

Discussion on Nicaragua

Socialism (in quotation marks)

The FSLN is, therefore, another example of how traditional left organisations, at least in crisis situations, choose to look upon society's production from a productivist viewpoint. In other words, they are solely interested in how to achieve increased production in a way that is remarkably similar to the attitude of 'our own' private capitalists.

A productivist viewpoint denies or forgets that production most of all produces class relations between people (workers and management) and also subordinates workers to objects. These relations between people and between people and objects flow out of production proper and dominate the whole of society.

From — SOLIDARITY JOURNAL ● SPRING 1986

by Keith Sorel



Reprinted from "No Middle Ground", San Francisco, 1984.

Reprinted in 1988.

NEWS FROM EVERYWHERE

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In the early 1970's, the world economic crisis began to hit Nicaragua. According to statistics quoted by Henri Weber in *Nicaragua: The Sandinista Revolution*, the rate of inflation rose from an annual average of 1.7% before 1970 to 9.7% in 1971 and 1975, and reached a rate of 11% in 1977. Many factories closed, and the construction industry was

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especially hard hit. The declining economic situation, combined with dictator Somoza's wholesale profiteering from the 1972 earthquake and theft of foreign aid funds, began a movement among the non-Somocista business classes to oppose Somoza's *competencia desleal*, or "disloyal competition" against their interests as capitalists. The formation of the Democratic Union of Liberation by leading bourgeois politicians, and the snowballing movement of repression and resistance were not a product of class conflict between the workers and bosses of Nicaragua. They began as a conflict between Somoza's greedy domination of the Nicaraguan economy and those Nicaraguan capitalists who wanted a bigger slice of the pie. From its very beginnings in the early 1960s the Sandinista National Liberation Front had emphasized multi-class cooperation against the regime and that the patriotic middle classes would play a central role in any effort to top-

ple Somoza. From the time of the *La Prensa* publisher Chamorro's assassination in early 1978 until Somoza's defeat in July 1979, the F.S.L.N. leadership was maneuvering to place itself in a government of "National Unity" with people like *Los Doce* (Group of Twelve), and other representatives of the "progressive liberal" upper middle classes. The

final overthrow of Somoza was to a great degree an unorganized and spontaneous revolt in which working class and poor people did most of the fighting and dying. But there was no time at which the workers and peasants asserted their interests separately from the multi-class struggle against the old dictatorship. And the Sandinista regime quickly demonstrated its class nature by inviting leading businessmen Alfonso Robelo and Arturo Cruz into top positions of the new government. At a Managua labor seminar of the state-controlled labor union, the Sandinista Worker's Central (C.S.T.), Commander Carlos Nunez declared that it was "important to distinguish between those members of the bourgeoisie who are still influenced by imperialism and those who had been victims of the dictatorship because the latter are individuals the F.S.L.N. wants to attract and consolidate into the revolution."¹

1. Carlos Nunez, in *Barricada* pp. 1 and 10, September 25, 1979.

Henry Ruiz, minister of planning, in a speech announcing publication of the 1981 economic plan said, "There are those who understand this national effort. There are patriotic entrepreneurs, who want to produce, who want to help the country... The patriotic entrepreneurs are an active subject who require incentives and who require the collaboration of every one of us." How mystified this plan must have been if its authors presumed that entrepreneurs are an active subject of production and not exploiters of other peoples' labor!

As with every government in the world, the F.S.L.N. regime hasn't been as repressive to its rivals in the business community as it has been to the Nicaraguan workers and peasants. The Sandinista Army has often forcibly evicted peasant squatters who had occupied lands in the wake of Somoza's defeat. The F.S.L.N. feared that if the landless peasants took over the lands, the *campesinos* would grow food for themselves instead of growing export crops for the State. The Sandinistas said that the peasants are not informed enough to make *responsible* decisions about their own lives. Against the actions of the landless peasants the F.S.L.N. bureaucrat Tomas Borge spoke for the regime, saying that private property would be respected and, "The Revolution will act with a strong and firm hand, because it cannot allow counter-revolution in the name of the revolution."² One Chinandega peasant commented, "I don't understand it at all, one minute seizing the land is revolu-

tionary, then they tell you it's counter-revolutionary."³ Under the rule of the F.S.L.N., the only lands that have been "expropriated" are the ranches, farms, (and factories) belonging to Somoza and a few of his cronies, about 30 to 33% of the productive resources of the country. Out of this roughly 30% figure, 23% have become so-called *People's Property*, state-owned farms, and 7% have become "cooperatives," where several small farmers pool their resources and labor under the production plans of the State.⁴ And on the state-owned properties, the Area de Propiedad del Pueblo we see the typical state-managed, capitalist set-up.

