

A Nation Under Siege

Nicaragua's Struggle

for Survival



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AN UNCERTAIN FUTURE

On Feb. 2, 1985, a second independent US trade union fact-finding delegation from the National Labor Committee in Support of Democracy and Human Rights in El Salvador arrived in Central America. The ten-member delegation represented five different unions: the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees, the United Auto Workers, the American Federation of Government Employees, the Amalgamated Clothing and Textile Workers Union and the International Woodworkers of America.

In their special report they stipulated their conclusions and recommendations:

-- The government of the United States should end all military support for the counter-revolutionary groups (Contras) attacking Nicaragua from Honduras and Costa Rica. Military support camouflaged as humanitarian or logistical aid should be similarly proscribed.

-- The United States should not attempt to circumvent a Congressional prohibition on aid to the Contras by funneling money through third party countries.

-- The United States should cease efforts to damage the Nicaraguan economy by blocking international credits.

-- Finally, the United States should resume its participation in the bilateral talks with Nicaragua at Manzanillo, Mexico.

The trade unionists also called upon the US government to support the Contadora group's effort to negotiate a stable and democratic peace in Central America.

Within Nicaragua itself, they urged that the rights of all unions, regardless of political orientation, should be respected. All harassment and other interference in the internal affairs of unions should cease.

POTENTIAL SCENARIOS

What, then, are the choices -- the "scenarios" -- for Nicaragua in the coming months and years?

Scenario 1 - Direct Invasion/Intervention

This is generally considered unlikely, though it was not discounted entirely by anyone. The Granada invasion spoke loudly in Nicaragua, and there is a feeling that some elements of the American military and political right are not disinclined to directly invade. Most Nicaraguan leaders do not believe, however, that an American invasion is imminent, largely because of the high political cost to the Reagan administration of such an intervention -- the prospect of another generation of young Americans returning

home in bodybags.

Nicaragua, however, is not Viet Nam. It is very small, and very close, so no Nicaraguan ever completely dismisses the possibility that the Marines, after a 50 year absence, might return to their country.

Scenario 2 - A Negotiated Peace

Nicaraguans feel that they have made serious efforts to reach a peace settlement through the "Contadora" process. They argue that the US objections to the Contadora draft treaty emerged only after the Nicaraguans agreed to it.

Contadora represents a regional approach to the tensions in Central America. The US broke off the Manzanillo talks between the US and the Nicaraguans. It is common sense that anyone truly supportive of "an end to the conflict" in Nicaragua and Central America would understand that the negotiating must continue, and continue in good faith.

The bilateral and regional peace talks are complementary. The United States ends its support for the Contra war and the military buildup in the region in exchange for explicit, verifiable guarantees by the Nicaraguans that no foreign bases will be established, no arms exported to other countries, and a greater degree of political pluralism.

Scenario 3 - Low Intensity Warfare

If the Contra war would go on, perhaps intensify, as higher technology weapons are introduced, the Sandinistas would probably respond by fortifying themselves militarily and restricting internal political options further. The United States cannot expect the Sandinistas to surrender, as most of the people are solidly supporting them.

"The Sandinista revolution is an indigenous, legitimate revolution. This is not Eastern Europe," the trade unionists were told during their visit to Managua.

To be sure, members of the Miskito, Sumo and Rama Indian tribes have resisted Sandinista efforts to extend the control of the central government. And as a result, they have incurred repression, including the mass relocation of some 10,000 Miskitos from areas on the Nicaraguan-Honduran border.

But the regime has been supported by the rank-and-file priests and nuns, despite the Church hierarchy's hostility. Moreover, four "revolutionary" priests occupy high positions in the government.

To accentuate the point, when asked if he is a Marxist, President Daniel Ortega usually replies: "We are Sandinistas...with a Christian upbringing... who are familiar with both Christ and Marx."

FSLN AND ITS INSTITUTIONS

The FSLN is comprised of three main political organizations, with somewhat varying ideological and practical approaches:

-- Tendencia Tercerista (TT - Third Way Tendency) led by Humberto Ortega, current minister of defense, and supported by his brother, Daniel, today the president of Nicaragua. They believed that socio-economic and political conditions in Nicaragua in the mid-1970s were ripe for a rapid, popularly-based, anti-Somoza insurgency led by an elite vanguard (the FSLN) struggling primarily, but not exclusively, in the cities.

-- Guerra Popular Prolongada (GPP - Prolonged Popular War) which foresaw and supported a rural insurgency. The main strategic objectives of the FSLN, in its view, were a military takeover and the establishment of "a revolutionary government based on a worker-peasant alliance."

-- Tendencia Proletaria (TP - Proletarian Tendency) led by Jaime Wheelock, today minister of agricultural development and agrarian reform, and Luis Carrión, the vice-minister of interior. They argued that the FSLN struggle ought to be focused on the proletarian masses in the cities of the Pacific lowlands and that the more class-conscious proletariat should be in the vanguard.

