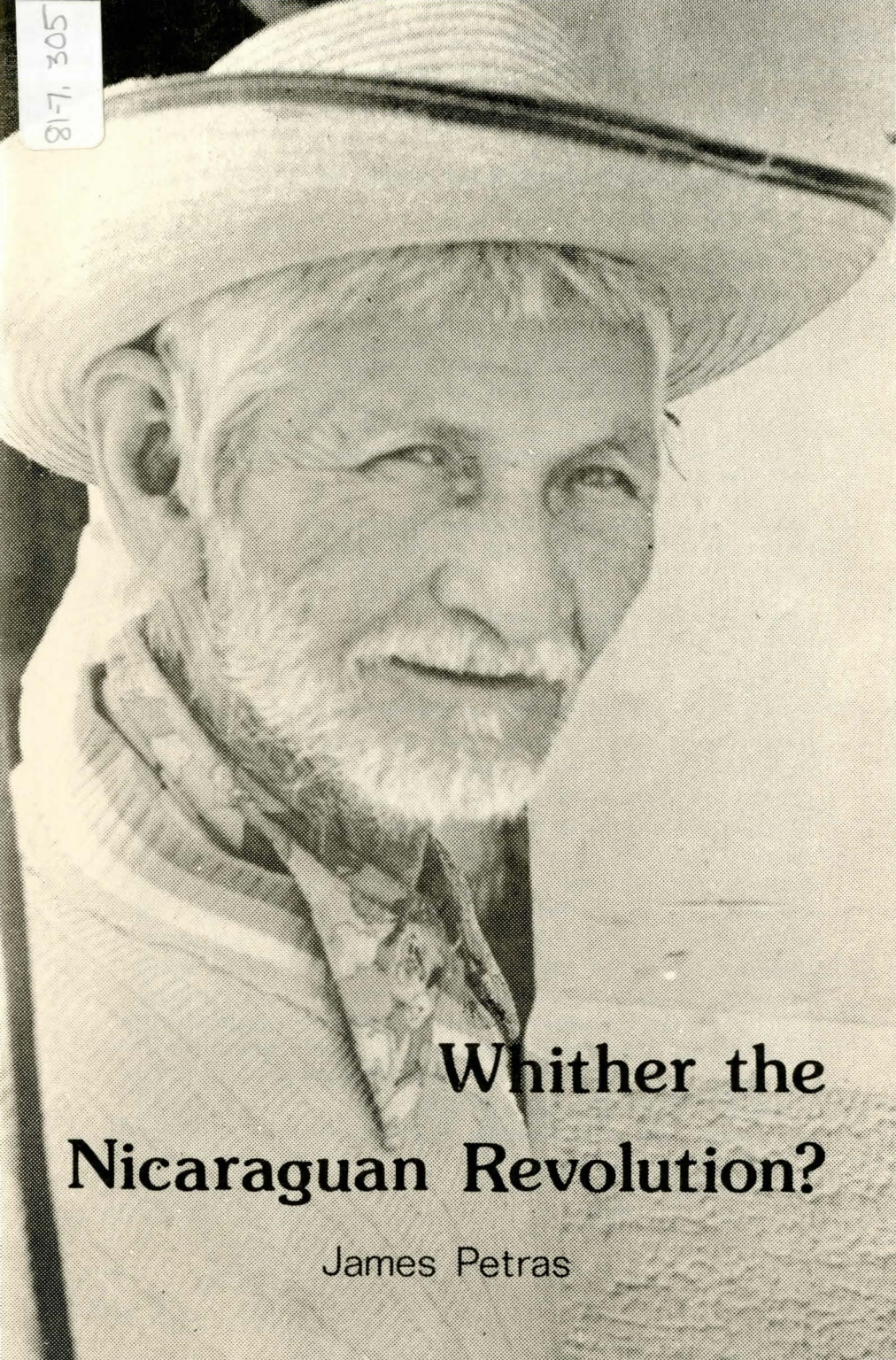

Whither the Nicaraguan Revolution?

James Petras

This article first appeared in Monthly Review magazine, October 1979 and is reprinted by permission. The Afterword was written in April 1980. Subscriptions to Monthly Review are $15 a year from 62 W. 14th St., New York, NY 10011.

Cover: Peasant in Matagalpa, Nicaragua. Photo by Larry Boyd/ Liberation News Service.

WHITHER THE NICARAGUAN REVOLUTION?

By James Petras

James Petras wrote this article after a trip to Costa Rica during the summer, just as the fighting was ending in Nicaragua. He is a frequent contributor to MONTHLY REVIEW and is the author of several MR Press books, the most recent being *Critical Perspectives on Imperialism and Social Class in the Third World*. To help readers follow the text, a glossary of terms used by the author has been provided at the end of the article.
—*The Editors*

> "We want enormously to go out and help, but we find we don't have the opportunity. We're worried that the junta is saying one thing, and the commanders in the field may be going their own way."
>
> Nicaraguan business member of the Superior Council of Private Enterprise (New York Times, July 26, 1979)

The Nicaraguan revolution has great substantive importance for the country and even greater symbolic significance for the continent. For the first time in over 20 years it was demonstrated that a U.S.-armed and -trained military dictatorship could be defeated in a popular armed upheaval. The defeats of the past decade have weighed heavily on all the popular movements: defeats in Chile, Uruguay, Argentina and elsewhere throughout the 1960s and 1970s. Now as we approach the 1980s there is a resurgence of popular democratic mass movements throughout Latin America; among them the Sandinista-led forces have been the most developed and, to date, have made the only successful effort.

Just as the Nicaraguan revolution has had a profound symbolic impact on Latin America, so have many Latin Americans contributed to its victory with their arms and lives. Volunteers

arrived from all over Latin America—from the age of 15 to 40, veterans and novices, militants and idealists—to join the Frente Sandinista de Liberación (FSLN). They came to fight against Somoza—symbol of tyranny, corruption, and wealth, of U.S. training, support, and subservience. These internationalists included Costa Ricans, who had seen the gap between the profession of democracy and the practice of privilege; Chileans, who had suffered the defeat of a revolution without a struggle, at the hands of the military and the United States, and who sought to redeem themselves; Mexicans, who came out of peasant movements and who saw in Nicaragua a chance to relive the struggles of the past, equalizing the odds. There were Guatemalans, Hondurans, Salvadorans, who had suffered the same kind of terror and destruction as the Nicaraguans and saw a chance to even the score, ending the reign of the regional gendarme and hopefully opening a new chapter—the first truly sovereign state in Central America governed by the people, not by oligarchies of a few dozen families. They came from Colombia's occupied universities, from the offices and factories of Venezuela, from the Argentine and Chilean diaspora.

