



is the unwillingness of the Sandinista leaders to hold elections immediately and their supposed failure to guarantee the property rights of private capital operating in the country.

Nicaragua's leaders and the majority of its people see things differently. Despite its extensive efforts to do so, the US administration has been unable to prove that Nicaragua is supplying arms to the El Salvadorean opposition. The evidence on this is so thin that the El Salvadorean government itself has never made a formal protest at international level.

US claims of the Nicaraguan arms build up are vastly exaggerated. The 40-50,000 Nicaraguan army is dwarfed by the combined strength of Guatemala, El Salvador and Honduras, all of whose governments are deeply hostile to the Sandinistas and have discussed joint military cooperation. Whereas the US media recently accused Nicaragua of receiving 1000 Vietnamese jet fighters, the Sandinista air force's real combat capacity rest on four T-33 fighter bombers (aircraft used by the USA in the Korean war). Neighbouring Honduras, whose army has already provoked several border incidents last year, has by comparison at least a dozen French Super Mystere jets.

The arms build up which is going on is justified, say the Sandinistas, by a relentless destabilisation campaign orchestrated from Washington, for which the main vehicles

have been small opposition parties, recalcitrant members of the private sector, and the main opposition newspaper *La Prensa*. The Sandinistas hit back by imprisoning three businessmen who had published a letter which violated the recently decreed state of economic and social emergency. *La Prensa* has been closed five times, on the last two occasions for opening their pages to a businessman who was under legal investigation accused of openly decapitalising his factory.

At the same time though, the Government has reaffirmed its commitment to political pluralism and a mixed economy. The new political party law will give legal status to opposition parties, while a foreign investment law will create favourable terms for foreign investment, emphasising the Sandinistas continuing commitment to a mixed economy. So the Sandinistas firmly reject US accusations. Bayardo Arce, the secretary of the Sandinistas political committee, said recently: 'Things are normal, though we don't deny there are difficulties. But the States is screeching to the world that Nicaragua is marching towards totalitarianism. It doesn't ring true. It's like putting on an Abba record in the middle of a wake.'

Yet in Washington Nicaragua has already been tried and found guilty and appropriate punishment is now being considered by President Reagan. As the top men look at the military options, the scenario is bleak. One US Congressman, foreign affairs committee

## NICARAGUA

Nicaragua enters 1982 under threat of United States military intervention. Accused of fomenting revolution in neighbouring Guatemala and El Salvador and of betraying early promises to install democracy, the leaders of Nicaragua's revolution are desperate not to provoke US aggression. They are nevertheless preparing for the defence of the revolution.

According to the Reagan administration Nicaragua is the new beach-head for Soviet expansionism in the Americas. Secretary of State Alexander Haig says Nicaragua's arms build up makes it a 'superpower in Central American terms'. And that without the alleged direct military assistance from both Cuba and Nicaragua the Salvadorean guerrillas would be quickly defeated by government forces in that country. Support for Soviet ambitions is allegedly accompanied by a drift towards 'Soviet style totalitarianism'. Top of the list of US complaints

chairman Michael Barnes said recently 'If I were Nicaraguan, I'd be building a bomb shelter'.