

By John Atlas, Peter Dreier  
& Tom Gallagher

## A long view forward for the American left

**W**HAT SHOULD THE LEFT AND JESSE JACKSON'S forces do now and after the 1988 election? First, they should take part in an all-out effort for Michael Dukakis, simply because any Democrat in the White House will provide more political space for reform.

The harder question is: can a fragmented left unite after the November election to pressure a Dukakis or oppose a Bush presidency with a progressive vision for America?

The Reagan years were among the most difficult of the century for progressive organizations. Even symbolic high points of resistance such as the 1981 nuclear freeze march or the 1982 Labor Day solidarity rally—were unable to build any lasting momentum. On domestic and foreign policy issues, the Reaganites defined the agenda and for the most part won the legislative battles.

In the last two years the tide has started to shift. Administration scandals played their part, as have the economic realities that have hurt living standards among both the middle class and the poor—epitomized by the national scandal of homelessness. But the nation is drifting along with no moral compass and no sense of national purpose as a selfish decade comes to an end.

Public opinion polls show that support for most basic "liberal" programs has remained constant during the decade. The late '80s have already witnessed increased public support for federal government intervention to solve basic problems of economic injustice—poverty, homelessness, hunger and unemployment. The success of the Democrats in regaining control of the Senate in 1986 was an indicator of this new mood, but most telling was the surprisingly broad support for Jesse Jackson's campaign for the presidential nomination.

Although we shouldn't exaggerate Jackson's support, the strength of his campaign was quite remarkable. The campaign mobilized many voters who would otherwise have remained uninvolved. Equally important, Jackson did something that no politician has done since the New Deal: he made the nation pay attention to progressive issues—corporate power and economic injustice, drug abuse and its causes, a humane foreign policy, jobs, health care, affordable housing. Whether these new directions can be maintained beyond the November 1988 presidential election is the major question for the democratic left.

**The big question:** Would a Dukakis administration make any difference?

In his three terms as governor of Massachusetts, Dukakis has been an effective liberal reformer with a strong managerial bent. Liberal groups have generally found Dukakis sympathetic to their causes and willing to devote state resources to solve social and economic problems of poor and working-class people, but often too willing to compromise—on regulation and taxes—for the sake of political consensus.

On foreign policy, he was an early opponent of contra aid and a strong advocate of removing state investments from corporations doing business with South Africa. A board member of Jobs With Peace, Dukakis'

campaign statements suggest that he does not share the Cold War mentality of some fellow Democrats and that he favors human rights over interventionism.

Whatever we know about Dukakis' experiences as governor, his campaign positions and his personality, the key forces shaping a Dukakis presidency would be political.

Within the Democratic Party the political center of gravity is increasingly dominated by corporate money. The historic Democratic coalition of the poor and the middle class has been eroded by fragmented "special interest" politics permitting well-heeled corporations and business political action committees to dominate. The various left constituencies—the poor, the minorities, labor, feminists, environmentalists, peace activists—have lost influence within the party and within Congress. The low level of voter participation among the poor and minorities, in particular, has created a vacuum within the party that big business, real estate developers and the rich have filled. The erosion of the progressive income tax is probably the best index of this disturbing trend.

In short, the key agenda for the left is to force the next administration and Congress to create policy alternatives to warmed-over Carterism.

**What next for Jackson coalition?** Jackson's supporters must ask not only what will happen to Jesse Jackson as an individual, but also what will happen to the political/organizational forces his campaign mobilized? The Jackson campaign laid the foundation for an effective, ongoing progressive coalition that could survive the November election and become an important force within the country's politics. More than Jackson himself, it requires agreement that a permanent coalition is the best strategy and willingness to concentrate energy on building a coalition that can overcome the left's twin dilemmas of single-issue and candidate-centered politics. We call this approach a "party within a party" strategy.

The '80s witnessed a tremendous amount of progressive political activity. This included campaigns to regulate toxic chemicals in the workplace and community, to oppose U.S. aid to repressive governments abroad, for the nuclear freeze, for tenants' rights, to unionize office workers, to feed the hungry and house the homeless, for plant-closing laws and many others. Organizers for these efforts employed a wide variety of tactics and won some victories. The efforts mobilized millions of Americans, raised their political awareness and honed their activist skills.

Progressive electoral coalitions already exist in several states. They include groups like ACORN, the Rainbow Coalition and others; but most have been initiated by Citizen Action, a national organization with affiliates in more than 24 states. In at least 10 of them, Citizen Action affiliates have sought to pull together the various strands

of progressive forces such as unions, neighborhood and tenant groups, women's groups, minority organizations, environmentalists and senior citizens' groups. They are loose coalitions of existing organizations that come together to identify which candidates they can recruit and support, how best to pool their resources and how to enhance the agenda that each organization seeks to implement. If each organizational member of the coalition cannot support a candidate, then the coalition takes no position and each organization goes its own way.

**Difficult task:** This is not to suggest that uniting the Jackson national constituency and the Citizen Action-type local constituencies would be easy. Beyond the technical and ego problems is the question of what it means to be a part of these existing grass-roots organizations.