The Ministry of Defense under Humberto Ortega commands the Sandinista Popular Army (EPS) and the Sandinista Popular Militia (MPS). The active-duty armed forces number approximately 62,000. According to the "Patriotic Military Service Law" of October 6, 1983, all Nicaraguan males between the ages of 18 and 40 are required to serve in the active or reserve military. (4)

In 1980, the FSLN created two newspapers, its own organ -- Barricada -- and the pro-FSLN daily El Nuevo Diario. La Prensa is the opposition's organ. The famous Chamorro family is associated with all three newspapers. Pedro Joaquin Chamorro Barrios was editor-in-chief of his late father's La Prensa (with a circulation of 60,000) until he recently left for voluntary exile in Costa Rica. Barricada (with a circulation of 100,000) is edited by his brother, Carlos, and El Nuevo Diario (with a circulation of 50,000) is edited by Xavier Chamorro, a brother of the late Pedro Joaquin Chamorro Cardenal.

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4. Decree No. 1327, published in "El Nuevo Diario" (Managua), July 2, 1984, pp. 4-5.

NATIONAL DIRECTORATE OF THE FSLN

	Political Affiliation	Government Position	Leadership Committee
Daniel Ortega	Co-leader of the TT	President of Nicaragua	Coordinator of the Executive Commission and member of State Commission
Tomás Borge	Leader of the GPP	Minister of Interior	Member of Defense and Security Commission and of the Executive Commission
Humberto Ortega	Co-leader of the TT	Minister of Defense	Coordinator of Defense and Security Commission and member of the Executive Commission
Jaime Wheelock	Leader of the TP	Minister of Agricultural Development and Agrarian Reform	Coordinator of State Commission and member of Executive Commission
Bayardo Arce	GPP	Minister of Foreign Cooperation	Member of State Commission
Luis Carrión	TP	Vice-Minister of Interior	Member of Defense and Security Comm.
Carlos Núñez	TP	Pres. of National Assembly	Coordinator of Mass Organizations in FSLN Secretariat
Victor Iirado	TT		Responsible for trade unions in FSLN Secretariat

MANAGUA -- A GHOST TOWN

"NO PASARAN!" This call to arms of the Spanish Republicans has been adopted by the Sandinistas in Nicaragua. It calls out to you from the walls of the houses it is painted on, from the posters glued to prefabs, huts, and from asbestos shacks which are spread out all over Managua, the capital.

Managua...the first shock. Even if one has a previous acquaintance with the forgettable sights of Latin America: a fleet of ancient cars which threaten to fall apart at any moment, youths on bicycles navigating between innumerable potholes, masses of people clinging to the sides of overloaded, teetering carts, swirling lines of shoppers, the familiar sights of poverty. You're ashamed to ask --- Where is the capital? Where are the main avenues, the skyscrapers, the stores, the churches, historic buildings, hotels? All that which one finds in every other major city in South and Central America.

Managua is a ghost-town. An earthquake reduced it to its foundations in 1972. The international community made a tremendous effort and contributed generously towards Managua's repair and reconstruction. But the Somoza family, which ruled Nicaragua undisturbed from 1936 to 1979, preferred to abscond with the aid money and deposit it in its Swiss bank accounts, instead of breathing life into the ruined areas. Somoza joined a long list of corrupt leaders who have made international aid little more than a bandaid and have taken the money given by the poor of the wealthy nations to further enrich the wealthy classes of the poor nations.

THE SOMOZA DICTATORSHIP

The voice of protest was raised by the Sandinistas, but to no avail. The ruthless Somoza regime, which used to rid itself of its political opponents by casting them into the volcanic crater of Mount Masaya, brutally repressed all protest. Opponents of the regime disappeared, were imprisoned or tortured and murdered, such as Pedro Joaquim Chamorro, editor of one of the leading newspapers.

The dynasty began to disintegrate in the 1970s under Anastasio (Tachito) Somoza, a graduate of the US military academy at West Point. As Régis Debray observed: "The (Sandinista) Front's best ally...was Somoza himself."¹

The continuous repression of the Nicaraguan people, supported by successive US governments, the tortures

and massacres of the civilian population, left their mark: an illiterate population (in 1979 more than 55 per cent), an infant mortality rate of 25 per cent, and 20 per cent of the cultivated lands and 25 per cent of all industry were owned by the Somoza family on the eve of the dictatorship's fall.

Tachito Somoza was "corrupt like his predecessors, (but) lacked their adeptness in political manipulation. This was evident in his handling of the (1972) earthquake, which killed 10,000 Nicaraguans. After this disaster, relief funds were shamelessly misused, while downtown Managua lay in shambles."²

"Adelante con el Frente!" -- Forward the Front -- was the cry raised by the supporters of the FSLN (Sandinista Front for National Liberation) which, from its founding in 1961, managed to channel the rising opposition to Somoza and widen its own support. The Nicaraguan people rebelled against their oppressors. On July 19, 1979, Somoza was deposed and the Sandinista movement reached power almost 50 years after the legendary Augusto Cesar Sandino first raised the banner of rebellion against the Somoza dynasty. This was not a palace coup, as so often happens in Latin America, but a revolution carried forward on a wave of popular support.

Daniel Ortega, the 42-year-old Sandinista leader, inherited a heavy load: a country wrecked by the bloody civil war (50,000 dead, equal to the number of US soldiers killed in Viet Nam; 100,000 wounded -- one must remember that Nicaragua has a total population of only 3 million). The gross national product had fallen to the level of 15 years before and there was a massive flight of capital and technical and management personnel.

