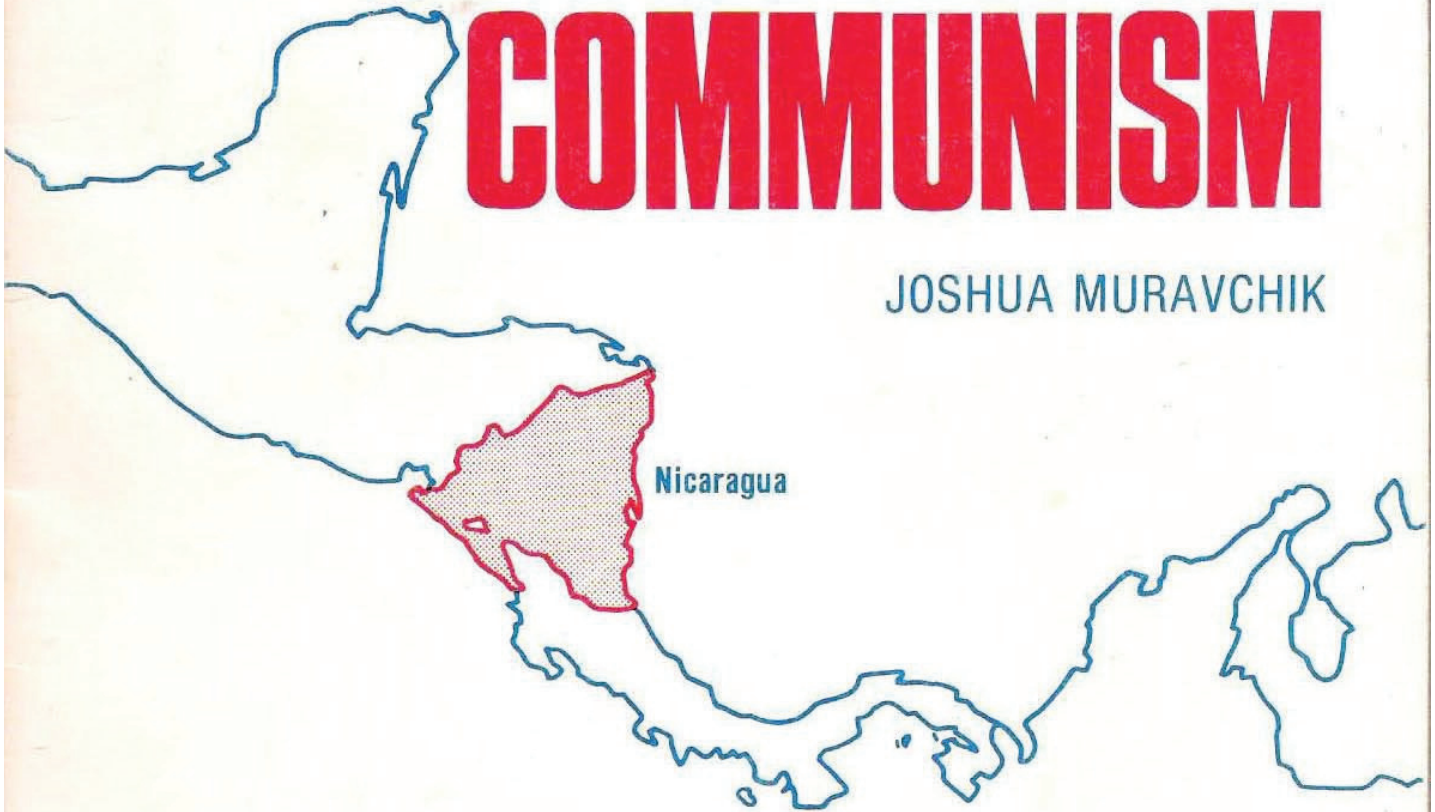


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NICARAGUA'S SLOW MARCH TO COMMUNISM

JOSHUA MURAVCHIK



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By Joshua Muravchik

The Cuban American National Foundation

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Joshua Muravchik

**NICARAGUA'S SLOW MARCH TO
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THE vexing dilemmas that confront U.S. policy toward Nicaragua have been needlessly exacerbated by a confused debate over what is really going on there. The confusion has been assiduously encouraged by Nicaragua's Sandinista rulers, and has been compounded by the tendency of all sides here to define Nicaraguan reality in a way that bolsters their own preferred policy choices.

By calling Nicaragua "Communist" and "totalitarian" President Reagan has set up a straw man that critics of his Central America policies have hastened to knock down. The President is guilty of exaggeration, but the critics who argue that Nicaragua may turn out like Mexico—a relatively open, pluralistic society, albeit dominated by one party—or that, as one former National Security Adviser to a U.S. president wrote recently, there is no way "to make a firm prediction" about how Sandinista Nicaragua will evolve are averting their eyes from a mound of evidence that leaves little doubt where Nicaragua is heading.

Nicaragua is not now a Communist country, unless that term is stretched beyond its usual meaning. What other Communist country has legal opposition political parties fiercely opposed to the regime; an independent, albeit censored, newspaper; an independent human rights organization that chronicles, as best it can, the regime's abuses; independent labor and business organizations; freedom of emigration; an economy roughly half of which is privately owned; and unfair elections in which, however, the ruling party claimed only two-thirds, not 99 percent, of the vote? No amount of stretching will make the term "totalitarian" fit this reality without losing the very kernel of the idea of the total state. On the other hand, Nicaragua is a country ruled by Communists, and solely by Communists, whose unanimous and unswerving goal is to turn it into a totalitarian state. They are, however, proceeding slowly and carefully, ever

mindful of the history of U.S. intervention in their country, and possessed of an image of "U.S. imperialism" that makes a new invasion seem more likely to them than it does to most Americans.

The Sandinistas' approach, therefore, is to be, as Commandante Henry Ruiz, one of the nine members of the Sandinista National Directorate, put it: "tactically flexible, but strategically intransigent." The policy of tactical flexibility has guided the FSLN since 1977 and has been the key to their success.

