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LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

Disinformation: Twisted facts distort reality

President Reagan told The Washington Post last week that "we've been subjected, in this country, to a very sophisticated lobbying campaign by a totalitarian government — the Sandinistas. There has been a disinformation program that is virtually worldwide, and we know that the Soviets and Cubans have such a disinformation network that is beyond anything we can match."

The Post in particular, and the liberal media in general dismiss the very notion of Soviet and Soviet-proxy disinformation as a manifestation of mindless anti-communism. In a column headlined "Sandinista Disinformation?" — the question mark was designed to discredit the president's irrefutable statement of fact — The Post's deputy editorial page editor, Stephen S. Rosenfeld, wrote, in effect, "Yes, but so what?"

So a lot, Mr. Rosenfeld. Vietnamese officials (e.g., General Giap himself) and defectors have confirmed that disinformation operations in the U.S. media and on Capitol Hill played a major role in changing perceptions about that war.

The former justice minister of so-called National Liberation Front of South Vietnam — created and controlled by the Hanoi government — escaped among the boat people. He has testified that clever disinformation operations led us to believe that the 1968 Tet offensive was an unmitigated disaster for the United States.

So pervasive was this perception — this misperception — that President Johnson felt compelled to abdicate a few months later. The reality, according to Truong Nhu Tang, was the other way round. Tet was an unmitigated disaster for Hanoi.

There is every indication that the liberal media and the Congress do not support the Reagan administration's policy in Central America — notwithstanding the endorsement of the bipartisan Kissinger Commission report in January 1984. But there is also every indication that disinformation and Soviet-Cuban-Nicaraguan "active measures" have played a crucial role in laying

the groundwork for yet another U.S. strategic defeat.

There are many groups in the United States whose media connections are an open secret. Their mission is to shade, embroider and distort the truth for their own disinformation agenda, while excoriating anyone else who is less than truthful.

These groups have helped nurture an entire new generation of journalists who have made it their duty to transform America's sworn enemies into misunderstood innocents, while at the same time portraying our own leaders as the foes of democracy and freedom.

Apologists for communism in Cuba, Vietnam, Angola, Mozambique, Ethiopia, Nicaragua, Afghanistan and elsewhere have argued that they were driven down the Marxist path of hostility because of abuse by the U.S. government. That this is sheer unadulterated disinformation is confirmed by communist dissidents and defectors, yet it is still eagerly regurgitated by the liberal establishment on both sides of the Atlantic.

How is it possible that so many intelligent people accept these dangerous misconceptions as the geopolitical gospel? Disinformation is the key. The Washington Times, beginning today and ending Friday, will unravel "The Network" that has been poisoning the lifeblood of democracy.

How does it do this? Quite simply by distorting the data and corrupting the process of understanding in such a way that it leads public opinion to react differently than if it understood the true nature of reality.

It would behoove the Congress to take note before our elected representatives vote yet another resolution that will once again make it possible for the Marxists to steal a revolution from the people, only to impose a totalitarian dictatorship more draconian than the authoritarian regime that was overthrown.

Arnaud de Borchgrave
Editor-in-Chief

THE NETWORK

TARGET: Reagan's Central American Policy

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8 April 1985By John Holmes
and Bill Outlaw
THE WASHINGTON TIMES

Intelligence experts call it "The Network" — a massive but almost invisible spiderweb of hundreds of left-wing groups and organizations, linked together by sinewy threads of personnel, ideology and politics, and seeking dramatic changes in the social, economic and political policies of the United States government.

And now, The Network has focused its attention and resources on its latest target: President Reagan's Latin American policy.

Last Thursday night, shortly after President Reagan announced his plans for bringing a halt to conflict in Nicaragua, a coalition of pacifist church groups began to prepare for a program of "nationally coordinated legal vigils and phone-ins" of protest.

Dennis Marker, spokesman for that coalition, which is called Pledge

of Resistance, was quoted over the weekend as saying that an "active alert" went out over its 55,000-person telephone network. Members of this network were told to call their congressmen the day after Mr. Reagan makes a future television speech on Nicaragua and urge them to vote against his policies.

This apparently well-oiled protest machine is just a small part of what

is called "The Network." Over the years, those who organize, operate and manipulate this web have thrown their efforts behind many causes opposed to policies of the administration.

The Network consists of literally hundreds of groups on the left side of the religious and political spectrum. Many are shoebox and telephone booth outfits — small groups of cause-oriented people working in cramped spaces for little or no money. Some, however, are large, well-funded and highly organized.

Most of these organizations claim to be non-partisan and independent, interested in such noble causes as "human rights" and "social justice." To a degree, that's true; and many individuals who participate in these activities are motivated out of a genuine sense of righteousness and altruism.

But in many cases, that's not the whole truth.

Well-oiled protest machine aims to kill Contra aid

Wall Street Journal columnist Suzanne Garment pointed out that "there is by now — on the American left — a whole cottage industry using the language of human rights and social justice to delegitimize" the United States' efforts to nurture democratic, anti-communist regimes in Latin America.

"While these organizations portray themselves as 'objective' observers of Latin America, this often is not the case," said Joan Fraley, an analyst writing in the Heritage Foundation's "Policy Review."

"Analysis of Latin American issues is offered mainly by organizations whose fundamental ideological perspective is sharply suspicious of, if not openly hostile to, U.S. policy in this region."

Of course, legitimate differences of opinion and debate are essential to the democratic process. But experts who have observed The Network over many years point out that some of the groups employ questionable tactics, including the planting of disinformation and outright deception — a tactic known as "active measures."

"Anything that advances their cause is, in their eyes, the truth. Anything that retards it becomes an untruth," wrote Auguste Lecoq, a former high-ranking Communist Party official in France, who was drummed out for protesting the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia.

Adds one analyst: "Ever since the creation of the World Peace Council by the Soviet Union in 1949, Moscow has manipulated the slogan 'peace' as a weapon of 'war.'"

And some groups in The Network actively cooperate with organizations established by the Kremlin for just these "active measures," proclaiming allegiance nevertheless to the lofty goal of "world peace."

The president himself expressed concern over this aspect of The Network.

"We've been subjected, in this country, to a very sophisticated lobbying campaign by a totalitarian government — the Sandinistas," Mr. Reagan said.

"There has been a disinformation program that is virtually worldwide, and we know that the Soviets and the Cubans have such a disinformation network that it is beyond anything that we can match," the president said in a recent interview with The Washington Post.

Mr. Reagan has proposed \$14 million in aid for Nicaraguan resistance. Congress has until late April to act on the president's proposal.

According to a 1984 Heritage Foundation report entitled "The Left's Latin American Lobby," there are six major organizations that constitute the bulk of this "cottage industry." These are the North American Congress on Latin America (NACLA), the Washington Office on Latin America (WOLA), the Council on Hemispheric Affairs (COHA), the Commission on U.S.-Central America Relations, the Central America Historical Institute (CAHI) and the Committee in Solidarity with the People of El Salvador (CISPES).

Among The Network's hundreds of groups, this handful stands out as the largest, best organized and singularly most effective. In an arena littered with amateurs, these are the professionals.

While their names may sound vague and non-partisan, and they may have differing fields of prime interest, many groups in The Network are linked in one way or another to the Institute for Policy Studies (IPS), which has been described as a radical "think tank" with headquarters near Dupont Circle.

"IPS has one line [on Central America]: It wants the United States to be disinvolved," says Sam Dickens, director of Interamerican Affairs for the conservative American Security Council.

"The single objective is to curtail

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the efforts the Reagan administration is making," he said.

In 1978 Brian Crozier, a London-based, veteran Soviet affairs analyst, called the IPS the "perfect intellectual front for Soviet activities which would be resisted if they were to originate openly from the KGB."

Mr. Crozier later stated that in 1982 the IPS concluded a public arrangement with two Soviet institutions used regularly by the Kremlin for "active measures" against the West.

IPS co-founders Richard Barnet and Marcus Raskin "are both specialists in 'blame-America-for-everything lobby,'" said Rael Jean Isaac, a close observer of The Network, in an interview.

Writing in "Midstream" magazine in 1980, Mrs. Isaac stated, "What IPS is really concerned about is assuring United States withdrawal of support from 'reactionary' regimes worldwide. Once that is done, IPS is quite confident in the ability of 'progressive' forces (backed presumably by 'progressive' arms of Cuba, the Soviet Union, etc.) to achieve victory."