ELECTIONS IN A STATE OF SIEGE

The new government began the process of distributing land to the farmers -- "More than a million and a half acres were placed in private hands and 5 per cent of the nationalized lands were turned over to the hundreds of cooperatives which were created in the country" was related to me by Alva Luz Vargas, the deputy minister of justice. Health and welfare services were established, the death penalty was abolished, the Ministry of Justice founded a public defender's office, but most importantly, a campaign was undertaken to eradicate illiteracy.

The educational project began on March 24, 1980, and continued for five months. One hundred and eighty thousand volunteers, most of them young, spread out

THE UNION LANDSCAPE

The economy is a rural one, so the most important union is the pro-Sandinista farmworkers organization (ATC--Asociacion de los Trabajadores del Campo).

There are several important urban unions, however, representing various political points of view:

The CUS (Confederacion de Unidad Sindical) was formed in 1962, and functioned during the Somoza years legally. The CUS opposes the policies of the Sandinista government vigorously.

Yet despite CUS leader Alvin Guthrie's open dislike of the Sandinistas, he believes that they are an improvement on the Somoza years. And on the question of US aid to the Contra forces in Honduras and Costa Rica, he is unequivocal: "We do not support US aid to the Contras. We do not support the military build up in the region."⁵

The CTN (Confederacion de los Trabajadores Nicaraguenses) leaders, another opposition group with a "social christian" orientation, speak of unjustified arrests and jailings. But they acknowledge that none of their leaders is currently imprisoned.

The CTN leadership is, as the CUS, opposed to American military aid to the Contras: "We don't support aid to the Contras," said Eugenio Membrano.⁶

Both opposition federations affirm the contention that much of the harassment against them is a result of the pressures of the war. Peace is necessary, according to a CTN leader, in order for union representatives to be permitted into the factories to "preach" their vision of unionism. The chances for pluralistic trade unionism would increase were the war pressures ended.

The leader of the CSN (Coordinadora Sindical Nicaraguense--an umbrella group of the Sandinista unions and others sympathetic to the government) is 29-year-old Edgardo Garcia. A farmworker, he firmly believes that the Sandinista government's commitment to the pluralistic experiment, both politically and regarding unions, is genuine. Garcia speaks of the great difficulty faced by his union with the demands of a war economy in which 30 to 40 per cent of the nation's production is diverted to the military.

The most important Sandinista urban federation, the CST (Central Sandinista de Trabajadores), has an official membership of 112,000. Its leaders cite the Contra war as the main problem facing labor in Nicaragua.

The curtailing of the right-to-strike from 1982-84 was, in their eyes, justified and they draw a parallel with the "no-strike" pledge made by American unions during World War II.⁷

The Sandinista unions also argue that, even under the strain of a wartime situation, they have made great progress. Health care benefits, comp time, day

care centers, maternity leave, workplace literacy classes, disability payments and similar non-wage improvements are routinely included in contracts. These improvements have been overlooked by the Reagan administration.

Similarly, the farmworkers union claims the significance of the changes in the pattern of land ownership in the countryside is misunderstood. There are new production cooperatives, service and credit cooperatives, and state-owned farms (largely on ex-Somoza holdings) as well as small, medium and large individual holdings, as before the revolution. There have been accompanying advances in minimum wages for farmworkers, in health care and literacy, and thus the Sandinistas receive strong support in the rural areas.

Changes in Ownership of Land, 1978-1983

Property Sector	Percentage of Land Owned			FSLN Goal
	In 1978	1982	1983	
Private Ownership				
Over 500 ^a	41.20	16.60	12	
200 to 500	13.80	12.00	10	
50 to 200	29.70	29.70	30	
10 to 50	12.90	12.90	14	
Less than 10	2.40	2.99	4	
Total Private	100.00	74.19	70	25
Sandinista Agricultural Cooperatives	0	1.81	7	50
People's Property Areas	0	24.00	23	25

a. Unit of land not specified

There exist in Nicaragua today three basic forms of ownership of the means of production: state ownership or the People's Property Area; cooperatives and associations such as the Sandinista Agricultural Cooperatives (CAS), and private ownership. The APP was created immediately after the 1979 revolution, when the holdings of Somoza's family were seized.

Sixty per cent of all industrial means of production belonged to the private sector as of 1984. As late as 1983, some 70 per cent of the farmland remained in the hands of individual producers, even though the percentage in the hands of large "latifundistas" had declined dramatically.

There is still the question of union freedom and rights in Nicaragua. There has been harassment. There have been detentions. But unlike El Salvador, there is no pattern of killings.

The opposition unions have offices, meetings, publications, training workshops and funding. They are active members of the political opposition.

AMERICA'S WAR IN NICARAGUA

The announcement of US President Ronald Reagan in Bonn on May 1, 1985, imposing an economic embargo on Nicaragua came as no surprise. In the eyes of the president and his vice-president, George Bush, Nicaragua has become a red cape. His enmity for the Sandinista regime stands in vivid contrast to the US support for the tyrannical regimes of Chile, Haiti, Paraguay, Guatemala and El Salvador, not forgetting the constant defense provided Somoza's cruel dictatorship for 40 years. And then there is Franklin Roosevelt's contribution to the litany of memorable quotations: "Somoza may be a son of a bitch, but he's our son of a bitch!" All this, of course, in the name of concern for freedom and political pluralism.

The imposition of a stranglehold on Nicaragua is evidence of the conflict's deterioration into a cold war battlefield between the super-powers. Ever since the US invaded Granada, in October, 1983, Nicaragua is on the alert for an American invasion.

