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U.S. politicizes Cuba's debt

NEW YORK—Early last month the U.S. tried to throw a monkey wrench into the complicated negotiations involving some 150 Western banks to come up with new terms for extending Cuba's \$3.3 billion foreign debt. As it turned out, the effort was mainly symbolic since American Express—the only U.S. institution involved—simply "sold" its share of the Cuban debt to a West German bank, allowing the negotiations to resume without missing a beat. In this instance, at least, the U.S. economic boycott was about as effective as a picket fence in holding back the sea.

Nonetheless, U.S. harassment of Cuba—and hypocrisy—continue. Shortly after the news of Mexico's imminent bankruptcy broke in August 1982, the U.S. successfully argued in favor of a \$1.07 billion loan by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) to the apartheid regime of South Africa on the grounds that fragile international financial negotiations must not be politicized. America assured Third World opponents of the loan that, needless to say, it opposed racial separatism in any form whatsoever, but since the world's largest banks were in grave danger of disappearing down a financial black hole, this was one instance when anti-racism would have to take a back seat.

But the Cuban incident demonstrates that politicization of high finance is definitely a one-way street in the view of the Reagan administration. If it hurts Washington's friends, such as South Africa, it is disruptive and irresponsible. If Washington's enemies suffer, though, it is the unfortunate consequence of a principled decision.

From the Cuban point of view, the debt negotiations are painfully ironic. Twenty-five years after the revolution and 22 years after Castro declared that his country

would henceforth and forevermore be socialist, Cuba is as economically dependent as ever on the vagaries of international capitalism. Efforts to diversify the economy have made little headway. In 1982, sugar accounted for 63 percent of Cuba's hard-currency exports (those to non-socialist nations), down considerably from the mid-'70s peak of 88 percent. Recently though the proportion has begun to rise again. The price of sugar, meanwhile, reached a high of 28 cents a pound as inflation was cresting in 1980-81, but then crashed to a low of six cents a pound, with devastating consequences for the Cuban economy.

Since then, demand has firmed and the world economic recovery has modestly boosted prices to the 11-cent level. The Cuban government is encouraged, but the world oversupply of sugar is still tremendous and threatening. The Cuban government frankly concedes that its own recovery depends on the capitalist world's continued recuperation.

Elaine Fuller, an economics student and member of the editorial board of *CubaTimes*, a pro-Castro journal, reports that Cuba is attempting to work its way out of its economic hole by cutting back on industrial investment and raising prices on luxury consumer goods. Despite the domestic austerity, though, she found on a recent trip to Havana that the standard of living of the average citizen is continuing to improve, mainly due to the comprehensive rationing of basic food staples.

Moreover, as eminently conservative a journal as *The Economist* recently observed that Cuba's annual growth rate has averaged 4.7 percent since the revolution, which is among the highest in Latin America. "By Third World standards," the magazine noted, "Cubans live well. They are well clothed and enjoy free education and health care.... For Cuba's poor majority, life has improved, though it remains austere."

—Dan Lazare



By Michael McConnell

For U.S. church people, both the curious and the committed, Central America is becoming familiar terrain. This decade's Vietnam is in the neighborhood and the religious community wants to see for itself what is happening and why.

That's why religious orders, mainline Protestant denominations and national religious organizations like Clergy and Laity Concerned (CALC) and Church Women United have been organizing a variety of tours and fact-finding delegations to the region since 1981.

when 156 U.S. religious people from 32 states held a vigil in the border town of Jalapa. Already at that time more than 1,000 Nicaraguans had been killed by *contra* attacks, 300 of those from Jalapa. Out of that experience came the idea of a permanent presence.

Since November a long-term team of eight people has been living along the border. Every two weeks they are joined by rotating teams of 15 people. These temporary groups are drawn from state and regional Witness for Peace organizations that were set up by the original vigilers.

James MacLeod, a WFP organizer in McAllen, Texas,

America. They called on Congress to stop funding the *contras*, end military aid to El Salvador and stop funding and building military bases in Honduras.

