

Central America forum questions U.S. role

Editor's Note: This week the Carolina Committee on Central America has been sponsoring a series of discussions led by professors, students, activists, and religious leaders. The talks have focused on Central American social, economic, and political issues, and are designed to increase understanding of conditions in the region.

The growth of modern agriculture in Central America may be the cause of the political unrest, poverty and violence in the region, a UNC faculty member who has visited the area said Tuesday.

Joe Straley, a professor of physics and self-described political activist, said that although the gross national product and food production had risen in Central America during the past few years, most of the population did not benefit from these gains because the arable land of the region is owned by a handful of people.

"Before this rise in modern agriculture, food was grown by small subsistence farmers who were not living particularly well, but getting by," he said. Farmers were gradually bought out by people who found it profitable to acquire large amounts of land and modern machinery to concentrate on growing large amounts of a single product, such as sugar cane and coffee. Small farmers who refused to sell their land were often tricked into giving it up, he said.

"Through one means or another, relatively few people have gotten hold of the arable land in Central America," Straley said. "The people feel swindled, so they are easily led into revolution."

If people are hungry and uneducated, there will be a revolution."

One problem with modern agriculture is that it encourages mass production of a single product for exporting purposes, and these products are often not what the country's inhabitants need most, he said. "In Guatemala, one third of the arable land is used for raising sugar cane. The people can't live on sugar cane."

He said the literacy rate of Central America outside Nicaragua, where the government has stressed education, was very low and little is being done to correct the problem. "It takes a long time to produce an educated class of people," he said.

Straley said he was not sure that the recent decline in killings by right-wing death squads would last. "Although death squad deaths are down, the death squads are still active. This seems to correlate with the current U.S. Congressional session," he said, referring to the ongoing debate over appropriation of funds to Central America.

Straley praised the Sandinista government of Nicaragua for being the only government in the region to make a serious effort to prosecute the radical members of the death squads and for the progress it has made in social and economic reform. He said the candidates running for office in other Central American countries such as El Salvador and Guatemala continuously promised to stop the violence in the region, but once elected, failed to take serious action to stop it.

Straley, who visited Central America with a group of college faculty who call themselves "Faculty For Human Rights," met many prominent figures

in Central America including El Salvador President Jose Napoleon Duarte.

Straley criticized the Reagan administration for supporting the Contras, the so-called "freedom fighters," who are trying to overthrow the Sandinista government. He said popular support for the government was proven by the overwhelming approval the people have given the Sandinistas in the last election. The recent election was different from elections in other Central America countries because it was truly legitimate and was approved by a U.N. committee, he said.

— RACHEL STIFFLER

No aid to Nicaragua

Congress will reject further U.S. military aid to contras in Nicaragua, said UNC professor of physics Joe Straley, who spoke Wednesday in the Student Union as part of a series sponsored by the Carolina Committee on Central America.

Straley, who traveled to Guatemala and El Salvador last month, studied votes in Congress concerning Central American issues. Out of the five key votes he tallied, 44 senators approved of U.S. intervention in Central America, 32 disapproved and 24 voted in a varied pattern, he said.

In the House of Representatives, the votes were generally split down the middle over issues such as giving U.S. aid to the Nicaraguan contras. But 83 members voted inconsistently, and some new members had not yet voted at all, Straley said.

"I regard the swing voters as those who don't have a 100 percent cast-iron ideology toward Central America. The chances are better than 50-50 that the House will not approve aid to the contras," he said.

Ashley Wells, a senior history major, outlined several issues during the discussion about the Reagan administration's policy towards Central America. Congress must decide whether to pass the Bowlin Amendment, which would guarantee \$14 million to Nicaraguan contras. Several members of Congress are also concerned about

contras receiving funds from private sources because the contras have a large amount of military equipment, Wells said. Finally, Reagan must decide whether to place American forces in Nicaragua to overthrow the Sandinista government, she said.

— JILL GERBER

Committee to march

About 500 North Carolinians will march on Fort Bragg March 21 to protest U.S. involvement in Nicaragua, said Howard Machtinger Wednesday night in a discussion of American policy toward Nicaragua.