The majority of the farms confiscated from the Somocistas were large, modern commercial farms oriented toward export production and worked by a small permanent wage labor force supplemented by a large seasonal labor force. The importance of these farms within the national economy was a key in the decision to convert them into state farms to be managed by INRA (Nicaraguan Institute of Agrarian Reform) with worker participation (meaning co-determination) rather than to proliferate the commune (sic) model of the war period.⁵

Like bosses everywhere, the Sandinistas feel that strikes are unnecessary and like leftist regimes all over the world, the San-

3. Black, *Triumph of the People*, p. 234.

4. "The View from Nicaragua," *Unity* (a pro-China socialist paper), May 11, 1984.

5. "The worker-peasant alliance in the first year of the Nicaraguan Agrarian reform," Carmen Diane Deere and Peter Marchetti, SJ, *Latin American Perspectives*, No. 29, Spring, 1981, pp. 52, 53.



"Nationalization of the mines: a firm step in consolidating the revolution."

dinistas' conception of "socialism" is strictly one of legal jurisdiction, based on who *owns* and/or *manages* the productive resources rather than on the real relations of people to each other and to what they produce. What was under Somoza a separate enterprise producing for profit remains a profit-oriented enterprise, producing goods and services for the irrationalities of capitalist exchange in local and international markets, not for the free and direct use of the working classes themselves. This State-capitalist sector of the Nicaraguan economy is referred to as the *People's Sector* by the Sandinista government and its supporters.

In the September 1983 issue of the bulletin *Echanges et Mouvement* there are some interesting details on the struggles inside a nationalized factory employing around 300 workers. A conflict arose when the quality-

control division began to supervise production more intensely. The author says, "Under Somoza, discipline meant that the workers were worked hard and shut up. Now, after 1979, discipline meant that the workers worked hard but also (were expected) to put their heart into it, because now they worked for themselves, for the country, for the revolution." Rumors were circulated implying that the individuals who were critical of conditions in the factory were "counter-revolutionary," sabotaging production and so on. The employees of this enterprise were considered to be fairly militant during the time of Somoza. In this factory, union membership is compulsory, dues are automatically deducted from people's wages and in the weekly meetings the shop stewards implore people to work harder. The article goes on in some detail about the activities

2. *Barricada*, Sept. 24, 1979, quoted from *Nicaragua: A People's Revolution*.

of the Sandinista secret police operating inside the factory, about threats to jail workers for holding strikes, like the ones at the FA-BRITEX plant referred to in *No Middle Ground* nos. 1 and 2. The state had locked out workers, closed down enterprises, and even taken to drafting the intransigent workers into the Army and sending them into the combat zones in the north of the country. How things have changed in the New Nicaragua!

Vanguardia! Ordene!

Pro-Castro leftists like Margaret Randall proclaim that there is no conflict of interests between the Catholic clergy and the Sandinista apparatus. It seems to be an accurate statement. Two hierarchical political entities, acting to decide what's best for the noble and, hopefully, subservient flock. Being inclined to meddle in all aspects of other peoples' lives, the coalition of priests and commissars express their repressive puritanism in the Sandinistas' persecution of prostitutes and closings of "immoral" gay bars. Of course, abortions are banned.⁶ In this oh-so "revolutionary" society, women suffer the freedom to die in horrible back alley abortions. Meanwhile, the State-controlled women's association, AMNLAE, insists that women should have the right to be drafted into the Army.⁷ Everywhere in Nicaragua are billboards and posters with jingoistic slogans celebrating the virtues of the state and of production for the fatherland. Billboards from the Bank of America announce, *Tú companero en la reconstrucción*, "Your comrade in the reconstruction."

