

IN SHORT

By Miles Harvey

A contra beachhead in our own front yard?

Floridians are worried that the next contra offensive will be directed at Miami. This month the presidents of five Central American nations sent an eviction notice to the estimated 50,000 to 60,000 Nicaraguan rebels and their families based in Honduras. The presidents' plan calls for the contras to be disbanded by December 5. But where will they disband to? The Miami area, home to an estimated 100,000 to 150,000 Nicaraguans—50,000 of them having arrived in the past year—seems like a natural site for a new contra base camp. And with economic troubles, ethnic tensions and criminal activity already at dangerous levels, area officials are concerned. As Robert Bernal, Metro-Dade County federal coordinator, told *USA Today*: "Just picture a young man who has done nothing but fight for the last four, five or six years. He can acquire arms easily here. It would make me nervous to have a number of contras in the streets."

Born to kill

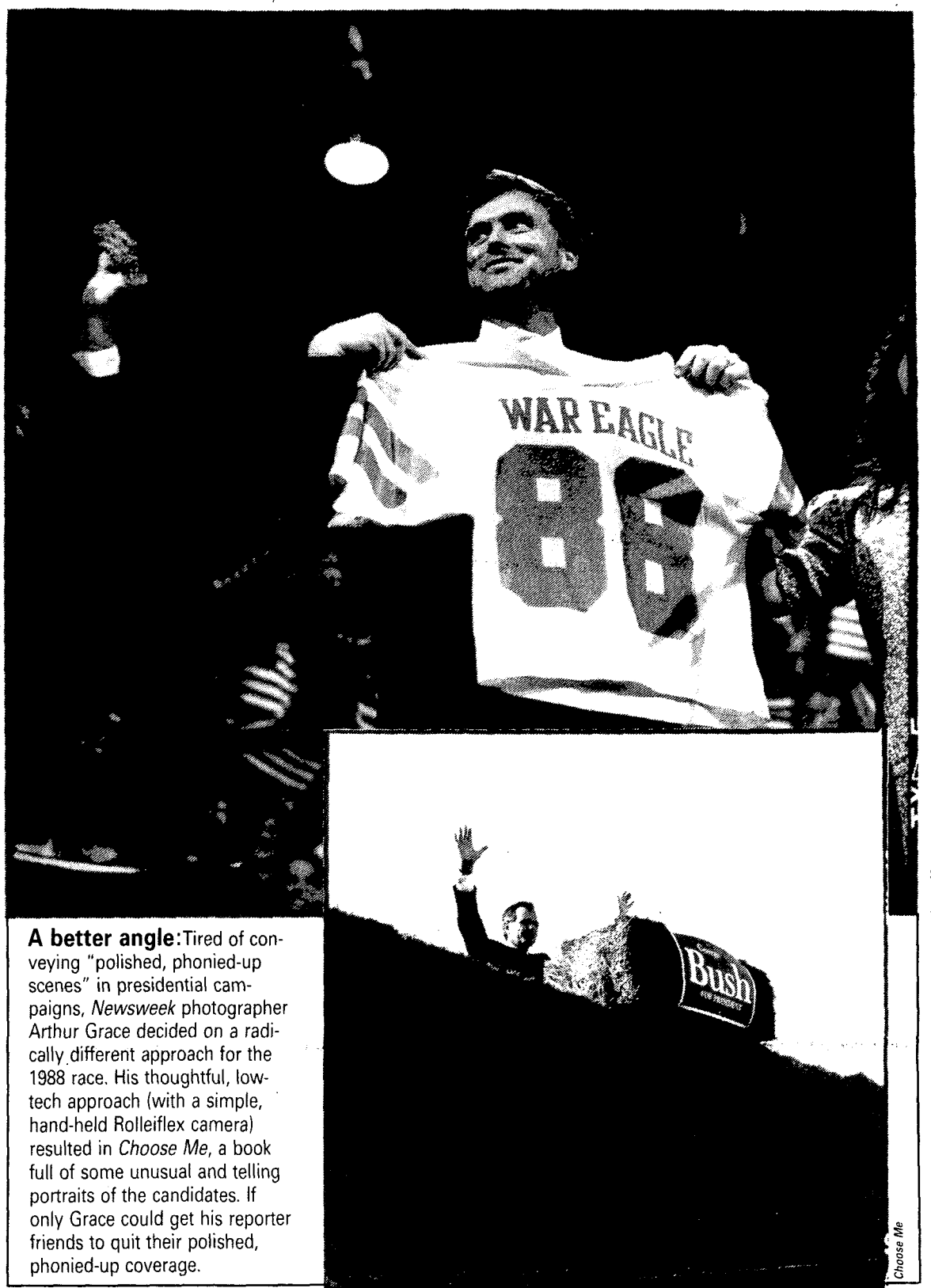
Peace does not come easily to the contras, even when it is thrust upon them. When Congress passed a "non-lethal" aid package for the contras back in April, President Bush and Secretary of State James Baker pledged that the guerrillas would refrain from military activity or human rights violations. But Witness for Peace, an anti-war group that monitors the situation in Nicaragua, has documented 32 contra attacks since Congress passed the latest contra aid package. The attacks left 17 civilians dead, nine wounded and 58 kidnapped. No wonder Miami residents are worried.

