

American Common Market), Central American integration leaders are striving to forge regional links in other fields. Joint commissions are now working on coordinated labor laws, health missions, and other activities related to social change.

I witnessed in action a moving and encouraging example of a multinational social program in action. The educational systems of the region represent a severe obstacle to development. Except in Costa Rica, where the literacy rate is 88 percent, literacy rates in the Common Market countries are distressingly low: El Salvador, 48 percent; Guatemala, 30 percent; Honduras, 47 percent; Nicaragua, 40 percent. While shortages of teachers, classrooms, and materials are factors, the problem goes deeper. The school systems have failed to provide curricula that parents can relate directly to the future welfare of their children. As a result, dropouts are high, occurring mainly in the second and third grades.

The United States, through AID's ROCAP, has joined with the Ministers of Education of Central America and Panama in a project to prepare and provide textbooks and teachers' guides in reading, writing, arithmetic, social studies, and sciences for use by elementary schoolchildren. The new books and teaching methods are designed to make education in Central America more practical and meaningful.

At ROCAP's office in Guatemala City I saw a lovely white-haired lady from Arizona, Mrs. Victoria de Sanchez, presiding over conferences in at least a dozen rooms in which representatives from each of the CACM countries were composing the new texts together. Mrs. de Sanchez has been a spark plug of the program from its outset, helping to conceive the idea and to bring it to fruition.

As of June 1966, 5½ million copies of 12 different textbooks had been published for the use of 1.3 million students and 58,400 teachers in the first 4 grades of the public schools in the CACM countries and Panama. At the conclusion of the project in 1970, it is expected that 11.5 million books will have been made available for 6 grades of elementary schooling.

The ultimate benefits of the program to the peace and security of the hemisphere as well as to the common good of Central America are incalculable. Obviously, children who are given an education which enables them to become gainfully employed are assets to modernizing societies. At the same time, people who are provided an opportunity to make something of themselves in their own environment are unlikely to succumb to Communist blandishments.

The textbook program is but a small part of the efforts of AID's Regional Office for Central America and Panama in support of the Central American integration movement. A summary of ROCAP's role and responsibilities can be found in the appendix, pages 24, 25.

As for the future direction of the Central American integration movement, a number of North and Central Americans with whom I spoke foresee some difficulties for the CACM countries in the common market's heavy emphasis upon industrialization. They point out that agriculture is and will remain for some time the principal occupation of the bulk of the populace and the chief means by which the countries earn foreign exchange with which to purchase capital equipment for industrial expansion. Consequently, they feel that agricultural activities should become an equal concern of the CACM.