The F.S.L.N. takes this comradeship seriously. A government pamphlet states, "The World Bank and the IMF have both noted the new government's sense of prudence and sound thinking in the area of monetary policy. In the period between July, 1978 and July, 1979, inflation in Nicaragua reached 80%. By 1980 this figure had been reduced to 35% and in 1981, to 24%. Complementing the food subsidies given to the majority of the population with an austere wage policy greatly contributed to achieving this stability in prices."⁸ (emphasis mine)

On Radio Sandino, denunciations of U.S. imperialism are followed by commercials for Pepsi Cola. But then the Sandinistas are such a threat to the Yankee Empire that they had to get \$60 million in aid from companero Jimmy Carter. In Nicaragua there are a wonderful variety of "mass organizations" that are supposed to give the illusion of popular power when they are actually one-way transmission belts from the ruling junta downwards to the masses. The country is covered by a network of Cuban-styled *Sandinista Defense Committees* (CDSs), which act to integrate all citizens into the reconstruction plans of the State and which also serve to spy on anyone suspected of disloyalty to the regime.⁹ Pro-F.S.L.N.

6. "Passionate Politics in Nicaragua," by Loie Hayes, *Gay Community News*, Boston, April 28, 1984.

7. Hayes, "Passionate Politics," *ibid.*

8. From a Junta for National Reconstruction pamphlet, quoted in the *Nicaragua Reader*, Peter Rossett and John Vandermeer, eds., p. 259.

9. Quoted from the Spanish newspaper *Cambio 16*.

literature and films are of disgusting references to "the glorious leadership," the cadre, of Daniel Ortega and Tomas Borge ranting and raving in a demagogic way akin to Mussolini, of the government's militia goose-stepping East German style. The militarist and productivist nature of their politics is so extreme that painters and musicians are referred to as "cultural workers," expected to volunteer in "cultural brigades" to sing the praises of the "people's state."

In Nicaragua today, under the "revolutionary socialist" vanguard of the Sandinista Front, the most basic defensive weapon of the working class, the strike, has been banned.¹⁰ The regime tolerates right-wing dissent, but nothing to the left of the government is tolerated. The Sandinistas are attempting to organize society in a military fashion. Commodity production is not overthrown, but regulated and protected by the State, the "popular" junta is always correct; that is the essence of the "New Nicaragua." There's nothing new about any of it. But there are signs of rebellion in a lot of different places. Besides strikes, the F.S.L.N.'s national mobilization for military service has been widely resisted. Supposedly the Sandinistas' efforts to get unemployed workers and university students to volunteer labor to bring in foreign exchange crops hasn't been very successful, either. If the "people's revolution" can't get its people to pick the coffee beans, perhaps they can get the guilty students and young professionals "in solidarity" from the U.S. to go

10. Recently eased as part of the FSLN electoral campaign.

slumming for a few weeks on the plantations and ranches of "the People's Sector."

In this article, I have given just a few of the many examples of how the Sandinista Front has constituted itself as a capitalist government over the working classes of Nicaragua. The current rulers of El Salvador, Honduras, and Guatemala are greedy barbarians and they deserve to end up in front of a firing squad. (They'll probably end up in Miami.) But the fact that the rightists are awful doesn't mean that the leftists are in any way opposed to capitalism. Look at El Salvador. Doesn't it seem a bit strange that some of the most hallowed martyrs of the "people's movement" like Roque Dalton and Melida Anaya Montes were dispatched to the Stalinist Valhalla by their very own ice-pick wielding *companeros*? Look beyond all the "socialist" verbiage. The Sandinistas, the F.M.L.N./F.D.R. in El Salvador and all the leftist parties, trade unions and armed groups are not *communist* or *anti-capitalist*, they only aspire to build a nationally-based kind of capitalism which is not completely tied to North American capital, but perhaps more tied to the social-democratic bankers of Sweden and West Germany. The left-capitalists in Central America also wish to avoid the mistakes made by the Cuban regime's development of an inefficient state capitalism which is totally dependent on the Russian-led East Bloc. *The Sandinistas and the F.M.L.N. in El Salvador are the active enemies of any autonomous working-class opposition to wage-labor and capital*, masking capitalist repression behind radical rhetoric and the



'I can invest as I wish'

Sandinista official Daniel Nunez was recently touring California with Samuel Amador, Nicaraguan's largest rice grower. Speaking at a Commonwealth Club luncheon, Nunez said, "It seems there are certain countries that see the phantom of communism wherever there is a struggle" for improved living conditions.

Amador said he was a Sandinista sympathizer seven years before they came to power. Since the revolution, the state had placed no extraordinary restraints upon

capitalists, he said.

"As long as I pay my taxes, I can invest as I wish," he said, adding that he believed he was taxed at a lower rate than he would be in the United States.

Most of the nation's land still remains in private hands, Nunez said. About 20% was seized from the Somoza family and their allies when the dictatorship was overthrown but "what we actually took over was debts," he said, explaining that the lands were mortgaged to various banks.

