Central America discussed

By David P. Hamilton

Professor Peter H. Smith of the Department of Political Science discussed the reasons for American involvement in Central America with nearly twenty students Wednesday in a forum sponsored by the Political Science Committee on Central America.

Two media presentations preceded Smith's talk. First, a film called Witness to War, a documentary on the experiences of the late Charles Clements, a Vietnam veteran turned Quaker who spent a year in El Salvador giving medical aid to war refugees.

The slide show, Central America: Roots of the Crisis, followed the film, describing the political and economic troubles facing El Salvador, Nicaragua, Guatemala, Costa Rica and Honduras, the five Central American republics.

Smith then spoke about the political situation in Central America. Many of his comments were taken from his personal experience, since he has visited both El Salvador and Nicaragua within the past year. He said "the attention on events in Central America is focused on El Salvador, Nicaragua, Guatemala, Costa Rica and Honduras, the five Central American republics.

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In Nicaragua, he said, the war between government forces and rebel guerrillas continues despite efforts at a truce held by the government. The violence has moved out of the city into the countryside, where the army arbitrarily sweeps through territory on its way to theEI Salvadoran border, which often injures or kill civilians.

The right-wing elements in the country continue to demonstrate the political strength despite the election of the moderate Christian Democrat Jose Napoleon Duarte, Smith said. Duarte's cabinets is filled with former government advisors appointed out of political necessity, he continued.

These conservatives plan to eventually remove Duarte. They consider his regime no better than the "regime," Smith said. They have also been encouraged by the apparent willingness of the rebels to negotiate.

The right-wing wing consists mainly of the comparatively few rich salvadoreans, mostly based in the country's capital, who control much of the land in El Salvador, according to the slide show.

These families wield economic power in addition to control of the army, the slide show said.

Smith said that Duarte has recently come under severe criticism by the right wing for negotiating with the rebels. Duarte arranged the release of several key prisoners from jail, including the return of his kidnapped daughter, Smith said.

In Nicaragua, the main destabilizing factor is the continued unrest among the United States, Smith said. The recent 272 million aid package to the contras is keeping war alive and "very explicit" in that nation, he said. In addition, the grain boycott imposed on Nicaragua by the Reagan administration is exacerbating the extreme poverty of the region, he said.

The most obvious implication is that "since January of '84 the United States has been dedicated to the overthrow of the Sandinista government," Smith said. The United States was the first nation to oppose the Contra treaty, a Central American declaration of mutual assistance and non-interference in internal affairs, he continued.

Smith asserted that the United States could not accept the Contras agreement because of its claim preventing outside military aid to the United States.

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