Delegation members were "appalled" by the extent of U.S. involvement in the war against Nicaragua. They talked with people in Honduras who had been paid \$1,000 per month by the U.S. to fight against Nicaragua. In Nicaragua, they saw the hardship people are experiencing because of the attacks. In El Salvador they were particularly angered by the amount of repression against the church. Salvadoran relief workers were receiving death threats

Briefing: U.S. churches work on resistance



Witness for Peace shields Nicaraguan border from *contra* bullets.

Those who already know the amount of U.S. dollars and military power poured into the region and are clear about the immorality of U.S. intervention are organizing riskier trips. More than 250 Christians from the U.S. have traveled to the Nicaraguan-Honduras border in the last six months. This action, known as Witness for Peace (WFP), has grown into a grassroots ecumenical network of U.S. Christians committed to a continuous non-violent resistance to U.S. covert and overt aggressions against Nicaragua.

In what organizers are calling "the moral equivalent to war," U.S. religious people are traveling to the war zones in Nicaragua to put their own bodies between the Nicaraguan people and the counterrevolutionaries, or *contras*. Besides saving lives, the action is designed to show the Nicaraguan people that North American Christians do not support the terrorism being waged against them.

Jim Wallis, chair of the Witness for Peace advisory council, characterizes this action as "a movement from protest to resistance. We are no longer saying the policy is wrong, we are now saying we are going to stop it." Wallis sees that U.S. government policy is sponsoring mercenary violence against civilians in Nicaragua. It is nothing less than "state-instigated terrorism." Since one half the population of Nicaragua is less than age 15, it is therefore "a war against children," he adds.

The action began last July

says, "There is a significant amount of danger, but the willingness to bear that danger and take the risk to life it implies is at the very heart of this project." The danger, rather than discouraging people, seems to be a spur to more widespread involvement. Regional groups of people, including Roman Catholics, mainline Protestants and members of the historic peace churches (Quakers, Church of the Brethren, Mennonites), have flooded national and regional offices with offers of support.

Less radical but still effective in awakening people to the futility of U.S. policy in the region is what one national denominational executive calls her "Republican strategy." The strategy has been to appeal to top church leaders and grassroots conservatives by offering tours that talk "to both sides." They usually visit Guatemala, El Salvador, Nicaragua and Honduras. When possible, they meet with government and opposition leaders in each country.

Typical of such tours was one organized last November by Gretchen Eick, policy advocate for the United Church of Christ (UCC). The tour group included national executives from the Presbyterians, Mennonites, Brethren and Baptist churches along with directors of church relief agencies. Upon returning, the group concluded that U.S.-funded fighting in El Salvador and Nicaragua is destroying the people and culture of Central

and were being arrested. "There seems to be a McCarthy-like rush to label humanitarian assistance as subversive," said Eick. The Salvadoran relief workers have requested that North American church people stay with them to help insure their safety. Patricia Rumer, UCC regional secretary for Latin America, has issued an appeal for volunteers to work in the camps to provide an international presence.

A visit to Central America is converting many church people. Tour leaders are finding that when people return home they begin local organizing efforts to change U.S. Central American policy. Future tours are even asking people to make those kinds of commitments in advance, agreeing to work for justice in Central America when they return. Another strategy is to take people from key legislative districts where "swing votes" may be crucial in stopping funds to the *contras*.

In addition to legislative work, religious people returning from tours are organizing educational campaigns, holding vigils and demonstrations and participating in acts of civil disobedience. As Jim Wallis of Witness for Peace concludes, "The U.S. government and the churches are headed on a collision course."

Michael McConnell is a UCC minister and is on the Chicago Religious Task Force on Central America.

IN THE NATION

NUCLEAR ISSUES

Physicians at the crossroads

By David Moberg

WASHINGTON

WHEN THE FIRST ATOMIC bomb was exploded, the people involved had the ominous feeling that "the genie was out of the bottle" and could never be put back. Although there were a few victories, such as the limited test ban treaty of 1963 and the SALT I anti-ballistic missile treaty of 1972, much of the public gradually grew wearily resigned to the nuclear age and numbed to its awesome threat.

But that began to change in the late '70s. Suddenly, millions of Americans became aware of the special dangers of new weapons, such as the MX missile, that would upset the long-standing and tenuous balance of terror and served no purpose except as a first strike in a pre-emptive nuclear war. At the same time, they gradually realized that talk of successfully waging limited nuclear war was utterly mad: not only would it quickly escalate, but even a small nuclear war would be incredibly devastating. Now another genie was out of the bottle—a newly aware public.