The millions who join Citizen Action or ACORN, for example, do not necessarily feel they are part of a movement and that joining is an expression of a shared ideological and political vision. The Jackson campaign was primarily an expression of black unity.

The forging of this coalition obviously involves great difficulties.

A successful "party within a party" strategy would link the momentum of the Jackson campaign and the efforts of these grass-roots movements into an ongoing coalition. There is already considerable overlap between Jackson's forces and these movements. But there is much to be worked out, and no one should expect a tight organization when there are so many "turf" issues—sources of funds, leaders, issues, loyalties to elected officials and so on. But Jackson's strength so far has been his ability to articulate vision, program and a sense of direction that adheres to the basic principles of the nation's fragmented progressive movement. If he decides to do so, and steps carefully, Jackson could help build a powerful progressive force within the Democratic Party that can have an impact on national policy.

**Transforming the Democratic Party:** It will take time to build a coalition that puts justice, equality and democracy at the center of American politics. We need millions of new citizens activated with a shared politics, new leaders elected and the Democratic Party transformed. It will require a great deal of diplomacy within the progressive movement to forge such a coalition in light of the many organizational and personal rivalries and pragmatic choices involved. But if there was ever a time for such a venture, it is now.

What would the progressive coalition do to achieve these idealistic goals? Here are some suggestions.

- Create a "shadow cabinet" composed of well-known policy experts. On a regular basis this group can evaluate and offer alternatives to the way the next administration—and subsequent administrations—does business. This "shadow cabinet" might include Jim Hightower as secretary of agriculture, Barry Commoner as secretary of energy or Ralph

Nader as secretary of commerce, to give a few examples. Numerous spokespersons help diffuse the dangers of the cult of personality, while recognizing the need for leadership.

- Create a weekly syndicated column for Jesse Jackson to provide a regular forum for his views and ideas on domestic and foreign policy.

- Engage in grass-roots voter-registration campaigns and efforts to reform state and local voter-registration laws.

- Compile a scorecard to rate elected officials' voting records on key issues of concern to progressives.

- In the spirit of maintaining a foothold both within and without the electoral system, it will not be sufficient to critique other other candidates and officials. In the long run, people espousing a democratization of the American economy will have to stand for office in much greater numbers.

This means that any organizations attempting to seize upon the opening created by the Jackson campaign will have to be on the lookout for vulnerable conservative incumbents, open seats and similar opportunities; and be able to recruit candidates—as much as possible from within progressive organizations—for offices at all levels of government, as well as campaign managers for those candidates. This may also involve the development of training centers for progressive candidates and campaign managers to help with the nuts and bolts of electoral politics.

- Hold conventions in between the Democratic Party's presidential nominating conventions. Since the official party eliminated the "midterm" convention, the progressives will have an opportunity to discuss issues, put forward a legislative agenda for Congress and lend support for candidates for Congress.

Many people attracted to Jesse Jackson's campaign and its issues will not be content simply to pull the Democratic Party lever. Activists will continue their organizing efforts—to build and democratize unions and community organizations, reshape universities, challenge environmental devastations, fight for peace and equal rights, fight against drug abuse and corporate irresponsibility.

The strength of the "party within a party" strategy is that by maintaining an independent political base it avoids the pitfalls of being completely absorbed by electoral politics, but gives the left an opportunity to have more direct influence over public policy.

Jesse Jackson has become the recognized leader of the nation's progressive movement. He has earned that mantle. At a time when Americans are looking for a new direction, a new sense of national purpose, a federal government that is compassionate and competent, Jackson has taken up the challenge. But he cannot and should not do it alone, and he cannot do it with only the organization he developed during the presidential campaign.

But Jackson *can*, if he desires, help build a coalition from the legacy of his own campaign and the strength of the existing progressive grass-roots network—a coalition that can reshape the party and the nation. ■

**John Atlas** is on the board of Citizen Action and is president of the National Housing Institute. **Peter Dreier** is director of housing at the Boston Redevelopment Authority. **Tom Gallagher**, a former Massachusetts state representative, is director of the New England Equity Institute, a progressive policy center.



## Ghosts

By Eva Figes  
Pantheon, 150 pp., \$16.95

By Pat Aufderheide

**E**VA FIGES BUILDS CHARACTERS from the inside. Sometimes she never gets to the outside, but you don't care. A well-known English author—of feminist non-fiction (*Patriarchal Attitudes*), self-consciously feminist fiction (*The Seven Ages*), and of fiction not intended to be overtly feminist