"THE SACRED CAUSE"

For more than fifteen years before that, the Sandinista Front, a tiny splinter from the Nicaraguan Socialist Party (the name of Nicaragua's official Moscow-oriented Communist party), had experienced almost nothing but failure. Then, an internal dispute resulted in the ascendance of the "tercerista" faction, led by the brothers Daniel and Humberto Ortega.

The other two factions believed in slowly amassing FSLN cadres until the movement would be strong enough to attempt a pure socialist revolution, that is, a grasp for power on its own. The *terceristas* proposed instead a popular front strategy aimed at the immediate overthrow of Somoza, followed by a struggle to turn the revolution toward socialism.

In 1977, although factional divisions remained, the FSLN as a whole embraced the "insurreccional" strategy advocated by the *terceristas*, issuing a fifteen-thousand-word program, titled, "On the General Political-Military Platform of Struggle of the Sandinista Front for National Liberation for the Triumph of the Sandinista Popular Revolution." The platform called for the overthrow of Somoza and creation of a "revolutionary democratic state" which would "assure the structural and superstructural bases for the revolutionary process towards socialism." It explained that "strategic and tactical factors—both national and international—do not allow for the formulation of socialism in an open way in this stage." And it emphasized that, "The present revolutionary movement do everything to avoid a new foreign intervention."

The Sandinistas moved quickly to implement the new program, launching ever more daring military actions aimed at igniting popular insurrection, while at the same time seeking to forge alliances with other anti-Somoza elements whom the Sandinistas had previously held in open disdain. In retrospect, the Sandinistas have repeatedly acknowledged when speaking among themselves that the main goal of the alliances was to avert U.S. intervention. Two months after Somoza's ouster, the first ever meeting of the FSLN Assembly, a body of the top 100 cadres, was convened in Managua. The report presented to that body by the FSLN National Directorate explained that in 1979 "the alliance [with bourgeois and liberal anti-Somoza forces] that took the form of the National Reconstruction Government, the cabinet and, to a major extent, the FSLN's basic program . . . was designed to neutralize Yankee interventionist policies."

In his closed-door speech to the Nicaraguan Socialist Party in May 1984, Commandante Bayardo Arce explained that it was the U.S. proposal in June 1979 for OAS intervention in Nicaragua that inspired the Sandinistas to announce their "program of national reconstruction" based on the principles of non-alignment, mixed economy, and political pluralism, "three principles which made us presentable in the international context," he said, and which "kept the international community from going along with American policy."

Western observers often took the Sandinistas' newfound tactical flexibility as a sign of "moderation" and many even inferred that Sandinista ideology was not Communist but rather some form of nationalistic democratic socialism. The Sandinistas diligently cultivated such interpretations. Daniel Ortega disingenuously complained to the *New York Times* that U.S. opposition to the Sandinistas showed that "Washington accepts social democracy in Western Europe, but not in Latin America." Tomas Borge told a press conference in 1978 that "We have some Marxists with us but the Frente is much wider." On the whole, he said, "We are neither Marxist nor liberal; we are Sandinistas." Sergio Ramirez, in his role as member of the original junta of reconstruction, proclaimed the revolution's goals to be: "no right, no left, just Nicaragua." In numerous private conversations with western reporters, Sandinista leaders reiterated these themes.

Sandinista efforts to project an image acceptable to the West were further strengthened by the emergence of Eden Pastora as the most visible guerrilla leader after he led the daring commando raid that succeeded in seizing the National Palace in the summer of 1978. Pastora obviously relished his sudden celebrity and spoke willingly to reporters, expressing his genuine democratic convictions. The FSLN high command was content to let Pastora serve as the movement's public face, while never giving him a seat on its ruling body, the National Directorate.

These image-building efforts bore fruit. In 1978 the *Washington Post* characterized the FSLN as "hazy in ideology." The *New York Times* called it "politically ill-defined." ABC's Peter Jennings said the Sandinistas final offensive of summer 1979 "has a single aim: the removal of President Somoza." And syndicated columnist Jack Anderson devoted a series to the Sandinistas based on first-hand reporting by one of his assistants. Anderson said: "Left-wing influence on the Sandinistas is minimal. Of the three main guerrilla groups [i.e., factions] that make up the rebel camp, the only avowedly leftist group . . . appears to have little or no influence."

Western journalists who insistently perceived "moderates" among the Sandinistas were the victims not only of Sandinista deception, but also of their own wishful thinking, as was suggested by their reaction to the announcement on the eve of Somoza's overthrow that Commandante Tomas Borge would hold the Interior Ministry folio in the incoming revolutionary government. The Ortega-led *terceristas* had been described often during the preceding two years as "moderates" in contrast precisely to the likes of Borge. But the same journalists

now found nothing ominous in Borge's appointment. On the contrary, the *New York Times* observed that in his new post, "Mr. Borge should be in a position to control the most radical elements among the rebels;" while the *Washington Post* quoted approvingly anonymous "political analysts" who said that "as director of police functions [Borge] will be in a better position to keep mavericks from his faction in line." In short, it was Borge who was now perceived as the moderate.

In reality, divisions among the Sandinistas have arisen over issues of strategy, and sometimes personality, but never over the question of "moderation" versus "radicalism," a dichotomy that has meaning in U.S. politics, but little in the explicitly Marxist-Leninist politics of the Sandinistas. There, it has no more importance than the fact that Stalin was a "moderate" compared to the "radicalism" of Trotsky. Moises Hassan, widely described in 1979 as the most radical of the three Sandinista members of the revolutionary junta, and even as its only true "Communist," has since suffered two demotions in Sandinista ranks apparently for taking too seriously the rhetorical ideals of the revolution.

Ironically, although it was the triumph of the *tercerista* line within the FSLN that was so instrumental in persuading American reporters that the Sandinistas were not mere Communists, the very 1977 platform that embodied the *tercerista* triumph was so chock-full of unmistakable Communist formulas as to leave no reasonable doubt about the ideology of its authors. It explained that: "The dialectical development of human society leads to the transformation from capitalism to communism." It declared that: "Our cause . . . is the sacred cause of Marx, Engels, Lenin and Sandino." It foretold that after the fall of Somoza, "our present-day Marxist-Leninist vanguard will be able to fully develop its organic structure and become a strong Leninist party." Where it spoke of the "revolutionary democratic" phase of development it hastened to add that this did not mean "bourgeois" democracy. It even went so far, in one piece of historical review, as to explain that in the 1930s, "The glorious Russian revolution was in a process of consolidation and combat against counter-revolutionary terror within its own country," as if the Sandinista authors had been weaned on Stalin's version and hadn't yet caught up with Khrushchev's emendations.

