

NY SEMINARS POSE HARD QUESTIONS

Nicaragua--What Next?

The June 7th seminar on the future of Nicaragua featured two knowledgeable observers of Central American politics: Enrique Soria, Managua correspondent for the New York newspaper *El Diario/La Prensa* during Nicaragua's recent election process, and Mike Curtis, Director of the Philadelphia HGS.

Mr. Soria's presentation focused on the geopolitical realities of Central America. "It was not the political ideology of the Sandinistas that made them unacceptable to the U.S. It was the kind of precedent that would have been set, had their revolution achieved any kind of real success. The Sandinistas were a threat to North American hegemony in the region," Soria said. If revolution were to be "exported," it would spring from the region's poverty, not from the march of Marxism-Leninism.

Thus, the victory of the UNO coalition was not an ideological one. Ravaged by war, earthquake, and runaway inflation, the Nicaraguan people cast their votes for whatever change in direction was being offered. Observing Managua's mood after the votes were counted, Soria was struck by the lack of celebration. "The assembly is now in the control of a coalition of seventeen different parties. A clear mandate is very hard to discern." Indeed, many Nicaraguans remain sympathetic with the goals of the Sandinista leadership, although there is a widespread feeling that an already dire economic situation was made worse by their mismanagement.

Asked about the influence of the Sandinista-controlled armed forces in the new administration, Soria stressed the unique character of the Nicaraguan Army as a people's army. He agreed that forces would certainly be reduced, but added that the army retained a large measure of popular support. "Violeta Chamorro has no choice but to cooperate with the army, for now."

Mike Curtis traveled to Managua with a group of Georgists in 1985, to see the country, and to present their views on land reform to a council of economic advisors. (Sadly, the Georgist program was never enacted.) Mike observed that Nicaragua's economic prospects, at least for the near future, are brighter at this juncture than they have been for a long time. "With no more Contra war, and American economic aid, and most-favored trading status," Mike asked, how can the Nicaraguan people not think Chamorro is doing a great job? However, the prospects of long-range peace and stability, Mike warned, depend on the land issue. He is particularly concerned with the fate of the approximately three million acres of land that was seized from the Somozas and other immensely wealthy landowners during the revolution. "There will be great pressure to return that land to its former owners," Mike said, "but to do that would re-polarize the country."

Drugs in America - Legalization or War?

The final Saturday Seminar of the New York School's spring term tackled the controversial topic of "the war on drugs." Featured speakers were New York State Senator Joseph Galiber and Michael Sehested, Program Coordinator for ADAPT, an agency which provides treatment and counseling to drug abusers. The program was ably moderated by Joseph Partansky, who brought years of hands-on experience in counseling and rehabilitation.

Senator Galiber is the chairman of the New York State Subcommittee of Hard Drugs, and a member of the Governor's Commission to Evaluate Drug Laws. His position in favor of the decriminalization of various illegal drugs places him in a politically dangerous position, but one that has been gaining support recently. The so-called war on drugs, he said, is simply not working. "Ten

A JAPAN INDEX

Much has been said recently about the fantastic rise in land prices in Japan. The following statistics were taken from the following publications: The Wall Street Journal, March 23, 1990; The New York Times, March 25; The Christian Science Monitor, March 8; and The Japan Times, June 11-17.

- Price of a prefabricated house an hour's commute from downtown Tokyo: \$500,000
- Percentage of Tokyo land designated as farmland: 12%
- Acres of farmland in Tokyo: 88,000
- Price of the world's costliest land, in downtown Tokyo, per square meter: \$200,000
- Price of the "Mini-Bar" a 6-by-18 foot club in Tokyo's Ginza district: \$3.6 million
- Number of applicants to purchase each unit of public housing in Tokyo, 1989: 80
- Portion of national net wealth of Japan comprised of land values: 2/3
- Portion in United States: 1/4
- Increase in residential property value in Kyoto in 1988: 68%
- Number of dollar millionaires in Japan, 1989: 1.3 million
- Amount of outstanding real-estate based loans by Japanese banks: \$325 billion

billion dollars a year has been spent, with little results. We can't afford any more time." What makes the drug trade so violent, Galiber said, is mainly a matter of dealers fighting for turf--for markets. The most urgent need is to "take the profit out" by legalizing and regulating the supply of drugs.

Legalization is by no means enough, however--Galiber stressed that treatment is vital. He said that one of the gravest faults of U.S. drug policy has been the pittance allocated for treatment programs, compared to the billions spent on interdiction.

It is bad enough that the "drug war" is failing to significantly cut the supply, but Galiber warned that it may pose grievous long-term dangers to civil liberties. Many surveys indicate that a majority of Americans would be willing to give up certain privacy rights to stop the flow of illegal drugs. "The real war," Galiber said, "is a war on civil liberties. No matter how vital the need might seem now, we'll never get our rights back once they are taken away."

Although he does not support legalization, Michael Sehested said, with some surprise, that he agreed with Senator Galiber on almost every issue. However, Sehested, a former heroin addict who has spent many years working in drug treatment programs, stressed that the drug problem must be viewed as a medical, not a legal issue. Sehested said the most important problem is addiction, and unless that is addressed, the market for drugs will go on and on, whether drugs are legal or illegal.

Furthermore, Sehested criticized the way the drug war is being waged: too much time and money being spent arresting small-time users and dealers, while the big players make millions with virtual impunity. "The drug war is a war on poor people only," he said. "As the cold war winds down, people place gays, drug users, and people with AIDS in the slot of enemy that society seems to need." What we need to legalize, Sehested concluded, is hope, and the war we must fight is against addiction.

Note: the Reverend Dino Woodard, of Abyssinian Baptist Church, was to be on the program. But, regrettably, he was under the impression that the seminar was a week later. He said that he had been eager to participate, and would be willing to be involved in any future events concerning this topic.