## LITERATURE

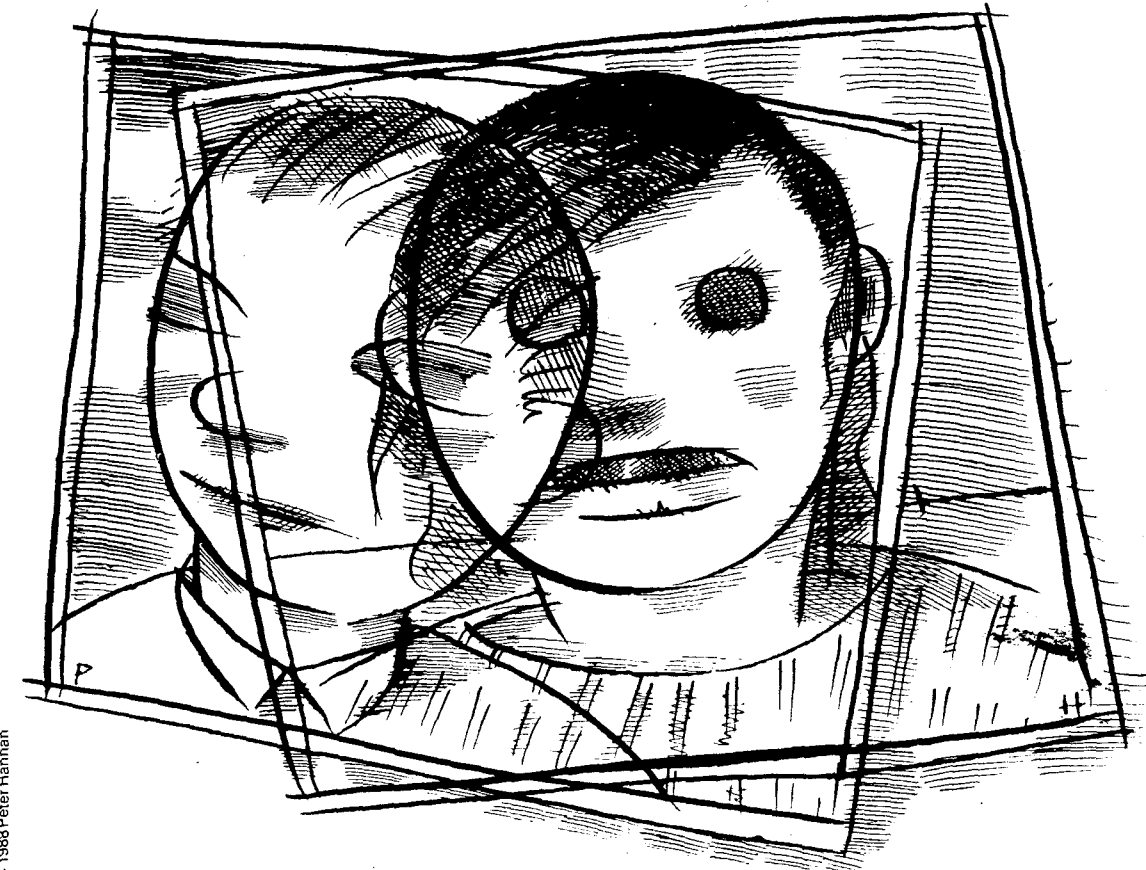
(Light)—she is too little known here.

I first became aware of Figes' work with *Waking*, a slender volume composed of vignettes that work like emotional photographs of a woman's life. The narrative occurs within the semiconscious state of a human being waking up, not quite sure where she is but intensely aware of everything around and within her. Smells in the air, colors, the feeling of exhaustion all become vivid; love, childbearing, aging all take on a crystalline specificity. You never know the name of that person, and you never need to.

The novel awakens within the reader an awareness of one's immediate presence in the world—a sense that everything in a normal day militates against. Whether you're concerned with getting to the babysitter or getting the press release out, or both, suddenly you're aware of the precious primordial fact of your own existence in a world whose greatest wonders are ever present.

**Memory and moment:** *Ghosts*, Figes' most recent work, echoes the style of *Waking*. Once again the narrator is unnamed, the viewpoint is of the partly submerged self, the events the tiny ones of daily life. In *Ghosts*, however, the emotional landscape is one primarily of aging and loss. Time, for this narrator has the elasticity of the old. The narrator's children, as babies, flit in and out of consciousness. The sight of punks on the street shocks her; "Where do they come from, these invaders from space?" she asks. "Fear is suddenly uppermost. Time has done this. I do not recognize this world. I live on the margin of death."

Memory and the moment mix, when the narrator visits her dying mother. The moment dredges up deep childhood hurt, and unanswered questions: "Somewhere inside that frail body, somewhere behind those cold eyes, the stubborn jaw, lurks my mother, the real parent I have never known. I want to draw her out, trick her, even now, into leaving her hiding place." The child in her still longs for a caress. "Touch me, I cry, but do not break the silence. And my skin aches for consolation, for what it has never known, my birthright. And I touch, for some-



c 1988 Peter Hannan

## Eva Figes' spirited feminism: the specter of change awakes

thing to touch, the blue delphiniums rising out of the tall white vase. Having shifted the framed photographs on the mantelpiece, just slightly, I begin to rearrange the stems of blue flowers, light and dark." Here, as in *Waking*, living in the present is shown to be an act of striking courage.