These Latin American revolutionaries built barricades, together with the embattled streetfighters of Managua, Masaya, Estelí, and León—cities made famous throughout the world by the thousands of anonymous militants who took to the streets and defended their *barrios* with rifles against Sherman tanks, and moved from city to city until they captured the last bunker in Managua.

Nothing functioned in Nicaragua without the permission of the FSLN. The workers, having traded their tools for guns, took the decision to struggle to victory or to die. The slogan, "the final struggle, cost what it may," which began as a rhetorical exhortation of a guerrilla band, came to be the living expression of a determined and committed people. Factories were closed (or in ruins); ports and transport were paralyzed; the marketplaces were empty, the stalls burned; the vendors (who had nothing to sell) had, weeks earlier, hidden scores of clandestine guerrillas who were entering the city. Even the prostitutes, wielding knives, advised Somoza's National Guard patrols to keep going.

Overview: The Nicaraguan Revolution

There are several features of the Nicaraguan revolution to be studied that are important to the rest of the Third World, especially Latin America. The writings that focus exclusively on the uniqueness of the Somoza dynasty and its wealth overlook several historical processes that are operating on a world scale, and that found expression in the Nicaraguan revolution. This article will focus on: (1) historical developments that generated the revolutionary upheaval; (2) the nature of the revolutionary process, the changing patterns, configurations of forces, strategies and alliances; and (3) contradictory developments in the transitional period—the relationship between the organisms of popular power, which were instrumental in the insurrectionary phase, and the governing organisms, which emerged largely from exile, and were recruited for the most part from bourgeois and petty bourgeois forces.

Capitalist Development: Autocracy and Revolution

It is important first to deal with several misconceptions about the socio-economic context of the revolutionary struggle. Nicaragua was not a simple "underdeveloped" country, wallowing in stagnation and backwardness. From the 1950s to the mid-1970s, the Nicaraguan economy underwent a period of rapid growth—large-scale commercialization of agriculture and high-powered expansion of industry, services, and finance. While most observers have noted the private wealth and corruption of Somoza, it is not usually pointed out that a portion of that wealth took the form of capital investments. The growth of capitalism was accompanied in part by the proletarianization of some of the peasants in the countryside and the artisans in the city, along with the displacement of others, and their incorporation into a large surplus labor pool which crowded the central cities in each region. The state—the Somoza clan—and foreign capital played a decisive role in implanting capitalism and capitalist social relations. The whole process of rapid growth from above was made possible by the autocratic dictatorship and its "free market" and repressive labor policies—a pattern not unknown to other Latin American countries. This configuration of forces displaced many fractions and sectors of traditional mer-

cantile society, while failing to integrate or provide mechanisms of representation for the new classes generated by the pattern of capitalist development. The very terms for success of the autocratic development-from-above-and-outside model prevented sustained and consequential *democratization*. Rather, the pattern was one of selective and time-bound *liberalization*—modifications of dictatorial policies—followed by widespread and systematic repression. While the competitors for power were largely located within the two capitalist parties (Liberals and Conservatives), and while the adversaries were mostly capitalist competitors, conflict—including armed and mass activity—was largely used as a bargaining weapon to secure a larger share of government revenues (subsidies, credit, etc.), and led to pacts between Somoza and his bourgeois critics. This pattern began to change only with the massive entry on the scene of the FSLN. In fact, parallel to the intransigent opposition of the FSLN, the bourgeois opposition continued to attempt to "deal" with Somoza, the United States, etc., in much the traditional pattern. The only difference was that the results, because they were unsatisfactory from the point of view of the masses, gave further sustenance to the FSLN and ultimately undermined bourgeois control of the mass movement. Hence, the growth of capitalism and intrabourgeois conflicts provided a gloss of "competitive" politics, limited by overwhelming concentration of power in the hands of the autocratic dictatorship and the total subordination of the National Guard to Somoza.

Rapid capitalist growth premised on large labor surpluses, labor discipline (the suppression of strikes, protests, etc.), and both extensive and intensive exploitation provided fertile grounds for social mobilization in the cities and larger agro-industrial complexes. Unlike the early Sandino-led movement, largely based on peasant recruits, the contemporary Nicaraguan revolution is generally rooted in the most urbanized, industrialized areas—the most "advanced" sectors of production and social reproduction. The revolutionary movement contains the most retrograde forces displaced by dynamic state and foreign capitalist development—the small and medium producers—as well as the new industrial working class, middle-sector professionals, employees (from the modern industrial and service sec-

tors), and the large reserves of under- and unemployed semi-proletarianized youth of the cities and countryside—products of the process of uprooting which accompanies capitalist development. Generally the most passive and least rebellious sectors, with some notable exceptions, were to be found in the agricultural areas least affected by commercial-capitalist activity—the isolated villages and communities of the south. The concentration of employed and unemployed workers in cities, the growth of impersonal wage relations instead of payment in kind, and the decline of personal forms of domination and control in the sprawling urban slums fostered antagonistic relations. The autocratic state, prime mover of capitalist growth, emasculated legitimate organs of representation and prevented effective articulation of demands for urban services. The social overhead costs for the reproduction of labor were borne directly and totally by the producers themselves. Hence, the growth of neighborhood organizations, initially active around local and immediate needs, became the vehicle for FSLN mobilizations: only the most radical and determined organizations capable of withstanding the dictatorship could sustain a consequential struggle for incremental gains. The neighborhood became the principal point of organization, the common meeting ground, for employed and unemployed workers, proletarians and semi-proletarians. The target was the state—the dispenser of social services, controller of social expenditures, the critical agent for urban real-estate speculation and slum eradication.

