

## Op-Ed

# Chilling details from Nicaragua's universities

By Alfred G. Cuzán

Four years ago, in a by now infamous report, a Latin American Studies Association (LASA) delegation sent to observe the Nicaraguan "elections" (which earlier that year *comandante* Bayardo Arce had called "a nuisance" demanded by the United States; and which the Sandinistas would turn into "one more weapon of the revolution to bring its historical objectives gradually into reality") did its best to whitewash the Sandinista regime and its policies, the good intentions of which were said to be matched only by the ideological hostility they induced within the Reagan administration.

The LASA report's abject apologies for Sandinista outrages against Arturo Cruz, the Catholic Church, the newspaper *La Prensa*, independent labor unions, and other targets of repression have long since been discredited. What concerns us here is the report's treatment of how Nicaraguan universities were faring after five years of Sandinista rule. In a section that sought to dispel apprehensions about the climate of fear and intimidation which the Sandinistas had imposed on Nicaragua, a single paragraph of the report conceded that "in recent years . . . there seems to have been a significant deterioration" in the autonomy of Nicaraguan universities, and that "the activities of at least one other academic research center have been heavily politi-

cized" (page 28).

In what must rank as one of the most remarkable statements on academic freedom ever penned by a group of academics, the paragraph's concluding sentence said, "It is not clear, however, whether reduced institutional autonomy has been translated into less freedom of expression for individual scholars."

Recently, however, Eric Chenoweth of the American Federation of Teachers has made all too clear what "reduced institutional autonomy" has done to Nicaraguan academics. In "Nicaraguan Universities Betrayed" (*Freedom at Issue*, May-June 1988), Chenoweth describes in chilling detail the systematic repression of university faculty undertaken by the Sandinistas, a repression which began within six months of Somoza's ouster and which had been essentially completed by the time the LASA delegation visited Nicaragua and issued its infamous report.

The first academics to come under Sandinista attacks were independent-minded Marxists who would not toe the Sandinista line, such as sociologist Gustavo Guvierrez and Rene Lacayo, a political scientist. Subject to Sandinista mob attacks and police beatings on the Managua campus of the National Autonomous University of Nicaragua, Lacayo, Gutierrez, "and several dozen other leftists resigned their university posts,

usually to go into exile." After the independent left had been eliminated, the Sandinistas proceeded to purge professors of other political persuasions, including many respected academics, such as Dr. Adam Fleites, who had courageously supported the Sandinistas during the years of struggle against the Somoza dynasty.

As a result of Sandinista repression and intimidation, "90-95 percent of the faculty from 1979 have left the university and no longer teach." The university curriculum has been infused with courses on Marxism-Leninism, and student admission and graduation, as well as faculty and administrative appointments, are now contingent on ideological and political submission to the Sandinista *comandantes*.

Chenoweth's article makes absolutely clear what the LASA delegation, which included several members of the Association's "Task Force on Scholarly Relations with Nicaragua," was seemingly unable to discern: In Sandinista Nicaragua, the "universities are drained of trained and respected academics; pluralism of university life has been replaced by the dominance of a single political ideology; the new student-faculty are ill-qualified to replace those who have left; and the quality of the students has deteriorated rapidly."

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