

## Op-Ed

# Tourists duped by Sandinistas

By Alfred G. Cuzán

In a recent follow-up essay to his splendid book, *Political Pilgrims*, Paul Hollander writes that "Marxist-Leninist Nicaragua has in the last few years emerged as the new destination of political tourists from the United States who have revived a grotesque and embarrassing tradition in Western intellectual/political history: the reverential pilgrimage to highly repressive Communist countries by educated people, beneficiaries of considerable political freedom and material well-being." (*Commentary*, August 1985).

Hollander, a sociologist, describes a "replay of the 1960s" in which self-described "peace activists" who once told us that the Vietnam war had nothing to do with communism or the Soviet Union are today recycling their discredited propaganda for use in Central America. For example, U.S. Out of Central America (USOCA), described by Hollander as "a major pro-Sandinista lobby," is co-sponsored by such perennial disbelievers in the evils of communism as Noam Chomsky, Linus Pauling, Ronald Dellums, Ramsey Clark, Benjamin Spock, the Berrigan brothers, and many other latter-day "fellow travellers."

A slick USOCA fund-raising brochure asserts that its score of co-sponsors are committed to taking its "message" to millions of Americans. Among the activities they have carried out are presenting "a slide show on Nicaragua over 100 times," organizing "four delegations of Americans" to Nicaragua, and carrying out "other educational activities, from coast to coast."

In the partial listing of USOCA National Sponsors are included several academic supporters of the Sandinistas within the Latin American Studies Association (LASA). They are Richard Fagen, Thomas Walker, and

Max Azicri. Fagen and Walker are Co-Chairs of the LASA Task Force on Scholarly Relations with Nicaragua. It was they who organized a LASA delegation to observe the Sandinista elections last November. An electoral farce denounced as a "sham" by the *New York Times* was, in the collective judgement of the 15-member delegation, "a model of probity and fairness."

Sandinista-sanctioned tours feature classic communist fare, such as sightseeing trips to model schools, clinics, prisons, and other revolutionary sites. The visitors are told of the countless statistics measuring how the lot of the masses has improved after over half of the economy became part of the Sandinista state. If the guests are considered important enough, they are treated to a conversation with one of the FSLN *comandantes*. The LASA delegation met with Jaime Wheelock, Commander of the Revolution and Minister of Agrarian Reform.

Hollander points out that among the most credulous visitors to Sandinista Nicaragua are western clerics. Lulled by "liberation theology" into believing that Marxist-Leninists do Christ's work and that moral salvation lies through revolutionary class struggle, not a few churchpeople have been duped into becoming devoted defenders of the Sandinistas and irresponsible critics of Reagan's foreign policy in Central America. They appear to be willingly following the foolish footsteps of such embarrassing "religious" figures as Hewlet Johnson, the "Red" Dean of Canterbury, whom Hollander quotes as having said that Stalin's Russia was "singularly Christian and civilized."

There is nothing new in communists disguising themselves as Christians. In January of 1959, Castro's guerrillas appeared in Havana wearing rosaries,

crucifixes, and religious medallions. Within a few years, however, Castro had expelled hundreds of priests and nuns, closed down all Catholic schools, and abolished Christmas festivities. Revealingly, an officially-approved Cuban cleric recently credited this militantly anti-religious regime for having been the first to implement "liberation theology."

In a replay of Castro's deceit, the Sandinistas have made a show of religiosity while attacking the established Church. They have insulted the Pope, expelled priests, and clamped down controls on Catholic schools and media. They have also fomented bizarre "popular" churches which preach the alleged unity of Marxism and Christianity. These Sandinista shrines are routine stops in the itinerary of political pilgrims.

Hollander appropriately observes that "the current pilgrimages to Nicaragua emerge as a remarkable example of the confluence of deception and self-deception." Indeed, after six years during which they have carried out (according to the Nicaraguan Commission of Jurists) 8,000 political executions; forcibly relocated hundreds of thousands of peasants; and brought every aspect of Nicaraguan society within easy reach of an intimidating police state with the help of thousands of Cubans and other Soviet bloc "advisers," it is difficult to believe that anyone but a dupe or an agent of the communists could still vouch for the democratic intentions of the Sandinistas. It is no small cause for indignation that among the pilgrims returning from Nicaragua are articulate and clever people cloaked with the robes of a university or a church, who then attempt to discredit the testimony of several hundreds of thousands of refugees who have fled their country at considerable personal risk and told whoever would listen about the terror and hardships they experienced at the hands of the Sandinistas.