While the economic boom increased the social weight of the working class and employees in the cities, the economic downturns marginalized the bourgeoisie, especially those medium and small owners without access to state credits and subsidies, pushing them closer to bankruptcy and threatening their property-owning status. The crisis and the lack of access to the Somoza-dominated state pushed the marginalized bourgeoisie into opposition. The convergence of workers and sections of the middle class and leading capitalists into a common anti-Somoza, pro-democratic struggle obscures the fundamentally different interests these sectors were pursuing, as well as their differing concepts of the state. For the bourgeoisie and its petty bourgeois political representatives the issue is one of securing

access to the state for the promotion of its class interests—financing, credit, protection, subsidies, contracts—and the rapid demobilization and disarming of the masses in order to create a new state apparatus in a proximate image of itself. For the masses, democracy is the generalization and maintenance of the local organs of popular power—extending them to encompass control of the productive forces to serve neighborhood needs. *The most crucial issue in the post-Somoza period is political not economic: reconstruction by whom and for whom?* The concentration of the insurrectionary struggles in the cities and among the most radicalized working class forces raises the issue of the *socialist* potentialities inherent in the struggle. The uneven nature of capitalist development, its concentration in certain urban/rural areas, finds expression in the uneven development of the revolutionary struggle. The insurrectionary struggle in the cities developed far in advance of the struggle in general: more important, the tempo and tasks of the revolution are not dictated by the *general* level of the productive forces in the *country as a whole,* but by the level of *class struggle* in the *most advanced* areas.

The Nature of the Revolutionary Process

The revolutionary process in Nicaragua was put into motion through a wide array of complementary and combined forms of struggle over a long period of time. Moreover, the revolutionary movement went through several phases, correcting itself, altering its course, dividing and converging for the final assault on the Somoza dictatorship. The central organization responsible for the overthrow of the autocratic regime was unquestionably the FSLN, whose origins and development are rooted in the Nicaraguan revolutionary experience of the 1920s and 1930s and in more recent Latin American history. Several aspects of the FSLN's program are traceable to Sandino: (a) *nationalism* and *anti-imperialism* as a basic tenet of its program—in contrast to other pro-United States oppositionists who presented themselves to the Embassy as "a democratic alternative"; (b) *reliance on mass support* as opposed to efforts, mainly by the bourgeoisie, to organize elite conspiracies and military coups behind the backs of the masses, aiming to sub-

stitute one elite for another; and (c) *development of armed struggle* as the only effective means of overthrowing the Somoza dictatorship (hence rejection of all "negotiations," "pacts," and U.S.-sponsored mediations, which were recognized as ploys to prolong the life of the regime and/or modify it in nonessential ways). Founded in 1961, and heavily influenced by both the *foco* theory of guerrilla warfare and the success of the Cuban Revolution, the FSLN launched a series of military actions designed to detonate popular uprisings. These isolated military actions, led largely by students and members of the professions, were easily put down by the military, who inflicted substantial losses but failed to destroy the organization. With the failure of the *foco* strategy, a complete change in tactics and orientation was introduced and applied beginning in the late 1960s and early 1970s. The decisive shift was toward the organization of mass support in the countryside and cities; the new perspectives envisioned a prolonged, popular war which would combine rural guerrilla activities, constant harassment of the Guard, mass struggle in the cities, immediate struggle on local issues and political demands, legal and illegal organization; these efforts were to culminate in the organization of a general strike, the arming of the masses and a national insurrection. The revolutionary insurrection was seen as a process, not an event. The process leading to the insurrection can be divided into three phases:

1. Accumulation of Forces in Silence: 1970-1974

The FSLN, generally not acting in its own name, engaged in organizing, mobilizing, and agitating in neighborhoods, trade unions, and schools by means of intermediate organizations which projected the basis for the organization of popular power. Through these intermediate organizations, the FSLN began to forge links with the mass movement and establish its legitimacy as a representative of the people. Its presence in everyday struggles for light, water, sewers, combined with its organizational demands for political rights, began to legitimize the FSLN as a national alternative to Somoza. Its participation in the strikes and protests following the 1972 earthquake—when the workday was arbitrarily extended, aid funds were pocketed, and busi-

nessmen displaced—increased its importance, especially among the urban working and middle class.

2. Accumulation of Forces with Offensive Tactics: September 1974-August 1978

On September 22, 1974, the FSLN captured a number of high-level backers of the regime and was able to liberate a substantial number of political prisoners. This action signaled a new turn in the struggle which saw local demands increasingly combined with national political issues: neighborhood issues with attacks on the dictatorial nature of the state; trade-union rights with demands for the freeing of political prisoners. A rising wave of mass protests and demonstrations forced the liberal bourgeoisie to augment its pressure on Somoza. After the assassination of *La Prensa* editor Pedro Joaquín Chamorro in January 1978, the bourgeoisie attempted to channel discontent into a general strike (during which the workers were paid). But the strikes which were begun by the bourgeoisie passed beyond its control; the failure of the bourgeois-led general strike to topple Somoza and its unwillingness to sustain the struggle to the end severely eroded its mass support, and hastened the mass shift toward the FSLN. Throughout this period, both mass organization in the cities and guerrilla harassment in the countryside increased.

3. Accumulation of Forces in Strategic Offensive: September 1978-July 1979

The constant mobilizations, conflict, and repression created the objective conditions for insurrection. Whole neighborhoods and sectors of the city were openly defiant of the regime; the intermediate organizations joined together in the Movimiento Pueblo Unido (MPU) and openly recognized the FSLN as their representative leader, thus converting it from a guerrilla to a mass organization. The Somoza regime became increasingly isolated: the bourgeoisie was organized in the Frente Amplio de Oposición (FAO); the liberal democrats, calling themselves Los Doce (The Twelve), were openly calling for the overthrow of Somoza, the disbanding of the Guard, and a coalition including the FSLN; and the MPU extended its organizational network to virtually the entire country.