The Carolina Committee for Central America, which sponsored the discussion, will be involved in the group that will march on Fort Bragg.

Machtinger defended the revolution in Nicaragua in his lecture, saying it represented a movement that opens endless possibilities for human rights.

"It represents a qualitative change for the better," Machtinger said.

He said the church in Nicaragua was a powerful force both for and against the revolution. Some church leaders are cabinet members in the Sandinista government, while others support the contras, he said.

"Nicaragua is the only socialist country criticized for having too many church people in government," Machtinger said.

As a fundamental part of Nicaraguan culture, the church plays a key role in any regime that will govern the nation, Machtinger said. He said the Sandinistas were not opposing any religious freedoms as a result.

Censorship in Nicaragua has decreased greatly since the elections, he said. There has been a long internal struggle in government over what is the right amount of censorship.

Machtinger said the moderate forces in government were assuming a more commanding presence and that U.S. involvement in Nicaragua was wrong and not in the interests of the American public.

— MARK POWELL

Soviets protest U.S. charges

From staff and wire reports

MOSCOW The Soviet Union filed a formal protest Wednesday over U.S. charges that it has violated arms control treaties and provided its own list of alleged American violations of every major arms agreement.

Claiming the U.S. charges were "poisoning the atmosphere," Foreign Ministry spokesman Vladimir Lomeiko said they cast a shadow over the arms talks scheduled to begin in Geneva on March 12.

Ortega invites Congressmen

MANAGUA, Nicaragua — Nicaraguan President Daniel Ortega said Congressional leaders would be invited to Nicaragua, after meeting with a group of U.S. bishops Wednesday. The American legislators would be invited to visit Nicaraguan military bases as a gesture to revive the stalled Contadora peace talks, he said.

"We hope that President Reagan will reflect on and take to heart these initiatives and contribute to the search for a peaceful solution" to the Central American conflict, Ortega said Tuesday.

Reagan may support farm relief

WASHINGTON — A White House official said Wednesday that President Reagan will vote for the

News In Brief

farm relief legislation currently being proposed in Congress if "budget-busting" amendments are attached to it.

Spokesman Larry Speakes said Vice President George Bush put off a planned trip to Texas to preside over the Senate in case of a tied vote on the Democratic amendments to bail out banks and debt-ridden farmers.

SEC's Fedders resigns

WASHINGTON — Securities and Exchange Commission enforcement chief John M. Fedders resigned Tuesday amid reports that he had repeatedly beat his wife.

In his resignation letter to SEC Chairman John Shad, Fedders said that while he believed his family problems had not affected his official conduct, "the glare of publicity on my private life threatened to undermine the effectiveness of the division of enforcement and of the commission."

Fedder admitted that "on seven occasions during more than 18 years of marriage, marital disputes between us resulted in violence, for which I feel, and have expressed, great remorse."

Housing workshop planned for tonight

A workshop for students closed out of on-campus housing for next year will be held tonight at 6 in Room 206 of the Student Union.

Campus service organizations, real estate agents, apartment managers and others will be on hand to tell how they can help.

Nicaragua topic of forum today

The documentary film *Nicaragua: Sing the Mountain, Weep the Cage* will be shown by the Carolina Committee on Central America tonight at 7. At 8:30 p.m. the committee will conduct

a discussion on "Democracy in Central America: A Comparison of Nicaragua and El Salvador." Both events will be held in the Student Union. Check the schedule board for room number.

Submit Chancellor's Awards nominations

Know any students who should be rewarded for the time they give to make UNC a better place? If so, fill out a nomination form for the Chancellor's

Awards. Applications can be found in Steele Building or at the Student Union information desk. Deadline is March 1.

For the record

"Proposal to reduce town council size opposed by members" in Wednesday's *DTH* should have identified Curtis Harper as the president of the town Church Housing Corporation. This was a reporting error.

Also, R.D. Smith was quoted as though speaking to Mayor Joe Nassif when he should have been quoted as editing error. The *DTH* regrets the errors.

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