

Contadora's Tortuous Path

When hopes were high for a peaceful resolution, new pressures once again prevented the signing of the Contadora Treaty

Contadora's efforts toward a peaceful, political solution to the Central American crisis increasingly resemble an endless race. Each time the contestants seem to be reaching the end of the track, the finish-line gets pulled further back. Time and time again, obstacles appear in the path of new peace proposals.

In their search for a breakthrough, the foreign affairs ministers of Mexico, Venezuela, Colombia and Panama (the countries that make up the Contadora Group), as well as their counterparts from Peru, Argentina, Brazil and Uruguay (the Contadora Support Group), met in Panama last April 5 through 7. They agreed on a two-month ultimatum, ending on June 6, for the five Central American nations to conclude peace negotiations and sign the Contadora Treaty for Peace and Cooperation in Central America. Thus, the Group's efforts would end on that date.

Discussions were tense at the April meeting. Reports indicated there were three main points of disagreement: arms controls and reductions, suspension of international military maneuvers, and treaty verification mechanisms.

The main point of tension at the diplomatic summit was Nicaragua's refusal to sign a joint communique agreeing to a set date for the Peace Treaty's signature. Managua argued that it could not "dismantle its army at a time when it is under attack from the number one economic and military power in the world."

Significantly, three Democratic congressmen from the U.S., and a representative of the European Economic Community, were present at the meeting as observers. Contadora issued a formal petition to the United States Congress requesting that the vote on President Reagan's proposed \$100 million in aid to the contra "at least" be postponed.

Between the April 7 meeting in Panama and the Central American presidential summit held in Guatemala on

May 25, two positions arose around Contadora's ultimatum. On the one hand, Guatemala, El Salvador, Honduras and Costa Rica stated their willingness to sign the Treaty on June 6. Nicaragua, on the other hand, insisted it would sign only if Washington ceased its aggression.

Guatemalan president Vinicio Cerezo said that Nicaragua's position would mean an end to Latin America's peace efforts in Central America. Likewise, in his inaugural address on May 8, the new Costa Rican president, Oscar Arias Sánchez, stated that the Contadora Treaty was the only alternative for the region, "or an apocalyptic war will destroy us all." Honduran head of state, José Azcona, took a similar stance.

Yet this eagerness to sign the Treaty changed, following the presidential summit in the Guatemalan town of Esquipulas. On May 27 Rodolfo Castillo Claramount, who is both vice-president and minister of foreign affairs in the Salvadoran administration, declared that his government would ask Contadora for an extension on the time-limit. On the following day, the Costa Rican government said they considered the June 6 deadline "utopian."



From left to right: Fernando Cardoze (Panamá), Bernardo Sepúlveda (México), Augusto Ramírez Ocampo (Colombia), Isidro Morales Paul (Venezuela).

new proposal, "rather than closing gaps between the positions of the Central American countries, in certain aspects opens them even further."

But the harshest criticism came from El Salvador and Costa Rica, where the final version of the Treaty was referred to as "an incomplete, gray and somewhat intranscendental document." At the same time, it was announced that together with Honduras and Guatemala, they would work on a new plan to resolve the regional conflict. "Contadora's tutelage has disappeared," said Salvadoran Minister Rodolfo Castillo. And Rodrigo Madrigal, head of Costa Rican diplomacy, accused Contadora of creating an aura of complacency around the Sandinistas. "We leave behind the realm of complacency to enter the realm of peremptory demands."

Most regional analysts believe that the Reagan administration's policy of support for the contra continues to be the "crucial element" hindering the Contadora agreement. And it's probably no chance coincidence that on the same day Secretary of State George Shultz stated that the Central American countries might reject the final version of the Peace Treaty, the Salvadoran government called a meeting to discuss the formation of an alternative to Contadora. Nicaragua was pointedly excluded from the initiative.

The road to peace in Central America is long, winding, and full of obstacles. Once more the peace-making group's proposals come up against seemingly insurmountable difficulties. But the members of Contadora have reaffirmed their determination to continue their mediating efforts. The firm support of the world community is with them.★

Horacio Castellanos Moya

Arguments that Favor a Theology of Liberation

Many people think the Vatican totally opposes liberation theology, yet recent Church documents have actually endorsed some of its ideas

Latin America's liberation theology has been legitimized by the highest levels of the Roman Catholic hierarchy. The Pope, himself, now considers it to be "a new stage" in Catholic theology, for all times and all places. Those who have wanted to have it branded as heterodoxy have been unsuccessful.

In March and April of this year, John Paul II made several references to liberation theology, as a Christian reflection that "is not only opportune, but also useful and necessary." Speaking to a representative group of 21 Brazilian bishops, in a unique meeting at the Vatican's Hall of Congregations on March 13, he said, "The Church recognizes that its obligation is to continue that reflection, to bring it up to date and to deepen it, as a reflection that tries to respond to the serious problems related to social justice, equality in interpersonal, national and international relations, peace and disarmament, freedom, the fundamental rights of the human person, etc."

In a special message to the Brazilian Bishop's Conference on April 9, he added, "We are convinced, you and we, that liberation theology...must constitute a new stage—closely linked to previous ones—in that

theological reflection begun with the Apostolic tradition and carried on by the great Fathers and Doctors, with the ordinary and extraordinary Magisterium, and in the most recent period, by the rich patrimony of the Church's social doctrine, as expressed in a series of documents that go from *Rerum novarum* to *Laborem exercens*."

On April 5, the Vatican also published its "Instruction on Christian Freedom and Liberation" (*Libertatis nuntius*), signed on March 22, with the Pope's approval, by Joseph Ratzinger, Prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith. It reaffirms that freedom and liberation are "the center of the Gospel message" (Nos. 1 and 2), and it once again recognizes the fact that "one of the principal phenomena of our times, that affects entire continents, is the awakening consciousness of people who, burdened by the weight of secular misery, aspire to a life of dignity and justice and are willing to fight for their freedom" (No.17).

Extending the theme of liberation to a world-scale, the same document denounces the development of "dependent relationships" that result from the "concentration of economic power" which includes: the "technological power" of the contemporary world (No. 12); the use of technology to "perpetrate genocide" (No. 14); and the establishment of "new relationships of inequality and oppression"