Robert Borosage, IPS director, maintains that allegations of Soviet influence on the institute are "preposterous."

He said the organization has had meetings with the Soviet Academy of Sciences but said these are done to promote an exchange of ideas. Asked about allegations that IPS is strongly influenced by those meetings, Mr. Borosage said "That's ridiculous. It's an open dialogue between two institutes."

He said IPS itself does not take a position on issues, but that institute fellows are free to take a position in their research. He further stated that efforts to link the IPS to pro-Soviet positions are attempts to "discredit" the organization.

"The IPS, nevertheless, has espoused many Soviet, Cuban and North Vietnamese positions since its creation 23 years ago," said an analyst. "It has acted as a conduit for major Soviet disinformation themes."

Depending on the specific task at hand, members of The Network will work together or separately. Cooperation isn't mandatory, or even easy at times, but they often pool their resources to great effect.

While on the surface separate, free-standing entities, each seems to specialize in a specific area. IPS keys much of its efforts to research;

COHA has mastered the art of influencing — and, some say, manipulating — the media.

CISPES and other solidarity groups organize demonstrations and protests on university campuses across the country and around the world. The National Council of Churches, the Interreligious Task Force on Central America and others seek to spread their liberal political gospel in the religious world.

Many of these groups, both politically and religiously oriented, are banding together later this month to stage one of the largest, most overt shows of strength in some time. They will be protesting "Reagan's War In Central America."

Organizations such as the Women Strike for Peace, CISPES, the Mobilization for Survival and the U.S. Peace Council — which the FBI has characterized as Soviet-controlled — are organizing and sponsoring a four-day weekend of activity in Washington, D.C., and around the country beginning April 19.

[When the U.S. Peace Council was set up in 1979 as one of the Moscow-controlled World Peace Council's 137 national branches, numerous U.S. and state congressmen participated in the founding conference and subsequent meetings.]

The upcoming weekend of activity, according to the groups' literature, will include protests, marches and rallies, as well as "training sessions" for lobbying and civil disobedience, activities that the groups plan to carry out primarily on Monday, April 22.

Similar activities also are planned for New York, Seattle, San Francisco, Los Angeles and other cities. Organizers expect 20,000 protesters for the Washington rally.

But while such demonstrations are the most obvious and blatant shows of strength, the key element and single most important facet of The Network's operation is influencing policy- and decision-makers.

These groups may not see themselves as "lobbyists" and, in the classic sense of glad-handers in three-piece suits who spend their days chatting up congressmen and staff assistants, they are not.

But if "lobbying" can be defined as an attempt at persuasion through education, then there is little doubt that these groups are "lobbyists," and very effective ones at that.

A major reason many of these organizations so vehemently renounce the label of "lobbyist" is legal. Groups such as IPS, COHA and WOLA are non-profit, tax-exempt organizations. That is a

highly desirable status that might be jeopardized if they were deemed to be engaged in influencing legislation.

"We don't do lobbying on the Hill," said Larry Birns, COHA's founder and director.

"We've never lobbied. I don't think I've been to Capitol Hill 10 times in the past 10 years."

Reggie Norton, an associate at WOLA, admits that WOLA representatives meet and talk with members of Congress and their staffs, but disagrees that that constitutes lobbying.

"We don't lobby," he said. "I don't

see them and say, "Vote against the Contras." I go in and say this is the situation we saw and a peaceful solution is possible."

And IPS' Borosage stated that institute fellows may talk with a lot of people in Washington about a wide range of issues, but said that these are not pegged to any congressional agenda.

There is, however, little question to conservatives involved in the Latin American question that these groups are lobbying.

"Lobby? Absolutely," said the ASC's Sam Dickens. "They have an extremely effective lobby, particularly with staffers on the Hill."

The Network uses a variety of tactics in their efforts to influence Congress and public opinion. The primary technique in dealing with Congress is the passing of information, at least some of which is held by many conservatives to be biased or misleading.

Mr. Dickens explains that representatives from these groups establish contacts with congressional staffers and supply them with "slanted" information. Some staffers then pass the information to members of Congress.

Often, some of the material ends up in the Congressional Record, in speeches the congressmen give, in mailings they send out, or in articles they write for various publications.

COHA Director Larry Birns boasts that his people prepare as many as 100 Congressional Record inserts each year for various legislators, including, according to Mr. Birns, D.C. Delegate Walter Fauntroy, Rep. James Oberstar, D-Minn.; Rep. Don Bonker, D-Wash.; and Sen. Tom Harkin, D-Iowa.

Some of the individuals with the

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groups — most notably IPS and COHA — also generate opinion pieces for major newspapers around the world. Articles by IPS fellows can frequently be found on the New York Times and Washington Post's opinion-editorial pages and are picked up by many of America's 1,700 daily papers.

Some media watchdogs have complained that IPS is seldom, if ever, identified in these publications as a radical think-tank on the left. Rather, it is frequently termed a "Washington-based research institute," as the New York Times has called it.

COHA issues scores of press releases each year. Mr. Birns claims COHA is merely spreading the word, but those on the other side accuse him of manipulating the media by passing his information as straight news.

"COHA is not a human rights group. It is a left-wing foreign policy group that often masquerades as a human rights group," said Elliott Abrams, assistant secretary of state for human rights and humanitarian affairs.

"If you read what they've had to say through the years about human rights violations in Surinam, or Bishop's Grenada, or Cuba — worst of all, Cuba — you will see that they don't care about human rights in leftist or Communist regimes," he said.

Some groups such as WOLA — which Mr. Dickens describes as "openly supportive of the Sandinista government" — go far beyond the gathering and distribution of information.

"In addition to lobbying, they're [WOLA] taking people to Nicaragua on the guided tour effort," Mr. Dickens says. "They're playing an activist role in getting people to be supportive." WOLA's Mr. Norton maintains that they merely allow people to see the situation in Nicaragua for themselves.

Some of the church-related groups also are heavily involved in this "guided tour" effort, an activity that appears to be growing in popularity throughout The Network.

"Some of these church-related groups seem to think the Sandinista regime is just another form of government," said one analyst. "But even the Sandinista anthem refers to the U.S. as 'the enemy,'" he said. [The verse in question is: "The children of Sandino don't surrender or sell out. ... We fight against the Yankee, enemy of humanity:"]

Much of the left-wing church activity is coordinated through the National Council of Churches, the umbrella group covering 32 major Protestant and Eastern Orthodox

churches with congregations totaling 42 million people.

Since the mid-1960s, the NCC has actively campaigned for what it calls "social justice." But, said one observer, "just think of any left-of-center cause and the NCC has been involved."

Though the liberal church network maintains its own agenda, it is extremely similar, if not identical, to that pursued by its secular counterpart. And in many cases, the two groups are tightly interwoven, sharing common goals, projects, ideology and membership.

The North American Congress on Latin America, for instance, was established in the NCC offices in Washington, D.C., and receives financial support from numerous Protestant churches through the NCC's Latin American Division and through specific projects like the Presbyterian hunger program, according to a report by the independent Institute for Religion and Democracy.

And the Heritage Foundation quotes WOLA's 1983 annual report as saying that WOLA received \$124,000 from the United Methodist Church.

The IRD has documented main-line Protestant church support for left-wing political activities in the United States and to Vietnam. The United Methodist Board has contributed to the National Network in Solidarity with the Nicaraguan People, which was founded "to support and defend the Nicaraguan revolution," and other solidarity groups that assist the Salvadoran rebels, according to IRD.

In her book, "The Coercive Utopians," Rael Jean Isaac details many examples of the ways in which church groups fund leftists in Central America and around the world. Primary among her tales is that of David Jessup, an AFL-CIO official and member of the United Methodist Church, who studied Methodist contributions and reported to the 1980 General Conference of the Church.

"Most Methodist churchgoers would react with disbelief, even anger, to be told that a significant portion of their weekly offerings were being siphoned off to groups supporting the Palestine Liberation Organization, the governments of Cuba and Vietnam, the pro-Soviet totalitarian movements of Latin America, Asia and Africa, and several violence-prone fringe groups in this country," Mr. Jessup wrote.