Only qualified tired, poor, huddled masses need apply

Even if Washington seems less than excited about giving its hired hands a home, statistics show that Nicaraguans are 18 times more likely to be granted political asylum in America than those fleeing neighboring El Salvador. This information comes from a report released this summer by the human rights group Helsinki Watch, which charges that INS officials and immigration judges demonstrate a broad bias against granting political asylum to refugees from countries with governments friendly to the U.S. The 106-page report, "Detained, Denied, Deported: Asylum Seekers in the United States," cites statistics showing that in fiscal year 1988 the political-asylum approval rate was 3 percent for Salvadorans and 5 percent for Guatemalans. For Nicaraguans it was 53 percent. Asylum is supposed to be granted to refugees who can prove that they face persecution at home because of their political beliefs. But the report documents the story of a Salvadoran woman who was gang-raped in a politically motivated attack—and whose brother, common-law husband and neighbors were murdered—yet was refused asylum. The report accuses the U.S. government of widespread violations of U.S. law and international human rights agreements in its immigration policy.

Video violence

What do young Israelis do to kick back and relax these days? A growing number of them, reports Gordon Barthos in the *Toronto Star*, are getting their kicks from a new video game called "Intifadah." Players assume the role of an Israeli soldier, and the game begins with a set of military orders: "You can use the wooden club that you were issued on any rioter. Use tear gas any time you feel it is needed. You are authorized to shoot any rioter with rubber bullets. Shoot plastic or rubber bullets at a rioter who throws Molotov cocktails. You are NOT allowed to use live ammunition under any circumstances." The "live ammunition" is available to players—but those who use it against Palestinian figures on the screen get a "performance report" at the end of the game that reads: "You have gone wild. Public opinion index: 0. Your inefficiency in suppressing the violence is appalling.... The government lost the elections, mostly as a result of your inaction." Players who use none of their weapons, on the other hand, are quickly disposed of by rock-throwing, Molotov-hurling Arabs. "You are DEAD," reads the screen. "You died of burns covering 95 percent of your body. You are just another victim of Arab terrorism." Barthos reports that some versions of the game reward a high score with a more right-wing defense minister, with the highest score installing ultraright leader Meir Kahane. What next? It's anyone's guess. Perhaps a video game called "Snatch a Moslem Cleric."



A better angle: Tired of conveying "polished, phoned-up scenes" in presidential campaigns, *Newsweek* photographer Arthur Grace decided on a radically different approach for the 1988 race. His thoughtful, low-tech approach (with a simple, hand-held Rolleiflex camera) resulted in *Choose Me*, a book full of some unusual and telling portraits of the candidates. If only Grace could get his reporter friends to quit their polished, phoned-up coverage.

Association for Union Democracy turns 20

For two decades Herman Benson nurtured the Association for Union Democracy (AUD), giving hope to embattled union members fighting for their rights and discomfort to both autocrats and crooks within the labor movement. As part of the group's 20th anniversary celebration this year, Benson turned over directorship to Susan Jennik, but he remains active.

"Ideologically, I got started as a Marxist who believed that the working class was the social force that would lead society to fuller and freer democracy," Benson says. "But as I become involved in the labor movement, I thought, 'If this working class can't sustain democracy in its own institutions, how can it be the bearer of democracy for society?'"

When Painters union reformers Dow Wilson and Lloyd Green were murdered in 1966, Benson and longtime Socialist Party leader Nor-

man Thomas set up a union democracy committee in their honor that two years later became the AUD. The Brooklyn-based non-profit group is dedicated to furthering democracy in the American labor movement.