Far from harboring any democratic affinities, the Sandinistas positively feared democratization in Nicaragua, for they realized that the existence of Somoza as their foil offered the best hope for the kind of polarization which was essential for their seizure of power. Thus, Humberto Ortega has since explained that the FSLN renewed its military offensive in 1977 precisely in order to try to "prevent such maneuvers" as a "democratization plan" which it feared the Yankees would press upon Somoza. Tomas Borge has said much the same thing. And Jaime Wheelock has explained that the FSLN joined the Broad Opposition Front in 1978 in order "to prevent sections of the bourgeoisie and the petty bourgeoisie from . . . convert[ing] themselves into an alternative to Somoza for imperialism."

Perhaps the clearest indication of all of the anti-democratic ideology of the FSLN was its own internal structure and self-conception. The 1977 Platform declared: "The task at hand is to make the Sandinista struggle massive without massifying the FSLN. . . . Because of our vanguard's enormous prestige, all the people who are connected to it in some way consider themselves militants of the FSLN. This is exceedingly important and must not be discounted. However, we must be aware that those who are not incorporated into the vanguard structure, although they may feel part of it, do not take on the responsibilities, duties, rights, etc. of actual vanguard militants. In time, the people will begin to understand the difference between the vanguard and the masses. . . ."

"WE HAVE A PROJECT"

The Sandinistas anticipated that when Somoza was overthrown they would have next to wage a bitter power struggle with their "bourgeois democratic" allies, an alliance the FSLN platform had called "tactical and temporary." It was true that other important anti-Somoza leaders were indeed wary of the Sandinistas, but the idea of the bourgeoisie as a self-conscious political force bent on holding power was a Marxist fantasy. Nine months after the revolutionary junta took office, its two "bourgeois" representatives resigned in disillusionment. One, Violetta Chamorro, insisted disingenuously that she resigned only for reasons of health, citing a fractured bone in her foot. The other, Alfonso Robelo, founded the Social Democratic Party. This was hardly the behavior of a class-conscious bourgeoisie.

Thus, when Somoza fell, the Sandinistas were somewhat surprised to discover the extent of their own dominance. As the movement's leadership explained to the Sandinista Assembly two months after Somoza's ouster: "Sandinism represents the sole domestic force. . . . Our failure to exercise full power has been more pro forma and quantitative than real and qualitative."

Had the Sandinistas been willing to live with the moderate program of the junta that they themselves had helped to write, their pride of place in the broad coalition that had toppled Somoza and in any revolutionary government would have been secure. This would have been assured not only by their military strength but because virtually everyone in Nicaragua recognized their leadership of the anti-Somoza rebellion and admired their courage and self-sacrifice.

But to be the leaders of a coalition government with moderate goals, to wield power only within limits, was not for them. As their leaders put it many times in that period: "we have a project." That project was to remake Nicaraguan society according to their particular conception of socialism.

What made the "project" especially difficult is that the FSLN was so small. In their penultimate offensive of September 1978, the Sandinistas had thrown 150 fighters into the battle, according to Humberto Ortega, their chief military commander. That was almost certainly the bulk of their membership. Hundreds,

perhaps a few thousand, flocked to fight under the Sandinista banner during the ensuing months, but though welcomed as combatants, few were accepted as members. On the morrow of the victory a great many Nicaraguans were eager to become Sandinistas or already considered themselves such, but the Sandinistas stuck to the platform's dictum not to "massify" the movement, and to guard its ideological purity. They judged rightly that to admit all who wished to join would be to run the risk of seeing "the project" undermined from within. Prospective members were required to undergo a long period of indoctrination and numerous tests of their loyalty and other capacities.

The small size of the FSLN did not constitute an immediate threat to the Sandinistas' grip on power, but it was a formidable obstacle to their ability to govern effectively, all the more to their plans for remolding society. Other revolutionary groups in similar straits have relied on raw terror in order to cow a population into submission. But this option was closed to them by their fear that unleashing a bloodbath would invite U.S. intervention.

The Sandinistas have coped with this dilemmas in two ways. One is to import large numbers of cadres from Communist countries, especially Cuba. The other is to extend the tentacles of social control from the bottom up, reaching Nicaraguans where they live, work, study, and shop, while leaving in place the most visible symbols of opposition and "pluralism" so as not to enrage the beast to the north.

The U.S. government estimates that there are 7,500 Cubans stationed in Nicaragua, of whom about 3,000 are assigned to the military and security services, as well as several hundred Russians and East Europeans and several score Libyans and PLO. Cuban military personnel serve with each unit of the Nicaraguan army from the company level up. In the security services, Cubans are reported to have charge of the unit providing personal bodyguards to the commandantes, and provide guidance in all fields, except "high tech" intelligence methods for which East Germans are preferred. In one case, and perhaps more, a Cuban has been given Nicaraguan citizenship and been made one of the official chiefs of Nicaraguan intelligence. Bulgarians serve in the Ministry of Planning as the chief economic advisers.

Non-communist governments that offered to send personnel to Nicaragua were rebuffed by the Sandinistas. This included not only the United States, which offered Peace Corps volunteers, but also Costa Rica which offered teachers and Panama which offered military advisors. These two governments were rebuffed despite the fact that they provided critical assistance to the FSLN in its war against Somoza, including the transshipment and "laundering" of the Cuban-supplied weapons on which the revolution depended.

This is only one piece of a vast amount of evidence that refutes the Sandinistas' claim to be "nonaligned," as well as the argument of some western observers that they are aligned only ambiguously or reluctantly. Six weeks after the FSLN came to power, Daniel Ortega represented Nicaragua at the sixth

summit of the nonaligned countries where he lined up firmly with Cuba in the effort to bring the nonaligned movement into open embrace of the Soviet bloc, a move resisted primarily by President Tito and other leftist governments not in the Soviet orbit.