Another group, the American Friends Service Committee, has become involved in political controversy.

In December 1984, the Citizens for Reagan submitted a letter to the Internal Revenue Service requesting an investigation of the AFSC and four other groups. CFR stated that the groups were violating the rules governing their tax-exempt status because they were engaged in "substantial lobbying" and political activities in favor of the Sandinista regime in Nicaragua and in opposition to U.S. policy in Central America.

As one observer of The Network put it, "the church lobby is important because they give (the debate) respectability. You can't argue with priests and nuns," he said.

Tomorrow: Activities of the Council on Hemispheric Affairs.

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Latin council called backer of leftists, not human rights

By John Holmes
THE WASHINGTON TIMES

In the spiderweb that comprises "The Network" of left-wing organizations opposed to administration policies, the Council on Hemispheric Affairs (COHA) stands out as one of the better known.

COHA literature describes the organization as "a non-profit, tax-exempt independent research and information organization" founded "to promote the common interests of the hemisphere; raise the visibility and increase the importance of the

Part two of a series

inter-American relationship; and encourage the formulation of rational and constructive U.S. policies toward Latin America."

COHA is run by Larry Birns, a tireless one-man army who serves as the council's founder, director, manager, press secretary, congressional liaison, researcher and chief fundraiser. Mr. Birns, extremely visible in liberal circles, calls COHA "a human rights organization."

But some of those who have dealt with COHA don't see it quite that way.

"COHA is not a human rights

group. It is a left-wing foreign policy group that often masquerades as a human rights group," says Elliott Abrams, assistant secretary of state for human rights and humanitarian affairs.

If you read what they've had to say through the years about human rights violations in Surinam, or Bishop's Grenada, or Cuba — worst of all, Cuba — you will see that they don't care about human rights in leftist or communist regimes," Mr. Abrams told The Times.

Mr. Abrams' duties bring him into contact with countless human rights organizations. He says there is a significant difference between COHA and such groups as the Washington Office on Latin America (WOLA), a group that shares COHA's political orientation and is an integral part of The Network. "WOLA has political

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prejudices just as we all do, but it makes a real effort to promote human rights progress," Mr. Abrams continued.

"So, while I disagree with WOLA, I work with them," he says. "But I will not have any contact with COHA and I do not permit members of the Bureau [of Human Rights and Humanitarian Affairs] to cooperate with them.

"COHA is not genuine in its stated beliefs in human rights. What it is in fact doing is promoting leftist regimes in Latin America," he said.

Bosco Matamoros, a representative of Nicaragua's anti-Sandinista FDN, agrees.

"They have no concern for human rights, just concern for foreign policy. If they did, they would have asked how many people are jailed by the Sandinistas in Nicaragua, but they haven't," he says.

"They know completely the situation down there, but they don't take into account the voices or opinion of the Nicaraguan people. They take as fact whatever is stated by the Sandinistas," Mr. Matamoros said in an interview.

These criticisms are supported by a 1984 Heritage Foundation

paper, entitled "The Left's Latin American Lobby."

"An analysis of [COHA's] publications reveals a pattern exaggerating the abuses of right-wing governments or movements, while understating the abuses of leftist regimes or guerrilla groups. This calls into question the integrity of COHA's sources and data that it marshals against the Reagan administration's policies in Central America," the Heritage report states.

"What [COHA's critics are] upset about is that we do a great deal of

accurate research," Mr. Birns counters.

To be sure, there are many who believe COHA's materials are accurate and well-presented. But critics contend that his publications are sometimes biased and have reflected Marxist Sandinista propaganda and disinformation themes.

A COHA press release dated Feb. 13, 1984, declared, "U.S. Helicopter Parts Sale to Guatemala Sure to Kill Indians and Worsen Refugee Flow to United States." And a headline on a release dated May 30, 1984, blared, "Guatemalan Military Dictatorship Set to Rig July Elections."

Two aspects of COHA's operations involve Capitol Hill and the press.

Mr. Birns calls COHA "a publishing mill." His council, he says, produces two to three press releases per week and numerous opinion pieces and reports. Some of these are incorporated by congressmen and their staff members into their own reports, speeches and letters, he says.

"We are a powerful force in the wings" of Congress, Mr. Birns admits.

Several liberal legislators, including Reps. Don Bonker, D-Wash., Robert Garcia, D-N.Y., and Sen. Tom Harkin, D-Ia., are listed as being on COHA's board of directors.

Last year COHA submitted numerous articles to these congressmen and others. As many as 100 of the articles to these congressmen were inserted in the Congressional Record, according to Mr. Birns.

But he denies that COHA engages in lobbying.

"We have no legislative people who go and chat up people on the Hill," he said. "It's pointless to try because many of the people up there know more than we do."

Indeed, aides to several senators and congressmen serving on such important committees as Foreign Relations and Intelligence report that they don't read COHA's releases and have never met with COHA lobbyists. Some say they've never even heard of COHA or Mr. Birns.

Still, says one intelligence analyst, "There are between 40 and 55 con-

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gressmen who would promote their material." And the attention of those legislators and their staffers is enough to make an impact on public opinion and perception, if not necessarily on policy or legislation, the analyst says.

COHA also is a powerful force in the media. It is there, more than anywhere else, that the organization has made its mark, according to observers. Of all the groups that comprise the left-leaning Latin American component of The Network, none appears to be more effective than COHA at planting its material in the press.

"We influence the mass public opinion via the press," Mr. Birns says. "We get stuff put in the local newspapers and the congressmen read those local papers."

Mr. Birns also regularly appears on programs ranging from radio's "The Larry King Show" to TV's "McNeil-Lehrer Report" and other network interviews. He also has been interviewed by television crews from Spain, Sweden, West Germany and other European nations.

But he appears to be most influential with a specific section of the foreign media, most notably the British Broadcasting Corporation (which has about 100 million listeners worldwide) — for whom he says he does as many as 50 interviews a year — and the Latin American press, which he says is a prime focus of COHA's efforts.

COHA brags in its literature that its "findings have been cited in the official publications of the U.S. government as well as in national and international publications such as Time, Newsweek, The Atlantic Monthly, The New Yorker, The New Statesman, Penthouse, Barron's and Macleans."

"On an almost daily basis, the results of COHA's work appear in the press in Latin America, the United States and Europe," the literature states.

The council also has been cited on numerous occasions in The New York Times, The Washington Post, the Los Angeles Times, the Christian Science Monitor, The Baltimore Sun, The Miami Herald, The Toronto Globe and Mail, the Manchester Guardian, the London Observer and the Times of London,

among other newspapers.

"COHA is effective with the press," says the intelligence analyst.

"The media is their main constituency."

Several analysts say they believe that COHA manipulates the media by submitting one-sided information.

"They'll get stuff put together for the BBC for broadcast on a Friday night, and people will pick it up in other countries on Saturday," one analyst explains. "It's a dead day, you're looking for a filler, and there it goes."

"They [COHA] have tremendous relations with the Latin America press, too," says a staffer with the conservative Council for Interamerican Security.

"Someone like a guy from the Venezuelan news service might take his press releases and send them back as news to Venezuela, to Costa Rica, to Honduras, wherever. So it has this duplicating effect. It gets sent down there as news, and very often it bounces back up here," the staffer says.

Many of COHA's detractors point to a 1980 incident as an example of the council's actions. Late that year, a so-called State Department "dissent paper" (a paper normally written by a foreign service officer to express his reservations over foreign policy) circulated widely throughout political, diplomatic and journalistic circles.

The paper was sharply critical of U.S. policy toward El Salvador, and charged that there had been a cover-up of U.S. military involvement there. The "dissent paper," however, was later revealed to have been a forgery.

Mr. Birns claims that COHA wasn't involved in distributing the document. But he did issue a four-page press release, with three of the pages filled with single-spaced details from the supposed dissent paper. COHA did question the paper's authenticity in the body of the release.

"We had been told by the State Department that it didn't take the form of an authentic dissent document, but I thought the reasoning in it was good enough to warrant the release," Mr. Birns now says.

At 55, Mr. Birns remains articulate and highly personable; even his critics admit that he's a master publicist. But he also remains an energetic opponent of Reagan policies in Latin America.

