

U.S. Academics Fear Crossing Established Political Mores

When it comes to Central America, many academics toe a line set by the Marxists who populate the Latin American Studies Association (LASA). The LASA line accuses the Reagan Administration of "militarizing" Honduras and waging "war on Nicaragua." It sanitizes the Sandinistas, pretending that they are nationalists, not communists, ignoring their Marxist-Leninist writings and policies, and turning a blind eye to the Sovietization of Nicaragua by agents of Fidel Castro's military and police. The LASA line also discredits the *contras* as former Somocistas with no popular support — mercenaries in the pay of the CIA.

The LASA line is wrong on all counts, but few Latin Americanists dare to deviate too far from it in their writings. Perhaps they are afraid of vilification and ostracism by the Marxists who dominate LASA. One Latin Americanist who is evidently not inhibited by such fears is Susan Kaufman Purcell, senior fellow and director of the Latin American Program at the Council on Foreign Relations. In a recent article ("The Choice in Central America," *Foreign Affairs*, Fall 1987, pp. 109-128) she analyzes the Nicaraguan situation with uncommon clarity.

Purcell's article dissects the Nicaraguan civil war and the various peace plans that have been proposed to resolve it. She faults both the Contadora and the Arias plans for siding too much with the Sandinistas. Both proposals call on the United States to stop aiding the *contras* without requiring the Sandinistas to stop receiving weapons and employing military and police personnel from the Soviet bloc — this despite the very asymmetrical flows of foreign support to the regime and the resistance. Since 1983, the United States has supplied the *contras* with \$200 million of aid. By comparison, the Soviet bloc has sent nearly \$3 billion in mostly military aid to the Sandinistas, \$850 million in 1986 alone. Furthermore, "Soviet assistance to the Sandinistas has been uninterrupted and dependable, in contrast to U.S. aid to the resistance, which has been erratic and unreliable."

Perhaps with the LASA line in mind, Purcell argues, "Those who believe that the Nicaraguan armed resistance is small, ineffective, unpopular and unable to hold its own against the Sandinistas" are mistaken. For one thing, Nicaragua's neighbors, who should know better, do not believe it. Purcell summarizes the findings of a Gallup poll conducted in January 1987 in Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras. The survey showed that "strong majorities in all four countries" see the Sandinistas as representing only "a minority of the Nicaraguan population, ...

think a majority of Nicaraguans favor the Nicaraguan resistance, ... (and believe that) it will be better for Nicaragua if the resistance wins." Significantly, at least 70 percent in all four countries describe Nicaragua as an instrument of Cuba and the Soviet Union and over two thirds of the respondents in all four countries are aware of and approve of U.S. aid, both military and non-military, to the Nicaraguan resistance.

Even more important than the perceptions and beliefs of Nicaragua's neighbors is the situation inside the country. The \$100 million in aid that the *contras* received from the United States this year enabled them "to put the Sandinistas on the defensive by launching hundreds of attacks each month." The *contras* are now active "in more than two-thirds of Nicaraguan territory," everywhere except "the Pacific coast area immediately west and south of Managua." The Sandinistas have not scored a single major military victory against the *contras*. What they have done is forcibly relocate hundreds of thousands of peasants in the hope of depriving the resistance of popular support.

Purcell believes that the *contras'* military activities, popular support for their cause, a deteriorating economy, and "tremendous latent discontent within Nicaragua" persuaded the Sandinistas to sign the Arias peace plan last August as a ploy to gain time and give the U.S. Congress an excuse not to renew aid to the *contras*. Purcell is not fooled by the Sandinista strategem. She urges continued U.S. aid to the *contras*: Given the uninterrupted flow of Soviet-bloc military hardware to the Sandinistas, without American assistance the *contras* "would be destroyed not only as a military force, but as a political force as well, thereby depriving the United States of leverage over the Sandinistas during the negotiating process and beyond."

Would that all Latin Americanists saw the situation in Nicaragua as clearly as does Susan Kaufman Purcell.

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