Playgrounds cont'd.

pealing for "sister" institutions throughout the U.S. to buy particular equipment like a neonatal incubator, hospital bedframes, intravenous poles, surgical delivery table, stethoscopes, sterile glolves and laboratory supplies. Oxfam is also a major channel of donated medical supplies to Nicaragua and El Salvador, as well as to Guatamala and Honduras. Some U.S. clinics and hospitals have formed "sister" relationships with counterparts in Nicaragua. Here in San Diego, the Beach Area Community Clinic is in the process of making such a connection.

Educational Aid

The American Friends Service Committee concentrates its relief campaigns on supplying educational materials and toys. As in agriculture and medicine, the needs are basic. In Nicaragua, 70% of the population is under the age of 25, and half are under the age of 15. Schools virtually did not exist in the countryside before the revolution. The National Autonomous University of Nicaragua was gutted by Somoza's army because it was thought to be a center of the Sandinistas power. Under Somoza's dictatorship, more than half of all Nicaraguans were illiterate. By 1980, the percent had been reduced to thirteen. Over 1,400 new schools have been built and now the children need paper, pencils, and books to use in them. The National Network in Solidarity with the Nicaraguan People has made one of its goals the supplying of the university. They are appealing for donations of chalk, chalkboards, lab equipment, stencils, reference books, and subscriptions to technical magazines. Chi ldren's recreational needs are addressed by such groups as "Bikes Not Bombs," in Washington D.C., and "Playgrounds Not Battlegrounds," in St. Louis, Mo. that collect childrens toys.

Artists and Architects and More...

The variety of projects is not limited to these three major areas. Creative projects in the arts are coordinated by "Artists Call" of New York, that has sent down brigades of all types of artists. Their projects are participatory, and range from musical shows to theater festivals, to murals in schools and factories. Architects and Planners in Support of Nicaragua, ,from Topanga, Cal. designed and are building a community about 140 miles northeast of Managua. The Women's Committee on Central America raises funds for women-related projects in Guatamala, Honduras, El Salvador, and Nicaragua. The Disabled International Support Group (SIDE) raises funds for programs and equipment for the disabled.

The National Network also has projects that hope to procure worker safety equipment and small motor boats to provide health care on the Atlantic coast; build a public laundry facility, a childrens study and play center in Esteli, and buy a van to transport disabled workers to a social and vocational rehabilitation center in Managua. Still another project is gathering machinery and raw materials for sewing and leather cooperatives; another is raising funds to buy Nicaragua's only new service, the ANN, the "tools of their trade."

Along with the material aid, some of these organizations send the donated labor of work brigades. The Nicaragua Exchange, in conjunction with the National Network in Solidarity with the Nicaraguan People, is coordinating for a second year brigades for U.S. citizens. Most brigades assist with the coffee and cotton harvests, working alongside Nicaraguans for two to four weeks. Others help build schools, community centers and houses, or work on the literacy campaign or as health workers.

When it comes down to raisng money for the projects, the story becomes a familiar one. Organizers fall back on any and all grassroots fundraising ploys that net a few hundred dollars here, and a few thousand there. Bake sales may be dead, but concerts are not. Participatory activities are popular: the walk/bike/skate-a-thons, auctions, house parties, and dinner parties. Church collection plates and coop's added taxes work in the unique communities that have a large progressive population. Direct mail and phone banking prove to be popular with both organizers and contributors in some places. Other groups report that they raised their funds with organized fasts, but far more enriching and popular are the cultural events which teach people about the different arts enjoyed by the people of Central America.

Home Town Solidarity

Here in San Diego, the Friends of Nicaraguan Culture raised $15,000 in 1984 by sponsoring various educational and cultural events, including Nicaraguan national music, peasant music, poetry, theater, and distinguished speakers. They keep in touch with similar groups in Los Angeles and San Francisco to find artists who are touring the area. In Los Angeles, the Nicaraguan Task Force helps channel people through San Diego.

The money raised here has bought a computer for the Barricada, one of the three major Nicaraguan newspapers, and medical supplies which went on an Oxfam boat from L.A. to Nicaragua. Currently FNC is helping in the campaign to collect sports equipment for the children of Nicaragua. In particular, they would like baseball bats, balls and mits, as baseball is Nicaragua's most popular sport.

San Diego CISPES is participating in the NEST program, and is raising money for their sister city, Los Dubon. This El Salvadoran hamlet is in the province of Chalatenago, near la Palma, close to the Honduran border in the zone of popular control. Each town within the zone is forming local popular governments to build the groundwork for the eventual control of the country. These local groups, called P.P.L.'s, write a sort of grant proposal to their sister cities requesting material aid. San Diego NEST is helping to fulfill a grant by raising $10,000 in six months. The grant, which is for an agricultural project, is very specific about the expenses; each item is listed with its projected cost. Most of the money will be earmarked for seeds.

NEST organizers are pleased with the projects success. The specificity and concreteness of the projecı attracts peope, they think, more than the organizing of anti-intervention activities, which CISPES also does. They use two main fundraising techniques. The most successful has been the Work-a-Day project, in which people pledge to contribute one day's wages to NEST. The other more frequent events are house meetings in which someone invites friends for dinner and an educational presentation, and then passes the hat. They have raised over $8,000 thus far with their efforts, and have made contact with many new people.