COHA operates out of the old McGovern headquarters near Dupont Circle, with a staff of about 30 apparently dedicated young people and, according to Mr. Birns, an annual budget of about \$125,000.

On its letterhead, COHA lists its board of directors as being from the Communications Workers of

America, the Amalgamated Clothing and Textile Workers Union and the League of United Latin American Citizens.

Critics of COHA accuse the council of engaging in misleading practices to generate the illusion of respectability by association.

From time to time COHA has sent out invitations to conferences and seminars with a list of "invited panelists," many of whom are respected authorities from all bands of the political spectrum.

But Mr. Birns doesn't always contact these "panelists" to ask them to appear. Nevertheless, COHA seeks to capitalize on the drawing power of their names, the observers say.

COHA did just that last month with a conference on Central America co-sponsored with the Fund for New Priorities in America.

On the list of "invited panelists" were such dignitaries as syndicated columnist Robert Novak, Arnaud de Borchgrave, editor-in-chief of The Washington Times, and Ambassador Otto Reich, the State Department's coordinator for public policy on Latin America and the Caribbean.

Mr. Reich says he first heard of his inclusion on the list from a friend who had also been invited. Mr. Novak said he was told of his inclusion by a reporter.

"I was not consulted," says Mr. Reich. "If I'd known that [Mr. Birns] was going to put me on the list, I would have demanded that I be taken off."

Insists Mr. Novak, "They never asked me."

Mr. Birns looks shocked when told some feel this is deceptive or manipulative, and says "this is standard practice."

"I never said all those people were going to show up," he says.

"I just said on the invitations that they'd been invited. If you were invited to an event, wouldn't you like to know who else had been invited?"

The heat of the debate over COHA's actions is matched by the continuing controversy surrounding the council's founding and purpose.

Much of this controversy stems from an article inserted into the Congressional Record by the late Rep. Larry McDonald, D-Ga., on April 15, 1977.

In that article, Mr. McDonald wrote that Mr. Birns once described COHA's purpose as "to manipulate the sophisticated political and academic communities," a statement Mr. McDonald called "indicative not so much of candor as of Birns' arrogance and deep contempt for his targets."

Mr. McDonald also wrote that Mr. Birns was "an associate of Chilean Marxist-Leninist Orlando Letelier," who soon after his death was revealed to have been receiving covert Soviet money channeled through the Cuban intelligence service, the DGI.

COHA's "pro-Marxist-Leninist stance was evident from its initial

press conference where Birns supported the Marxist Allende government of Chile, Cuba, the pro-Castro dictatorship in Panama, the left-leaning governments of Mexico and Venezuela," Mr. McDonald wrote.

The 1984 Heritage Foundation report states that COHA "essentially was a by-product" of Mr. Birns's participation in a 1976 meeting in Mexico City of the International Commission of Inquiry into the Crimes of the Chilean Junta, a creation of the World Peace Council, a known Soviet front group.

"Much of that McDonald stuff was fabricated," Mr. Birns counters. "I never attended the Mexico deal. I saw Letelier once after the coup.

And he never gave us any money. In fact, I gave him \$25 for some Chilean refugee program he was running."

The controversy over COHA's origins and purpose apparently had little effect on its dealings with the Carter administration, on which Mr. Birns says "our influence ... was profound. He [President Carter] praised us by name."

Mr. Birns admits that "our influence with Reagan is minute. It's more and more difficult to communicate with [the Department of] State. The liberals in State and the CIA for that matter are closet liberals," he says.

"But our influence on public opinion is great."

Tomorrow: Activities of the Washington Office on Latin America.

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Accuracy, balance of WOLA found lacking by its critics

By Roger Fontaine
THE WASHINGTON TIMES

When a congressional delegation arrived in Managua in 1979 shortly after the Sandinista takeover, a member of the group recalls that the first person they met at the airport was an employee of the Washington Office on Latin America.

According to at least one report, a WOLA staffer later showed up at the U.S. ambassador's residence on the arm of one of the Sandinista coman-

Third in a series.

dantes. The comandante, Jaime Wheelock, was then as now in charge of the regime's agriculture program.

Among the hundreds of groups that comprise the left-wing "Net-

work" working to radically influence the administration's policies toward Central and Latin America, WOLA could probably lay claim to being one of the most senior, if not effective, in its area.

Founded in 1974 — and therefore "ancient" as these organizations go — WOLA is headquartered on Maryland Avenue on Capitol Hill,

almost across the street from the Supreme Court in a suite of offices located in the United Methodist Church building.

A major focus of WOLA's activities is Nicaragua. WOLA is providing information in opposition to the Reagan administration's proposed assistance to the resistance forces fighting the Sandinista government.

Unlike some other groups in The Network, WOLA is not a "one-man-with-a-mimeo" affair — the kind of political activist group that once flourished in the heat of Vietnam but then was left to wither.

Rather, WOLA is established. Part of its funding comes from such respectable sources as the MacArthur Foundation and Ford Foundation as well as from mainline

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church bodies. In 1983, WOLA raised \$340,866, more than one-third of it from religious organizations, according to its Annual Report.

The key to WOLA's effectiveness, according to one former legislative staffer familiar with the organization, lies in its ability to provide a steady stream of information to members of Congress and their staffs. "On Capitol Hill, information is everything," the former aide said.

But it is the accuracy and balance of WOLA's information that its critics have called into question.

WOLA literature describes the organization as "an information source for interested officials, providing resources for documenting information, briefing those traveling to Latin America, facilitating interviews between prominent Latin American leaders and U.S. officials, organizing background briefings for congressional staff and giving testimony before congressional committees."

Amid all these activities, one of the major criticisms leveled at WOLA is for practicing a double standard on human rights.

Governments and organizations that are either anti-communist or non-communist, particularly if they are U.S. allies, typically come under WOLA's close scrutiny, while allegations of human rights violations by socialist states, such as Nicaragua and Cuba, are not subjected to the same degree of attention.

"It means all criticism is directed at one set of problems, and that leads to an unbalanced situation," one WOLA critic said.

"WOLA has been a faithful spokesman for the Sandinistas and El Salvador's guerrillas," said a State Department official.

"They [WOLA] consistently have distorted the fatalities in El Salvador and blurred it so it all appears to be coming from the right," the official said.

Penn Kemble, founder and director of the Institute on Religion and Democracy, said of this double standard, "from a Christian perspective that argument is wholly unacceptable.

"Christians are obliged to judge all governments and institutions from the standpoint of the churches," Mr. Kemble said.

Castro's Cuba has received mention in WOLA reports only in the context of U.S.-Cuban relations. Human rights abuses documented by the Organization of American States and other organizations have been largely ignored.

In fact, according to Update's 1984 index, Cuba went unmentioned the entire year, despite the fact that the newsletter had space for 44 articles on 12 other Latin American countries.

"Our interest is helping to make available to the public a concern for the way, the effect, the impact that U.S. policies have on people who live in this hemisphere," said Joseph T. Eldridge, WOLA's director, in an interview.

Contributions in 1983 from religious institutions totaled \$124,602, according to WOLA's Annual Report. Some of the contributors included, the National Council of Churches, the American Lutheran Church, American Baptist Churches, Maryknoll Fathers and Brothers, Maryknoll Sisters, the Presbyterian Church, the Episcopal Church and Jesuit Missions.

Mr. Eldridge, a Methodist clergyman, is paid his salary by the United Methodist Church Board of Global Ministries, according to a Heritage Foundation analysis published in 1984.

Although WOLA's annual budget may be small by Washington standards, observers point out that WOLA increases its budget's effectiveness by using hardworking volunteers.

Not all critics, however, speak harshly of WOLA.

Elliott Abrams, head of the State

Continued

Department's Bureau of Human Rights and Humanitarian Affairs, said WOLA "has political prejudices just as we all do, but it makes a real effort to promote human rights progress.

"So while I disagree with WOLA, I work with them."

Some sources, including critical ones, give WOLA credit for quality reporting on some aspects of Latin America.

One former Foreign Service officer critical of WOLA's support of the Sandinista government, nevertheless credits the organization for "excellent, responsible, objective reporting ... on various issues — both political and human rights."

But not on Nicaragua.

"I find it difficult to explain why they [WOLA] have taken this turn to the left and why they are associated with this so-called Sandinista lobby since they have projected themselves earlier as a very reputable, balanced, objective research organization," the former officer said.