This fear borders on obsession: trenches were dug in Managua, the army is on permanent alert, housewives undergo weapons training, the radio constantly warns the population of the coming dangers. In Nicaragua, they remember that the US has invaded in the past, in 1912, and again in 1925. The US also invaded Guatemala, the second largest central American nation 31 years ago. In 1954, the Republican administration decided to rid itself of Guatemala's socialist president, who threatened the monopoly of the American multi-national corporation, United Fruit. President Eisenhower set up an underground movement in Guatemala and sent "rebel planes" to bomb the capital, forcing the president to flee for his life.

The US war on Nicaragua does not rely only on economic damage. It is based on arming and training the remnants of Somoza's national guard, and mercenaries who are ensconced across Nicaragua's northern and southern borders. Most of the "Contras" of the "Democratic Front of Nicaragua" (FDN) are trained and sent on their missions with the support of the CIA and the Honduran army. About 7,000 Contras are based in camps set up for them on Honduran territory. In the south, another Contra group, the ARDE, is active and receives support from the Costa Rican and Reagan governments.

The economic damage inflicted by the Contra raids, and their surprise attacks, further threatens the stability of the Nicaraguan economy, which already suffers immensely. The Contras aim their rebellion at farmers gathering coffee beans and harvesting cotton and sugar cane, but they do not hesitate to burn schools and fields in order to sow panic and

fear and disturb the quiet lifestyle. The dozens of teachers who were murdered or tortured in the hills around Latotogalpa, and the 252 schools which have been ravaged, are ample evidence of this. One need only remember that the damage to the coffee harvest may shut down one of Nicaragua's economic foundations -- the coffee exports account for one-third of the country's foreign currency income, close to \$200 million annually.

In January, 1984, with the release of the Kissinger Committee Report it became evident that the CIA gave about \$24 million in aid to the Contras and their guerrilla warfare aimed at Nicaragua.

The consequences: At Nicaragua's border areas with Honduras and Costa Rica the farmers of Nicaragua till their fields with rifle in hand, and the Sandinista militia guard the field workers. Even so, the Contras have wrought hundreds of millions of dollars in damage.

There is no doubt that Nicaragua is a devastated country, under siege -- both military and economic -- and in need of immediate aid.

AN ESCALATING WAR OF NERVES

The war of nerves between Washington and Managua is intensifying. The sabre-rattling heard from the White House has caused a reinforcement of armed civilian militias throughout Nicaragua. The Sandinistas fear an American air assault on their military installations and the landing strip north of Managua.

Nicaragua has an impressive armed forces (including elite units), which is well-equipped, particularly after Soviet arms shipments. The regular army numbers 150,000 soldiers. It is not surprising that a significant percentage of the country's income is earmarked to feed, outfit, equip and train one of the largest standing armies in Central America.

An impressive array of military equipment stands at its disposal -- T-54 and T-55 Russian tanks, heavy artillery, M-8 Soviet helicopters, transport planes, and more.

The Sandinista regime is aware that it cannot expect massive military aid from the Cubans, under present conditions -- beyond the few hundred military advisers currently in Nicaragua -- and that the Soviet Union is not capable of maintaining a "second Cuba" in Central America. (Moreover, we are not speaking about an island, but a "sandwiched" nation, trapped in a vice-grip between Honduras to the north and Costa Rica to the south.

Nicaraguan officials have no illusions, they recognize the fact that the nation's skies are vulnerable to American air attack, and that the mountainous

jungle which covers vast areas of Nicaragua cannot provide effective shelter in the case of massive bombings.

There is no need for direct American intervention in order to threaten Nicaragua. The Pentagon took care to adequately supply its allies in the region. According to data published by the International Institute for Strategic Studies, Nicaragua maintains 12 fighter planes, while El Salvador has at its disposal 59 fighter planes and 9 assault helicopters, Guatemala has 16 fighter planes and 4 helicopters, and there are 30 fighter planes in the hands of the Hondurans regime. These are neighboring states, dependent upon the US and hostile towards the Sandinista government. The regional balance of power, consequently, is not in favor of Nicaragua. This in-balance may become more acute if the United States broadens the military base of Honduras and supplies that country with F-5 jet fighters. It is not wonder, then, that the Nicaraguan authorities are concerned so long as an American paratrooper unit is stationed at the American base in Palmyrola (70 km north of Tegucigalpa).

Nicaragua is not a security threat to the United States -- a poor country, exhausted from years of dictatorship and war, with three million residents, is not even capable of tickling the United States.

Anthony Lewis of the New York Times has a different explanation for American policy vis-à-vis Nicaragua: the Sandinistas are a cataract in Reagan's political eye.

Lewis argues that ideological obsession guides Reagan's policy-making. Reagan came to power with a resolve to overcome what has been defined by the conservatives as "the Viet Nam syndrome." That is, America's demonstrated lack of desire to make use of its military power after Viet Nam. Reagan needs, then, an appropriate opportunity in order to flex America's muscles -- Nicaragua offers a golden opportunity and he cast his lot upon it.

One can point to at least three primary results of America's tainted Nicaragua policy:

-- The American boycott created a state of emergency in Nicaragua which affected the liberal manner in which the Managua regime had treated the internal opposition during the election campaign.