For more information regarding material aid projects please contact:

- **Friends of Nicaraguan Culture**
  PO Box 8305
  La Jolla, Calif. 92038
  (619) 459-4650
- **NEST / CISPES (619) 231-4984**
- **Committee for Health Rights in Central America**
  1885 Mission St.
  San Francisco, Calif. 94102
  (415) 431-7760

The Re-Election and the Dialectic of Hope

by Robin Greyson

There is something different about Leftist movements. No matter what some liberal sociologists claim, there is something very important that separates our groups from Right wing organizations. Unfortunately, this difference is not to be found in the personalitites that these group attract. It would be comforting to believe that all Leftists were kind, gentle, insightful, and caring; and that all Rightists were cruel, callous, and mean, but such is not the case. There is among both the Right the Left opportunists and martyrs, saints and sinners, heroes and villians. Our leaders are no less intelligent than theirs, but neither are they any less egotistical. As a matter of fact, it has been by personal experience that our sleaze balls stack up pretty well against their sleaze balls. Both groups desire power, and wish to use it to advance a vision and a set of beliefs. And it should be a matter of no little consolation to know that their side has almost as many factions and splinter groups as ours.

What differentiates Left movements from Right movements, however, is one very simple feature: hope. Right wing movements are no less hopeful than Left wing ones (and these days much more so), but hope is much less important to them. The Right, you see, can always buy hope. By nature the Right is a defender of privilege. It enjoys all the advantages that access to institutional power can bring. For the Right there is always some Right wing millionaire who is willing to finance whatever hair-brained scheme they may come up with. When a Jessie Helms decides that he doesn't like what he sees on CBS, there is a rush from Right wing cranks with big bucks to give Jesse his chance to be Dan Rather's (and for that matter, America's) boss. The Left has never had that luxury. When was the last time you heard of a group of ghetto kids getting together to buy ABC because they didn't like Ted Koppel's treatment of Jessie Jackson on *Nightline?* For the Right, hope is a luxury that they can afford to import when conditions aren't producing it at home. For the Left, however, it is a domestic product on which we are absolutely dependent. For the Right, hope springs eternal, or at least until the pool of money dries up. For the Left it is a commodity in chronic short supply.

Part of the desperation felt inside the Left community following the election arises out of this fact. This seems to be a hopeless time for progressives. Not only didn't our candidate win, s/he didn't even get a chance to run. Not only wasn't our agenda a part of the debate, our speakers didn't even get to the podium. The horizon of American politics is without any form that is recognizable or familiar to us. We seem to be strangers in a very strange and hostile land.

The Left is by definition a people's movement, and when "the people" have given up hope that things can change these movements disappear, and with them, any evidence of the Left. When we are in retreat we have no Right Wing think tanks to sustain us, no Christian broadcasting networks with which we can hurl our message to a philistine world, no corporations to sponsor our speakers until the next upsurge comes along. We are forced to retreat to the shadows. And from the shadows it always seems that the Left has died, or that America has lost its conscience and sympathy for the oppressed.

None of this, however, is true. The U.S. has never been the most hospitable of places for Leftists, but neither has it been without our presence for very long. Just as the Left seems to disappear totally during hard times, during "good" times we seem to come from nowhere. In the 1920's there seemed to be nothing but apathy and capitulation inside the labor movement, but less than a decade later the most explosive period of American labor history was born. In the mid-1950's there seemed to be nothing but one long American Celebration of affluence and conformity, but a few short years later the Civil Rights and Anti-war movements burst onto the scene. The Left in this country lacks insitutional power, and so we are no stronger than our ability to convince ourselves that there is hope for change. When this hope is extinguished the Left seems to die, but when it is revived our movements and causes explode into poitical life with a passion and an enthusiasm that only hope can generate.

Reagan's re-election seems to promise the worst of times for the Left, but even this is ambiguous. His victory was a vote for economic good times, and a president who was willing to promise them. In opinion poll after opinion poll Americans agreed more with the policies of the Democrats than with those of the Republicans. But this was irrelevant. Elections in general, and American elections in particular, have very seldom been referenda on issues or the specifics of ideologies. They have been festivals in which people vote for the one true ideology in this country, "MORE": more television sets, more VCRs, more cars. Reagan gave the country a rest from the fear that the affluence it craved might be disappearing. He delivered nothing of substance, but no one wanted to believe this. Americans voted not for a party or a candidate, but for a promise.

The ability to fulfill this promise, however, is more than a little problematic. The economic growth of the last two years has been financed by the repressed demand of the greatest recession in the country's history and by a deficit that dwarfs the economies of most third world nations. Ronald Reagan has been able to produce growth at the price of a chonic deficit that will be there for years to come. We now have an economy locked into permanent deficit spending which, as even the editors of *Business Week* have warned, means that the next time we go into a recession we will not be able to make use of this mechanism to compensate for the downturn. The next recession is only matter of time, and if it is as serious as many are predicting then the political direction of the nation will once more be up for grabs.

But for the time being, these are hard times for the Left. What with the Great Republican Traveling Road Show that was generated during the election it is easy to forget that there are currently more poor people in American society than at any time since 1965, and that the number is growing. What with the return to the old time religion of consumerism and self congratulation, it is sometimes hard to remember that the ghettoes and barrios of this country are filling up with the outcasts of American society. What with the bombast about four more years of growth and prosperity, it is easy to forget that chronic employment is on the rise and that the well-paid worker is fast becoming an endangered species.

Women and Blacks in this country have seen both their real and comparative

continued on page 16