Mr. Eldridge told The Times that, "Our concern is whether U.S. policy either encourages or discourages human rights.

"Our view is that what Latin America needs is not a lot of emphasis on military support. Rather, what Latin America needs is economic development and social change," he said.

In the recent past, WOLA also has opposed the bipartisan Kissinger Commission report on Central America. Mr. Eldridge said WOLA opposed the Kissinger Plan because it "places a lot of emphasis on military support for the region."

But WOLA was also opposed to El Salvador's land reform, according to one U.S. consultant who worked on the program.

"They [WOLA] were worse than the landlords," the consultant said. "Land reform just drove them up the wall. They really hated it."

Earlier, when the Sandinista opposition in Nicaragua was struggling to overthrow the government of Anastasio Somoza Debayle, WOLA participated in exposing the former president's human rights record and also introduced pro-Sandinista spokesmen to Washington — particularly to members of Congress and the media.

Some of its more prominent guests were Ernesto Cardenal and Miguel D'Escoto. As priests, they were particularly effective witnesses before congressional committees, observers recall. Later, both joined the Sandinista government.

Nicaragua's Marxist Sandinista regime has been in power for nearly six years. WOLA, according to its critics, has put the best face it can on that regime's human rights

record, first and foremost, by not reporting on it.

Mr. Eldridge contends that WOLA has been critical of the Managua regime.

"We're not here to exonerate the Sandinistas," he said.

"We've been highly critical of Sandinistas [in direct communications with them]," he said. "Our concern is to do what we can to create a climate in the United States, international public opinion, to bring all pressures" on both sides.

The November/December 1984 issue of Update, expressed approval of the Nicaraguan elections. It cited a "vast majority of international observers from the British Parliament ... agreed that the actual running of the November 4 vote went smoothly."

No critics, aside from the State Department, were cited in the article.

U.S. labor officials contacted by The Times said that, to their knowledge, WOLA has not shown any interest in the Nicaraguan government's suppression of independent labor unions in that country — unions that have the support of the State Department, AFL-CIO and others.

WOLA remains active on the Nicaraguan front. In late February, for example, WOLA and the International Human Rights Law Group

requested a follow-up investigation of alleged atrocities committed in Nicaragua — not by the Sandinista government, but its armed opposition.

For a week, two investigators toured Nicaragua to investigate allegations made by New York attorney Reed Brody.

Their investigation was limited to the FDN (Fuerza Democratica Nicaraguense). They described the FDN as a group that has received support from the CIA and whose military leaders are "former Somoza National Guard officers."

Thirty people were interviewed, according to the authors of the report, and their principal conclusion was "the Contras are committing serious abuses against civilians."

"The weight of probative evidence indicates a reasonable basis to believe that the Contras engage in acts of terroristic violence against unarmed civilians."

The authors also drew a policy conclusion: "To the extent that it is reasonably foreseeable that they will continue to engage in such acts, any provision of aid to the Contras, directly or indirectly, by the government of the United States would render our government responsible for their acts."

The report of the two investigators received Mr. Eldridge's approval.

"Our report took some of the affidavits that Mr. Brody had collected to see if they could be validated, to see if in fact there was some substance to these charges," he said.

"I found that these accusations had been collected as a matter of fact were, in fact, true, discovering there was a pattern [of atrocities]," he said.

Some previous supporters of the Sandinista revolution have become disillusioned with WOLA.

Geraldine Macias and her husband were supporters of the Sandinistas before and for three years after the revolution. They left Nicaragua in 1982 and came to the United States after government-led mobs burned their house.

Mrs. Macias, who is now vice president for the Washington-based New Exodus — an organization aiding Central American refugees — said she contacted the WOLA staff and explained what happened to her and her husband. Mrs. Macias said that, after making a few telephone calls to Managua, WOLA "did nothing."

Mrs. Macias said that WOLA was nothing more than "an apologist for the Sandinistas."

Adriana Guillen, a Sandinista supporter during the revolution and an officer in the Sandinista government for six months tells of a similar experience.

"Several times, I have been contacted by COHA (Council on Hemispheric Affairs) or WOLA and I have also called Americas Watch. ... So they know the sources, they know where to go and find the information. But they don't care ... about reflecting the truth," she says.

"What comes out of their report has nothing to do with checking the sources — the right sources to reflect an objective report," she said.

But, she added, "He did nothing."

Mr. Eldridge, when questioned about these incidents, said of Mrs. Macias, "I don't recall that specific story.

"We have not hesitated in our communication with government representatives to raise objections and criticisms that are presented to us."

Regarding Miss Guillen, he replied, "I don't know what her expectations were," adding he tries to pass along such reports whenever he receives them.

Miss Guillen's disillusionment has led her to conclude that WOLA and other organizations "are dealing with protecting the left, not protecting human rights."

Washington Times staff writer Bill Outlaw also contributed to this story. Tomorrow: A look at the Committee in Solidarity with the People of El Salvador

ARTICLE REPRODUCED
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CISPES' strategy is lies, deception for Salvadoran left

"The Committee in Solidarity with the People of El Salvador (CISPES) seeks to educate and mobilize public opinion against U.S. intervention in El Salvador and Central America and in solidarity with the FMLN-FDR, the legitimate representative of the Salvadoran people." — April 1985 edition of "Alert," CISPES' monthly publication.

By Bill Outlaw
THE WASHINGTON TIMES

In "The Network" of organizations that are engaged in a massive effort to turn opinion against U.S. policies toward Central America, CISPES is one of the more active and visible.

"CISPES has launched a national grass-roots canvassing effort to reach hundreds of thousands of people in their communities and bring

Fourth in a series.

many new people into active opposition," according to a CISPES report.

But CISPES appears to be much more than just another "grass-roots" organization disagreeing with specific administration policies.

Documents obtained by The Washington Times and CISPES' own publications reveal that the organization openly supports the Marxist Sandinista guerrillas (FMLN-FDR) in El Salvador and elsewhere in Central America.

Moreover, documents indicate that CISPES was itself a creation of the FMLN-FDR and was, among other things, designed to generate

support for guerrilla activity in El Salvador among members of the U.S. Congress and the American public.

CISPES organizers in Washington did not return several telephone calls from The Times for comment. But one researcher reports that CISPES officials have denied the allegations.

"An integral component of CISPES activity is to counter Reagan administration policies in Central America.

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"STOP U.S. MILITARY INTERVENTION IN CENTRAL AMERICA," reads a headline on the front page of CISPES' April issue of Alert. "Support human freedom and dignity by also ending intervention in the Caribbean, Middle East, Asia, the Pacific and Europe."

Administration officials and observers of the group say CISPES is the largest and most effective of the solidarity organizations, which include the National Network in Solidarity with the People of Nicaragua, the Network in Solidarity with the People of Guatemala and the Network in Solidarity with the People of Central America.

Solidarity groups exist for other regions as well, such as for the people of Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia.

CISPES offices in Washington are located on the seventh floor at 930 F St. NW, next to the office for the Guatemalan solidarity group. The Nicaraguan solidarity group used to be located there, but they have moved to a nearby location on I Street NW.

Observers of the organizations report that they often appear together at protests and demonstrations. However, there is no specific evidence to link these groups.

CISPES' own literature claims that the organization has grown to more than 300 local chapters and affiliates, with seven regional offices.

Each local chapter "includes a series of outreach groups oriented toward the religious community, organized labor, schools, and other community groups and organizations," a CISPES brochure distributed in 1984 states.

CISPES literature further states that it "lobbies Congress, coordinates protest efforts, and conducts humanitarian aid campaigns."

"CISPES activities include fund-raising and legislative campaigns, educational and outreach programs, and mass mobilizations, conducted on national, regional and local grass-roots levels," according to Alert.

CISPES has taken part in or has helped organize many of the major protest demonstrations in the United States over the past few years. Its most recent efforts will be seen in the upcoming "Four Days In April" protest in Washington scheduled for April 19-22.

According to a CISPES document entitled, "CISPES Structure and Funding," other major activities in which the group has organized or participated in include:

- A "massive demonstration" in Washington on March 27, 1982, that was timed to coincide with "the U.S. orchestrated elections" in El Salvador.