"Union democracy is in far greater shape today than it was 20 years ago," Benson insists, as a result of the Landrum-Griffin labor law reform (that most unions opposed) and the efforts of union members and some lower-level officers to use the law. "The atmosphere is different. [Steelworker challenger] Ed Sadlowski put it this way: 'Before, if you opened your mouth in the Steelworkers union, they kicked you downstairs. Now they don't. But on every important issue that's come before the courts on union democracy, the official union movement has been on the wrong side.'"

Over the years, the Mineworkers union has shown the most improvement, the building trades the greatest decline in union democracy, Benson says. Despite occasional problems, he ranks the Musicians; Oil, Chemical and Atomic Workers; the Teachers and the United Auto Work-

ers among the more democratic unions.

Benson believes that union democracy, like general political democracy, faces a built-in problem: elected representatives have a dual interest, representing their constituency and their own personal interests. The conflict is exacerbated in unions "because there's such a vast difference in the mode of life between officials and members," Benson said.

"The greatest unfinished task of the labor movement in relation to union democracy is its total, complete, utter inability and unwillingness to confront infiltration of important unions [such as the Teamsters, Laborers, East Coast Longshoremens and some construction trades] by racketeers," he says.

But Benson also thinks Landrum-Griffin needs to be strengthened so that union members with complaints about elections can go directly to court and not have to rely on the U.S. secretary of labor to file challenges. But unions should also have to inform members regularly of their democratic rights, and mem-

bers need ways to enforce their rights without the prohibitive, costly step of hiring a lawyer.

The American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) has a good policy on union democracy but rarely carries it out. Benson said, partly because influential lawyers saw union democracy issues as anti-labor. But the ACLU has become more active in defense of union democracy and

worker rights in recent years. Also, the Labor Education and Research Project, which publishes the newsletter *Labor Notes*, frequently supports democratic insurgents in unions such as the Teamsters for a Democratic Union and the recent upset slate of officers in the Mail Handlers. More than 1,000 union members gathered in Detroit in May for a conference marking the proj-

ect's 10th anniversary. *Labor Notes* promotes democracy incidentally to its main goal of a more militant labor movement.

"The difference between us and *Labor Notes* is that AUD will defend the rights of anybody from right to left against any official from left to right," Benson says, "because we believe union democracy transcends politics."
—David Moberg

land and nationalized oil firms. But while long on populist rhetoric, their program remains short on specifics.

The July 2 vote in Michoacan, Cardenas' home state, was a key test for his party. He served as governor of the southwestern state from 1980 to 1986. Last year the official returns gave him the state by a margin of almost 2-to-1. Would the PRD repeat his performance?

The PRI's governor, backed by just-inaugurated President Carlos Salinas de Gortari, tried to win by charm instead of repression. Fearing another Cardenista victory, Salinas' generally austerity-minded government lavished funds on the state. After years of inaction, ministries suddenly awarded loans, paved roads, equipped health centers and resolved land disputes.

The ruling party also counted on the PRD's organizational difficulties to work in its favor. Before the July 2 vote, the Cardenistas were unable to establish municipal or state structures. Their two Michoacan leaders spent as much time fighting each other as the PRI. In addition, the center-left parties who had refused to join the PRD were running candidates against it, threatening to split the opposition vote. And, of course, the PRI fell back on large-scale fraud, widely documented in the Mexican press.

The official results showed a narrow 45 percent to 40 percent PRI victory. Yet as veteran PRI member Marco Antonio Aguilar, former mayor of the state capital, Morelia, told the Mexican press, "Even the PRI's own members don't believe those results." Though the PRD managed to monitor only four-fifths of the polling places, it reported a clear 49 percent to 33 percent edge over the PRI.

While the PRD's apparent victory was being stolen in Michoacan, the conservative opposition, the National Action Party (PAN), was winning—officially—in the Mexican state of Baja California.

As Lorenzo Meyer, a leading Mexican political scientist, wrote in *Excelsior*, "In Michoacan, the president and his party have shown their determination to impose their results over the people's will. Salinas de Gortari's differential treatment of the PAN in Baja California and the PRD in Michoacan reflects the distinction between useful, limited opposition and the real enemy."

If Michoacan showed the PRD could hold its own in its natural constituency, the August 6 election in Oaxaca displayed the consolidation of its support in a state where oppos-

ition parties were traditionally weak.