Six months later a Sandinista delegation to the Soviet Union signed a party-to-party accord between the FSLN and the Soviet Communist Party and issued a joint communique that closely tracked Soviet policy, including a denunciation of "the campaign by imperialist and reactionary forces . . . [to] stifle the inalienable right of the people of . . . Afghanistan . . . to follow the road of progressive change." This came at a time when Nicaragua was receiving more aid from the United States than from the Eastern bloc.

Wallace Spaulding pointed out in *Problems of Communism* in 1982 that the FSLN had replaced the traditional Nicaraguan Communists (the Socialist Party of Nicaragua) as the sole representative of Nicaragua at the congresses of foreign Communist Parties, notably including those of the Warsaw Pact. This practice appears to have begun from the time the FSLN took power and continues to today, and applies also to international Communist gatherings.

Each time a Soviet head of government has died, the FSLN has declared three days of mourning. Banner headlines proclaimed Brezhnev "Glorious Son of the Working Class;" Sandinista TV described Chernenko as a "great statesman and untiring fighter for the cause of world peace and solidarity;" and Andropov's death was officially grieved as a "loss . . . to mankind" Deaths are not the only occasions for such effusions. The 65th anniversary of the Red Army was commemorated by this message from Humberto Ortega to Defense Minister Ustinov: "We know that the USSR Armed Forces shall always guarantee the policy of peace pursued in the world by your government, your party, and your people."

Nicaraguan bookstores and newsstands are filled with publications from the USSR and other Communist countries. American publications are hard to come by, and the works of Trotsky cannot be found. Sandinista television features such fare as long serialized sagas of the heroic struggles of Cuban soldiers in Africa. When General Jaruzelski's government instituted martial law in Poland, the FSLN instructed all of its media "to publish only those facts that have been confirmed by TASS And by the Cuban Prensa Latina News Service." When a delegation from Solidarity traveled to the Americas, they were denied entry into Nicaragua.

Seven to eight thousand foreign "advisers" does not seem a vast number in a developing country of two and a half million population, but measured against the FSLN's own cadre it is a formidable force. When it came to power, the FSLN comprised only several hundred full members, or "militants." Since then the Sandinistas have hastened to expand the party. Estimates of its current size range from a few thousand to twelve or thirteen thousand, with most estimates falling in the middle of this range, or roughly the same as the number of foreign

personnel. But the FSLN leaders must have doubts about the quality and loyalty of the new members generated through their rapid expansion. They must know that such individuals are more likely to be opportunists than ideologues, a situation perhaps entirely congenial to a well entrenched party like that of the Soviet Union, but not at all satisfactory to a party still trying to solidify its grip on society. The Cuban and East European advisers, on the other hand, are completely reliable, if only because they are firmly subject to their own governments.

CLOSING THE RING

The process of building the party is itself one of the important mechanisms of social control. The party is highly hierarchical. Categories of membership begin with "aspirant" and go up through pre-militant, militant, cadre, member of the Sandinista Assembly, to member of the National Directorate. At each level, promotion is by cooptation. A member may not even apply for elevation to the next category. He must simply wait until he is raised up, a procedure that involves the assent of his neighborhood Sandinista Defense Committee and the party Base Committee at his place of employment, as well as clearance by State Security, recommendation by some higher ranking party members, and final approval by a committee governing elevations to the rank in question. All of this occurs without the candidate's being notified of his prospective elevation.

The effect of this system is that while every citizen is encouraged to belong to the Base Committee at his job or school, those who want to get ahead in revolutionary Nicaragua must strive to get themselves noticed by party superiors. To achieve this they are encouraged to demonstrate their exemplary obedience and to help enforce the obedience of their fellows. They must also prove their earnestness by attending party meetings and classes and by volunteering for the militia and for other activities such as unpaid work brigades that help harvest cash crops or "turbas," the government-organized "mobs" that assault and intimidate dissidents.

In addition, those hoping to advance must take part actively in the neighborhood Sandinista Defense Committee (CDS). The most important work of these is "revolutionary vigilance," a kind of night watch duty aimed less at preventing crime or counterrevolutionary activity than at generating anomie by reminding citizens that they are always being observed.

The CDS observes who comes and goes, who complains too demonstratively, who is active in church, and who reads the independent daily, *La Prensa*, rather than the approved newspapers. It distributes ration cards for scarce essential commodities, helps supervise draft registration and housing assignments, and provides letters of approval that are necessary for receiving passports, visas, licenses, business registration, loans, scholarships, and many jobs. It also provides manpower, when called upon, for the "turbas."

Interior Minister Tomas Borge recently acknowledged to the *Washington Post* what had been charged earlier by such observers as Robert Leiken and Linda Wolin—that many local CDS's were run by former Somocistas, who continued their jobs as neighborhood bullies but merely changed masters. Borge said that these officials had gained their positions as a "refuge to avoid punishment and repudiation." But leading Nicaraguan dissidents say that the FSLN deliberately recruited these Somocistas, using their known former affiliations as blackmail to assure their obedience. Since anyone holding an official position in the CDS was certainly checked out by Borge's State Security force (DGSE), and indeed since defectors from the DGSE say that CDS officials report to or are employed by State Security, it is hard to believe that Borge was unaware of the role played by ex-Somocistas. More likely, Borge's belated acknowledgment of that role is prelude to the time-honored Communist practice of purging underlings as scapegoats to assuage popular discontent.

The CDS's and the workplace party Base Committees stamp Nicaragua with one of the distinct characteristics of totalitarian systems—citizens are not allowed to be politically neutral or uninvolved. Merely not to belong to the CDS or Base Committee marks someone as derelict from the Sandinista norms of good citizenship and invites suspicion. The consequences may not be dire, but the act requires courage. Every individual, thus, faces a choice of either participating in the institutions that enforce conformity or being their victim.