-- America's massive support of the Contras, on the one hand, and the continuing damage caused to the Nicaraguan economy (through Contra sabotage and as a result of the mining of Nicaragua's ports, which prevented the import of essential goods -- raw materials, fertilizers, replacement parts, oil, foodstuffs, etc.) and the economic boycott, thrust Nicaragua to fall like a piece of ripe fruit into the Soviet Union's open arms -- as in a self-fulfilling prophecy.

Many European countries understood this, as did the leaders of the Socialist International, and they therefore bound themselves to the international effort to aid blockaded Nicaragua to liberate itself from the morass into which it has been forced.

-- Enmity towards the United States and Reagan's administration is on the rise in Latin America because of its police actions on the continent (the war it is waging against Nicaragua has removed the fear of the Russian bear from the jungles) and its contribution to the growth of the region's foreign debt -- through the International Monetary Fund, the private banks and US economic policy -- which today exceeds \$360 billion.

The obsession which directs Reagan's policy towards Nicaragua has created a political short-sightedness. Not only has the number of Latin American democracies (Brazil, Argentina, Uruguay, etc.) which condemn American enmity towards Nicaragua grown, but it has also put an end to Fidel Castro's isolation in Latin America. His open and frequent contacts with the heads of government in Ecuador, Colombia, Uruguay, Argentina, Peru, Brazil, Bolivia, and more, are paving the road to a resumption of full diplomatic ties.

COST OF THE WAR

For most of 1983 and 1984, Washington contended that the Contra war against the Nicaraguan government had to be escalated for two reasons.

The first was that Nicaragua was shipping arms to the Salvadoran rebels, and pressure on their own country would force them to stop doing so. Although some might contend that "the Nicaraguan threat comes from the spread of ideas, not guns." (8)

The second was that Contra pressure would force the Sandinista government to implement political changes "promised" at the revolution's triumph but subsequently betrayed.

In 1985, the third reason, unstated before but quite audible now, is that the Nicaraguan government is a "tool" of the Soviet Union and Cuba, and therefore should be destabilized, disrupted, and eventually deposed. The Soviet Union and Cuba, it goes, are using Nicaragua as a launching pad for subversion and revolution in Central America and Mexico. US support for the Contras is aimed at blocking their progress.

When one travels to the northern region of Nicaragua, visiting the coffee plantations and villages that have been the site of most of the fighting, it appears that the fundamental fact of life in Nicaragua, as in the rest of Central America, is poverty, not communism. It is not even accurate to call what is happening in Nicaragua a "guerrilla" or "civil" war. There is no "social base" inside the country

throughout the country (including remote villages) and reached more than 600,000 Nicaraguans. The results were staggering: the illiteracy rate dropped from 55 per cent to 13 per cent. Today, there are more than a million students receiving elementary, secondary and university education. A Jesuit priest, Father Fernando Cardenal, directed the campaign. At its conclusion, the Sandinista leadership announced that by 1985 there would be free elections for the first time in nearly 50 years -- elections to be carried out far from the army camps and the watchful eyes of Somoza's National Guard and the Marines.

The regime kept its promise.

In spite of an aggressive election campaign by the opposition (in the newspaper "La Prensa," hours of radio and TV broadcasts, posters and public assemblies) an overwhelming victory was won by the "Patriotic Revolutionary Front" -- which included the FSLN, which was founded in 1961 and led the revolution; the "Popular Socio-Christian Party" founded in 1976, and the "Nicaraguan Socialist Party" founded in 1944. Notwithstanding the economic straits, the recession and the state of emergency, two-thirds of the Nicaraguan electorate gave democratic legitimacy to the Sandinista regime in the elections which were held in November, 1984. The representative of the Socialist International, who observed the election campaign and the voting process on behalf of his organization, confirmed this in his report to Willy Brandt, president of the International.

Political pluralism -- the Church and some trade unions are in an open struggle with the regime, as well as no less than eight legally recognized political parties from the right and left, although the pro-Soviet Communist Party, founded in 1979, is not a partner to the administration -- and the mixed economy, the private sector is dominant and trade with the Soviet bloc accounts for no more than 25 per cent of all foreign trade, are characteristic of a country which the US administration stubbornly defines as a "marxist-Leninist state."

PLURALISM AND DEMOCRACY

Pluralism refers to the existence of a variety of competing interests, ideas, policies among a variety of political forces each seeking to influence decision-making structures.

Pluralism does not, therefore, include "bourgeois control of the strategic institutions of political decision-making (media, state) and economic development (public enterprises)." (3)

The Nicaraguan experience highlights several issues: 1) that the bulk of the Nicaraguan bourgeoisie has begun to disinvest and run down production -- engaging in a self-fulfilling prophecy of creating

the conditions they claim to have sought to avoid, namely an economy with a growing public sector; 2) that the fundamental issue for capital is neither political participation nor economic opportunities (assured by the Sandinista government) but political power, and specifically the balance of power in the state; 3) that the behavior of the private sector cannot be separated from an analysis of the international political-economic context in which it operates. The massive and direct intervention of the United States, providing subsidies to cushion economic losses and providing alternative sites for investors, sustains the willingness of the private sector in rejecting the pluralist rules of the game.

The exigencies of survival in the foundation-defense phase may lead to centralized and authoritarian measures and enhance bureaucratic centralism.

