
REVIEW ESSAYS

CELEBRATING THE DEMISE OF SOMOCISMO

Fifty Recent Spanish Sources on the Nicaraguan Revolution

John A. Booth

University of Texas at San Antonio

Nicaraguans and other Central Americans danced in the streets on 19 July 1979 when the regime of Anastasio Somoza Debayle collapsed. They soon did more than just dance, however—they published. Thousands of pages flowed from the pens of dozens of authors, most ecstatic about the fall of the forty-five year dynasty and many full of hope for the Sandinista revolution. This review lists and briefly describes, according to several broad themes, over fifty recent Spanish titles on the Nicaraguan revolution.¹ These works range widely in nature and purpose—from scholarship to celebration, from propaganda to personal experience, from dry bureaucratic prose to instant journalism for profit. Each, however, provides some valuable insight into the origins, evolution, and outcome of the insurrection and revolution in Nicaragua.

Sandino and the Origins of the Somoza Dynasty

Mendieta Alfaro (1979b, p. 11) dramatically claims that the 1979 overthrow of Anastasio Somoza Debayle began in 1934, when his father decided to execute Augusto César Sandino. Indeed, Sandino's two roles—first in the founding of the Somoza regime and, posthumously, as the major symbol of its overthrow five decades later—give this affirmation a validity that stresses the continuity of recent Nicaraguan history. Anastasio Somoza García's dynasty originated with American

intervention in Nicaragua to end the 1927 Liberal rebellion against the Conservatives. Sandino, enraged by the Liberal generals' agreement to a truce with the U.S. and with the Conservatives, began a six-year guerrilla war to oust the American Marines from Nicaragua. Sandino's anti-imperialistic guerrilla struggle against enormously superior forces made him a hero to most Nicaraguans and to many other Latin Americans. Sandino's war also led to the creation of the Guardia Nacional, first to assist and then to replace the U.S. Marine Corps in pacifying Nicaragua. Anastasio Somoza García, the first Nicaraguan commander of the Guardia, erected his dictatorial dynasty upon the grave of Sandino, whom Somoza had ordered assassinated by the Guardia in 1934.

The insurrection against Anastasio Somoza Debayle in the 1970s rekindled interest in Sandino and spawned both new and republished works about the "General de Hombres Libres." Ramírez Mercado (1979) has edited much of Sandino's voluminous correspondence and prefaced it with a useful biography. Selser's 1966 biography of Sandino (republished by EDUCA in 1979) provides a detailed account of Sandino's life, the 1927–33 war, the formation of the Guardia Nacional, Sandino's assassination, and the early years of the Somoza regime. The memoirs of Gilbert (1979), a citizen of the Dominican Republic who served with Sandino, give a first-person account of life with the guerrilla army, its strategy, tactics, and personalities. Salvatierra's 1936 recounting of Sandino's role in Nicaraguan history, republished (1980) in Nicaragua in facsimile, describes the political events in Managua from an insider's perspective. Salvatierra, Minister of Labor under President Sacasa and a confidante of Sandino, helped arrange the truce between the administration and guerrillas, and later unwittingly lured Sandino to his assassination. Essential for understanding both Sandino and Somoza, as well as the Guardia Nacional, is Millett's *Guardians of the Dynasty*, published by EDUCA in Spanish (1979).² Millett describes the Sandinista struggle, the diplomacy and politics of the war, the establishment and training of the Guardia, Somoza García's appointment as its first Nicaraguan head, and the circumstances of the Guardia conspiracy to assassinate Sandino and its role in Somoza's 1936 overthrow of his uncle, President Sacasa.

Augusto C. Sandino's role as a symbol of the insurrection, as a rallying point for the diverse anti-Somocista opposition, constitutes another aspect of his importance to the current Nicaraguan revolution. The tenacious and feisty Sandino prevailed against great odds and forced the United States to withdraw its troops—not definitively beaten but clearly not victorious. This triumph made Sandino a symbol of Nicaraguan resistance to foreign interference. Since later American aid and backing at key junctures in the Somoza dynasty kept the family in power and kept United States influence strong, many Nicaraguans viewed the Somozas and the Guardia as surrogates for the U.S. Marines in Nicara-

gua—as a device to thwart Sandino’s struggle for independence. It is little wonder, then, that many have dubbed the last Somoza to hold power, Anastasio Somoza Debayle, “the last marine.” Neither is it surprising that Sandino’s name and tradition have been invoked by the rebels against the dynasty. Ediciones Monimbó (1979) presents an anthology of articles, poetry, and miscellanea celebrating Sandino. Escobar Morales (1979) wrote his rudimentary biography of Sandino at the fourth grade level for use as a school textbook. Both Fonseca Amador’s (1980) edition of Sandino’s writings into a primer of *sandinismo* and the FSLN’s (1979) collection on Sandino and the victorious 1978–79 insurrection provide excellent examples of the evocative power in contemporary Nicaragua of the life and doings of Sandino.