With rugged green mountains and vast social inequalities, the far southern state resembles the Central American countries farther south. Oaxaca is also Mexico's poorest state, where even the state government cannot afford much patronage. Instead, it has a reputation for bossism, broken promises and violence.

These factors stimulated growing peasant, student and union movements there in the '70s and '80s. Yet the left's electoral support remained stagnant at 3 percent. Last year, however, it scored a breakthrough when Cardenas received 28 percent of the official vote. His supporters claimed twice that share.

During the 1989 campaign, the center-left opposition's vitality contrasted with the Oaxaca PRI's low morale. The PRI's final rally August 1 drew just 600 listless, bused-in peasants. Asked why she had come, one replied, "I don't know. They told me to." The PRD rally the next day attracted an enthusiastic 1,500.

Of course, Oaxaca's Cardenistas had their own problems. While the Michoacan PRD's backbone came from PRI defectors, Oaxaca's came from the PMS. This alignment resulted in tensions between former Communists and more conservative Cardenistas. And though the PRD was present in 65 towns—twice as many as the PMS in 1986—it did not have the organization to field candidates in 100 others.

Although official results had not been declared at press time, the PRD claimed 32 towns, against eight won by the PMS three years ago. Eloi Vasquez, state PRD leader, estimates the Cardenista vote at 27 percent, with roughly 5 percent for each of the other three center-left parties. "We weren't able to maintain the full force of the Cardenista Front from last year, but we established a definite lead over the other parties," he says. "In Oaxaca, we're going to be the second electoral force."

In the eight other state elections scheduled before the year's end the PRD faces more of the same—strong second-place finishes but defeat by fair means or foul. In one of those states, Sinaloa, a study published in July by political scientist Cuauhtemoc Rivera showed that someone had already padded the voter rolls by 32 percent, opening the door to fraud.

But in the long run, the growth of a credible left alternative may mean that the ruling party is called to account—either at the polls or in the streets.

—Craig Charney

Mexico's new politics

MEXICO CITY—The July election in Mexico's state of Michoacan wasn't just a case of fraud-as-usual.

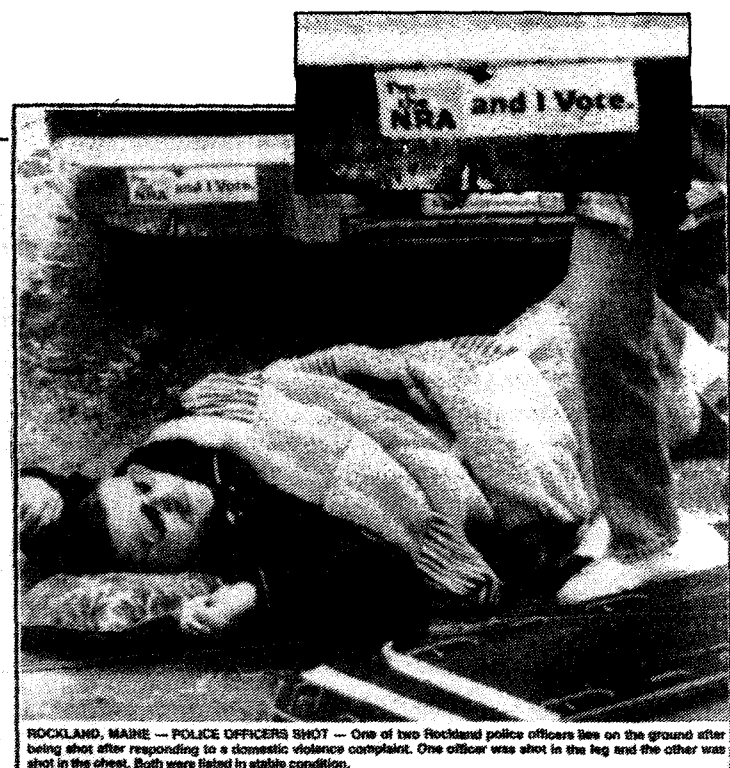
Not that the ruling Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) didn't resort to fraud—probably stealing the election. As one opposition poll watcher noted, "It's incredible how many voters have been dead for years. They should've just put the polling place in the cemetery!" In another polling place where ruling party officials were more imaginative, their poll watcher was reportedly sent a box of fried chicken with 100 extra ballots inside. The news-weekly *Proceso* dubbed the recipe "chicken with ballot stuffing."