While politically vulnerable, Somoza was still militarily strong. The insurrection of September 1978 was partly spontaneous and partly the result of an initiative by a faction of the Sandinistas (the Terceristas, a social democratic wing). A general strike was called by the MPU following the seizure of the Government Palace by the Terceristas and uprisings in Matagalpa, Monimbó, Masaya, León, Chinandega, and the rest of the major cities and towns. The National Guard and Air Force destroyed cities, houses, hospitals, and schools in their attempt to drown the insurrection in blood. They failed. The genocidal repression polarized the whole country *against* Somoza and *for* the FSLN. At that point, the FSLN had to face the problems of: (1) unifying the three forces; (2) organizing and coordinating the insurrections at the national level; (3) attacking strategic areas affecting the regime; (4) dispersing its forces to several fronts; and (5) arming the organized local committees in each city.

The strengths and limitations of the September uprising were analyzed. There were two principal problems: (1) within the FSLN there were several substantially differing conceptions of political-military strategy which impeded a unified action, and (2) the lack of sufficient arms forced the populace to rely on hunting weapons and handguns, on revolvers against tanks. The first problem was resolved by a unification agreement among the Sandinista tendencies, signed in March 1979; the second by a concerted effort to organize and arm popular militias, the Comités de Defensa Civil (CDCs), and the Comités de Defensa de Trabajadores (CDTs) throughout the major cities. The positive results of the September insurrection were to be found in the general recognition of the importance of the masses in military tasks and the centrality of political organization.

These organizational experiences prepared the masses to carry out political-administrative tasks in the May-July 1979 uprising. In regard to tactics the FSLN leadership had come to recognize that the armed forces of the regime had to be engaged outside the population centers prior to the mass insurrection, in order to relieve some of the pressure on the local committees and militia and provide them with an opportunity to

establish themselves. By the beginning of 1979 a new wave of unrest was growing. February brought another uprising in Monimbó (Masaya), continual guerrilla and militia harassment of the Guard, daily barricades and street demonstrations, the takeover of churches, schools, and other buildings. By May the neighborhoods were ready to explode again, but this time the insurrection was organized, the militants were armed, and the FSLN command was unified. Within a month, 20 cities were in the hands of the people. From the beginning of the insurrection, the local committees took charge in León, Estelí, Masaya, Matagalpa—areas of large concentrations of workers, with long traditions of militancy and political struggle; both factors weighed heavily on the level of organization. In León and Masaya, the CDTs were transformed into military organizations, organizing seizures of towns, taking over factories and continuing production. In the rest of the country, the CDCs functioned as politico-administrative and defense units: sustaining defense, distributing food, maintaining sanitary conditions.

The FSLN leadership—especially where the Guerra Popular Prolongada (GPP) and Tendencia Proletaria (TP) factions predominated—envisioned the CDCs and CDTs as playing a major role in all aspects of the insurrectionary effort. The functions of the CDCs have been described as follows: (a) training the masses in all forms of civil defense; (b) creating groups of guards to protect and supply the neighborhoods, preventing the activity of anarchistic groups; (c) creating food and provision outlets; (d) collecting all types of material that could serve to strengthen the barricades; (e) concentrating all materials that could serve for defense against punitive actions by the enemy forces; (f) developing clandestine hospitals and clinics; (g) establishing operational barracks; (h) collecting medicine; (i) orienting the masses in the recovery of food from the regime's supply centers; (j) locating the strategic points through which the enemy might advance; (k) creating linkage and supply groups with the Sandinista military groups fighting in the neighborhoods; and (l) providing information to the militia and military forces about the Guard and other Somoza supporters. As for the CDTs, their objectives were to: (a) obtain control of the principal factories, especially those of a strategic nature, in order to convert them into small war industries;

(b) take hold of any and all objects that could be used as weapons, and distribute them to the combatants; (c) maintain the workers concentrated as a class, linking their revolutionary activity with that of the neighborhood masses; (d) create obstacles in the strategic transport lines, impeding the enemies' movement; (e) gain control of the means of communication; (f) paralyze the public sector and exhort the technicians to provide aid to the combatants; (g) seize the haciendas of the Somozas and their supporters and transform them into refugee centers for noncombatants; and (h) incorporate fighters into the militias or the Sandinista army.

The successful insurrection in all the major cities and eastern Managua reflected the decade-long political-organizational work of the FSLN. Both the formal organizations and the informal networks functioned to bring about complete solidarity between neighborhood residents and combatants, evidenced in the flood of volunteers and militia units, and the saying that every house was a Sandinista fortress.

Though these mass organizations do not have an explicit class character, the bulk of their membership is drawn from the working class, employed and unemployed, and it would clearly be feasible for them to serve as the basis for a new form of popular representation and government. During the insurrection, the inter-community committees coordinated defense throughout the municipality, and they could effectively serve as the instrument for popular control over reconstruction and as an alternative to the bourgeois-dominated Junta, Cabinet, and Council of State.

Several features of the revolutionary struggle need to be stressed because of their importance not only in the Nicaraguan context, but in terms of future revolutionary struggles in the rest of Latin America.

1. Both the guerrilla movement and the mass urban insurrectionary organizations were necessary for the maintenance of each other's struggle. The earlier debates which had counterposed one approach to the other have been surpassed.

2. The urban mass movements through their organized local power were able to destroy the standing army located in their cities. The notion that urban insurrection is an outdated concept has itself been proved to be outdated. What was clearly

in evidence was the high level of political organization, the availability of arms, and the broadest organizational unity.

3. The prolonged nature of the struggle was evidenced in the several stages through which it passed and the concomitant shifts in tactics and strategy. The Nicaraguan experience illustrates the fact that revolution is a process requiring the gradual accumulation of forces, punctuated by decisive actions which focus on the essential weaknesses of the regime and mobilize previously uncommitted forces. The flexibility of the revolutionary leadership, reflected in its recognition of the specificities of the issues and problems facing urban/industrial organizations, was a necessary ingredient in laying the groundwork for mass organization. The fusion of neighborhood and factory struggles, and the dialectical interplay of both, clearly demonstrated the critical importance of combining political action in the neighborhoods and at the work place. The necessity of pursuing both extra-legal and legal struggle provided both the military and the mass organizations that were required to sustain insurrectionary activity. Tactical unity and organizational independence facilitated the maximum application of pressure at critical moments, and at the same time allowed the revolutionary movement to raise the level of struggle beyond immediate issues to broader systemic problems.