The Somoza Dynasty and Somocismo

The origins of the Somoza dynasty take shape in the books of Millett (1979), Selser (1979), and Salvatierra (1980). The memoirs (1979) of Cuadra—a Nicaraguan Conservative, soldier of fortune, and early member of the Guardia Nacional—also contribute insightful, if sporadic, details about the foundation and early years of the regime. Details about the political and economic evolution of the regime of Somoza García may be found in greatest detail in Millett (1979), Chamorro (1979), Wheelock Román’s *Imperialismo y dictadura* (1979), Barahona Portocarrero (1977), and Torres Rivas (1977).

The most comprehensive economic and political analysis of the dynasty and its power base since 1956 may be found in the Wheelock (1979) study of the economic structure of the Nicaraguan capitalist class until 1974. Wheelock identifies key groups of investors, including the Somozas and their cohort, which were converging into a unified bourgeoisie transcending the Liberal-Conservative split within the political-economic elite. He also describes the corruption of the regime, the holdings of the Somoza family, and the links of both to foreign private capital and to American diplomatic, developmental, and military assistance. Menjívar’s (1974) collection on foreign investment in Central America reveals that Nicaragua had proportionately less foreign capital invested than any other nation in the Central American Common Market, but that it was also far more concentrated in the modern industrial sector than elsewhere in the region. The study by the Centro Superior Universitaria de Centroamérica (CSUCA 1978) outlines critical changes in the agrarian sector and rural population after 1950. Barahona Portocarrero’s (1977) survey of the economic history of the regime also enhances our knowledge of the last several decades.

Interpretations of the economic crisis and eventual breakdown of the Somoza regime in the 1970s come from several sources. DeFranco

and Chamorro (1979) discuss the devastating impact of the 1972 Managua earthquake and the regime's recovery programs on employment, investment, and the economy overall. López et al. (1979), the Ministerio de Educación (1979), and the Ministerio de Planificación (1980) also present critical details on public policy, including spending, international borrowing, and taxation. The López et al. book—a collection of critical articles on the nature and decline of the Somoza dynasty—is particularly useful for understanding the reversal of the trend toward economic and political convergence among the Nicaraguan political-economic elite. Fajardo et al. (1979, pp. 261–76) present a history of the Nicaraguan labor movement. There one finds clearly, if briefly, outlined the reaction of both blue-collar and white-collar workers to the great Nicaraguan economic crises of the middle and late 1970s.

For details about the political side of the Somoza regime several works are invaluable: Millett (1979), Barahona Portocarrero (1977), López et al. (1979), Vélez Bárcenas (1979), Chamorro (1967, 1979), and Urcuyo Maliaño (1979). With particular respect to the structure of the state, Barahona Portocarrero (1977, pp. 31–49) and Ruiz Granadino (1979, pp. 147–54) describe the general style of operation and degree of decentralization of public entities. Chamorro (1967, 1979) and Wheelock (1979) outline the exploitation of public institutions for personal enrichment by the Somozas themselves. Others explain corruption from the top of the government (Urcuyo Maliaño 1979, Morales Henríquez 1979) to the bottom, including the military (Robledo Siles 1979).

Several works, the most scholarly of which is Millett's (1979), enlighten us about the Guardia Nacional. Millett gives a complete history of the Guardia from its birth up to the early seventies. He explores its growth, organization, its broad responsibilities (defense, police, internal security, postal and telegraph services, customs, tax collections, municipal government), its morale and discipline troubles, and its manipulation by the Somozas. Robledo Siles (1979) recounts the Guardia's rural operations against the FSLN and its terror campaign against peasants in the late sixties and the seventies. Briceño (1979) relates an extended conversation with an enlisted deserter. The ex-Guardia describes the internal spying, morale problems, and the corruption within the Guardia, and mentions the presence of American, Korean, and South Vietnamese mercenaries in both training and combat. Perhaps Briceño's most interesting passages concern the EEBI (Escuela de Entrenamiento Básico de Infantería), a unit commanded by Colonel Anastasio Somoza Portocarrero, fourth in line for the dynastic throne. These elite shock troops, mainly peasants, underwent a brutal and strenuous socialization and indoctrination to desensitize them toward killing their fellow Nicaraguans in the name of anticommunism. Though some of the pro-FSLN ideological rhetoric of this Guardia deserter has a specious ring, Morales

Henríquez (1979), César Sánchez (1979), and Mendieta Alfaro (1979b) independently verify most of his allegations about the EEBI.