The CDS's also exemplify another feature of Nicaraguan society that severely vitiates its claim to "pluralism." This is the intertwining of party and state institutions. As pro-Sandinist academic Richard Fagen has explained it, the FSLN's definition of its "vanguard" role is "that FSLN hegemony . . . ought to be a structural, not just a temporary, feature of the political economy of the nation." Thus, for example, although the CDS's are party institutions, they distribute ration cards. Salaries for top CDS officials, and other party expenditures, are paid out of public revenues. In the schools, students are required to sing both the Sandinista and Nicaraguan anthems and to salute both the national and the Sandinista flags. Moreover the army is formally a creature of the party, although its ranks are filled by conscription, a power that was exploited during the 1984 election campaign when many of the youth leaders of the opposition parties were drafted.

The militarization of society through the creation of an enormous conscript army is, for the Sandinistas, another means of social control.

Between the army and militia, the Sandinistas now maintain some 120,000 men under arms. This amounts to five percent of the population or ten times the size of Somoza's National Guard after Somoza had radically enlarged it at the height of the civil war. The ordinary size of the National Guard, which served as the nation's police and security forces, as well as its military, was about seven or eight thousand, all of them volunteers. Today, the Sandinista police and State Security alone exceed that size.

The military build-up is presumably motivated in part by the threat posed by the armed resistance, but the impulse to militarize society has much deeper roots in Sandinista ideology. The FSLN's 1969 platform pledged that once in power, the FSLN would "strengthen the new people's army" and imbue its members with "revolutionary ideals." It promised to "establish obligatory military service," and in addition create "people's militias." In its report to the Sandinista Assembly two months after taking power, the National Directorate said that "the defeated National Guard cannot possibly organize an attack on us for the time being" and that "there is no clear indication that an armed counterrevolution by the Somozist forces beyond our borders is going to take place." Nonetheless, it spoke of the need "to establish obligatory military service." A year later, still well before the onset of the "contra" war, when the *Washington Post* asked Moises Hassin, one of the Sandinista members of the governing junta "to name the major accomplishments of the first year, [he] listed the organization of the state security forces, the Army, the militia and the police."

"THE SENTINELS OF THE PEOPLE'S HAPPINESS"

The Sandinistas also work hard at indoctrination. Soon after coming to power, they launched a national "literacy crusade." It was directed by Fernando Cardenal who described it as "not a pedagogical project with political implications, but rather, it is a political project with pedagogical implications." The Crusade used a single, specially prepared text, "The Sunrise of the People," with 23 lessons, each one on a political theme. Students began with the lesson, "Sandino, Guide of the Revolution," and progressed through, "The FSLN Led the People to Freedom," and "People, Army, Unity: A Guarantee of Victory," until reaching such advanced themes as "A Real Democracy is the Expression of the Power of the Organized Masses" and "There is Freedom of Worship for All Churches that Defend the Interests of the People."

At the conclusion of the campaign, the FSLN announced that illiteracy had been reduced from over 50 percent to a mere 12 percent of the population, figures that have been repeated by North American admirers of the Sandinistas. But no one really knows whether that many people learned to read, or indeed if anyone did, as a result of the crusade, and the Nicaraguan government has not provided for any independent assessment. On the other hand, there is no doubt that the crusade enabled the Sandinistas to bring their political message to corners of the country that had previously had little exposure to it. And Miguel Bolanos Hunter, a defector from State Security, says that the DGSE also used the campaign to establish a network of informers in remote areas where it had had few or none.

Just as the literacy crusade required a special text, so the Sandinistas have replaced the texts used in Nicaraguan schools with new ones, often published in East Germany, that, as Borge puts it, "are guided by revolutionary principles."

Borge explains: "Education is a process of forming individuals in ideology, in a complex system of values and ideas that justifies the interests of the class that wields state power . . ." The "philosophy program" for teacher training, puts it: "Our education has as its objective the training of new generations in the scientific, political, ideological and moral principles enunciated by our national leadership, the FSLN, turning them into convictions and habits of daily life."

It is not only political subjects that are imbued with political content. Grade school children learn elementary arithmetic from a workbook that has them add and subtract rifles, hand grenades, and FSLN banners. The reading primer contains lessons on the army, the militia, the border guards, Sandino, FSLN founder Carlos Fonseca, and on "our vanguard," the FSLN. Students learn handwriting by copying the phrase, "The FSLN guided and guides the struggles of the people." In later grades they study grammar by analyzing the speeches of the commandantes.

Indoctrination also goes on outside of the schools. Both television stations, two out of the three newspapers and most radio stations are government owned or controlled. The editor of the principal official newspaper, *Barricada*, doubles as the director of the FSLN's Department of Agitation and Propaganda. Even the non-government radio stations are required to broadcast news prepared by the government, and they like the one independent newspaper, are severely censored.

In addition, political officers and party groups are spread throughout the army, where much time and effort is devoted to political training.

As with other Communist governments, the FSLN's zeal to control definitions of reality leads it to the kinds of ironic inversions or perversions of meaning best captured by Orwell and which we have come to call "Orwellian." Thus the Nicaraguan police and state security forces are officially dubbed, "the sentinels of the people's happiness." In a perfect echo of Stalin's 1936 dictum that the withering away of the state first required its utmost strengthening, Tomas Borge proclaimed last year:

Some day there will no longer be any reason for coercive organs of the state. . . . When . . . human society has been transformed into the reign of justice, when egotism and hatred have been driven out of man's consciousness. . . .

But in the meantime the Ministry of the Interior is indispensable, and . . . the only possible alternative is for it to grow in quality and quantity, in organization, in operative capacity, in sharp and forceful response, in unrelenting vigilance over the happiness we have won . . .

. . . the Ministry of the Interior, . . . as we know it now, [is] a powerful, decisive body whose vitality is the very essence of the revolution.

When the Miskito Indians of the Rio Coco were forcibly removed from their villages, their buildings and crops burned, their cattle machine gunned—all because they were believed to sympathize with the "contras"—they were driven on forced marches to a complex of isolated, barren relocation camps which the

government named "Tasba Pri," the Miskito words for "free land." The government explained that "Tasba Pri" was created "for the purpose of improving and dignifying the living conditions of the Miskitos" and to "assure . . . the defense of their fundamental human rights. . . ."

One of the hundreds of articles excised from *La Prensa* last year by the censors was about censorship. The *New York Times* reported the censor's explanation: "They accused us of suppressing freedom of expression. This was a lie and we could not let them publish it."