4. The insurrectionist activities of the Tercerista faction served to detonate action, while the GPP and TP groups contributed to the building of the mass organizations that sustained the struggle. The *audacity* of the former and the *organizational skills* of the latter were complementary—each requiring the other for the making of a successful revolution.

5. For a time the mass movement was under bourgeois leadership, but it was unable to maintain control once the masses were mobilized. The FSLN displaced the FAO between February and September 1978—a period in which the process increasingly took the form of mass armed struggle. Though displaced, the bourgeoisie have not been eliminated from the scene, and the question remains whether they will be able to retake through political manipulation what the masses have won militarily.

6. The participation of self-directed and organized mass organizations in the uprisings of September 1978 and especially in those of May-June 1979 attests to the fact that the masses are not looking toward a bourgeois-democratic state dominated by notable personalities, but rather are struggling for a regime which allows direct mass participation in the process of transformation.

7. The mass organizations which were instruments of struggle against the dictatorship can also be the instruments for "reconstruction." Even before the arrival of the Junta, the mass organizations took a leading role in the organization of production and distribution, and in the administration of neighborhoods. The CDCs, the CDTs, and the militia were the parallel power before Somoza's fall and could serve the same function with the Junta, *thus ensuring that the revolution continue uninterrupted.*

Contradictions and the Transitional Period: The Government, the Masses, and the Strategy of the United States

The Provisional Government, or Junta, is made up predominantly of personalities from the nonrevolutionary forces, only two of the five members having direct contact with armed insurrectionary movements. Alfonso Robelo represents business groups and collaborated closely with the U.S. effort at mediation with Somoza. Violeta Barrios de Chamorro is the widow of assassinated newspaper editor and former Conservative Party leader Pedro Joaquín Chamorro. Sergio Ramírez, considered a centrist liberal democrat, is a member of Los Doce (The Twelve), which supported the idea of a broad popular anti-Somoza front including the Sandinistas. Daniel Ortega Saavedra, the representative from the FSLN, is associated with the social-democratic Tercerista faction. Moisés Hassán Morales, a member of the MPU, is also an FSLN leader, associated with the revolutionary GPP faction.

A Council of State has been established, with which the Junta shares legislative powers. This organ is made up of 33 members, drawn from the FSLN, the FAO, and business, civic, religious and other bodies. According to my calculations, the left—counting social democrats and other reformers—numbers

15 and the right 18; by a more rigorous definition, the left has 6 representatives, the center 19 and the right 8.

On the evidence of the initial twelve names announced, the Cabinet appears to be overwhelmingly controlled by liberal professionals: five posts went to the liberal-left affiliates of Los Doce, three to conservatives (including the former Somocista hardliner Larios, who was named the Minister of Defense) and three to Sandinista supporters (two of them from the Tercerista faction). The only crucial post held by the left-wing of the FSLN is that of Minister of Interior, to which Tomás Borge (of the GPP faction) was named. Clearly there is a marked discrepancy between the program and composition of the Junta, Cabinet, and State Council and the degree of mobilization, organization, and demands of the masses. While these political bodies waver between the center-left and center-right, the combatants are clearly in a revolutionary mood.

A mixed economy is projected: the former Somoza properties will make up the public sector, there will be a private sector, and another with joint investments. The national army will be made up of Sandinista fighters, "honest" National Guardsmen, and others. Agrarian reform will be based on the expropriation of Somoza-owned plantations and those owned by his supporters; apart from that, only land which is not being cultivated will be expropriated. An independent non-aligned foreign policy is stipulated.

Under these institutional arrangements and with this configuration of forces, the transitional period is likely to be dominated by petty bourgeois democrats supported by the social democratic Tercerista faction of the FSLN, while the left (GPP and TP factions) avoids challenges to power and acts as the loyal opposition. This approach is based on a mechanical stage-theory of revolution which subordinates the mass struggle to the diplomatic needs of "reconstruction" and consolidation of the anti-dictatorial state—in other words the construction of a bourgeois state and society without Somoza.

Nevertheless, this regime will be unable to solve any of the fundamental problems of the masses. On the contrary, in order to curry favor with its outside benefactors, it will have to demobilize the masses, limit change, and demand sacrifices, while

restructuring the old class society—thus provoking mass protest. In these circumstances, the petty bourgeois regime will resort to the old ploy of attacking counter-revolutionary forces of the extreme right and left. But in effect this will be a transitional regime facilitating a drift to the right—in much the same way that the Soares regime in Portugal was used as a means of stopping the revolutionary drift to the left and eventually discarded for an outright rightist regime. After taking several initial radical measures, such as abolishing the institutional legacy of the Somoza regime and nationalizing the banks (emptied by their owners), the regime may well end up by collaborating with imperial financial capital to begin "reconstruction"—mortgaging the revolutionary future in order to cope with the immediate needs of business and of the local treasury. This hypothesis is compatible with past experiences of bourgeois governments elsewhere in Latin America (and even with the behavior of the Nicaraguan bourgeoisie): their opposition, including armed actions, culminated in capitulation to imperialism and its internal representatives. There is no reason to believe that the new democratic and social democratic spokespeople for the mixed-economy will end up any differently.

Independently of the good intentions of the governmental figures, efforts at forming a reform capitalist "mixed economy" have certain objective limits: foreign aid is dependent on the nature and direction of socio-economic change, arms control, demobilization of the masses, and the reconstitution of a bourgeois social order. The capitalist forces in the "mixed economy" depend on finance, imports, credits, investments from abroad—all premised on disarming the masses and creating a new democratic, capitalist state. This perspective has substantial and articulate representation in each of the new political organs established at the top. Only the combative masses are under-represented.

The problem with the left (the GPP and the TP) is that it has imposed limitations on itself which foreclose the option of establishing a regime based on the emerging organs of those local popular-power groups which played such an important role in promoting the revolution. Indeed, one of the great ironies of the insurrectionary war was the fact that Somoza blocked the

advance of the social democratic Tercerista-led columns on the Southern Front, while the GPP, TP, and left-Tercerista groups gained control of all the major cities, thus vastly expanding their influence among the masses, politicizing and organizing the organs of popular power. Yet at this crucial transitional point the left appears to be conceding the leadership of this stage of "reconstruction" to the petty bourgeois democrats, thus missing the historical opportunity to convert mass military support into the means for a socio-economic transformation. Lacking a clear sense of political rulership, they have taken a back seat to the bourgeoisie.

