

At the end of a trial in San Jose, the Costa Rican capital, on Sept. 26, 1986, eight contras and three foreign mercenaries arrested in April 1985 were sentenced to prison terms of between 5 and 5 1/2 years for "hostile acts against a foreign government". This was the first time that foreigners had been convicted for fighting alongside the Nicaraguan contras. While awaiting trial two of the mercenaries had provided details of the alleged activities in Costa Rica of the US Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) and of the contras, including the illegal shipments of arms from the USA, and had implicated Mr John Hull, a US citizen resident in Costa Rica.

On Sept. 5 President Arias rejected the possibility of the use of Costa Rican territory to train contras, US administration officials having spoken on Aug. 20 of plans to send Green Beret soldiers to train contras commanders in Central America. President Arias had also expressed "concern" about the negative consequences for Costa Rica of US aid to the Nicaraguan rebels, since the latter had pledged to open a military front in southern Nicaragua once the new military aid was received.

During the first week of November 1986 the Public Security Minister, Sr Hernan Garron, declared the border area with Nicaragua a "restricted zone", due to the activities of contra rebels and the imminent increase in the conflict with Nicaragua. Strict controls would be applied to the civilian population living in the border area, with access to and from border towns restricted and the introduction of special passes for local inhabitants.

On March 8, 1987, the Costa Rican government announced its decision to expel from Costa Rica all contra leaders involved either "directly or indirectly" in military activities. This was widely seen as an attempt by President Arias to underline his policy of neutrality, at a time when he was sponsoring a Central American peace plan [see forthcoming article for Contadora group's peace plan for the region as approved in August 1987].

The warning was given while a meeting was taking place in San Jose of members of the main anti-Sandinista umbrella organization, the United Nicaraguan Opposition (*Union Nicaraguense de la Oposicion—UNO*), which had been called to resolve continuing factional disputes. It followed a decision taken by the UNO in Miami on March 4 to centralize within its hands the control of contra military operations and the disbursement of funds to the guerrillas. Costa Rica was host to two of the organization's then leaders, Sr Alfonso Robelo Callejas and Sr Pedro Joaquin Chamorro Cardenal; there had also been recent reports of plans to move the UNO's headquarters from Miami to San Jose.

### Relations with USA

Against a background of increasing US financial pressure on Costa Rica, President Arias embarked upon a three-day official visit to Washington on Dec. 4-6, 1986, during which he met separately the US President, Mr Ronald Reagan, the US Secretary of State, Mr George P. Shultz, and also the then Managing Director of the International Monetary Fund (IMF), M. Jacques de Larosiere, and World Bank officials.

It had been announced in November that over US\$60,000,000 promised as US economic aid had been held back due to overall restrictions on the US foreign aid budget. The promised aid had been approved in mid-1986 as part of the \$300,000,000 in economic assistance for Nicaragua's representatives of President Reagan's request for \$100,000,000 in aid to the contras [see page 34548].

In the first official protest ever filed on any subject with the United States, the Costa Rican government alleged, on March 16, 1987, that the USA had pressed it to forego its stated policy of neutrality to take a more active role in supporting the Nicaraguan contras.

In a note delivered to the US embassy in San Jose and addressed to Mr Shultz, the government demanded a clarification of US statements and positions reported by the Tower commission as part of its investigation of the "Iran-contras" affair [see 35182 A]. The note referred to the

The construction of the airstrip at Portero Grande, Guanacaste, near the Nicaraguan border (apparently built secretly by US embassy employees and members of a network run by Lt.-Col. North, with money from the US-Iran arms sale), for use by aircraft supplying the contras, had been authorized and completed under the previous Costa Rican President, Sr Luis Alberto Monge, after US officials had warned him of a possible Nicaraguan invasion. President Arias said that he had ordered the immediate closure of the airport on learning of its existence, shortly after taking office in May 1986, and had subsequently refused at least two requests by Dr Tams to permit its further use. The Tower commission report cited memoranda from Lt.-Col. North, as well as testimony from a Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) official, revealing that Lt.-Col. North, Dr Tams and the US Assistant Secretary of State for Inter-American Affairs, Mr Elliott Abrams, were all involved in promoting the use of the airstrip in Costa Rica to supply the contras, despite public statements that they respected Costa Rican neutrality.

Dr Tams resigned "for personal reasons" on Dec. 8, 1986, following the revelation of his role in securing Costa Rican consent to build the airstrip and in overseeing its use. The following month the CIA station chief in Costa Rica, Mr Joe Fernandez (known by the pseudonym Tomas Castillo), was recalled and compelled to take early retirement after allegations that he had given military and logistical advice to the contras. The area surrounding the airstrip was declared a national park at the end of July 1987.

In a letter to Mr Shultz on June 23 the Costa Rican government asked the USA to explain its role in training Nicaraguan contras in Costa Rica. The letter cited testimony of Dr Tams and of Col. Robert C. Dutton, a former US Air Force pilot, in which they had said that the Juan Santamaria airport in Costa Rica had been used covertly as a contra refuelling base despite earlier assurances from Mr Shultz that the US would not sanction such activity.

In mid-1987 an investigation into possible breaches of Costa Rican neutrality during the administration of former President Monge was suspended by executive decree on the basis that it would be wrong to set a precedent by which a newly installed government submitted its predecessors to "a generalized investigation which can easily turn into political persecution".

### Anti-drug trafficking co-operation with the USA

The purchase of three "push-and-pull" aircraft from the USA, for use in drug traffic control and surveillance of contra and Sandinista military activities along the border with Nicaragua, was announced by Sr Garron in July 1986. Although in 1985 the USA had supplied Costa Rica with two helicopters and four Cessna 206 light aircraft, the "push-and-pull" aircraft, each costing an estimated \$25,000,000, were its first aircraft with a potentially military use.

In August 1986 Sr Garron confirmed that two small naval ports were to be built at Port Limon on the Atlantic coast and Caldera de Puntarenas close to the border with Nicaragua, was to be used to train a