In addition to the more manipulative and subtle methods of social control, the Sandinistas rely heavily on raw coercion and intimidation. According to defectors, the DGSE numbers about 4,000 officers and the Sandinista police 5,000. These two forces work "in close cooperation," says Lenin Cerna, the DGSE chief, because "it is sometimes hard to distinguish criminals from counterrevolutionaries." Together, these two forces are larger than the normal size of the National Guard during Somoza's reign.

These forces have broad powers under the law, including that of administrative detention, but in any event they are not much restrained by the laws. As their boss, Tomas Borge, puts it, "in a revolution there is only one power, revolutionary power." Borge, himself, often extends, shortens or commutes prison sentences, merely by edict.

The Sandinistas have reactivated the "special tribunals" originally set up to impose "revolutionary justice" on captured National Guardsmen. Each tribunal consists of one lawyer and two representatives of "the people" who are selected from the Sandinista "mass organizations." They dispense a harsh, politicized justice, little inhibited by due process. Few defendants are acquitted by these tribunals and sentences often run to thirty years. During interrogation, according to DGSE chief Lenin Cerna, "the accused are told that their sentence depends not only on the gravity of the crime they have committed, but also on whether they are still hostile to the revolution or sincerely repentant." In a further effort to eliminate any lingering trace of judicial independence, the government has instituted new exams for candidates for judgeships in the regular courts. These consist of a series of essay questions such as "when and why did Marxist philosophy arise," "explain the terms idealism and materialism," "define social being and social consciousness and the relation between them," and "what does the method of dialectical analysis consist of?"

ALL WITHIN THE REVOLUTION

Estimates of the number of political prisoners held by the Sandinistas vary widely. The government has at various times acknowledged holding a total of 5,000 or 7,000 prisoners, but without acknowledging that any or many are political prisoners. The Permanent Commission on Human Rights of Nicaragua estimated 1,700 political prisoners were being held in addition to former

National Guardsmen. The U.S. State Department has put the number of political prisoners at 4,200, and some Sandinista defectors have put it at 15,000. In any event, it almost surely exceeds by many times the number that were held under Somoza.

Not only is there no good count of prisoners, there is not even a good count of prisons. It has been repeatedly reported by defectors and Nicaraguan human rights groups that secret prisons exist, and Nicaraguan dissidents who have been arrested for only short periods of time usually report being taken blindfolded so as not to know where they have been held. The International Red Cross and all other human rights groups have been denied access to the prisons of the DGSE. When the International Human Rights Law Group asked for an explanation of this, "Minister Borge explained that [the prisoners] are isolated in order to establish a psychological link between them and their interrogators." Meanwhile, foreign delegations are often shown a model prison where unguarded inmates are constructively rehabilitated while enjoying such amenities as conjugal visits.

The head of State Security is Lenin Cerna, who has given his unusual first name by parents who were devout Communists. (His brother, reports Cerna hilariously enough, was named Krupskaya). An article in *World Marxist Review* quoted from an interview with Cerna: "'My underground name was Felix. That,' he added with a smile, 'was probably why I was appointed to this job.'" Cerna's reference, of course, was to Felix Dzerzhinsky, the original head of Lenin's secret police, the Cheka. Cerna has emulated some of Dzerzhinsky's methods, notably in the realm of deception and entrapment. Just as Dzerzhinsky created "the trust," an artificial underground opposition designed to entrap those hostile to the regime, so the DGSE initiated a fake insurrectionary group, the sole purpose of which was to set up and justify their murder of Jorge Salazar, the leader of the private farmers and a man regarded by some as the most charismatic figure in the civic opposition. It also lured the priest who serves as spokesman for Radio Catolica to the home of a female parishioner where he was seized, stripped of his clothes and then pushed out of the house naked to be filmed by a Sandinista TV crew, which just happened to be waiting outside. And it apparently sent a group of agents, posing as representatives of the International Red Cross, to a Miskito village, where they asked to be directed to the hideouts of local Miskito resistance forces, in order to bring them humanitarian aid.

On the other hand, the Sandinistas have indulged in little eye-catching violence. A relatively small number of executions have been attributed to them, and physical torture of prisoners is far less common than psychological abuse. This has distinguished the FSLN from many other triumphant Communist parties and has gone far toward softening Western perceptions of them. Their behavior seems all the more commendable in view of the sanguinary political traditions of Nicaragua, and the fact that the Somoza regime, though in most

ways less restrictive than the Sandinistas, had a reputation for crude brutality.

One major exception to this relatively benign pattern of Sandinista behavior has been in their war with the Miskito Indians. Numerous instances of executions and torture, as well as rapes and other abuse of Miskito civilians have been documented to the satisfaction of all impartial observers. In addition, recent testimony from some DGSE defectors raises questions about whether, in other situations far from public view, the Sandinistas have indulged in more killing and physical torture than has previously been realized.

Although the FSLN has refrained, for whatever reasons, from unleashing an outright reign of terror, it instead conducts a reign of intimidation. Opposition figures are often arrested for brief periods of interrogation, during which they are sometimes subjected to death threats both against themselves and their families. More prominent ones are denounced in the Sandinista press as CIA agents, a severe though implicit threat because it justifies virtually any kind of retribution against them.

In addition, the "turbas," stick-wielding, rock-throwing mobs, gather outside dissidents' homes or offices, chanting threats and inflicting minor injuries and vandalism. Homes are defaced with painted threats and accusations, "traitor," "CIA agent" and "always watched." Borge and other FSLN leaders have sometimes denied government responsibility for the "turbas," characterizing them as spontaneous grass-roots outpourings. But the veneer is thin. The mob attack on the home of former junta member Alfonso Robelo that sealed his decision to flee the country occurred at dawn on a Sunday. Government employees and students were reported to have been given the day off to join the mobs that attacked the meetings and rallies held by Arturo Cruz in 1984 when he weighed entering the Nicaraguan election. And when a U.S. embassy official asked for protection against possible anti-Yankee mob violence, Humberto Ortega replied in a speech published in *Barricada* that the diplomat need not fear because "our people . . . have discipline and they are not going to move against any target unless they have been ordered to do so beforehand by the National Directorate."