The transitional period is characterized by a shift in the triangular bloc of contending forces. In the past, Somoza was at the apex of the triangle; at the base were (1) the popular bloc and (2) the bourgeois reformists, represented by the coalition known as the FAO. In the post-Somoza period the bourgeois reformists in the Junta and Council of State are at the apex; at the base are (1) the revolutionary left, i.e., the radicalized masses, and (2) the social democrats.

For the bourgeoisie and the petty bourgeoisie, the overthrow of Somoza spelled the end of the revolution—the time for law, order, work, and capitalist reconstruction. For sectors of the left and the radicalized combatants, the overthrow of Somoza was seen as a prelude to creating a new egalitarian participatory society—socialism. While the bourgeois reformers sought Somocismo without Somoza, the bourgeois revolutionaries want capitalism (the mixed variety) without Somocismo, and the social revolutionaries want neither capitalism nor Somocismo.

U.S. Policy in the Transitional Period

U.S. policy in the present, post-Somoza conjuncture is oriented toward strengthening the right, neutralizing the center, and isolating the left. Carter administration policy evolved through several phases, reflecting the changing correlation of forces in Nicaragua, the United States, and Latin America. During the first phase, roughly 1976 to September 1978, the Carter administration criticized and prodded the Somoza regime to liberalize its policies; under pressure from the human

rights groups in the United States, Washington cut off military aid and sought to encourage Somoza to make concessions to the business-conservative opposition. The second phase, from October through December 1978, involved U.S. "mediation" efforts between Somoza and his conservative opponents—essentially a response to the massive uprising of September and the growing radicalization of the population. The purpose was to evolve a scheme to allow Somoza to step down in favor of a conservative-business coalition, while preserving the National Guard and the rest of the coercive apparatus. Phase three, between January and April 1979, saw the United States discontinue pressure on Somoza, apparently believing that the threat of mass insurrection had passed and that the conservative-business opposition was impotent by itself to change the regime: the United States was clearly more concerned with repressing the FSLN than with ousting Somoza. Phase four began with the May-July 1979 insurrection, the popular takeover of almost all major cities and the precipitous victory of the Sandinista forces.

Lacking sufficient internal support for direct intervention, Washington had sought intervention by a joint military expeditionary force from the Organization of American States (OAS) to prevent an FSLN victory, to replace Somoza with a conservative pro-U.S. coalition, and to preserve the military-administrative apparatus of the Somoza regime (Somocismo without Somoza). The OAS vote against the U.S. motion reflected the convergence of ultra-right-wing and liberal interests. For the military regimes, the precedent of a U.S.-initiated intervention against the right-wing Somoza regime carried a potential future threat to their own rule; if it became necessary, someone like Pinochet could reason, U.S. imperialism could replace him with a conservative civilian such as Frei. Thus in the interests of its own self-preservation, the Latin American right invoked the "right of self-determination," even though, ironically, their regimes were products of violations of that very principle. On the other hand, the liberals, social democrats, and nationalists (Panama, Costa Rica, the Andean countries) had developed links with their counterparts within the Nicaraguan Junta and the Tercerista faction, and opposed U.S. intervention as a threat to what they perceived to be an emerging center-left govern-

ment. Their approach was to *channel resources exclusively to the nonrevolutionary anti-Somoza forces engaged in the armed struggle in order to gain hegemony from within.*

Phase five followed the failure of the OAS-direct military attempt. Washington sought to trade off the resignation of Somoza for a coalition regime of far-rightwingers, including the National Guard and members of Somoza's Liberal Party. Utilizing Costa Rica and Venezuela—material supporters and allies of the FSLN—as pressure points, Washington attempted to save the state apparatus by sacrificing its titular head. This approach was to be strengthened by direct U.S. military pressure through troop landings in northern Costa Rica. This policy failed as the FSLN military leadership categorically rejected the plan and forced the Junta to do likewise, while the Costa Rican legislature repudiated its executive's decision and gave the United States 48 hours to clear out.

Phase six: having exhausted all possibilities of excluding the Sandinistas from military victory or of saving the Somoza apparatus, the United States shifted ground and adopted the position of the Latin American liberals and social democrats, pressuring the Junta to choose a predominantly liberal cabinet, including a former Somoza officer as Minister of Defense. In addition, the United States insisted on protecting the National Guard as a potential counter-revolutionary reserve force for the future, and as proof to other client military regimes that Washington maintains concern for their ultimate welfare. The new U.S. policy is oriented toward working through the Junta during this transitional period, using emergency and reconstruction aid to strengthen the conservative-business bloc, and building bridges toward the center. The new power bloc includes substantial parts of the political superstructure (Junta, cabinet, etc.), the United States, and the liberal Latin American states. This bloc will, as a primary objective, move to demobilize and disarm the population, tying foreign aid to what will euphemistically be described as "bringing back order." Every effort will be made to limit the organs of popular power to local, immediate, productionist tasks, while national middle- and long-term political-economic decision-making will be concentrated at the top. Accompanying this attempt to establish the foundations of

a new bourgeois state, every effort will be made to restrict socio-economic changes, especially those initiated from below ("ultra-leftism," as it surely will be called), that do not conform to the pre-ordained plans laid out by the technocrats of the Junta. Special care will be taken to protect U.S. investments (a prerequisite for foreign aid) and all reform efforts will be concentrated on the former Somoza-owned properties, thus deflecting attention from other sources of exploitation. Factories and latifundios seized in the struggle and claimed by conservative businessmen will be returned according to the Junta's Plan of Reconstruction and Development—which at no point refers to classes, let alone class struggle. Finally, every effort will be made to defuse the revolutionary impact of Nicaragua on the rest of Central America—including restrictions on support to popular revolutionary groups. By supporting the Junta and using the aid program to establish linkages with the new administration, Washington hopes to apply "salami tactics"—slicing off supporters, isolating the revolutionary tendency in Sandinismo, and undermining the functioning of the combative committees in the cities controlled by the GPP, TP, and radicalized Terceristas. U.S. policy is biding its time—getting a foothold, keeping up the pressure, and avoiding a precipitous and untimely confrontation with revolutionary Sandinismo, which currently enjoys the widest support among most sectors of the population. In the aftermath of the demise of Somoza and Somocismo, we see a dual structure: a political superstructure largely recruited and oriented by the petty bourgeoisie, and an amorphous mass base fresh from a revolutionary upheaval. What is not evident is any clear indication that this potential cleavage will lead anywhere, as there is a clear absence among the left Sandinistas of any effort to organize and centralize local popular-power committees at the national level. Confrontations between the bourgeois superstructure and the militants could emerge over issues such as "order" and disarming the popular committees; over the devolution of occupied property;* or over the question