Reprinted from the Oakland Tribune.

death-worship of nationalism. Right now, due to the Yankee intervention and the increasing clumsiness of the F.S.L.N., the merchants who once invested in the Sandinista portfolio of labor management seem ready to divest by bank-rolling the rightists in Honduras and Costa Rica. Up here in North America, a wonderful variety of guilty-liberal organizations and publications uncritically glamorize the image of the heroic guerrilla, fighting for something

vaguely better, with the sound of the "people's patriotic music" playing in the background. *Lots of leftist groups act as the unpaid public relations firms of the left expressions of the world capitalist system and its crisis in Central America,* while also acting as the unpaid auxiliaries of big city police forces in timid peace demonstrations in North America.

In the traditionally morbid way of Christianity and Leninism, the Sandinistas are fond of saying,

"May the blood of the martyrs drown us if we do not uphold their sacred ideals." Against that kind of necrophilia Karl Marx once said, "It is one of the peculiarities of revolutions that just as the people seem about to take a great step and to open up a new era, they suffer themselves to be ruled by the delusions of the past and surrender all the power and influence they have so dearly won into the hands of men who represent, or are supposed to represent, the popular movement of a by-gone era."

Nation or Class? The Myth of National Liberation

In the past forty years or so, many new nation-states have been created by the struggles of "national liberation" movements. But what really changes for the vast majority of people? Imagine that you live in a small village in Angola, or work in a factory or farm in Vietnam. One day the bosses and landlords leave town. A horrible war develops and is fought against a vicious foreign power or a local tyrant, and when the fighting ends the bosses and landlords march into town at the head of an army, hang up red banners and portraits of the new leaders everywhere and announce that from now on you will work just as hard as before because the new bosses have taken over and they know what's best for you and all the members of the working-classes. All of this is presented to you in the name of a "people's revolution."

National liberation movements are capitalist multi-class coalitions in which the proletarians of the Third World do the

fighting and dying so that small elites of Western (or Russian) educated intellectuals and military officers can take power and force-develop capitalist production on the backs of the local working classes and peasants. The rise to power of leftist-capitalist dictatorships has at times brought about small improvements in the living standards of Third World peoples. But that's more a matter of buying off the temporarily armed anger of the people who have done the fighting, showing them that they are going to be dominated by rulers "who care." Better nutrition and health care programs, and the much-touted "literacy campaign" fulfill a role in the development of modern market production for production's own sake; a well-nourished and healthy wage-slave can work more efficiently and work longer hours as well, a worker who knows how to read can read instructions for the operation of machinery, technical manuals, and pro-government newspapers.

That brand of leftist politics which constitutes itself around an opposition to imperialism alone is in no way anti-capitalist. The anti-imperialist hierarchies in the Third World and their apologists in the developed countries are only opposed to the domination of the world market by big capitalist exploiters like the United States and France, something like the anger that an unsuccessful small businessman might feel for a more successful major rival. Under the nickel-and-dime market economies of places like Cuba, actual conditions of work often become more exploitive, working

hours are extended, piece-work replaces wage-work, "voluntary" days of work are expected from the "responsible" worker. But the difference is that this completely capitalist exploitation of the peasants and workers is done in their name, for a so-called "socialism," the "revolution." The scarcity produced by production for foreign markets continues, even increases, and the capitalist state establishes a totalitarian surveillance of the workers, using mass systematic terror to stifle dissent and prevent the dispossessed from fighting back. And when all of the poverty and victimization are presented in the guise of "socialism" it establishes a false faith in the virtues of "democratic" capitalist tyrannies in the more prosperous Western Bloc.

The butchering dictatorships, the extreme poverty and the death by starvation of one out of every four human beings on this planet cannot be remedied in any one country— *they are the direct product of the capitalist economy— the system of commodity production, market exchange, wage-labor and profit which exist in every nation in the world.* Even the most directly democratic and communistic revolt would fail if it based itself within the capitalist division of national boundaries, because it would be unable to attack the basis of oppression, the worldwide market system, as it must be attacked, on an internationally-coordinated basis. The utter inhumanity of the totalitarian capitalist regimes of Cuba, China, and elsewhere, are plain for all to see. For many dozens of years, capitalism in all its "democratic" and dictatorial forms had nothing to offer to humanity but cycles of crisis

and horrible wars. And nationalism in all its mutant forms is just an excuse for wars between capitalist states and states to be.