It is necessary, therefore, for the Sandinistas to preserve democratic socialism -- that is, the growing proliferation of "semi-autonomous" interest groups, decision-making centers and levels of power, the introduction of worker co-participation and self-management, and political participation through mass organizations and trade unions -- if they want to ward off the impasse of bureaucratic authoritarian systems or even totalitarianism in the future.

If democratic resistance movements of smaller and less-developed societies are to succeed and to gain freedom, they must be independent and self-governing. They will at certain times need advice, training or material assistance, but unless they are truly indigenous and self-reliant, they cannot win. And even if they should, they will not be able to govern if they rely on outsiders to grant or to secure their freedoms.

But experience teaches us, also, that authoritarianism, due to the situation left by the old-fashioned despotism of the military regime, leads generally to totalitarianism and that authoritarian dictatorships lead to totalitarian systems. That is why it is to the democratic left to stand for a free trade union movement in Nicaragua, for the rights of the Miskito Indians and the Creols on the Atlantic coast, for a free press and for civil and political rights. It is the democratic left's duty, if it wants to prevent the outside-initiated guerillas from having a justification for civil war.

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1. Regis Debray, "Nicaragua: 'Radical Moderation,'" Le monde diplomatique (Paris), Sept. 1979, pp. 6-9.
 2. Valenta, Jiri and Virginia, "Sandinistas in Power," Problems of Communism, September-October 1985.
 3. James Petras, "Authoritarianism, Democracy and the Transition to Socialism," Socialism and Democracy, (New York), Fall 1985, pp. 14-17.

THE CONTADORA: PERSPECTIVE AND PROSPECTS

which supports the "insurgents" or "freedom fighters" or "guerrillas". The Contra bases are in neighboring countries, paid for by American taxpayers. Their targets are not opposing soldiers, but economic production centers, coffee pickers, teachers, health workers and other non-military targets. The damage to the economy, from fuel depots to day-care centers, has been enormous.

As of 1984, the country's total foreign debt was nearly \$4 billion. Financing the government's defense against Contra forces operating in border areas has swelled defense expenditures to an estimated 25 per cent of the total national budget in 1984, and a much higher figure in 1985. By June, 1985, the total economic aid of communist nations to Nicaragua had reached \$600 million.

In Managua, the cost of the war is evident. There are shortages and bureaucratic inefficiencies in transport, consumer goods, even basic food items. Rationing appears to prevent any widespread hunger, but the flourishing black market is proof of the severe strain that the Nicaraguan economy is operating under.

The cost of the war to the Nicaraguans has, therefore, been immense. Eight thousand dead, thousands more maimed and wounded, a disabled economy, and a hardening of the anti-American feeling inside the country.

The logic of the Reagan administration's policy vis-à-vis Nicaragua is not a logic of containment but rather one of rollback. Indeed, the administration's aim is the suppression of socialist movements. (9)

The strategy of rollback, initiated by the invasion of Granada, is now underway in Nicaragua. The Reagan administration sees that the national liberation movements emerging in Central America are enhancing revolutionary changes in a region where transnational capital has always had virtually unlimited freedom for its investments and political manipulations.

Since 1917, the United States has responded with militaristic and interventionist solutions to revolutionary shift. Challenged "in its own backyard," the US is reacting with particular vehemence to the Nicaraguan revolution -- trying to overthrow the Sandinista government.

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5. The National Labor Committee in Support of Democracy and Human Rights in El Salvador, "The Search for Peace in Central America -- A Special Report" (New York) 1985

6. Ibid.

7. Ibid.

8. Ibid.

9. Frank Rosengarten, "Susanne Jonas on the Nicaraguan Crisis," Socialism and Democracy, (NY) Fall, 1985, pp. 60-61.

The Contadora group was originally created in January, 1983, at the initiative of Colombian President Belisario Betancur, as a diplomatic alternative to the conflict escalating in the region.

The United States, as a global and non-Latin power, tended to impose an East-West perspective on conflicts which essentially involved such North-South issues as poverty, inequality and exploitation.

Contadora has forged a consensus around a number of objectives which could constitute the basis for a negotiated settlement. These are embodied in the 21 points of the Document of Objectives of September, 1983, calling for democracy and national reconciliation, an end to support for paramilitary forces across borders, control of the regional arms race, reduction of foreign military advisers and troops, and prohibition of foreign military bases. These goals were incorporated into the draft treaty or "Acta" of September 7, 1984, which Nicaragua quickly accepted and the United States just as quickly rejected.

Nicaragua has consistently preferred bilateral over multi-lateral negotiations to resolve the conflict in Central America, as a series of bilateral agreements would make it more difficult for the US to coordinate its policies with its Central American allies. Facing a Central American refusal to accept bilateral negotiations, and therefore a choice between multi-lateral negotiations or nothing, Nicaragua joined the Contadora process -- which could legitimize the Sandinista regime and formally circumscribe the US military role in Central America.

The Nicaraguan government, however, demanded bilateral talks with the US, in order to achieve a separate US-Nicaragua treaty which would prohibit the United States from invading Nicaragua. When these talks began in Manzanillo, Mexico, in June, 1984, Nicaragua's purpose was to preclude US support for the Contras. Nicaragua was willing to make a number of concessions to achieve that goal. Nicaragua therefore agreed in principle to send home its Cuban advisers, refrain from supporting guerrilla movements in neighboring countries and to prohibit the installation of foreign bases on its territory.

The United States suspended the Manzanillo talks in January, 1985, after their 9th session.