*Ghosts* also describes with unpretentious lucidity how much the present is a thick weave of personal history. The narrator is sometimes astonished at her own aging, and sometimes surprised by the echoing images of the past that invade a moment. Occasionally she sees echoes into the future: "O brave new world, says the growing child, whilst the old man looks on, knowing how old it is. Youthful players speak words that others have spoken, as though for the first time."

This is a mature work, yet it retains the creative energy of Figes' earlier writing. Perhaps most surprising, given the subject matter, *Ghosts* is not depressing. Instead the narrator's solitary intensity allows us to realize what we share with others when we are most alone.

Eva Figes spoke with *In These Times* from New York about her writing and her work with the English writers' union.

**The images in your books seem photographic or even cinematic.** I respond very strongly to visual things. I would have liked to paint, but I didn't have much talent in that direction. When I'm writing I have a film going on in my head. I think it's

very important to make things come alive on the page, so it has immediacy. When I was younger I was quite interested in working in film, but the industry is so commercial it's so difficult.

**The central character in *Ghosts* is nameless, but also very specific.**

I'm interested in the basic human experiences that I assume other people relate to and that most people spend their lives trying to escape. I assume that human beings on the whole are more alike than different underneath, and it seems to me that if I didn't assume that I couldn't communicate at all.

In *Ghosts* I was trying to get across the sense of unreality that the process of aging imposes on one. The image I started out with is the feeling that everything becomes transparent with time. A double exposure, when both things become transparent—in a funny way because of that things matter less rather than more. When you're very young everything is tremendously bright and solid. I'm 56 now; many people who were a part of my life are no longer here, many parts of London have changed out of all recognition. I've got children who are grown up, and I have that strange feeling that I've lost my children. I still dream of them as very small.

**How has your personal history, as the child of German refugees from the Holocaust, marked your writing?**

I've never felt particularly English, and when I began to read prose and think seriously about writing, it was

European not English, which was at the time very old-fashioned. The war was a very early experience for me. As you can imagine, my parents were bitterly anti-German. I would say, "But you were German, too, and if you hadn't been Jewish then what would you have done?" My question was responsibility and guilt. I wrote an early novel on it, a sort of Kafkaesque novel about a stateless seaman. Although I didn't name places, it was intended to be Central Europe

Eva Figes



**With unpretentious lucidity, *Ghosts* describes how much the present is a thick weave of personal history.**

in the aftermath. And then I didn't return to the subject. Fiction for me is a form of problem-solving in a way, and I find that once I've written on a certain theme it doesn't bother me anymore.

**Your non-fiction writing is quite distinct from your fiction. Do you find commonalities?**

I used to vehemently believe that my political writing was very separated from my fiction. But after I wrote *Patriarchal Attitudes*, my fiction writing changed dramatically. There were certain areas I had been just too scared to go into, and I wasn't scared anymore. *The Seven Ages* was deliberately a political and feminist statement on history. Then I decided I didn't want to do non-fiction anymore. I decided to go into fiction that allows me to say things, politically and historically, and allows me to use my imagination.

**Do you see yourself as part of a feminist movement?**

Only in the most general sense. I have a bit of a quarrel with some younger feminists, because I think there are things in life that transcend feminism—love, pain and death—and are perhaps more important. I do see *The Seven Ages* as quite deliberately a feminist book, in a way *Ghosts* is not. I am doing another historical book, set in the 17th century, which has a feminist dimension.

**You've been very active in the Writers Guild of Great Britain and were instrumental in passing legislation mandating royalties for writers from library use of their books.**

It was a 25-year battle that began long before my time, with John Brophy and others. I've always been an activist in the Writers Guild of Great Britain and got involved with a fight about the public lending rights.

I feel that writers are basically very vulnerable in the marketplace, and we have to get together to improve things. It is hard to overcome writers' own resistance. People are very smug. They either think there's nothing they can do about it or they're doing fine and don't want to do anything about it.

I don't see any point in joining a union unless you do something, because the things don't do themselves. There's no point in paying a subscription and just waiting for something to happen. The main thrust now is to get better contracts. We have the minimum terms agreement, an ideal contract. We began five years ago by writing civilized letters, which got us nowhere, then we picked a publisher where we were strong and we had a strike. I was the chairman of the books committee at the time, so I had the experience of waiting, and then there was a break and W.H. Allen capitulated. You have to pick your target and know what chance you have of winning and why.

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## Banana Diplomacy

By Roy Gutman  
Simon and Schuster, 404 pp.,  
\$19.95

By James North

# The contra cabal's deadly circle of lies

**Y**OU FINISH THIS BOOK WITH A stark realization: some high officials in the Reagan administration, some past and some present, could very plausibly be charged with war crimes for their Nicaragua policy over the past eight years. Much of the debate about Nicaragua has been over how the contras behave. Their supporters argue that the U.S.-supported guerrillas represent a wide spectrum of Nicaraguan society, and that only at times do they commit "excesses," which better "training in human rights" will end.