* During the armed struggle many firms were taken over by the workers after the owners fled. The provisional government apparently has plans to return many of these plants to those previous owners who had not been Somoza collaborators.

of whose authority is to be obeyed—the committees, the Junta, or the FSLN, assuming that the latter eventually separates itself from some of the liberal-democratic positions.

Herein lies the most difficult question: Which way will Sandinismo turn, now that its unifying anti-Somocismo theme is gone? Will the FSLN transform itself into a party? Can it sustain its unity or will it break up along with the new societal polarization? And if it becomes a party and remains cohesive, can it convert military to political power, local popular rule to national rule, a political to a social revolution?

Conclusion

Bourgeois writers and spokespeople emphasize the destruction, the economic losses, the costs, and the need to seek capitalist support for reconstruction, development, and so on, minimizing the tremendous creative efforts that have emerged internally from the struggle and given birth to popular mass organizations, which, in addition to carrying out the bulk of the fighting, also organized neighborhoods, production, distribution, etc. They are now relegated to the "war period," to be set aside in the new stage of reconstruction, where the demands of financial support require capital collaboration and the demobilization of these "destabilizing" organs of mass struggle. Some of the left sees a need to link the mass organizations that made possible the military victory with the necessary tasks of reconstruction, through continuous mobilization of the masses and by deepening and extending the revolutionary process from city to national levels, from politico-military to socio-economic tasks. Such an enterprise requires the organization of a new government that *grows up from below.*

The political future of Nicaragua will be determined by the relationship between the mass organizations, product of the revolutionary war, and the bourgeois Junta and its external allies, who are setting their sights on consolidation of their current position; between policies derived from a vision of a liberal political economy and those rooted in the class demands of the masses; between a U.S. government intent on strengthening local and international capital and the forces on the left that are seeking to continue the revolution uninterruptedly. Within

the FSLN, the burning question is: What class content will define the rather ambiguous Sandinista formula? Will it be bourgeois nationalist or proletarian socialist? This will depend largely on whether the left itself is clear in moving the masses toward a social revolution.

GLOSSARY

CDC: Comité de Defensa Civil; Civil Defense Committee. Mass organization established throughout the liberated cities during the final insurrectionary phase, to organize civilian defense against mortar and bombing attacks and to aid in the distribution of food and medicine, as well as to provide support to the military fighters.

CDT: Comité de Defensa de Trabajadores; Workers Defense Committee. Committees of workers formed in the liberated areas during the final insurrectionary period to provide military supplies and to organize and recruit military forces from the industrial proletariat.

FAO: Frente Amplio de Oposición; Broad Opposition Front. An anti-Somoza organization controlled and directed by the bourgeoisie; it included businessmen, center-right political parties, and one faction of the pro-Moscow Communist Party. Its policy was generally to collaborate with the United States in ejecting Somoza and preventing a Sandinista military victory.

Foco theory: The notion that military action by guerrilla detachments would generate mass support and ignite a revolutionary uprising. Its main exponent was Régis Debray in *Revolution in the Revolution?*

FSLN: Frente Sandinista de Liberación Nacional; Sandinista Front of National Liberation. The revolutionary organization that organized and led the anti-Somoza struggle. Named for Augusto Sandino (see below).

GPP: Guerra Popular Prolongada: Prolonged Popular War faction of the FSLN. Oldest of the three factions, it was oriented toward rural guerrilla warfare and a war of attrition. Cautious and critical of strategic alliances with bourgeois forces, it has been a strong supporter of the Cuban Revolution.

La Prensa: The leading democratic, capitalist, anti-Somoza newspaper. It was edited by Pedro Joaquín Chamorro until his assassination on Somoza's orders, on January 10, 1978.

Los Doce: The Twelve. A group of notables—clergy, businessmen, and professionals—who opposed Somoza and advocated the replacement of Somoza by a coalition government including the Sandinistas.

MPU: Movimiento Pueblo Unido; United People's Movement. Founded in April 1978 as a coalition of trade unions, and women's, student, and neighborhood organizations in a nationalist, anti-Somoza front.

National Guard: The main military force supporting the Somoza dictatorship; organized by the United States during its intervention in Nicaragua in the 1930s and maintained by Somoza as his personal protectors.

Provisional Government: The regime now governing Nicaragua pending free elections. A coalition including liberal businessmen, social democratic intellectuals, and guerrilla leaders.

Sandino, Augusto: Leader of a guerrilla army which successfully resisted U.S. occupation between 1927-1933; assassinated by Anastasio Somoza Garcia, the father of the recently deposed Anastasio Somoza Debayle, in 1934.

Tercerista faction of the FSLN: "Third Force." Supported alliances with the bourgeoisie and focused on the immediate organization of urban insurrectionary activity. It is reported to have strong ties with the socialist parties of Europe and with the social democrats of Central and South America. Organized in 1975, it has substantial support and more financial resources than the other factions.

TP: Tendencia Proletaria; Proletarian Tendency, faction of the FSLN. Smallest of the three tendencies, oriented toward organizing the working class, proposes political organization as the basis for insurrectionary struggle. Critical of alliances with the bourgeoisie and of precipitous insurrectionary activity.

