

Congress & Contra Aid

On October 7, President Reagan announced that he will ask Congress for \$270 million in military aid to the contras before the Nov. 7 cease-fire mandated by the Central American peace plan.

In a speech to the Organization of American States, Reagan contradicted Secretary of State George P. Shultz who had assured the Senate Foreign Relations Committee last month that no formal request for contra aid would be sent to Congress before the Nov. 7 cease-fire.

Reagan's announcement also defied the plea of Costa Rican President Oscar Arias, author of the plan which calls for termination of aid to "insurgents" in Central America. Arias and four other Central American presidents, including Nicaragua's Daniel Ortega, signed the plan in Guatemala City, on August 7.

Ortega and the Sandinista government have taken dramatic steps to fulfill the letter and spirit of the Arias plan. "Give peace a chance," Arias declared in a speech to a joint session of Congress on Sept. 22. Without mentioning Reagan by name, he denounced those who would impose artificial timetables on the peace plan in order to "sink" it.

House Speaker Jim Wright (D-TX) echoed Arias. He told reporters that Reagan's list of conditions for U.S. acquiescence to the peace plan are "ridiculous demands that violate Nicaraguan sovereignty." The administration aim, he charged, is to "torpedo" the peace plan. He branded it an "extreme right-wing" policy.

Wright had collaborated with Reagan in drawing up a "peace plan" announced two days before the Central American president's announced theirs. Anticipating expiration of last year's \$100 million in contra aid, Sept. 30, Wright helped push \$3.5 million in "humanitarian" contra aid through the House on Sept. 25.

Rosa DeLauro, executive secretary of Countdown '87: Campaign to Stop Contra Aid, said Wright's angry blast was a welcome sign of a shift and that Congress can be persuaded to terminate all contra aid.

Bill Spencer, coordinator of the Days of Decision campaign told the PDW they have mobilized over 100,000 messages to Congress urging a contra fund cutoff. "Our position hasn't changed," he said. "Contra aid in any form — military, 'humanitarian,' private or in escrow — is the main danger to the peace process."

By Tim Wheeler