- A "people-to-people" aid drive to provide medical assistance to Salvadorans "living in the FMLN-FDR zones of control. Through hundreds of grass-roots fund-raising activities, CISPES committees raised more than \$150,000, surpassing the goal of the campaign."

- "Highly visible protest actions including civil disobedience" at Fort Benning, Ga., and Fort Bragg, N.C., where Salvadoran troops were being trained by U.S. soldiers.

- A rally at the State Department to protest the "presidential certification amid growing human rights violations in El Salvador."

- A protest at the Honduran embassy and consulates in major cities to oppose "Honduran intervention in El Salvador and the growing use of Honduras as a base of U.S. directed military operations in the region."

CISPES and some other solidarity groups have also promoted letter-writing campaigns about U.S. policy to members of Congress and to U.S. officials in other parts of the world, according to CISPES literature and other sources.

Continued

According to Greg Lagana, who was a press attache at the U.S. embassy in El Salvador from 1982 to 1984, the embassy received hundreds of form letters and telephone calls from U.S. citizens during the time he was there.

These calls and letters were protesting alleged atrocities committed by the U.S.-backed government, Mr. Lagana said.

Mr. Lagana said he could not prove the telephone calls or letters were encouraged by CISPES or an affiliated group, but he said the embassy received calls about alleged atrocities involving labor unions in El Salvador from some labor union members in the United States. Telephone calls concerning teachers in El Salvador came from some teachers in the United States, and calls about health care came from some health care solidarity groups.

But what disturbed Mr. Lagana the most, he said, was that the information the U.S. citizens were commenting on was frequently wrong or misleading, at best.

As an example, he said some human rights groups in El Salvador who were known to be sympathetic to the Sandinistas would put out information that civilians had been killed in guerrilla skirmishes with government troops when what really happened was that some guerrillas themselves had been killed. But calls would come pouring in anyway to the U.S. embassy from Americans complaining about civilian atrocities committed by government troops.

Quite often, Mr. Lagana said, the complaints were form letters which contained a "central Spanish syntax that a native speaker of English would not use. That led me to conclude they were being written in Salvador," Mr. Lagana said.

CISPES activities on college campuses were well organized three or four years ago, said a trade union official who frequently spoke at various colleges nationwide.

"They were on every campus [he went to], they provided speakers, they had their membership at the meetings with banners who would heckle speakers with opposing points of view," the official said.

He added that the harassment often was so great that many of the meetings were disrupted. But the official added that recently, "they lost their punch."

"Meetings are orderly now, and while the college audiences may not be sympathetic, they will listen," the official said.

He said he has noticed a decline in CISPES activities on college campuses recently — a decline he

attributes to Salvadoran President Jose Napoleon Duarte's victory in the elections.

Nonetheless, CISPES remains active in other areas, and its activities have not gone unnoticed by others.

According to an article published by Inter Press Service in New York on Dec. 3, 1984, CISPES "has also been visited by FBI agents and many of its 10,000 members have been questioned."

Inter Press also stated that the group "has also been infiltrated by FBI officials," citing an alleged "FBI internal document that CISPES lawyers obtained under the Freedom of Information Act."

A story in this month's Alert, CISPES' monthly publication, outlines what they call a recent case "involving the FBI's seizure of a personal address book and diary" of Ed Hasse, as he was returning home from a trip to Nicaragua. Mr. Hasse works for the National Network in Solidarity with The Nicaraguan People, the report said.

A spokesman for the FBI said yesterday, "The FBI does not expand on documents that have been released under the Freedom of Information Act. They stand by themselves."

Regarding Mr. Hasse's claim, "it is before the courts and it would be inappropriate to comment," the spokesman said.

The Fund for a Conservative Majority (FCM), in November filed a letter of complaint against CISPES to the Federal Election Commission. The FCM alleged that CISPES "apparently violated the provisions of [the law] in making expenditures for the purpose of financing communications which expressly advocate the defeat of Ronald Reagan."

An Associated Press report quoted Van Gosse, a national student organizer for CISPES, as saying, "We have taken an explicit position that we have not endorsed any presidential candidate..."

A spokesman on behalf of the FCM said they have not heard back from the FEC regarding their complaint.

A CISPES document, entitled "1984 CISPES National Administrative Committee Strategy Proposal," obtained by The Washington Times states that the group had established the following goals for 1984:

"1. Impede the escalation of U.S. intervention in Central America by (a) making the political costs of a full-scale, direct intervention too high; (b) obstructing the step-by-step escalation of U.S. intervention in Central America.

"2. Provide political and material support to the FMLN-FDR of El Salvador; and

"3. Defend the Sandinista reputation.

"Our defense of the Sandinista revolution will directly contribute to the Nicaraguan people's efforts to consolidate their revolution," the document states. "It will also undermine Reagan's attempts to build a 'strategic consensus' in the U.S. for intervention in all of Central America."

Other CISPES literature describes its "public projection strategies (propaganda)" for 1984:

- "Portray each stage of U.S. intervention as a step toward a Vietnam war. Project the urgency of stopping intervention.

- "Project an emerging 'Vietnam war-type' movement.

- "Project Reagan as a warmonger and his policies as a threat to world peace.

- "Refocus concern on the issues of human rights and democracy in Central America.

- "Project the advances being made by the people of Central America, particularly in Nicaragua and the FMLN-FDR zones of control."

Some critics raise questions about CISPES' origins.

According to independent research studies and documents released by the State Department, CISPES was formed in 1980 as a result of an organizational tour by an agent for the Salvadoran FMLN guerrillas.

In February and March 1980, a Farid Handal traveled to the United States for the purpose of "the creation of the International Committee in Solidarity with the People of El Salvador," according to a report he made after the trip.

A copy of the report was obtained by Salvadoran military officials after a raid on a guerrilla location in El Salvador, according to the State Department, which subsequently released the report and a translation.

Mr. Handal's purpose in coming to the United States was to "coordinate" activities among the already-existing "solidarity committees," including non-communist, political, religious and human rights groups; in order to form a nationwide umbrella organization in support of the FMLN-FDR "with the help of the CPUSA [Communist Party USA]," according to the documents.

According to his report, Mr. Handal stated, "...the offices of Congressman Dellums were turned into our offices. Everything was done there."

Mr. Handal also met with other congressmen in Washington and

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with officials from the Cuban Mission to the United Nations in New York, he wrote.

The Communist Party USA (CPUSA) and the United States Peace Council (USPC) were both instrumental in aiding Mr. Handal in his efforts to form a solidarity committee, he wrote.

He also wrote that he had an interview in New York "with members of the Directorate of the CPUSA," among them "the person responsible for the U.S. Peace Council," according to the documents.

That individual was Sandy Pollack, who Mr. Handal identified as the "solidarity coordinator for the U.S. Peace Council."

"Sandy proposed a national conference under the auspices of the US Peace Council, the National Council of Churches, Amnesty International, WOLA, and various important unions of the US," Mr. Handal wrote.

"The objective of the conference would be to establish a support mechanism for the solidarity committees in those states where it does not already exist," he wrote.

Ms. Pollack died in a plane crash on a flight from Cuba to Nicaragua last January.

An FBI report released in 1982 entitled "Soviet Active Measures," states that at the time of Mr. Handal's trip to the United States, the FMLN was setting up a political front in Mexico City.

In June 1980, Salvadoran leftists created the United Revolutionary Directorate (DRU), the central political and military planning and tasking operation for the insurgents, the report states.

Mike Waller, an analyst and co-author of a soon-to-be published book on "The Revolution Lobby," said that CISPES has engaged in "a massive effort to oppose Reagan administration policies."

They "called for the establishment of 'solidarity committees' worldwide "to serve as propaganda outlets, conduits for aid, and organizers of solidarity meetings and demonstrations," Mr. Waller wrote. The first solidarity committee was CISPES, he said.

On March 13, 1980, FMLN Radio

Venceremos in El Salvador reported: "We have organized a large solidarity apparatus that encompasses the whole planet, even in the United States, where one of the most active centers of solidarity exists."

CISPES leaders have denied that the group was founded or influenced by the FMLN, according to Mr. Waller.

Some CISPES critics charge that the group's activities should require them to register as an agent of a foreign government under the Foreign Agents Registration Act.