Afterword, April 1980

The Nicaraguan revolution led to an historic change—the smashing of the old political regime and the destruction of the military, bureaucratic, and police apparatus linked to the family-anchored class domination. The process of creating a new political order is proceeding apace, through the simultaneous building of a network of mass organizations covering every aspect of economic and social life. The previous crisis of rulership is being resolved through the proliferation of forms of direct representation at the point of habitation and production and by the growth of a military force linked to the mass organizations. Direct representation is manifested in the creation of a number of mass organizations. The Sandanista Popular Militias are under the leadership of Eden Pastore, Vice-Minister of Defense. On December 20, 1979, the Rural Workers' Association (ATC) had its first meeting, drawing representatives from 14 departments (administrative units equivalent to a province). The Sandanista Defense Committees (CDS) are organized on a neighborhood basis and centralized on a regional and national level. The Nicaraguan Women's Association ("Luisa Amanda Espinoza") and Sandanista Youth (JS) have thousands of members. The Sandanista Trade Union Center has organized 360

trade unions throughout the country, has more than 100,000 members, and is the biggest and fastest growing union center in the country. These organizations can serve as the foundations for a new form of rulership, one in which the rulers are directly linked to and responsible to the producers in the country.

In the economic sphere, the revolution has substantially modified the scope and pattern of capitalist production, though without fundamentally altering the ownership of production. The greatest changes have occurred in agriculture where expropriation of the plantations of the Somoza group has given the Sandanista government 55 percent of all cultivable land, most of which will be operated as collective farms. In addition, the government has nationalized insurance companies, foreign trade, domestic banks and foreign mining companies–in total, some 240 companies owned by the Somoza group. Despite these substantial changes, the private sector accounts for 60 percent of the GNP, 75 percent of the manufacturing sector, and 45 percent of the cultivable land. In addition, the government has agreed to pay almost all the loans and financial obligations of the Somoza regime–1.6 billion dollars–including the 490 million dollar debt to foreign private banks.

The revolutionary process cannot be considered independently of the conditions in the country and its position in the world economy. While the productive forces were developed under the Triumverate (military, kin-corporation, multinational corporations), the crises and revolutionary class struggle which ensued led to the destruction, largely by the ruling class, of the main productive forces. Five major cities were razed in large part, 70 percent of industry was destroyed or damaged, one-fifth of the population was on the verge of starvation and one-third or more were unemployed, the principal export crop (cotton) was not planted, and only 3.5 million dollars was left in the Treasury.

The government's response has been to combine mass organization with the promotion of state and private capitalist growth. The mass literacy campaign, promotion of health care and recreation centers for the masses, a 50 percent reduction in rents, etc., have been accompanied by the government's willingness to accept foreign financing to rejuvenate the private sector. Thus, while the mass movement and the working class have representatives, their political hegemony over society is anchored in their political organiza-

tion and not in their control and ownership of the means of production. The domestic capitalist class's major organization, COSEP (Consejo Superior de Empresa Privida), has demanded greater political representation for itself, limits on the role of the mass organizations, private control over television, and less government support for trade union demands. These positions were denounced by the Sandanista Union Center, which characterized them as counter-revolutionary. Thus the pre-Somoza class struggle continues and deepens under new circumstances. The bulk of domestic capital, claiming a lack of proper guarantees, has been holding most of its funds in foreign accounts rather than making the kind of major investments necessary for reconstruction. Thus while the social order has been modified, the remaining social hierarchy contains within it a new polarization of forces. U.S. financial assistance is specifically directed toward funding the private sector: of an 85 million dollar loan, 75 percent is directed toward financing private capital. The willingness of the foreign banks to contribute reflects their desire to consolidate a socio-economic base in the society. The scarce internal resources, the tremendous destruction of productive forces, and the dependent position of Nicaragua in the world market have apparently dictated that it pursue a "pragmatic policy"—a process of gradual socialization over a prolonged period. The economic model of export economy based on kin-corporate power is being replaced by a modified class/state financial capital approach in which state capital is to predominate and private capital play a "subordinate" role.

Obviously, the revolutionary process is very new and still unfolding, and it is not easy to decipher where these "transitional" policies or institutions are leading. It is hazardous to make any definitive statement on the outcome or to make any categorical judgements on the specific policies pursued at this given moment. The best we can do is to examine the historical direction and the probable problems and contradictions in the context of the multiple crises that confront not only Nicaragua but the region as a whole.

The Nicaraguan revolutionary leadership defines its immediate task as one of reconstruction of the productive basis of society. In this line, its emphasis is on raising productivity and extending or creating new social services (educational, health, and recreational facilities). Political mobilization is as much to provide social discipline for work as it is to promote political consciousness.

The question becomes how far can the process of political mobilization proceed without affecting the prerogatives of the property-owning classes? Conversely, how far can license be granted to foreign and domestic capital without eroding the ethos of class solidarity and the loyalties to the regime? The tension between the policy of concession to capital and political mobilization will become acute if this policy is only a tactical measure adapted to the exigencies of reconstruction. If, however, this policy becomes a strategic orientation then the new revolutionary regime will preside over the reproduction of a new capitalist order in which kin-capitalism will simply give way to a more diversified capitalist class. The bourgeois ideology of equal opportunity will replace the revolutionary socialist belief in equality of condition. Mass organizations will be transformed, as they were in Mexico and Bolivia, into bureaucratic appendages of the state. The consequence of long-term linkages to foreign and domestic private capital has been to subordinate the state sector to the private and for private entrepreneurs to coopt revolutionary state functionaries.

The alternative path is for the mass organizations, with greater or lesser speed, to eventually nationalize and expropriate the private sector and through common ownership create a new social order. The mass political institutions would thus be anchored to collective ownership. This process would polarize not only the domestic property classes, but—more important—their outside benefactors, who could be expected to cut back sharply on their loans. This internationalization of the conflict, in turn, would likely force the regime toward greater self-reliance and/or encourage alliances with kindred movements in the region. The transformation of the social order and the breaking off of external links to dependence would hence contribute to the forging of a new internally oriented economic model. The historic break which began with the transformation of political rulership would then have been consummated in a socialist revolution. But we are a long way from that as yet, and there are many hurdles and dangers along the way. The results of trying to harness private investment to mass organization are far from certain.

—James Petras

Published by
New England Free Press
60 Union Square
Somerville, Mass. 02143

Write for free catalogue of
radical literature.