OP-ED

LASA line on Central America questioned

By Alfred G. Cuzán

In "An Interpretation of the Central American Crisis," published in the fall 1986 issue of *The Latin American Research Review*, John Weeks of The American University argues that the "Nicaraguan revolution . . . the civil war in El Salvador, two recent coups in Guatemala, and the militarization of Honduras by the United States are all aspects of a crisis currently transforming the region." This "crisis" consists of a "general disintegration" of Central America's "anachronistic" "old order" as the "reactionary despotism" of the past collapses in a "conflagration of the social formation, as occurred in Nicaragua and is occurring in El Salvador."

As for the United States, Weeks holds that its "policy failures in Central America reflect a mistaken conceptualization of the region's history." Having, for the strategic sake of protecting the Panama Canal, reduced the countries of Central America to "semicolonial status," the U.S. has "imparted a particularly reactionary and antipopular character to the regimes in Central America." Having opposed reform in the interest of political stability for many years, the United States is now backing a "counterrevolution" by an "old oligarchy" "hoping for a triumphant and vengeful return in Nicaragua."

Weeks' "interpretation," which reflects what amounts to a LASA (Latin American Studies Association) "line" on Central America, is clouded with Marxist mythology and corrupted by Leninist language and logic. Weeks, along with LASA, "blames America first" for "the Central American crisis" while keeping silent about the Soviet Union, Fidel Castro, and the Communist nature of Nicaragua's Sandinista regime. (For the LASA view, see the "Report of the Latin American Studies Association Delegation to Observe the Nicaraguan General Election of November 4, 1984.")

From premises to conclusion, Weeks' argument is Marxist-Leninist. It is Marxist in that Weeks conceptualizes a "current of history" that is about to sweep away a "landlord class" that has tenaciously opposed "social and political change." It is Leninist in that Weeks believes that "reactionary despotism" "was designed so that it would always be 'too late' for peaceful reform" and that a "conflagration" sparked by "uprisings" is the most likely future for Central America.

Weeks never mentions Communism or the Soviet Union. He calls the Sandinistas "nationalists" even though they themselves boast of an "internationalism" (in the Marxist-Leninist meaning of the term) that brings thousands of Soviet-bloc "advisers" and "volunteers" to Nicaragua.

According to Weeks, Col. Jacobo Arbenz "sought to transform Guatemala into a modern capitalist society with a social democratic orientation." Facts such as that Arbenz was married to a Communist, fled to Czechoslovakia in 1954 and reappeared in Castro's Cuba in 1960, do not merit mentioning in Weeks' article.

Also passed over in silence is Farabundo Marti, head of the Salvadoran Communist party, who in 1932 was executed by the government for leading an uprising in El Salvador. According to Weeks, that failed attempt at Communist revolution was both "a general insurrection" and "an uncoordinated revolt" by the peasantry which "never posed a threat" to the Salvadoran "oligarchy." Weeks also fails to mention the fact that today's Salvadoran Communist guerrillas have named their "front" after Farabundo Marti.

In Weeks' "interpretation," ever since the United States first intervened militarily in Nicaragua 80 years ago, it has played a "colonial role" in Central America. Although by "any objective judgment" Sandino "defeated" U.S. occupation forces in Nicaragua during the early 1930s, Weeks avers, the United States "learned the limits of direct military intervention in Central America" and proceeded to maintain its economic and political "hegemony" indirectly, through military assistance to armies at the service of "reactionary despotism." In the 1980s, however, the U.S. has turned Honduras into a "permanent base" for its "military installations and for the operations of a counterrevolutionary force financed by the United States for raiding Nicaragua."

Weeks tendentious "history" of U.S. policies toward Central America raises many questions. For instance, if Sandino "defeated" the U.S. Marines in Nicaragua, how come Sandino and his army were so easily eliminated by Anastasio Somoza Garcia? Also, if U.S. "colonialism" only reinforced "reactionary despotism" in Central America, then why didn't something similar happen in Puerto Rico, which is in Latin America the society most "colonized" by the United States? Finally, how can Weeks attempt to explain U.S. strategic interests in Central America and the Panama Canal without mentioning the German threat in both world wars and the Soviet threat since 1945?

Weeks' "interpretation of the Central American crisis" is cyclopic. He sees despotism, terror, oligarchy, militarism, and colonialism only on the right, associated with the United States, but never on the left, on the Soviet side of the political axis that runs through the Isthmus.

Unfortunately, Weeks' Marxist-Leninist, blame-America view of Central America is not idiosyncratic. Rather, it amounts to a LASA line on the region. How an organization of academics subsidized by many state universities has come to adopt such a bizarre view of Central America and the United States is a perplexing and disturbing question.

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