FROM: Phyllis Schlafly
68 FAIRMOUNT, ALTON, ILLINOIS 62002 / (618) 462-5415

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MISTAKES AND PROSPECTS IN NICARAGUA

After the Sandinistas overthrew Anastasio Somoza in 1979 and captured Nicaragua, I asked a friend living in that country, "Are they Communists?" She replied, "only 100%."

But somehow the liberal intellectuals and politicians were fooled again. In 1979 the Sandinistas wrote a letter to Organization of American States promising free elections, freedom of religion, free trade unions, a free press, civil rights, human rights, and a just judicial system. The liberals believed, or pretended to believe, that the Sandinistas were merely agrarian reformers or democratic do-gooders.

So the OAS expelled the government of Somoza. The Carter Administration withdrew U.S. aid from Somoza, refused to let our Ambassador present his credentials to Somoza, and gave economic aid to the Sandinistas while the Soviet bloc armed them with weapons.

During the first year and a half after the Sandinistas took over, the Carter Administation sent them $118 million in U.S. aid. In addition, the Carter Administration actively supported loans to the Sandinistas from international lending institutions, helping them to get $262 million from the InterAmerican Development Bank. The Sandinistas received three times the economic assistance that Somoza got in the previous 40 years.

So the Communist Sandinistas grabbed the power, the police, the military, the radio station, the information ministry, and the foreign ministry. They filled all positions of power with Communists and squeezed out the non-Communists. The Sandinistas persecuted the church, wiped out the Jewish religion, attacked the Indian tribes on the northeastern coast and relocated them, closed down the trade unions, suppressed the newspapers, and carried out a methodical murder campaign.

Whereas Somoza had maintained a little army of 15,000, Nicaragua now has an army of 175,000 troops trained by the Soviets, Cubans, Czechs, Bulgarians, and East Germans. Their arms are supplied by Vietnam, Libya, the U.S.S.R., and their allies. "We are a Marxist-Leninist revolution without boundaries," they proclaim.

The Nicaraguan army now has every type of weapon needed for the next Soviet-Cuban move in the Caribbean, including Soviet-made T-55 tanks, howitzers, artillery, rocket launchers, amphibious ferries, helicopters, and transport aircraft. Six airfields are under construction. There are 1,750 Cuban military and security "advisors" in Nicaragua plus 100 from the Soviet bloc.

Of course, the Sandinistas have never held the elections they promised. Supposedly, elections are now scheduled for 1985, but Radio Sandino reports that they may be postponed again because of American "aggression." Sandinista leaders openly say that, if elections are held, they will not be American style, meaning that any elections will be one-party Communist style.

The official state of emergency which has been in effect since March 1982 is scheduled to run until May 30, 1984. This declared "emergency" is the excuse for Sandinista censorship of the media and the indefinite holding of prisoners without any right of habeas corpus.

La Prensa, the newspaper voice of opposition to the Somoza regime, has been closed repeatedly; it and other newspapers are now heavily censored. The media get their news-publishing orders from the Ministry of the Interior.

The 19 non-Communist groups which worked to bring about the Sandinista revolution in 1979 (called "contras") are now outside of Nicaragua trying to take back their country from the Communists. The United States owes them help to repair the damage the Carter Administration did to Nicaragua in sending so much money to the Sandinistas.

President Reagan has asked the fundamental question: "Must we sit by while Central Americans are driven from their homes like the more than a million who have sought refuge out of Afghanistan, or the 1-1/2 million who have fled Indochina, or the more than a million Cubans who have fled Castro's Cuban utopia?"

If we do nothing, and Nicaragua is allowed to function like another Havana, exporting Communist revolution to El Salvador, Honduras, Costa Rica and elsewhere throughout Latin America, we had better get prepared for at least five million refugees to flood into Texas, Arizona, New Mexico, California, Louisiana, and Florida. ~~And~~ They won't have to come on boats like the Vietnamese; they can just walk north.