It would be very naive to assume that the average person is constantly on the verge of revolutionary consciousness. As the events in Poland in the last few years have shown, faith in trade-unionism, "democratic" forms of the state, religion and nationalism are just a few of the powerful psychological obstacles that keep working people separated and skeptical of their own potential. But in response to failing living standards and tyrannical regimes, to wars and the threat of war, working class women and men have shown a great capacity to link up with one another, to reject condescending saviors, and fight aggressively on a class-wide basis. In the most far-going strike-waves and insurrections of the 20th century, working class people have gone beyond parties and unions of the old society, and, again and again, formed organizations like the workers' councils, direct face to face assemblies linking proletarians in workplaces and communities, like the assemblies of the miners in Bolivia, the *cordones industriales* of the Chilean workers in the early 1970s. From Germany in 1918 to Iran in 1979, there have been cases of powerful and seemingly well-organized State armies being collapsed from within by the fraternization between soldiers and civilians, by armed mutinies, and being opposed from outside by armed militias of the revolutionary workers. This kind of revolutionary perspective hasn't developed yet in Central America,

and all of the rightists and the leftists stand in the way of it.

Such a tendency among working people can, and *will* emerge, not from the interventions of any self-appointed "organizers" but out of the concrete needs of human beings to go beyond the crazy and artificial limits of the existing economy and all its defenders. When the old ways of doing things have collapsed and people begin to act around their own needs, and attack the money-market-wage-labor system, we see the embryonic form of a new way of life. A real revolutionary movement would be much *less* respectful of the "democratic" rights of the merchant class and ex-National Guardsmen and *Somocistas* than the Sandino-capitalists have been.

If so many people are to suffer and die, it should be for the direct and unlimited power of the working class, against the market system and the nation-state. There really isn't any "middle ground" here. Hopefully an armed and extremist movement for libertarian communism will emerge, not just in the poor region of Central America, but also in the nations of Latin America with large and restive industrial working classes like Mexico, Venezuela, and Brazil, and in the major capitalist nations too, to permanently end everywhere the domination of people by the exchange of things, to do away with the basis of all wars and poverty, and begin a new era of liberty and community for the entire human race.

— Keith Sorel

Maurice Walsh in Managua

NICARAGUA'S Government is embroiled in an increasingly acrimonious dispute with striking building workers who have questioned the Sandinistas' socialist credentials and who in turn, have been accused of counter-revolutionary activity.

While the Nicaraguan President, Mr Daniel Ortega, was assuring a May Day crowd of 10,000 last Sunday that the Sandinistas were dedicated to protecting the working class, 38 labourers continued their hunger strike over wages.

The construction workers and mechanics have been on strike for almost 10 weeks. The hunger strike began more than a week ago when negotiations with the Ministry of Labour fell through.

Five days after the hunger strike began police surrounded the union hall where the workers were protesting, arresting supporters and preventing access to the building.

The union representing the striking workers is affiliated to the Moscow-line Socialist Party but they have received enthusiastic support from all the opposition parties and conservative trade unions.

The labour unrest is the worst since shortly after Sandinistas came to power in 1979. The new boldness in reaction to the Government's tightening economic reforms in February shows the increasing determination of opponents of the Sandinistas.

The debate between the Sandinistas and the strikers has been polemic and fierce. President Ortega told his May Day audience on Sunday that they were led by people who had a counter revolutionary programme.

Since the strike began he has called them false revolutionaries with no class consciousness and said that if they were patriotic they would be protesting outside the US Embassy. The Sandinista newspaper, *Barricada*, has charged that they are being paid by the US.

The comments by the workers themselves are equally vituperative. "Construction workers make the big buildings but we can't live in them, we end-up living in hovels," said Mr Ramon Luna Castro, one of the hunger strikers. Although explaining that he was suffering no ill effects from going without food for a few days he said he had very high blood pressure which could have started long before the hunger strike. "We don't have time to get ourselves checked out like the bourgeoisie in the Government."

When the Government introduced a new currency last February prices shot up and the purchasing power of many people declined. The Government ordered that the construction workers and mechanics be incorporated into the rigidly controlled wages scales rather than continuing to earn commission. It meant that the new wage for a helper on a building site was 26 cordobas a day, equivalent to about £1.23. A newspaper costs 10 cordobas and a pair of shoes 400.

From "The Guardian" - 4/4/88.