

Contadora, not Contras, for Central America

by Gretchen Small

U.S. policy towards Central America has indeed taken on the character of war: not against the Soviet threat, but against America's allies in the Western Hemisphere. In the past weeks, the United States has thrown more threats, diplomatic pressure, and economic warfare against its Ibero-American allies than against Nicaragua.

Repeatedly, Ibero-American governments tell Washington that a change in economic policy would do more to isolate Nicaragua and local radicals, than its policies of arming 20,000 combatants in Central America, or a mooted direct U.S. military intervention. Accept the principles outlined in the Contadora Accord, the peace plan drafted by the Contadora-Group nations—Panama, Mexico, Venezuela, and Colombia—Washington is told; your policies are handing the Soviet Union the conflict they seek in the Western Hemisphere. Now the message is getting tougher: Ibero-America will not stand by the United States in this folly.

Peruvian President Alan García was the most blunt in his warnings. "Any act of hostility and intervention against Nicaragua, will be an act of hostility and intervention against all of Latin America," García stated in his address to the Argentine Parliament. He specified that if foreign forces invade Nicaragua, Peru will break relations "with the aggressor power," and "make all efforts to defend that brother country." The parliament answered García here with a standing ovation.

Wire services attempted to twist García's warning into support for communism, or the words of an isolated radical. It may make good propaganda, but it is a foolish Washington bureaucrat indeed who believes that García does not express the sentiment of the region on this issue:

● Stated Colombian President Belisario Betancur on March 9, "I think that an initiative such as the request for \$100 million taken by President Reagan is wrong," and "will not produce good results." He added: "*All of Latin America doesn't like the Reagan proposal. . . . I know we can get more through negotiation. I know that the Reagan administration is aware of the fact that Latin America has its own language, and that language is expressed through Contadora.*" Investment in poor regions where guerrillas recruit, is a government's best defense against subversion, Betancur stated.

Betancur made his statements to the *Washington Post's*

Bradley Graham, to make sure they reached Washington. They did. The State Department, in reply, accused Betancur of aiding and abetting terrorism. "President Betancur has demonstrated his good intentions by extending the hand of friendship to the Sandinistas and has maintained a conciliatory attitude toward communist guerrillas in his own country," read the State Department statement. "Unfortunately, the response to that policy has been increased Sandinista support for terrorist activities in Colombia, including arming Colombian guerrillas for their attack last November on the Palace of Justice in Bogota, where they killed 11 Supreme Court Justices."

Shortly thereafter, the United States announced that it was considering pulling out of the World Coffee Pact, which sets coffee prices. Privately, the State Department made sure the move was understood in Bogota, as an answer to Colombia's opposition to aiding the Nicaraguan "contras," and defense of non-intervention. "To express company of the greater part of Latin America, could not interfere with negotiations on the Coffee Pact, which, after all, affects all the producing companies of our America, Asia, and Africa," Colombian Foreign Minister Ramirez Ocampo remonstrated March 17.

● Brazilian Foreign Minister Abreu Sodre stated March 20: "The United States' radical position with respect to Nicaragua really hurts the search for a political solution to Central America's problems." In his zeal to sell his "contra" policy, President Reagan created a diplomatic incident, as yet unresolved, with the Brazilian government, by presenting a map of Ibero-America in his U.S. television address, which painted Brazil, and several other nations, red: Brazil's foreign ministry has requested "a formal explanation to the government" from the U.S. government, and rejected a statement at a White House briefing by spokesman Larry Speakes as insufficient.

● "Guatemala is not supporting President Reagan in his position of support for the anti-Sandinistas," Guatemalan Foreign Minister Mario Quinonez Amezquita stated March 20. The foreign minister was answering declarations by U.S. envoy Philip Habib that all Central America supports the U.S. policy. From Venezuela, where he was visiting, Guatemalan President Vinicio Cerezo chastised Habib as "tactless," and reiterated that Guatemala's policy is "active neutrality." This is no "ideological neutrality," the President emphasized, but an insistence that a "political solution" can be found in Central America. "We in Guatemala have adopted the position of demanding of both. Demanding that the U.S. not do something, and of Nicaragua what it should do."

● Costa Rican President-elect Oscar Arias, calling himself "an intelligent anti-Sandinista," stated March 20 that Central America's solutions should be solved "through dialogue, the diplomatic answer, and not by war." Under his presidency, he added, Costa Rica will fight to maintain its "neutrality."