As *In These Times* went to press, opposition supporters were occupying 50 town halls in Michoacan to protest the alleged improprieties. But fraud is old hat for the PRI. What was new in Michoacan's state legislature vote was that the governing PRI faced a resurgent center-left opposition. The Michoacan vote was the first for the Party of the Democratic Revolution (PRD), led by Cuauhtemoc Cardenas, official runner-up in the 1988 presidential election. In Michoacan, despite an officially declared loss to the PRI, the new party held onto most of the support Cardenas won last year. In state elections in Oaxaca this month, the PRD established itself as a strong second electoral force.

Although they also displayed the opposition's organizational weaknesses, the elections reflected the new forces at work in Mexican politics. In both the Cardenistas gained momentum from the new rebelliousness and protest movements that surged after the presidential vote, which the PRI is widely believed to have stolen.

The PRD was formed in the April merger between centrists who left the PRI with Cardenas last year and the small Mexican Socialist Party (PMS), a fusion of the Communists and other left groups. Many individuals from three center-left parties that backed Cardenas in 1988 also joined, though the parties themselves did not.

The Cardenistas fiercely oppose the ruling party's export-at-all-costs response to Mexico's crushing foreign debt. The PRI's policy has meant slashing wages, employment and social programs. The PRD's discourse echoes that of Cardenas' father, Lazaro Cardenas, who as president in the '30s redistributed



ROCKLAND, MAINE — POLICE OFFICERS SHOT — One of two Rockland police officers lies on the ground after being shot after responding to a domestic violence complaint. One officer was shot in the leg and the other was shot in the chest. Both were listed in stable condition.

Sign of the times, part I

The above photograph appeared in *Police Times*, a publication of the American Federation of Police. The federation once gave an award to an Oak Park, Ill., gas station owner for openly ignoring that city's prohibition on handguns. Apparently, *Police Times* editors missed the bumper sticker on the car behind the wounded officer—or at least its irony.

NATIONAL
ENDOWMENT
FOR
THE ARTS

WASHINGTON
D.C. 20506

A Federal agency advised by the
National Council on the Arts



Dear _____

You may be aware that on March 18, 1989 the provisions of the Drug-Free Workplace Act of 1988 became effective. This Act requires applicants for federal assistance to certify that they will provide a drug-free workplace by taking the steps outlined in the attached certification form -- before they can receive federal assistance. These requirements also appear in Section 5153 of the Drug-Free Workplace Act.

Your application package submitted to the Arts Endowment requesting support through the VISUAL ARTS Program has been assigned application number 89-013170 and will be considered by the National Council on the Arts at its August 1989 meeting. However, because of the new law, the enclosed certification form must be signed and returned for your application package to be complete.

Please sign the certification form and, using the enclosed, pre-addressed envelope, return it to the Arts Endowment's Grants Office on or before August 20, 1989. Remember, your application package will be incomplete and the Endowment will be unable to notify you as to the final outcome regarding your application until the Grants Office receives your certification.

If you have any further questions about the requirements of the Drug-Free Workplace Act, please contact the Endowment's General Counsel at (202) 682-5418.

Sincerely,

Laurence M. Baden
Laurence M. Baden
Grants Officer

Enclosure

Sign of the times, part II

It's the era of art for sobriety's sake. Or maybe art for demagoguery's sake. Individuals who receive National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) grants are now required, under the Drug-Free Workplace Act of 1988, to vow that they "will not engage in the unlawful manufacture, distribution, dispensation, possession or use of a controlled substance in conducting any activity with the grant." Congress doesn't want any mind-altering experiences to get in the way of the creative process—a concept that, in the words of the great drug-using artist Lewis Carroll, gets "curiouser and curiouser" the more you think about it. For instance, *In These Times* wondered, what if another great drug-using artist, jazz singer Billie Holiday, were alive today and applied for a grant? Would the NEA just say no? A government official, who requested anonymity, explained that if Holiday were to receive a "non-project fellowship grant" for her general artistry, she'd have to agree to not be a heroin addict during the duration of the grant. If, however, she were to receive a grant for a specific project, she would only have to guarantee a "drug-free workplace" while working on that project and could shoot up as much as she liked in her free time. The official conceded, however, that in practice it would be somewhat difficult to determine where the artist stopped and the heroin addict began.