Often the "turbas" will chant or scrawl, "Go to Miami," and this probably reveals their true aim. The Sandinistas have not significantly restricted emigration, and their goal seems to be to encourage all dissidents to leave the country.

Another way in which Nicaragua today differs from Communist countries is in the large proportion of the economy that remains privately owned. According to official Nicaraguan figures, the public sector accounted for just 43.5 percent of gross domestic product in 1983. Other leading Nicaraguans, such as Alfonso Robelo, argue that such figures, whatever their accuracy in their own terms, understate the scope of government intervention. The public sector is comparatively so inefficient, they say, that to produce a given percentage of the GDP it must utilize a much larger percentage of the means of production. But whatever the truth of this, the private sector is still large.

The Sandinistas apparently recognize that the managerial experience of private producers would be difficult to replace. They also calculate, as a Sandinista leader is quoted as having told the Marxist magazine, *Monthly Review* that "the private sector is bait for getting foreign capital."

In addition, the Sandinistas see important political benefits in preserving the private sector as an influence on U.S. perceptions. Wheelock explains, "The economic considerations of the Nicaraguan revolution are not as important to us as its political aspects." The survival of the private sector helps to maintain national unity, he says, and "Unity to confront imperialism is vital."

Nonetheless, as Borge explains, "a mixed economy in Nicaragua is not the same as a mixed economy in Costa Rica, or in Uruguay and other countries of Latin America. This is a mixed economy within the revolution."

This means that private entrepreneurs may own enterprises, but their control over what they own is acutely circumscribed. The state maintains a monopoly over banking and foreign commerce and controls most legal domestic commerce. The state supplies credit and most factors of production; controls wages and prices; and in the case of agricultural goods, is the sole purchaser. As President Ortega put it last year, the revolution's progress toward further "social structuring of the economy . . . is perfectly compatible with the mixed economy, so long as the producers agree to produce what the economy needs, under production contracts with the state, and so long as businessmen dedicate themselves to distribution, in association with the mass organizations, and not to speculation." Probably the biggest reason for the shortages in basic commodities that now plague Nicaragua, traditionally a nation that though poor produced enough food for domestic consumption plus export, is the maintenance of prices by the government's agricultural purchasing monopoly near or below the costs of production, thereby discouraging production.

Within the context of the mixed economy, the Sandinistas have used confiscation as a tool of political control. Initially, the vast holdings of the Somoza family were expropriated, followed by those of his close cronies. Banking and foreign commerce was then nationalized in order to give the government control of the "commanding heights" of the economy. But since the early years of the revolution, confiscations have been applied increasingly as punishment against those who dissent politically or fail to cooperate economically with Sandinista policies. The most recent in a long line of prominent victims of such confiscations was Enrique Bolanos Geyer, the current president of COSEP, the umbrella organization of private business and professional associations. Bolanos, said Commandante Wheelock, "has been involved in acts of aggression against our country."

If the preservation thus far of a substantial private sector distinguishes Nicaragua from Communist countries, the particular model of "land reform" followed by the Sandinistas falls squarely in the Communist tradition. Nicaragua is a sparsely populated country. As Daniel Nunez, head of the Sandinista

association of ranchers and farmers put it: "the problem in Nicaragua is not a land problem. There is enough land for a million people to work," a number larger than the agricultural workforce. When the Sandinistas confiscated the holdings of Somoza and his circle, they had or were close to having enough land to provide each landless peasant with a plot of his own. But instead they created huge state farms and government supervised cooperatives. Few private plots have been allocated, and these have come without clear title.

A NATURAL DEATH?

Probably the most important thing distinguishing Nicaragua today from totalitarian states is the survival of various independent institutions that make for a genuine element of pluralism. These include the newspaper, *La Prensa*; the Permanent Commission on Human Rights; two independent labor federations; a variety of business and professional associations linked together under the umbrella, COSEP, the Supreme Council of Private Enterprise; several independent political parties, the most important of which work together with the labor and business groups in the Democratic Coordinator; and various churches, most significantly the Catholic Church led by the staunchly independent Cardinal Obando.

The FSLN's general approach toward these groups was expressed by Borge in a 1980 statement referring specifically to the political parties, but applicable to the others as well: "they want to go on living. They stubbornly refuse to retire to a museum. We are not going to prevent them from continuing to live. They are going to die a natural death."

The FSLN's strategy is to do what it can to hasten their "natural death," without assuming the onus of banning the groups outright. Leaders of these groups have often been arrested and roughed up. In custody they are threatened and often pressed to collaborate with the authorities against their colleagues. The DGSE uses blackmail, threats, and bribes to sow division within their organizations. Even Cardinal Obando was seized in his car in a lonely spot by non-uniformed men, but whatever they had in store for him was aborted when he managed to shout into his two-way radio. "Turbas" have attacked the offices and meetings of these groups and the homes of their leaders, as well as the newsstands that sell *La Prensa*, some of which have as a result stopped selling it. There is relentless petty administrative harassment, and sometimes the harassment is more than trivial. Recognition of any new branch of the independent labor unions requires that the names of all members be submitted to the government. These new members then often receive chilling visits from agents of State Security. Leaders of the business organizations have suffered repeated confiscations.

These methods have born fruit. None of the groups has yet collapsed, but all have been weakened by leadership turnovers and splits as one individual after

another has found himself unable to withstand the pressure. A long list of leaders of COSEP have left the country, as have two successive heads of the Permanent Commission on Human Rights, one labor federation head, several party leaders, the editor of *La Prensa*, and various of its reporters and columnists. Some of those who have remained within the country have moved their spouses and children abroad, not wishing them to share the perils.

In addition, the Sandinistas have worked to undermine these independent institutions by fostering their own parallel bodies. Most noted of these is the "People's Church," a group of Catholics who dissent from the Cardinal's stance, defy his authority, and embrace "liberation theology." Although it claims an emphasis on the poor, various observers have pointed out that its adherents are mostly foreign priests and middle class churchgoers, and that its own institutions are far better funded than those of the mainstream church, because the former enjoy not only the favor of the government, but large subsidies from left-leaning foreign church bodies. The "People's Church" bears a striking resemblance to the "Living Church," a progressive, schismatic body in the Russian Orthodox church encouraged and manipulated by Lenin and then Stalin in their successful efforts to bring the main body of the Orthodox church to heel.