Amnesty International has another view. Roy Gutman's thorough new history of U.S. policy-making toward Nicaragua quotes an Amnesty International report that concluded that for the contras "targeted assassinations of government officials and real or supposed supporters, the abduction of civilians and the abuse or ill-treatment of captives, far from being isolated or questionable incidents, have become a constant feature of military operations."

Indeed, I remember visiting northern Nicaragua in 1984, just after the contras had stopped an unarmed coffee farmer named Noel Rivera, pulled out his fingernails one by one, and then murdered him; I wonder where better "training" fits in here.

**Sustained deceit:** Gutman's book deals only superficially with events inside Nicaragua. His great strength is the meticulous documentation of Reagan administration policy-making. The picture that emerges is of a record of deceit so sustained that it will surprise even those who have long opposed the Reagan administration. Some high officials lied to Congress, lied to the American people, lied to Ronald Reagan and even lied to each other. All the while, they planned and carried out an aggressive war against another country, an act that was defined as a war crime at the Nuremberg Trials. Without their illegal plotting, there would have been few if any contras inside Nicaragua to commit the atrocities that Amnesty International documents.

Gutman, who is a national security correspondent for *Newsday*, uses more than 400 interviews to develop his persuasive thesis. He depicts a constant battle within the Reagan administration between the right and the far right. Reagan's detached, hands-off management style gave an advantage to the more zealous far-right faction.

It sounds unbelievable that people like George Shultz or Thomas O. Enders, who helped coordinate the bombing of Cambodia in the early '70s, could have had enemies to their right. But these two, and others, including some generals, saw the contras as merely one more way to "pressure" the Sandinista govern-

ment into reducing Soviet and Cuban influence.

But the hard-liners never wanted to settle for less than the overthrow of the Sandinista government. Elliott Abrams said, "I want to be the first guy to reverse a communist revolution." Other key far-rightists included: William Casey, the late CIA director; Lt. Col. Oliver North; and Jeane Kirkpatrick.

**Deadly syllogism:** What they shared with Abrams, aside from arrogance, was a criminal lack of interest and knowledge about the real situation in Nicaragua. Gutman

## NICARAGUA

explained why they pressured the opposition not to participate in the 1984 presidential elections. "They argued by syllogism," Gutman writes. "Communists never allow fair elections; the Sandinistas are communists; for the opposition to participate in elections will legitimize communist rule." (In fact, independent monitoring groups judged the elections to be remarkably open, given the wartime conditions. Arturo Cruz, who would have been a candidate for president, says today he regrets not running.)

Reagan's far-rightists made up for their willful ignorance about Nicaragua with their cunning at manipulating the lazy and docile U.S. president. Gutman argues that Casey gave Reagan deliberately misleading intelligence reports. North and the others formed an alliance with Reagan's speechwriters, fellow far-rightists like Patrick Buchanan, who put preposterous statements into the elderly president's mouth, such as having him call funding for the contras "one of the greatest moral challenges in postwar history."

*Banana Diplomacy* is particularly valuable because it puts the crimes of the far right into a coherent, readable narrative that makes far more sense than the charges and countercharges of daily journalism. Gutman recalls that even a conservative like former Sen. Barry Goldwater (R-AZ) described the harebrained 1984 effort to mine Nicaraguan harbors as "an act violating international law. It is an act of war."

Nor was "democracy" ever really the goal of this cabal. Gutman describes how the little group successfully turned to Saudi Arabia for some \$32 million in contra aid to keep the weapons flowing when Congress hesitated. Neither the Saudi princes, nor the hereditary Sultan of Brunei, to whom they also went begging for funds, could come anywhere close to meeting the specifications for "democracy" they were trying to impose on Nicaragua. Neither Abrams nor North complained about freedom of the press in Riyadh, the Saudi

capital, or sent fact-finding missions there to demand that opposition political parties take part in free elections.

Even with other Americans, the hard-liners were vicious and unprincipled. When Anthony Quainton, the ambassador in Managua, declined to go along with a story they concocted about supposed Sandinista anti-Semitism, they tried to fire him; Shultz only rescued his career in the foreign service by posting him to Kuwait.

What is frightening is how close this band of extremists came to success. Yet perhaps more remarkable is that despite the rise in opposition inside Nicaragua, due in part to the crippling U.S. economic pressure, the contra insurgency was never able to win over the disgruntled in appreciable numbers.

For the far-right cabal, "success" would have meant large-scale American military intervention. The scenario had been sketched out back in 1981 by Gen. Gustavo Alvarez, the de facto leader in neighboring Honduras. Alvarez, together with military advisers from Argentina, which was then still under a vicious dictatorship, had helped form the core of the contras from remnants of Somoza's national guard who had fled to Honduras. He hoped to use them to provoke the Sandinistas into a cross-border blunder that would prompt U.S. intervention.

**The myth of reform:** It is by no means proven that the hard-liners actually wanted an American inva-

sion, although their appalling ignorance of Nicaragua may have induced some of them to side with Alvarez. But no one wanted the World War I to break out the way it did, either. In a supercharged atmosphere of military buildup, one episode, even an accident, can set in motion a chain of events that leads to tragedy. American troops could, right now, be embroiled in a shooting war inside Nicaragua.