One of the people most responsible for pulling the cork was Helen Caldicott, an Australian doctor who began touring the country in the late '70s with a spellbinding message—both technically informed and emotionally disturbing—that was designed to "break through the psychic numbing." Caldicott reinvigorated a small group of doctors originally organized out of concern about the effects of nuclear tests. Physicians for Social Responsibility (PSR) played a role in winning that initial test-ban treaty and for the first time made research on and discussion of the health hazards of nuclear war professionally legitimate. But it was only with Caldicott's enthusiastic work, perversely aided by Ronald Reagan's acceleration of the already worsening policies of Jimmy Carter, that PSR took off, bringing its cloak of medical authority to the prescription against nuclear weapons.

Now PSR claims 30,000 members in 148 chapters. It has inspired emulators in other fields—teachers, lawyers, computer professionals, nurses and many more—some of whom are now forming a new Professional Coalition for Nuclear Arms Control. The new genie is manifested not only by this antinuclear proliferation (there are more than 1,250 groups opposed to nuclear arms in the U.S. by one count) but also by the spread of disarmament and antinuclear politics to other groups.

PSR is now at the crossroads. At its annual meeting in Washington the last weekend in January, PSR officially took note that Helen Caldicott had stepped down some months earlier as president of the organization. Could the group, which had so benefitted from her ability to recruit enthusiasts, continue to thrive? More important, as the task becomes less one of waking people to the perils of nuclear war and more one of devising political solutions and strategies, will PSR lose its sense of mission?

The story is told of one doctor who last year had finished the usual PSR speech detailing exactly what would happen when a nuclear bomb burst over Hometown, USA, with the high winds, the firestorms, the exhaustion of oxygen, the transformation of glass and other materials into deadly projectiles and the radioactive contamination of the environment. "But doctor," one frustrated



About the 1984 presidential election, Physicians for Social Responsibility president emerita Helen Caldicott says, "Anybody but Reagan."

woman said from the audience, "we know all that. What do we do?" Similarly, an American Medical Association survey of doctors showed 62 percent favored a nuclear freeze, yet 60 percent also felt that Reagan was "balanced" in his approach to the Soviet Union and only 15 percent found him "too aggressive."

One of the present dangers is that everyone—including Reagan officials and extreme right-wingers like Phyllis Schlafly—will say that, of course, nuclear war would be terrible. That is why we need a tough stance with the Russians and a military build-up, especially the construction of an anti-ballistic missile shield on the "high frontier" of space, they say.

As a result, within the last year PSR has gradually become more political, while still taking a very cautious approach designed to appeal to conservative doctors and continuing its basic educational lesson in areas like the South and Southwest where it has not sunk in as well. It has criticized civil defense programs, lobbied against the MX, supported the freeze and built a network of pressure groups in every congressional district. This year it will include advocacy of a comprehensive test ban and opposition to research or deployment of space-based weaponry.

New research on the effects of nuclear war by a research team including astronomer Carl Sagan also underlines the basic PSR message that nuclear war is not survivable. The Sagan group, expanding on earlier Swedish research, showed how even a modest exchange of nuclear weapons between the U.S. and the USSR would produce such volumes of dust and smoke (especially if cities were targets) that as much as 99 percent of the sun's energy could be blocked, with the earth's temperatures plummeting by 30 to 40 degrees centigrade. As a result all fresh water would freeze, most trees and crops would be killed off, the majority of large animals and humans would perish and only weeds and insects would be likely to survive.

"What was arguably rhetorical a few years ago about the extinction of the species is no longer rhetoric," PSR board member H. Jack Geiger says. "Also, the new message is that 'star wars,' even more than civil defense and crisis reloca-

tion, create the opportunity to discuss survivability and the impossibility of defense." Reagan's development of first-strike weapons combined with the efforts to create a space-based system of anti-satellite (and therefore potentially anti-ballistic missile) weapons further create the illusion among U.S. policymakers that nuclear war could be fought and consequent fears on the Soviet side that it will be.

"That's why nuclear winter is so important," Geiger said. "Only with survivability does being 'ahead' or 'behind' make any sense." Nuclear winter could be precipitated for the entire northern hemisphere—and probably the world—even if only one side fired its weapons in a totally "successful" first strike.