The Sandinistas also have created their own labor federation, the CST, which, because many workers are compelled or pressured to join it, is now far larger than either of the independent labor bodies. But the CST is also a different kind of union. It is affiliated with the World Federation of Trade Unions, the Communist labor international, and it functions like the trade unions of the Communist countries. Its leaders are appointed by the government and, rather than representing the workers, its job is to represent the government to the workers. Much as the Soviet functionary Shelepin a few years back went from being an official of the KGB to head of the Soviet labor movement, so the head of the CST recently moved over to become head of the Sandinista militias. At its national assembly last year, the CST adopted a resolution declaring that "the strike is a form of struggle . . . [that] has no place in Nicaragua, because power is in the hands of the workers;" another calling on the government "to put a stop to the incorrect practice of some administrators and directors who encourage wage anarchy" by paying their workers *above* prescribed scales; another calling for *reductions* in the amount of finished goods that each worker is allowed to purchase at cost from his own factory; and another declaring that in the face of hunger, "we workers must push forward family and institutional gardens." The CST resolutions concluded with ringing calls for "More productivity!" and "More discipline!"

The government also created the National Commission for the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights, the role of which, in the words of one of the several of its officers who have defected, is "to discredit the Permanent Commission for Human Rights" and to "make propaganda for the Sandinista government" by focusing on abuses by the "contras." It also has created all kinds of business-

men's organizations to parallel existing independent ones, and even a new organization of the Miskito Indians, MISATAN, as an alternative to MISURA and MISURASATA, the authentic Indian organizations. Brooklyn Rivera, one of the Miskito leaders, commented: "They try to control an organization. If that fails, they try to divide it. If that fails they form another organization with a similar name."

For the moment, the parallel organizations contribute to the process of weakening and discouraging the original ones. In the long term, the Sandinistas may foresee mergers between various of the parallel groups and their counterpart originals, as a graceful, relatively non-controversial way for the latter to expire.

After more than six years of rule, the Sandinistas have brought ruin to the Nicaraguan economy. According to official Nicaraguan figures, the economy has been shrinking while inflation and foreign debt have been soaring. GNP per capita has fallen to the levels of twenty years ago. Immense increases in the price of food and clothing, without any commensurate wage increases, mean that the average Nicaraguan's standard of living has plummeted. This of course has been exacerbated by the civil war and the U.S. embargo, but its fundamental cause is irrational economic policies that transformed a food exporting country into a land of severe shortages.

It is not clear how much this distresses the Sandinistas. "Our economy might drop to 1940 levels," said Jaime Wheelock, but "the important thing is . . . the ability to make the revolution prevail" against its enemies. And although the economy drops, the Sandinista rulers themselves don't share in the privations. They have taken for themselves the homes, cars and luxuries left behind by Somoza and expropriated from other wealthy Nicaraguans. Las Colinas, a luxury neighborhood of Managua, is now largely populated by the Sandinista elite, guarded by a roadblock that keeps ordinary Nicaraguans away. Borge and some of the other commandantes are known to each have several homes and cars, justified on the grounds that this improves their security. As in Communist countries, an exclusive hard currency store has opened in Managua where foreigners as well as members of the emerging Nicaraguan "nomenklatura" may shop for goods otherwise not available.

One result of the transformations wrought in Nicaragua by the FSLN has been a huge exodus. The Sandinistas acknowledge the flight of many middle class Nicaraguans to the United States, but tens of thousands of others have crossed the borders into Honduras and Costa Rica. These are mostly poor people, and their migration is not legal. Hence, there are no exact numbers. But various shreds of evidence suggest that five percent or more of the Nicaraguan population has fled.

The current civil war is itself another major result of Sandinista rule. The rebels, a wholly volunteer force, are now reported to have some fifteen to eighteen thousand men under arms. This probably exceeds the total number

fighting on both sides combined in the FSLN's war to overthrow Somoza. It is fifty times as large as the FSLN was a year or less before it came to power. The Sandinistas were mostly romantic student radicals, but today's rebels are mostly peasants. Ironically, the Sandinistas have finally succeeded in generating the kind of mass movement of the poor that they dreamed of for two decades, only its purpose is to oust them from power, not sweep them into it.

Whether the rebel movement can succeed is of course quite uncertain. This leaves ample room for thoughtful disagreement about U.S. policy. But there is little room for thoughtful disagreement about where Nicaragua is headed under the Sandinistas. No Leninist group has ever changed its course once in power. Djilas is probably the only example we have of an individual leader of such a group who did change, and he knew he had no chance of turning his comrades around. The current situation and ideology of the Sandinistas allows them the special gratification of being at once flagrantly self-indulgent and certain of their own righteousness. It's a hard combination to beat. As long as they face an external threat they are likely to proceed slowly, but unless something stops them, the end of their journey is not in doubt.

Seeing Sandinista Nicaragua through clear eyes does not in itself resolve the policy dilemmas the United States faces, but it does clarify them. The essential question is whether the United States should support (or even undertake) the use of force against the Nicaraguan government. Some say that U.S. support for the Nicaraguan rebels has led to a greater degree of repression there, but this is true only in a trivial way if at all. Their deeply held convictions tell the Sandinistas that forces independent of themselves are anachronisms whose dying out is part of the process of human liberation. Only concern about U.S. reaction deters them from smothering these forces entirely. The same convictions impel the Sandinistas to lend fraternal support to other Central American revolutionaries. Again, concern about U.S. reaction affects the level and visibility of this support. And the Sandinistas have at least once made public their willingness to host Soviet military bases, although the Kremlin quickly nixed the idea.

The Sandinistas' history of coping with the United States by means of deception diminishes whatever small hope may exist that these issues would be amenable to diplomatic solution. The only agreements that would stick are those that the United States would be prepared to uphold by force, such as prohibitions against basing certain weapons. But the United States is already enforcing such prohibitions unilaterally. The "bottom line" issue is whether the costs of trying to remove the Sandinistas outweigh, for ourselves and the Nicaraguan people, the costs of a Communist Nicaragua.

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