This terrible possibility was being helped along by another unlikely group. In 1986, a tiny coterie of ex-liberals and one-time leftists successfully persuaded enough Democratic Congress members to restore aid to the contras. This group, which included a writer named Robert Leiken and Bruce Cameron, a former lobbyist for the Americans for Democratic Action, apparently thought they were shifting the debate by emphasizing "non-lethal" aid and "reform" within the contra high command. (Leiken helped the cause along by grossly distorting the political reality of Nicaragua's situation in several widely circulated articles.)

This little group—Gutman reveals that their efforts were well-paid—won a few moments of fame for pur-

**Far-right Reaganites compensated for their willful ignorance about Nicaragua with their cunning at manipulating the lazy and docile U.S. president.**

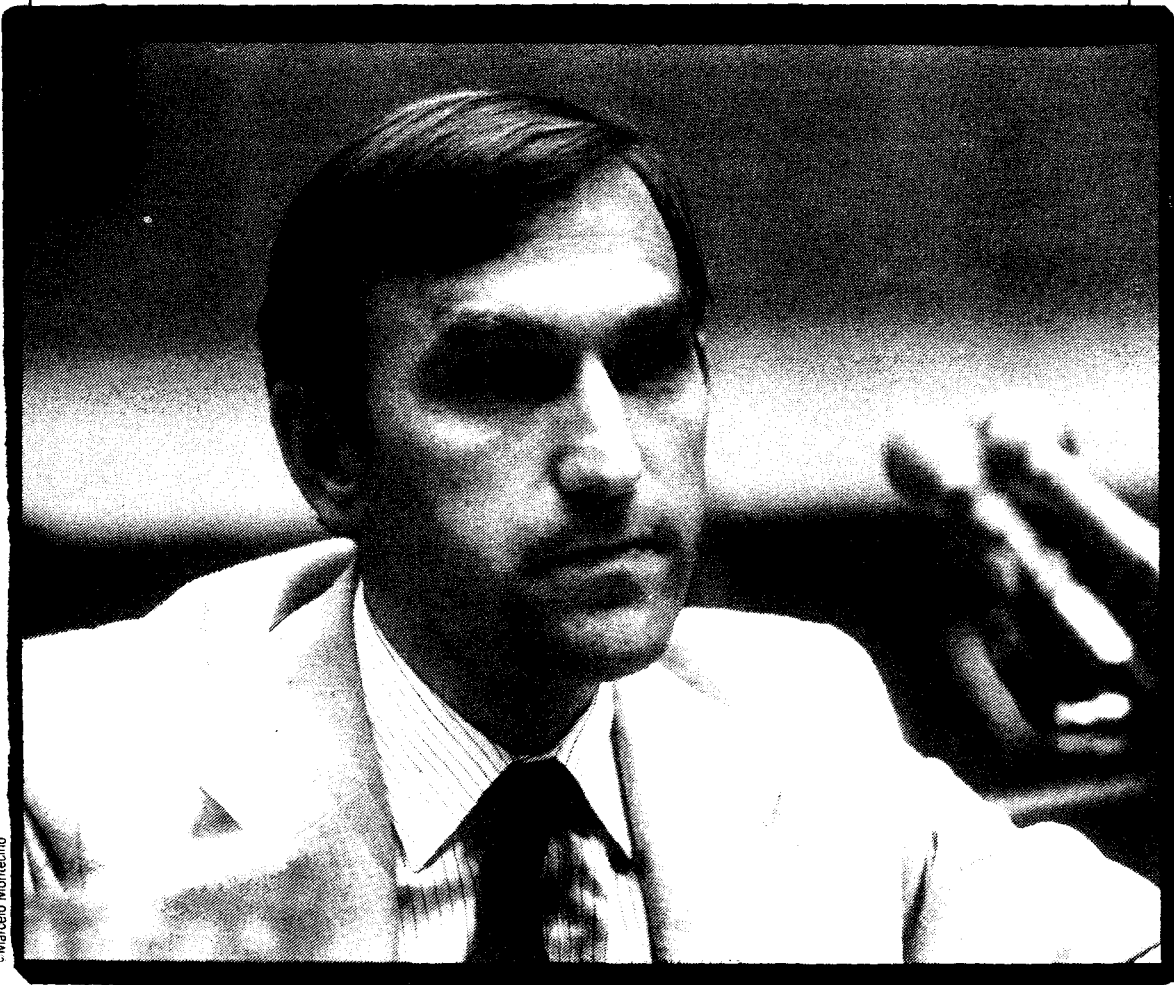
portedly showing the courage to break with orthodoxy. In fact, the far right was using them with what must have been contempt. The distinction between "lethal" and "non-lethal" aid was irrelevant; the Saudis could continue to buy the guns while the American taxpayers paid for the uniforms. Gutman shows that "reform" was a cynical fraud, meant only to reassure Congress. Arturo Cruz and other "reformers" have left the contras, whose de facto head today is Enrique Bermudez, once a colonel in Somoza's national guard.