But Federation of American Scientists Director Jeremy Stone warned physicians that war planners are unlikely to be affected by even the best-argued projections of nuclear winter. "This is a political problem," he said. "These two sides can't solve their problems through medical or physical science. It has to be done politically. The problem is they're not interested [in data on the threat of world annihilation]. They are caught up in internal struggles in their societies."

Those struggles even constrain groups like PSR. Geiger, for example, argued against PSR adopting a policy goal of abolition of nuclear weapons, since no one could clearly describe how that would happen, and favored reduction of arsenals on each side to 400 to 500 megatons, enough to destroy totally the other side. Other PSR leaders, such as Chicago chapter President Richard Gardiner, see that as inconsistent with their message on nuclear devastation.

Caldicott has little tolerance for such caution. "I think we've been enormously successful because we've been flamboyant, and because the doctors were doing something doctors don't normally do. So it made the public sit up and take notice," she said. She decided to relinquish the presidency of the organization in part "so I could be freer, not representing [30,000] physicians. I could represent my own views, be more provocative politically, which is what I want to do in this election year." Although she is continuing as PSR president emerita, her main energies will be directed into the

35,000-member Women Against Nuclear Disarmament (WAND), "working on the gender gap"—the much greater opposition to Reagan's bellicosity among women—by trying to recruit one million women this year to "hold candidates' feet to the fire."

With the threat of war emerging in some polls as the number one issue and with Reagan seen by as many as 43 percent of Americans in a recent *New York Times* poll as likely to get the country involved in a war, peace groups see an opportunity to make their voices felt. Caldicott's view—"anybody but Reagan"—is most pervasive, but many of those attending the PSR convention seemed unexcited about any of the Democratic alternatives.

Deputy Defense Secretary Richard Perle attempted to blunt the attacks on his boss by insisting on the essential continuity between Carter and Reagan military policies. Jerome Grossman, chairman of Council for a Liveable World, one of the most experienced peace political action groups, basically agreed with that analysis but concluded that the Democrats need pressuring while antinuclear groups fight Reagan.

A survey of peace group leaders published in the February *Harper's* showed George McGovern the overwhelming ideal favorite of half of those who responded, but 41 percent would recommend voting for Mondale (even though the majority thought Reagan would win). Yet Mondale recently impressed a small group of Washington peace organization leaders constituted as the "peace roundtable" with his willingness not only to support a bilateral freeze and other steps for bilateral reduction but also to take "unilateral" initiatives to halt the arms race and induce Soviet cooperation.

Mondale told the group, according to PSR Director Jane Wales, that he would pull back all tactical, battlefield nuclear weapons from the front lines in Europe and move to a "no first use" policy.

He pledged a six-month moratorium on underground testing, to be followed by a comprehensive test ban treaty if the Russians responded. He would declare a moratorium on anti-satellite weapons testing and on submarine launched Cruise missiles. He favored the so-called "walk in the woods" disarmament proposal that would reduce deployment of Cruise missiles in Europe and eliminate all Pershing II missiles in exchange for a reduction in Soviet SS20 missiles (an arrangement that the Soviets reportedly supported.)

Although Mondale also opposes the MX missile, the B-1 bomber "build-

PSR now claims 30,000 members in 148 chapters across the country.

down" strategies that reduce numbers of weapons but permit dangerous modernization, he supports the Stealth bomber, the Midgetman single-warhead missile and the first-strike Trident 2 missile (although he favored deploying it far from Soviet shores).

McGovern may go farther, but Mondale's pledges to the peace roundtable went beyond most of his public statements so far, creating a warm feeling among disarmament leaders that Mondale will need to mobilize the potential armies—such as the Freeze Voter '84 campaign—to work hard for him.

Despite Reagan's apparent vulnerability on the issues of war and peace, as president he can easily manipulate foreign policy issues to mold public opinion. Pollsters claim that Reagan's popularity is less when people are first asked about his performance on various issues than when they are simply questioned about general support for him. That argues for Mondale, if he continues to lead the pack, to take his disarmament views to a larger audience than a small peace roundtable if he hopes to defeat Reagan. ■