace in Central America.»

Though hopes for a peaceful settlement in Central America were increased by the Guatemala plan, a number of obstacles remain. Chief among these is the Reagan Administration's continued efforts to overthrow the Sandinista government. Another problem is related to the fact that to be lasting, peace must be just, acknowledging the political, social and economic realities prevailing in the countries involved. Peace has in fact different prerequisites in Nicaragua and El Salvador, sites of the two most intense conflicts in the region. In Nicaragua, the Sandinista government came to power as the result of popular struggle against dictatorship. It is leading the masses' struggle for democracy and social progress.

Democratization does not therefore necessitate power-sharing with the contras whose war is but sabotage kept alive by US support.

The opposition in El Salvador - the FDR/FMLN - is a completely different force in terms of its nature and strength. In El Salvador the liberation struggle is propelled forward by broad mass opposition to the Duarte regime's political and economic oppression, and its dependence on US imperialism. Democratization there does require serious negotiations between the regime and the FDR/FMLN since the latter has a legitimate right to demand that the grievances of the people be addressed and a government acceptable to the people be created.

Despite these problems, reaching a regional agreement on peace in Central America is in itself a success. It shows a positive tendency to seek indigenous solutions related to local needs, rather than submitting to US-imposed solutions. This was a very difficult achievement in view of the fact that several of the governments that signed the peace plan were imposed and/or kept in power by the US. ●

Nicaragua's president Ortega