Only a lucky twist of fate sidetracked the far right. The Iran-contra scandal forced some of their members out of government. Nicaragua's willingness to compromise—something Gutman makes clear it has done all along—has helped give the Arias plan for a regional peace settlement a reasonable chance to succeed.

But the struggle to stop the far right is far from over. Elliott Abrams remains, inexplicably, at the State Department, even after lying to Congress, and there will be other unbalanced zealots around to replace Oliver North. Gutman points out that the Reagan administration pretended to negotiate with Nicaragua during the 1984 campaign so it would not frighten American voters; the lies and the threats started again as soon as Reagan won. George Bush has said little about Nicaragua during this campaign, even though he could have used it as a real issue to hit Dukakis for "liberalism" instead of relying on the Pledge of Allegiance. Bush's handlers recognize that a majority of Americans, even after eight years of lies, oppose aid to the contras. But what will Bush do if he wins the election? What will the people under him do? ■

James North has spent a total of two years in 16 Latin American nations.

Far-right point man Elliott Abrams: "I want to be the first guy to reverse a communist revolution."

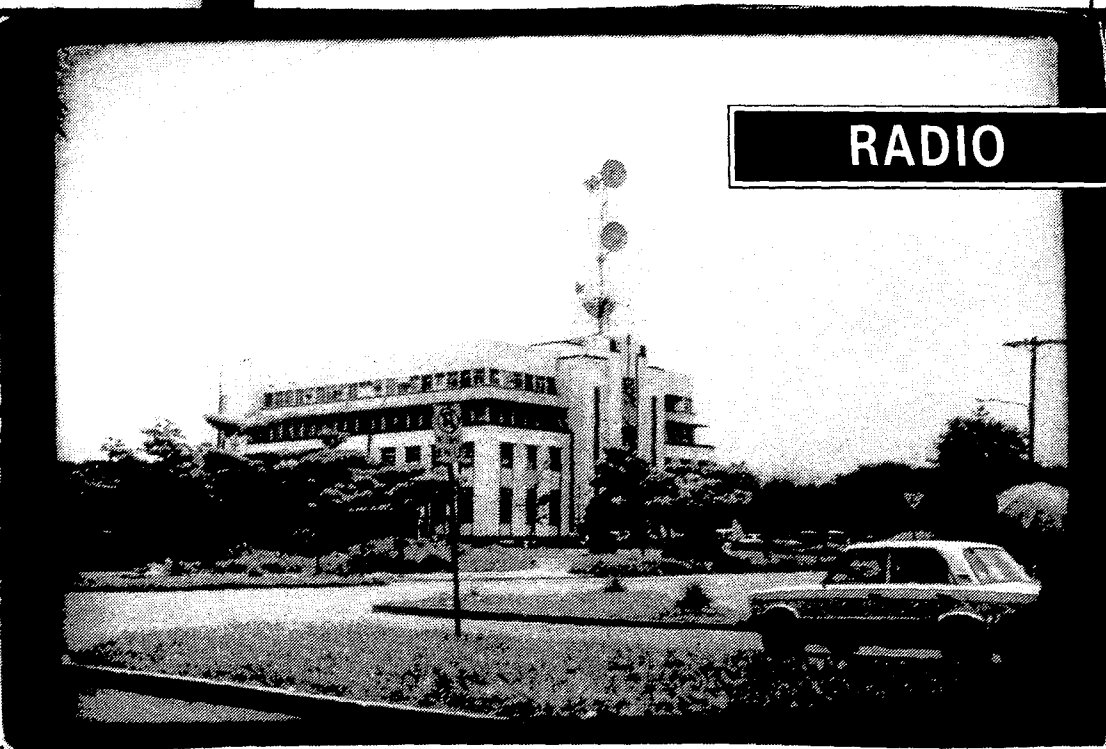




# IN THE ARTS



Broadcasters met in Managua to discuss the future of community radio: (above) Ministry of Culture; (at right) Ministry of Interior.



## RADIO

By Richard Mahler

## Making waves worldwide

IT WAS 10:30 P.M. IN MANAGUA AND EVEN restless musicians from the Nicaraguan salsa band were tired of sitting. But the more than 300 community-oriented radio broadcasters preferred debating locations for their 1990 international conference to revving up their Saturday night wrap-up party.

"The future of the community radio movement lies in the Third World," pleaded one Latin American programmer, urging support for a

convention in Bolivia.

"If this meeting is held in the Western Hemisphere for a third consecutive time, we and many other Europeans will not attend," responded a Norwegian station executive in an ominous tone.

A few moments later the final vote at the late August meeting gave Dublin a comfortable victory, and with that, the third biennial AMARC con-

vention was history. The salsa band struck up a syncopated beat and delegates from 55 countries, lightheaded from a marathon 13-hour meeting, shifted to the dance floor of a repatriated *Somocista* country club.

AMARC is the French acronym for a four-year-old congress of community-based, mostly non-commercial radio stations sprinkled across the globe from Saskatchewan to São

Paulo, Sri Lanka to Senegal.

