

# LASA Disinformation on Nicaragua

By Dr. Alfred G. Cuzán

The Latin American Studies Association (LASA) is the single most important organization of professional Latin Americanists in the United States. It publishes a prestigious quarterly journal on whose editorial board serve distinguished academics employed by some of America's best universities. Hence, one would expect that policy positions emanating from this body represent intelligent, informed, well-meaning, and responsible opinion on Latin America which the public and government of the United States could safely trust.

But, judging from the recently published "Report of the Latin American Studies Association Delegation to Observe the Nicaraguan General Election of November 4, 1984" (which can be obtained by sending one dollar to the LASA Secretariat, University of Texas at Austin) such trust would be sorely misplaced. As any reader can ascertain for himself, the report is a highly tendentious document, as apologetic for the Sandinista dictatorship as it is critical of the Reagan Administration for its alleged "attempt to undermine the Nicaraguan electoral process and to destroy its credibility in the eyes of the world." Contrary to a *New York Times* editorial which denounced the Sandinista "election" as a sham, the LASA delegation concluded that, "by Latin American standards" it was "a model of probity and fairness."

As novel as that conclusion may sound, the report includes many more statements and observations that are even more startling. It denies that the Sandinistas — avowed Marxist-Leninists who regard Castro as their patron — are totalitarian, that censorship of the press inhibits opposition against them, or that the refusal of a broad spectrum of erstwhile allies of the FSLN in the war against Somoza to participate obediently in Nicaragua's "nascent democratic process" was motivated by anything other than arbitrary pressures from the United States.

But that is not all. The report uncritically accepts as true outlandish Sandinista claims — standard in communist regimes — that they have made spectacular strides against child mortality, illiteracy, and poverty in a very short time. For example, the report claims that in less than six months, an army of "nearly 100,000 volunteer literacy workers drawn mostly from the government-sponsored organizations" were able to cut the country's illiteracy in half. The source for these "statistics" was none other than the government itself. In repeating these

claims, the report shows none of the skepticism for which academics are known.

Among the many Sandinista fallacies given credence in the report, one deserves special mention. It seems that the shortages of pork, chicken, eggs, milk, and medicines which have developed — as they always do after a communist take-over — under the Sandinistas do not mean that Nicaraguans now consume less than under Somoza, when all those items could be purchased freely in greater quantities and at lower real prices than at present. Rather, the report interprets the shortages as evidence that Nicaraguans — especially the "working class" — are consuming more! In the "economics" of the report, empty shelves means people are getting more, not less, than before, when the shelves were full.

At its most sycophantic, the report parrots Sandinista euphemisms for disguising their dictatorship, such as the "logic of the majority concept." According to this Marxist-Leninist syllogism, the FSLN and its mass organizations are the sole repository of knowledge and of selfless commitment to the "basic needs of the majority" against which are juxtaposed the "private profits" of the "economic elites" who "will no longer be allowed to rule." But what if the majority, disenchanted with the Sandinista

elite, were to vote in favor of a party of those "economic elites?" Would the FSLN accept *that* logic of the majority — elementary in every real democracy — and transfer power to the people's choice?

It is customary to evaluate a written piece by whether it at least accomplished the goals it set for itself. The LASA report fails that test, too. It had set out to remedy "the paucity of academic (rather than journalistic and governmental sources)" concerning the "unusual international circumstances" surrounding the so-called election.

But there is precious little deserving of the adjective "academic" (other than the reputation of the authors) in the report. There are no results from statistical analysis of United Nations or census data, survey research or other sampling of the population, or balanced historical inquiry. In fact, the sources relied upon by the delegation — during a week's travel in a rented bus — such as "key informants," anonymous "international observers," and man-in-the-street interviews, were heavily weighted in favor of the Sandinistas. Rather than add new knowledge about Nicaragua, the report simply repeats stale Marxist-Leninist clichés taken from the Sandinista government and the Sandinista press, whose word we are expected to believe is just as good as that of western governments and the free international press.

As for the "unusual international circumstances" the report dwells on "the deep, ideologically-grounded hostility of the Reagan Administration toward the Sandinista government," but does not even mention the thousands of Cuban and other Soviet-bloc "internationalists" that permeate the Sandinista state. By not mentioning them, the report leaves out the most "unusual circumstance" of all, since no other Latin American country except Cuba has them.

Judged by its stated goal, the report is a failure. But perhaps the stated goal was not the real one. Maybe the report is simply an act of deliberate disinformation by a committee of "political pilgrims" (as in the title of Paul Hollander's splendid book) enamored of the latest fashion in the third world stalinism. Given the intellectual corruption which Marxism has wrought on Latin American studies during the last generation, that interpretation cannot be summarily dismissed.

*Dr. Cuzán is Associate Professor of Political Science at The University of West Florida, in Pensacola, and one of CR's Ivory Tower Praefecti.*

