Anthropology professor discusses trip to Nicaragua, El Salvador on education

By Janice Eileen

Jean Jack~son, associate professor of anthropology, spent two weeks in El Salvador and Nicaragua in August and September as part of a delegation from the Faculty Committee for Human Rights in El Salvador and Central America (FACHRES-CA) to observe educational conditions and human rights in those countries. Her academic work includes intensive study of South American Indians.

Q: What is FACHRES-CA?
A: FACHRES is a fairly loose network of faculty in the United States and Canada who have done work in Latin America there is a tradition of rather total universi-
ty autonomy. And the university officials that we spoke to were concerned about the stability of the university.

Q: What do you plan to do at the Salvadoran government?
A: Yes, we interviewed the provisional President Alvaro Magaña, the Minister of Defense Vides-Casanova, who heads both the security forces and the army, and heads of the government by the National University campus, which was closed by the army in 1980. What did you see there?

A: Well, we visited the National University campus, and we entered the University campus. Right now those are farms. It's an area that's been turned into a stockpile for supplies. There certainly was political dissent, and I admitted, so it's difficult to say just what was going on at the time, many people were killed because the army arrested everybody. Why they said they had to go in violently, invading the campus was being used as a stockpile for supplies, and the government did not tolerate that. It sees all kinds of dissent as subversion. The church — priests, archbishops, are brutally assaulted, and the education apparatus, UCA, the National University, have been seen as subversive organizations. You have the possibility of making mistakes, and they also say they will continue to keep tabs on people who have been arrested, who are in jail.

Q: What were the grounds on which the university was originally closed by the army? Why was it closed?
A: The university was being used as a stockpile for supplies, and the government decided to close it. Many, many people see the university stands for people who think differently, who feel a responsibility to criticize government abuses, and the government does not tolerate that. It sees all kinds of dissent as subversion. The church — priests, archbishops, are brutally assaulted, and the education apparatus, UCA, the National University, have been seen as subversive organizations. You have the possibility of making mistakes, and they also say they will continue to keep tabs on people who have been arrested, who are in jail.

Q: What is your summary of the educational situation in El Salvador?
A: It's totally bleak and un_promising. The situation in the country is one where over 30 million people have been killed, and many Catholics, and Nicaragua's a very Catholic country, believe in the Sandinistas as having brought them all kinds of good things, literacy, better opportunities, better life. Nicaragua is like itself in a state of war. It's being attacked. It's a very tiny country, and the government officials that we talked to will say this is a time of war, and therefore they have press censorship.

Q: Your group compared the censorship and harassment of journalists reporting on national security in El Salvador to the United States... national security?
A: I think Nicaragua is very beleaguered. It's public knowledge now that there are funds being channeled to the Sandinista government. In Nicaragua, they have been very, very secretive about this, and we have heard that it is a different linguistic area, it's not just Miskito, and as I said, there's a different political, geographical, linguistic barrier.

Q: What about the vigilante groups?
A: There are several organizations like the Sandinistas, who have been very active, that have been very, very active, but that's not the question. Nobody wants to talk about it.

Q: What did average Nicaraguans say about life under the Sandinistas?
A: They said that was unacceptable and threatened to resign if that happens. They talked about the violence, the social science building was bombed, a great deal of damage happened. I don't really know how much of it was because of the vandalism aspect of it, the violence aspect, or personal vendettas getting translated into political action in the university. They talked about the violence, the social science building was bombed, a great deal of damage happened.

Q: Do you think it's fair to compare Nicaragua to the United States?
A: I don't think it's fair to compare Nicaragua to the United States. It's a different political, geographical, linguistic area. It's a different political, geographical, linguistic area. It's a different political, geographical, linguistic area.

Q: Do you really think this is a fair analogy?
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