**Egalitarian and active:** Michel Delmorme co-founded *Association Mondiale des Artisans des Radios de type Communautaire* and was elected its new president at the convention. The Montreal-based organizer sees community radio as a distinctly populist medium. "It breaks down barriers between the listeners and the broadcasters," he said at the

convention's opening session. "It begins a process of communication that is egalitarian and active. Community radio is one powerful facet of resistance that can help to break the chains of passivity and isolation that maintain forces of oppression throughout the world."

Delorme, who also heads the Association of Community Radio Stations of Quebec, will be meeting with an eight-member steering committee over the next two years to negotiate AMARC's recognition by the U.N. as an official Non-Government Organization (NGO), eligible for UNESCO funding.

"We have taken the first rudimentary steps toward becoming an NGO," explained Nan Rubin, a New York-based member of the convention's steering committee. "We are hopeful that we'll complete that process by 1990."

Many of the 345 delegates attending this year's conference agree that recognition and financial support from the U.N. is critical to assure AMARC's survival. The group, like the stations it represents, has limped along on a shoestring budget since its founding in 1984. Pacifica Radio, represented on the steering committee by Bill Thomas, director of its program service, will co-host the first strategy session next spring in San Francisco in conjunction with its 40th-anniversary celebrations.

**High-powered visitors:** Even though Nicaragua did not officially sponsor the Managua gathering, the government provided translators, a plush conference center, transportation and plenty of high-powered visitors—including President Daniel Ortega. Answering a question critical of the shutdown of an opposition newspaper and radio station earlier this year, Ortega insisted, "It is not simply what the individual feels, it is the action of the individual within society which organizes the rights

### Nicaraguan community radio: filling the communications gap in a war-torn land

When the regime of Nicaraguan dictator Anastasio Somoza fell in 1979, the new government inherited 16 radio stations. These stations, along with two TV networks and a daily newspaper, had in most cases been owned by Somoza's family members or cronies.

Today those 16 radio stations, plus a handful of new outlets, are operated by CORADEP (*Corporación de Radiodifusión del Pueblo*, or People's Broadcasting Corporation). The government agency competes for listeners with the 28 privately held stations still on the air in Nicaragua.

But the CORADEP network is also up against at least as many radio signals from outside Nicaragua's borders, including CIA-supported *Radio Liberación* in El Salvador and a Spanish-language Voice of America station in Costa Rica. The more than 70 other AM and FM outlets range from the Voice of Honduras to Radio Colombia.

As in most other parts of Latin America, radio has more impact on the daily lives of Nicaraguans than does television. Domestic television signals reach only 60

percent of Nicaragua's territory, and even those who own TV sets frequently experience electricity problems.

Gregorio Landau, CORADEP's director of international relations, concedes that Nicaragua's geographic location makes it especially vulnerable to radio-based disinformation campaigns, unsympathetic news coverage and consumerist messages from outside its borders. "That's just the risk we take," said Landau. "We trust our people will exercise good judgment in making up their own minds about issues and events that affect them."

**Popular correspondent:** For example, the chief of *Radio Nuevo Segovia*, a 10,000-watt AM station near the Honduran border in Ocotal, stressed the critical importance of its programming in the day-to-day activity of Nuevo Segovia province.

"Remember that because of the war we have few working telephones or other means of personal communication," said Maria Chavez, one of only two female station managers in the country. "So people depend on us to send and receive very spe-

cific messages. Radio Nuevo Segovia may be the only way for a woman to tell her husband on the front that she is in the hospital, for example. Because we have been given that trust on a personal level, people tell us what else is going on in their communities."

These "popular correspondents" are the backbone of CORADEP's news-gathering system. When a farmer notices contra troops moving through his fields, a representative of the radio station is often the first person he contacts.

Radio Nuevo Segovia is the most powerful CORADEP station and one of the best equipped, despite a contra attack in 1986 that destroyed much of its studio—which was already a relic of the '50s and '60s.

Because of the U.S. trade embargo, replacement equipment is scarce and everything from microphones to tape is in short supply. Most stations operate with 1,000 watts of power or less, and they often operate for only a few hours a day.

"About 350,000 people live in our listening area, which includes

part of southern Honduras," said Jose Martinez, a member of the station's news staff, adding that an estimated 75 percent of the area's population tunes in *Radio Nuevo Segovia*.

During a recent visit, AMARC participants heard the station broadcast a live jam session by local folk musicians, a series of telegram-type personal messages, a baseball game play-by-play, various public service appeals and music from Costa Rica, Mexico, Colombia and the U.S., as well as Nicaragua.

Only in the major cities of Managua, León and Granada is the Nicaraguan economy strong enough to support a wide assortment of radio stations. There the dial is filled with outlets operated by the Catholic Church, political parties and universities, as well as private businessmen.

Ironically, the infrastructure of Nicaragua's radio system was set up in 1931 by the U.S. Marines, who were frustrated by telecommunications during a six-year occupation and campaign against guerrilla leader Augusto César Sandino.

—R.M.