The Foreign Agents Registration Act requires that organizations in the United States which are acting on behalf of foreign powers to register as agents and make reports identifying their lobbying activities, expenditures and literature it distributes.

According to officials, it may be difficult to investigate groups to determine whether or not they should come under the act. And proving that an organization is acting on behalf of a foreign power is often difficult, according to officials.

Joel Lisker, who was in charge of enforcing the Foreign Agents Registration Act for the Justice Department, said the law needs to be

changed to give it more teeth.

"What's needed is [for Justice to have] civil investigative demand authority, akin to administrative subpoena power," Mr. Lisker said. He is now staff director for the Senate Subcommittee on Security and Terrorism.

According to another official, it is difficult for the Justice Department to collect information about organizations unless the groups cooperate or unless the Justice Department has "probable cause" to seek grand jury action or request an FBI investigation.

"CISPES' objective is a guerrilla victory in El Salvador by the [guerrillas]," said Sam Dickens, Latin American expert for the American Security Council Foundation. "In fact," he said, "it's the propaganda arm of the FDR in the U.S."

"Without any question they should be registered under the Foreign Agents Registration Act," Mr. Dickens said. "I'm greatly disturbed that they have not — to my knowledge — been investigated by the FBI."

Washington Times staff writer Roger Fontaine also contributed to this report.

Tomorrow: Involvement of religious groups in "The Network."

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'Coercive Utopians': Church groups bless Sandinista cause

By John Holmes
and Ed Rogers
THE WASHINGTON TIMES

American church groups, many of which have long histories of involvement in national politics, are turning their attention to Central America in increasing numbers.

And while some church groups remain dedicated almost exclusively to promoting church exten-

sion, evangelism and the protection of human rights throughout Central America, others have become more involved in the movement to oppose U.S. foreign policy in the region.

Now, many church groups share common goals, projects, ideology and membership with some leftist political organizations. As a result, they are tightly woven into "The Network" of organizations whose primary goal is to seek radical change

in Reagan administration policies in Latin America.

"Church groups in general, and leaders of the Catholic Church in particular, have become the most vocal and persistent opponents of the administration's anti-communist strategy in Central America," the Wall Street Journal reported in a 1983 news report.

Commenting on this church opposition, a senior administration official was quoted in the Journal as saying, "It's the toughest nut we have to crack."

The number of church and religious-affiliated organizations involved in these activities has grown in recent years. Some intelligence experts say that as much as 50 percent of the left-wing Latin American "Network" effort comes

from groups and organizations manned, funded or coordinated by elements of some of the nation's major religious denominations.

And in many cases, they say, these groups are more radical, more active and much more heavily funded than their secular counterparts.

These church groups are "the

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most effective in lobbying ... because they wear a cloak of legitimacy," said Michael D. Boggs, former director of international affairs at the AFL-CIO.

"They get folks to write letters who don't have the faintest idea what they're talking about," Mr. Boggs was quoted as saying in a 1982 article in Congressional Quarterly.

"The churches are the most active group and the most influential group lobbying against U.S. policy [in Latin America], without any doubt," concurred Kerry Ptacek, research director for the independent Institute for Religion and Democracy (IRD).

"I would say that the churches and their various executive groups were primarily responsible for the initial cutoff of aid to the Contras," he said.

Perhaps most infuriating to critics is that some churches have provided money, credibility and an audience to a host of other groups critical of U.S. policy, ranging from "human-rights" organizations — such as the Washington Office on Latin America (WOLA) — to a network of organizations openly sympathetic to guerrilla movements in Latin America.

"So many left activists are linked up with church groups that it's hard to know what is a real church group," IRD spokesman Penn Kemble said in the Congressional Quarterly story.

Few of the religious/political connections are overt but, in many cases, they are strong. And though some liberal churches maintain their own agenda, it bears strong resemblances to that pursued by many of their political counterparts.

One example of the tie-in between the church and political groups is the link between the National Council of Churches and the North American Congress on Latin America (NACLA). According to a 1984 study by the conservative Heritage Foundation, much of the research used by those who oppose Reagan policy in Central America is derived from NACLA.

NACLA was established in the NCC's offices in Washington in 1966, and receives financial support from numerous Protestant churches through the NCC's Latin American Division and through specific projects such as the Presbyterian hunger program, according to an IRD report.

Other groups, such as the Washington Office on Latin America, also benefit from church funding.

WOLA's 1983 Annual Report, for instance, lists \$124,602 in contributions from religious organizations including the National Council of Churches of Christ in the U.S.A.; the American Lutheran Church; St. Luke Presbyterian Church; American Baptist Churches, U.S.A.; Board of Global Ministries (United Methodist Church); Maryknoll Father and Brothers; Maryknoll Sisters; Jesuit Missions; World Council of Churches; the Presbyterian Church, U.S.A.; the Episcopal Church, and others.

The IRD also has documented mainline Protestant church support for radical political movements in the United States and in other nations, including Vietnam.

"Direct NCC involvement with the governments and Communist Party structures of the Indochina region is intense, conscious and ongoing," IRD stated in a 1983 report titled, "A Time for Candor: Mainline Churches and Radical Social Witness."

The institute also has reported that the United Methodist Board funds the National Network in Solidarity with the Nicaraguan People, which was founded "to support and defend the Nicaraguan revolution" and other solidarity groups that assist the Salvadoran rebels.

"Support for the pro-Sandinista network in Nicaragua and the

Continued

United States has come from money collected every Sunday in U.S. churches," the IRD commented in a 1984 report titled, "Church Support for Pro-Sandinista Network."

Primary among its examples is the controversial funding by church agencies of the Evangelical Committee for Aid to Development (CEPAD), which claims to represent Nicaragua's Protestant churches even though it supports the Sandinistas, according to the 1984 report.

Another Nicaraguan Protestant body known as the National Council of Evangelical Pastors (CNPEN), which doesn't support the Sandinistas, has received no funding from the U.S. mainline church agencies, the report states.

(This support for the Nicaraguan Sandinistas appears not to have declined over the years while other prominent supporters of the Sandinista revolution, such as Robert S. Leiken, senior associate at the Carnegie Endowment, have since become disillusioned.

(Mr. Leiken, writing in the October 1984 issue of *New Republic*, stated that a recent visit to Nicaragua had "convinced me that the situation is far worse than I had thought, and disabused me of some of the remaining myths about the Sandinista revolution.")

In their 1983 book, "The Coercive Utopians," Rael Jean Isaac and Eric Isaac detail many examples of how church groups fund radical groups in Central America and elsewhere.

Among their accounts is that of David Jessup, an AFL-CIO official and member of the United Methodist Church who, they recount, stud-

ied, among other things, Methodist contributions to political groups from 1977 to 1979 and reported his findings to the 1980 General Conference of the Church.

"Most Methodist churchgoers would react with disbelief, even anger, to be told that a significant portion of their weekly offerings were being siphoned off to groups supporting the Palestine Liberation Organization, the governments of Cuba and Vietnam, the pro-Soviet totalitarian movements of Latin America, Asia and Africa, and several violence-prone fringe groups in this country," Mr. Jessup wrote in his 40-page report.

"The climate in some church agencies has grown so fevered that they have literally become breeding grounds for terrorists," the Isaacs wrote, noting that "the FBI uncovered a cell of the Puerto Rican FALN [which has claimed responsibility for more than 120 bombings] operating out of the Episcopal Church's National Commission on Hispanic Affairs."

They also cited Mr. Jessop's 1980 report in which, they stated, some "direct grants" went to "terrorists and totalitarian support groups," and that "the Methodist Board of Global Ministries gave money to five organizations that produce pro-Cuba propaganda," including NACLA.

Some of these actions have caught the attention of the left's opponents.

In December 1984, the Citizens for Reagan submitted a letter to the Internal Revenue Service requesting an investigation of the American Friends Service Committee, operated by the Quakers, and four other groups. CFR stated that the groups were violating the rules governing their tax-exempt status because they were engaged in "substantial lobbying" and political activities in favor of the Sandinista regime in Nicaragua and in opposition to U.S. policy in Central America.

CFR chairman Ken Boehm told *The Times* that the IRS has not told him whether it had concluded its inquiry with respect to the complaints made, but said his recent communications with the IRS gave him "reason to believe" the IRS either has audited or is auditing the groups. He also said his organization intends to file more complaints later.

