



Collegian photo by Andy Heller

Minister and poet Ernesto Cardenal

# Cardenal: we have no choice

## Nicaragua 'forced' to seek aid

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After reading selections from his revolutionary poetry, the Nicaraguan Minister of Culture in the Sandinista government yesterday told a University of Massachusetts audience that the Sandinistas will continue to seek aid from Communist countries as long as the United States continues to impose economic sanctions on Nicaragua.

Defending Nicaraguan President Daniel Ortega's recent visit to the Soviet Union in search of economic assistance, Father Ernesto Cardenal said, in a question and answer session, "We prefer aid from the United States, but if the United States keeps doing what it is doing we will seek aid from the Communist nations."

As to why Ortega timed his trip so soon after the U.S. Congress had voted down all forms of aid to the rebels trying to overthrow the Sandinista government, Cardenal said it was known in Nicaragua that Reagan was ready to use other options against the Sandinistas if plans for aid failed.

Those options included a break in diplomatic relations, an economic embargo or a total blockade of Nicaragua, Cardenal said.

"Ortega was already aware that these options were probable and he had already outlined his options to get aid in other countries," he said. "We are forced to seek aid from whatever country is willing to provide it."

All of Cardenal's statements were translated from Spanish by Roberto Vargas, an official in the Nicaraguan embassy in Washington who is traveling with the minister during a three-week tour of U.S. colleges and universities. Cardenal was at Mt. Holyoke College Monday night and is expected to make appearances in the Boston area.

Before answering a variety of questions on the political situation in his country, Cardenal recited five poems he wrote during and after the revolution that brought the Sandinista government to power in 1979.

One poem called "Ocupados" (Busy) referred to the flurry of activities needed to restore the country. "The marketers should be clean and well ordered...quickly prepare the highways...it's time for a million to learn to read...we must plant very quickly."

Cardenal received three standing ovations and was widely applauded for his comments on social reforms enacted by the Sandinistas.

"There has been a literacy campaign, development of free health delivery service, free education, housing projects for the poor and great promotion of culture," he said.

Cardenal rarely criticized President Reagan, as other Sandinista leaders have done, but instead attacked the U.S. press.

"We cannot direct publicity used in the United States which molds public opinion. A lot of the news is incomplete.

"They have only talked about his (Ortega's) Moscow visit and have not talked about other countries he is now in," he said, which include capitalist countries in Europe.

About the effect of the U.S. embargo on the people of Nicaragua, Cardenal said, "Certainly it will do damage. With the economic difficulties we are now facing anything will have an effect."

Cardenal was also asked about the extent of the private sector in his country. "Between 60 and 70 percent in the agricultural and industrial sector is privately owned," he said.

"We have a mixed economy."