The ultimate treaty draft must resolve the timing issue and deal adequately with the problems of verification, enforcement and compliance.

ISRAEL'S GUNBARREL DIPLOMACY

Israel's support for the Somoza regime -- by supplying arms and training mercenaries who fought alongside the national guard -- will certainly not be registered as a golden moment in the history of Israeli-Nicaraguan relations.

And Israel continued to support Somoza's heirs -- the Contras -- a right-wing force waging a guerrilla war aimed at deposing the Sandinista government.

In the United States, internal criticism -- particularly in Congress -- of the Reagan administration's aid to the rebels (which reached its apex with the mining and bombing of Nicaragua's ports) has risen. But in Israel, we hear no warnings of the dangerous political and moral consequences inherent in selling arms to the darkest dictatorships.

Indeed, the MAPAM Knesset faction proposed legislation prohibiting arms sales without appropriate public supervision and without prior approval by the Knesset Foreign Affairs and Security Committee, but it fell on deaf ears.

And on Nov. 19, 1984, MK Haika Grossman, chairwoman of the MAPAM Knesset faction, tabled a motion in the Knesset stating, "no sale of military equipment to a foreign power will be carried out if its constitution, laws or actions systematically violate the human rights provisions of the U.N. charter."

In explaining her motion, MK Grossman wrote: "Arms sales...to the apartheid regime in South Africa, and to Latin American nations with despotic regimes, such as the tyrants in El Salvador, the former Somoza regime in Nicaragua, and especially the ruling sect in Guatemala...is liable to undermine our national status and all our diplomatic relations on that continent."

Until now, all her efforts have been in vain.

She remains empty-handed because the Labor Party has refrained from taking a principled position on the issue, despite the damage done to the state of Israel by abandoning arms sales to an independent agency (the Israeli defense industry) which is guided by short-sighted economic considerations, not Israeli diplomacy.

Once, Israel took care to gain friends in Latin America by virtue of its agricultural assistance and development programs; today, her friends belong to the Latin American club of despots who buy Israeli weapons for use against their own citizens.

The dictatorships are not eternal, and perhaps the people of the region will find it difficult to forget Israeli's contribution to extending the life of the dictatorships and prolonging their suffering.

The ouster of the tyrannical Somoza regime in Nicaragua indicates the utter failure of this policy

-- also implemented in Zaire -- by which the future of our diplomatic relations with the Third World is viewed through the barrel of a gun.

SANDINISTA - PLO TIES

The dire effects of this erroneous foreign policy have also been felt on our homefront in the Middle East. A recently published US State Department report entitled "The Sandinistas and Middle Eastern Radicals" enumerates a history of relationships between the Sandinistas and radical Middle Eastern groups which date back to the late 1960s.

Members of the PLO were among the first trained in Cuban and Soviet camps, and upon graduation the PLO guerrillas set up camps of their own for training terrorists, at first in Lebanon and later in Libya.

The State Department report speculates that "among the Nicaraguans trained in the Lebanon camps in 1969 was Tomas Borge, interior minister and one of the nine commanders on the FSLN national directorate." (10)

Also in 1969, an arrangement was negotiated by Sandinista representative Benito Escobar in Mexico City for joint PLO-Cuban training in Lebanon for a contingent of 50-70 Sandinistas. Subsequently, other contingents were sent to PLO camps in Libya. And when the PLO, including the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine, attempted to overthrow the government of King Hussein of Jordan in 1970, PLO-trained Sandinistas participated. From the PLO, the Sandinistas received training in guerrilla warfare and the opportunity to practice their skills by aiding the PLO in terrorist acts.

Shortly after the Sandinistas seized power, they rewarded the PLO for its assistance in their revolution by permitting the PLO to open an "embassy." The PLO ambassador and his staff were accorded full diplomatic privileges. In July, 1980, Yasir Arafat made a four-day "state visit" to Nicaragua to formalize full diplomatic ties.

IS THERE ANTI-SEMITISM IN NICARAGUA?

About two years ago, the Israeli press carried stories about a B'nai Brith Anti-Defamation League (ADL) report which claimed that the Sandinista leadership had anti-Semitic tendencies. Two exiled Nicaraguan Jews who had found refuge in Miami were the initiators. They were rich entrepreneurs who had diverse business connections with the Somoza family.

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10. Center for International Security, "The Sandinista-PLO Axis: A Challenge to the Free World," (Washington, D.C.), February, 1984, p. 2.

They blamed the Sandinistas for the flight of almost all of Nicaragua's Jewish community, which found shelter in the US, for the seizure of Jewish property, and for the confiscation of the Managua synagogue.

The Reagan administration pounced on these claims and publicized them widely. The administration was attempting to gain support for its interventionist policy in Nicaragua, and it was important that it be able to dampen the criticism it was receiving among Jews -- especially in Congress. These charges came at a most convenient time in the effort to convince the Jewish lobby to prop up its propaganda campaign.

The telegram sent on July 16, 1983, by the American ambassador to Nicaragua, Anthony Question, to Secretary of State George Schultz, did not help, even though he made a point of stating:

"There is no evidence to sustain the charges that the Sandinistas conducted an anti-Semitic policy or persecuted Jews because they were Jews. Even though most members of the minute community have left the country, and although a few of them had properties confiscated, there is no connection between their religious affiliation and the treatment they received."