The AFSC could not be reached for comment yesterday.

The AFSC is one of several groups that has relied on information, voting records and advice on how to approach lawmakers from groups such as the Coalition for a New Military and Foreign Policy, according to a 1983 *Wall Street Journal* article.

According to the *Journal*, the coalition, which is composed of religious and non-religious organizations, has inspired thousands of calls, telegrams and letters opposing U.S. aid to anti-Sandinista insurgents in Nicaragua. A coalition leader estimated that 75 percent of the messages were instigated by the coalitions' religious groups, according to the *Journal* story.

The prime coordinator and mover behind the Protestant portion of "The Network" is the National Council of Churches, an umbrella group consisting of 32 major Protestant and Eastern Orthodox churches and claiming congregations totaling 42 million people, some observers believe.

Since the mid-1960s, the NCC has actively campaigned for what it calls "social justice." But, said one observer, "just think of any left-of-center cause and the NCC has been involved."

The NCC is involved in activities in many parts of Central America, including Nicaragua.

Bishop Jose Ramos, associate director of the the council's Office of Latin America and the Caribbean,

said in a recent interview with *The Washington Times* that the NCC's aim is to achieve a "peaceful negotiated settlement" of the conflict in Nicaragua.

"The Sandinista government has almost done everything that is required of them," said Bishop Ramos, who stressed he was expressing his "personal feeling."

"They had elections which were no more imperfect than the one in El Salvador," he said. "It is the legally constituted government there." (The State Department, AFL-CIO and others have criticized the Nicaraguan elections as being unfair.)

Mr. Ramos was asked in the interview about allegations that his and other groups are spreading disinformation.

"Who, we?" he said. "I don't think so. We are assuming the positions of the churches of Nicaragua."

Others don't see it quite that way.

In 1983, the IRD issued a 100-page document in which it asserted that the NCC had "leftist leanings." In that report, the institute claimed the NCC had a "double standard" of criticizing human-rights violations of right-wing governments but ignoring those that occur under left-wing totalitarian regimes.

Of the Protestant groups, the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) is "perhaps the most active denomination," the IRD's research director, Mr. Ptacek, said.

"The Presbyterian Advocates for Central America is officially backed by the denomination, which is a church of some 3.1 or 3.2 million members.

"By tying into this network, they then can use the resources of the denomination to provide information for them, take them to conferences, and then contact them when they need a letter to be sent to Congress," he said.

"The letters come out as though they are a spontaneous outpouring of letters from individuals around the country. And yet, no one knows that these people represent a tiny minority in their local church," Mr. Ptacek said.

Because of its strong historical ties to Central America, the Catholic Church has been involved in the region for centuries. But from all indications, some Catholic clerics and laymen in recent years have stepped up their political activities.

It is to the point that some observers now consider some elements of the Catholic Church to be the most important of all the groups involved in the Central America question.

Rep. Michael D. Barnes, D-Md., chairman of the House Interamerican Subcommittee, was quoted as saying in the 1982 Con-

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gressional Quarterly article, "The Catholic Church has unquestionably the most influence of any group" on El Salvador policy.

One of the command centers for Catholic activity in Central America is the Department of Social Development and World Peace run by the United States Catholic Conference, the administrative agency of more than 300 bishops.

Thomas E. Quigley, adviser on Latin American affairs for the USCC, said the denomination does no "lobbying" as such, but high church officials have testified before Congress against "supporting irregular forces [the anti-Sandinista guerrillas] who are seeking to overthrow a government with which we have maintained diplomatic relations."

Though the Catholic Church once was known and respected worldwide for its vehement opposition to communism, the focus of some clerics and laymen apparently began to change in 1980. That was when Archbishop Oscar Romero was gunned down while saying mass in San Salvador. About a month earlier

he had read aloud in church a letter to President Carter asking for the cancellation of \$5 million in aid to the Salvadoran military.

A subsequent killing of four Catholic churchwomen late that year sent shock waves through the church that have yet to subside.

Since then, many bishops repeatedly have opposed U.S. military aid to El Salvador and have called for negotiations with the communist rebels.

On many occasions, these clerics have preached their politics from the pulpits, and their remarks have been covered extensively in the Catholic press. This has helped to generate an outpouring of mail from priests, nuns and parishioners.

"We don't have a push button that turns on all the dioceses," said Mr. Quigley in the Congressional Quarterly article. But the USCC's Rev. Bryan Hehir noted in the same article, "When the bishops take that kind of leadership, there's bound to be a response."

Mr. Quigley is an example of the interconnection between the church and political groups. According to the Congressional Quarterly article, Mr. Quigley, along with his USCC duties, also has served on the boards of WOLA and the Council on Hemispheric Affairs (COHA), two of the better known groups in The Network that seek to change U.S. policy in Central America.

He also has worked with the Protestant National Council of Churches and helped start the Religious Task Force, which disseminates El Salva-

dor information to a variety of Catholic clergy and laity, the article said.

Within the Catholic Church, the Maryknoll order of missionaries remains one of the most active segments. Maryknoll publications, which have a large Catholic audience in the United States, have for years emphasized El Salvador. The order also has contributed to several groups opposing U.S. policy.

Frequently on the cutting edge of this movement, the Maryknolls also are among the leaders in translating their beliefs onto film. They provided two grants to help produce a film titled "El Salvador: Another Vietnam" and they themselves produced a film called "Roses in December."

"Another Vietnam," which was nominated for an Academy Award in 1982, portrays the civilian-military regime as the culprit in El Salvador, and the message of "Roses," which tells the story of the four churchwomen killed in El Salvador in 1980, is that American efforts to help the government of El Salvador is wrong.

Some Jesuit priests working in Central America also have been

active — so much so that they have become targets of some official attacks in El Salvador, the Congressional Quarterly article said. In the states, their letter-writing campaigns, teach-ins and demonstrations at some college campuses are a "mainstay" in Catholic opposition to U.S. involvement.

Some of the the Catholic and Protestant church groups also are actively involved in sponsoring trips by American legislators, clerics and laymen to Central America. Though some of these trips have been highly publicized and apparently have had a strong impact on those who went, several groups have been sharply criticized for allegedly staging "slanted" tours.

The Boston-based Unitarian Universalist Service Committee has made "significant impact," according to the Congressional Quarterly story, by underwriting several congressional "study trips" to El Salvador, which usually include visits with rebels and other dissidents.

Reps. Gerry Studds, D-Mass.; Thomas Petri, R-Wis., and William Coyne, D-Pa., were among those who have gone on the trips.

Rep. Coyne later said the trip on which he went was a "political exercise" for his hosts and chided them for playing down abuses by the Latin American left, according to the Congressional Quarterly article.

Last month, two women who participated in a trip to Nicaragua sponsored by the American Lutheran Church Women complained in a written report to Rep. Vin Weber, R-Minn., that the trip had been turned into "two weeks of intensive anti-United States, pro-Sandinista indoctrination."

As many as 200 churches across the country also are involved in a

"sanctuary" movement, in which illegal immigrants from Central America are clandestinely brought into the United States and hidden from Immigration and Naturalization Service agents who might seek their deportation, according to Elliott Abrams, assistant secretary of state for human rights and humanitarian affairs.

But wrote the Rev. Philip C. Cleary, chairman of the Association of Chicago Priests, "these refugees are quite literally fleeing for their lives. They are fleeing civil war and repressive governments that have been bolstered by the United States government."

"After fleeing such repression, to be sent back to their countries by the INS often means persecution, torture or death. For the INS to deport such refugees is completely immoral," Rev. Cleary wrote in 1982.

A study produced in January by the Washington-based Mid-Atlantic Research Associates states that the churches have been drawn into the movement by leftist groups whose real goal is overthrow of El Salvador's government.

"The national sanctuary movement is coordinated by supporters of Central America's Soviet- and Cuban-backed revolutionaries who have been engaged in a terrorist 'armed struggle' since the 1960s," the study said.

In a recent interview with The Times, Mr. Abrams cited a number of documents distributed by sanctuary movement organizers as "proof" that the movement's leaders "do not exclusively have human rights goals."

"They have political goals," he said, adding that their main target is to disrupt U.S. policy in Central America.