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# The bewildering case of David MacMichael

It's amusing how people who have been arguing that we should cut off support to the anti-communist contras in Nicaragua are taking David MacMichael seriously.

Their argument used to be that the contras are a failure, that they have not been able to check the flow of weapons and support from the Marxist-Leninist regime in Nicaragua to the Marxist-Leninist guerrillas in El Salvador.

But Mr. MacMichael has been making a media splash by denying that there is any such flow. If his story were true, it would suggest that the contras are doing a bang-up job.

Although Mr. MacMichael claims to be an authority because he worked for the CIA for a couple of years as an outside contractor, his credentials and his auspices suggest that his testimony is both worthless and mischievous. But that hasn't stopped him from achieving instant celebrity among those who are seeking to discredit President Reagan's Central America policy.

No one had ever heard of David MacMichael until he surfaced a few weeks ago to announce that there is no credible evidence that Nicaragua is acting as a support base and arms-supplier for the communist guerrillas in El Salvador. For those eager to scuttle the contras, Mr. MacMichael's timing could not

have been better. His highly publicized charges that the U.S. government has been lying are already being cited by foes of the president's policy.

But just how credible is Mr. MacMichael? Although he did work for two years with the CIA as an outside contractor, only about half his time was spent on Central America. His assignment was not arms supplies or military action but political analysis of internal opposition to the Sandinista regime.

It is axiomatic in intelligence work that classified information is given out only on a "need-to-know" basis. Moreover, highly sensitive information is routinely kept from outside contractors and foreigners. Mr. MacMichael's "top secret" clearance did not include "code clearance," access to radio intercepts, or access to the overwhelming evidence gathered by aerial infra-red photographic surveillance.

It should be noted that all government officials who have seen this information — including members of congressional committees who were briefed as recently as last month — have reached the exact opposite of Mr. MacMichael's conclusion.

His claim that CIA officials refused his repeated requests to be shown such evidence, if true, should have set off alarm bells at the agency. Perhaps that is why his contract was not renewed. In the light of his current role as a disin-

former, there should be a thorough review of just *who* hired him and *how* he got through the agency's screening process.

Who is behind Mr. MacMichael's media blitz? According to one network executive, the "Caribbean Basis Information Project, has been peddling him real hard all over town." The CBIP, it turns out, is a hard-line single-issue advocacy group working to discredit and reverse President Reagan's Central American policy. (It was set up last year as an offshoot of the "Youth Project.")

The CBIP's "advisory board" is studded with the names of activists

in such ultra-left, pro-Castro outfits as the North American Conference on Latin America, the Washington Office on Latin America, the Coalition for a New Foreign and Military Policy, and the Network in Solidarity with Guate-

mala. Also on the board is Heidi Tarver of the Committee in Solidarity with the People of El Salvador. CISPES was set up in 1980 by Farik Handel (brother of Shafik Handel, secretary general of the Communist Party of El Salvador), with help from Castro's U.N. mission and from Sandy Pollack, a member of the directorate of the U.S. Communist Party.

None of this, of course, was brought out by *The Washington Post*, *The New York Times*, and the other media which have been giving such a play to Mr. MacMichael's attacks on American policy and the truthfulness of the American government.

The case of David MacMichael recalls the extravagant attention the media lavished last October on Charles Modica, the chancellor of the St. George's Medical School in Grenada, who ran a student recruitment operation out of offices in New York City. His wildly erroneous picture of the situation on Grenada was definitively debunked when the rescued students returned, praising the president, describing the terror, and even kissing the ground.

On Nov. 11 Democratic columnist Mark Shields summed up the episode:

"House Democrats . . . were so eager to believe the worst of the United States that they rushed to embrace a medical school dean they had never heard of but who said there was no threat to the safety of the American students. Unless the Democrats can rid themselves of the overtly anti-American nonsense that was so apparent in the House on the days of Grenada, they will be rejected by people who know better: American voters in 1984."

That will go double if they now fall for the ill-informed anti-American nonsense being peddled by David MacMichael.