And the Reagan administration preferred to overlook the counter claims made by important Jewish sources.

The Chief Rabbi of Panama, Rabbi Heskiah Klafish, after visiting Nicaragua, reported to the World Jewish Congress that he "did not find any anti-Semitic activity," even though he "felt a clear anti-Israeli sentiment which was always attributed to the sale of Israeli weapons to Somoza."

Rabbi Marshall Meyer, founder of the Latin American Rabbinical Forum in Buenos Aires, and a member of the committee created by President Alfonsin to investigate the "desaparecidos" (missing) in Argentina, also visited Nicaragua. After meeting with Nicaraguan exiles in the US and after investigating the history of the Jewish community in Managua, he stated emphatically: "The Sandinista regime did not carry out an anti-Semitic policy."

The same conclusion was reached by the first Israeli delegation to officially visit Nicaragua since the Sandinista revolution. The delegation, comprised of MAPAM MK Haika Grossman and International Secretary Dr. Avraham Rozenkier, held talks in October 1984 with representatives of the FSLN and members of the ruling junta.

One must remember that there were no more than 50 families at the peak of Nicaragua's Jewish community in 1972, just before the earthquake which destroyed Managua. Most left soon after, finding calmer port in Miami. Those remaining in Nicaragua gradually joined them, as the armed struggle to overthrow Somoza grew in scope.

The majority of the community had come to Nicaragua from Eastern Europe after World War II, the memories of war still fresh in their minds. They preferred to abandon the arena to others. Therefore, most of the Jewish community had found refuge outside of Nicaragua prior to the Sandinista rise to power in 1979.

There is no doubt that the Sandinista regime did not act properly when it converted Managua's empty synagogue into an educational center. In the talks we held with the deputy foreign minister and the deputy justice minister, however, the Sandinistas conveyed their readiness to return the synagogue to the remnants of the Jewish community -- as well as to impartially investigate the claims of unjustified confiscation of Jewish property.

Even so, strong anti-Israeli expressions made by official Nicaraguan representatives are sources of concern -- although it is known that Israel today is painted in dark colors in most of Central America.

The generous financial aid of some Arab countries and the massive PLO presence in Managua, on the one hand, and the Israeli military aid in Central America, on the other, feed the hostility towards Israel. Therefore, relations between the two nations were frozen when the Sandinistas rose to power, and they were broken following the events at Sabra and Shatilla in September, 1982.

There is no justification to the breaking of diplomatic relations between Israel and Nicaragua, as the latter did not take such a drastic step against the United States after it invaded Granada, or after the Reagan administration decided, in fact, to wage a war to overthrow the new regime in Nicaragua.

Even so, this criticism does not change the assessment that there is no anti-Semitism in Nicaragua, and claims of its existence were only intended to help the Reagan administration in its efforts to convince American Jewry to support its Central American policies -- in view of strong Congressional criticism.

This is the time, perhaps, to add a pungent piece of information: there are many Jewish communities in the world from which government ministers have not yet sprouted, but in Nicaragua, with an all but non-existent Jewish community, there is a Jewish minister.

Herty Lewites, the minister of tourism and acting minister of information, is Jewish. His family was lost in the Holocaust and his father, the lone survivor, found refuge in Managua. As we said our farewells in his office, he told us:

"I hope that the ties between MAPAM and the Sandinista front will help bring about an improvement in the relations between our two countries, which are both destined to live freely. For both of us, the absence of liberty means destruction."

CONCLUSIONS

The Nicaraguan government has imposed restrictions on the democratic process, but there is no pattern of torture and government sanctioned murder of political opponents. Furthermore, there is political opposition, free speech, thought and assembly existing in Nicaragua today.

Although opposition unions in Nicaragua have occasionally been harassed, they have been allowed to exist and press their demands. These unions have been free to maintain offices, meet with their members, distribute their publications, conduct workshops and solicit funds. Most significantly, these unions have been allowed to voice their opposition to the Sandinista government without fear of extinction.

The "Contra" forces in Nicaragua are not supported by the vast majority of the Nicaraguan people, and the militarization of the state reduces the chances for a stable, pluralistic society.

The "Contra" army is not a popular insurgency which operates inside Nicaragua with the support of the Nicaraguan population. Instead, it operates from base camps in Honduras and Costa Rica, with no territory held in Nicaragua itself. Not even the opposition unions support a victory by or aid to the "Contras". US President Ronald Reagan thus seems to stand alone in his support of these so-called freedom fighters.

Furthermore, the systematic atrocities committed by the "Contras", the direct economic destruction, and the resultant militarization of the country are also undermining the chances for a stable, democratic society.

US policy towards Nicaragua is an unwise, self-fulfilling prophecy of cold war fears.

The Nicaraguan government desires trade with and aid from western countries. The United States, however, has successfully denied Nicaragua access to Western aid sources, leaving them no alternative but to turn to Eastern bloc suppliers. US policy of aid to the "Contras" has fueled the civil war, polarized the country, caused the government to become more "hardline", and compounded Nicaragua's need for military aid. US policy is thus turning Nicaragua into a pawn in the East-West conflict.

Nicaragua alone remains extremely vulnerable -- it is vital that everything be done to augment the impact of counter-balancing forces -- Europe, the Socialist International, as well as the Contadora group -- to strait-jacket militaristic and interventionist American policy.