Finally, interesting speculations about the personalities of the Somozas appear in Chamorro (1979), Urcuyo Maliaño (1979), and Morales Henríquez (1979, 1980). From these accounts, the accuracy of which must be open to considerable reservation, one develops certain impressions. Dynasty founder Anastasio (Tacho) Somoza García combined great craftiness, an earthy wit and joviality, political astuteness, and extreme ruthlessness. Nevertheless, Tacho was as likely to compromise or to co-opt his opposition as to coerce it. His older legitimate son, Luis Somoza Debayle, appears to have inherited his father's considerable political skills and some of his more benign personality traits. Nicaragua under Luis' leadership in the sixties was relatively peaceful and gave an illusory sense of movement toward reform. The second legitimate son, Anastasio (Tachito) Somoza Debayle, by contrast, has been consistently portrayed as more violent and cruel, greedier and more corrupt, as well as less intelligent and less compromising than Luis. Tachito's son, Anastasio Somoza Portocarrero, being groomed for succession during the deteriorating conditions and siege mentality of the late seventies, was reportedly very much like his father. He came to be greatly feared as the commander of the EEBI.

Opposition to the Somozas

Opposition to the Somozas came from many fronts, but shifted and realigned constantly. Blandón's (1979) extremely valuable book catalogues opposition by three generations of rebellious students—1944–48, 1959–61, 1970–79. He also describes armed insurrectionary movements by disaffected Conservatives and Liberals, and from within the ranks of the Guardia Nacional. Of particular interest are the 1959 guerrilla actions led by ex-Sandinista Ramón Raudales, and the ill-starred invasion at Olama and Mollejones led by Conservatives and Independent Liberals, including Pedro Joaquín Chamorro and Enrique Lacayo Farfán (see also Chamorro 1979). Though poorly written and organized, the wealth of detail on armed resistance to the Somozas in Blandón's book will amply repay the careful reader. Fajardo et al. (1979, pp. 261–76) give a quite valuable capsule history of the labor movement and its rapid growth in the 1970s. Chamorro (1979), Vélez Bárcenas (1979, pp. 5–23), Barahona Portocarrero (1977), Urcuyo Maliaño (1979), Dávila Bolaños (1979), and López et al. (1979) all supply valuable bits and pieces on opposition parties and movements, as does Millett (1979). None of these sources, however, systematically examines any single opposition party in any way remotely resembling Walker's (1970) solid study of the Social Christian movement in Nicaragua.

Perhaps the most consistent thread connected with opposition to the Somoza regime was its frequent repression. All of the Somozas utilized co-optation and corruption of possible opposition and attempted to maintain certain democratic trappings such as a *partially* free press. Nevertheless, overt repression too was a constant feature of the regime. Several books graphically depict the fate of those opposed (or suspected of opposition) to the Somozas, especially in times of crisis. Guido's *Noches de tortura* (1980), first published in 1966, describes the author's terrifying experiences as a suspect in the assassination of Somoza García. Chamorro (1979) also presents a true tale of torture and trial, vividly graphic and highly detailed. Robleto Siles (1979) recounts his experiences in the Guardia Nacional, and thus confirms from within the accusations by victims as to the terror tactics of the regime during the sixties and seventies. Robleto's insider account of the rural operations of the Guardia and its treatment of the peasantry in zones of guerrilla operations gives flesh to the chilling reports of rural repression. Amnesty International (1977) and the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (1978) confirm thousands of peasant deaths in the late seventies alone. Dr. Alejandro Dávila Bolaños, an Estelí physician of leftist leanings, described in his short monograph (1979) his torture by the Guardia in 1978. Shortly after writing that account, Guardia troops dragged Dr. Dávila from the operating room in the midst of surgery and executed him. No reader of these vivid accounts could retain any doubt that the Somoza regime was its own worst enemy. Nor could one not understand why Nicaraguans by tens of thousands struggled to overthrow the Somozas.

The Frente Sandinista de Liberación Nacional

The Frente Sandinista (FSLN) occupied the pivotal role in the overthrow of the Somoza dynasty. The FSLN began as a tiny guerrilla movement in 1961, only one among many similar groups in the 1959–61 period. Its main founders, Carlos Fonseca Amador, Tomás Borge Martínez, and Silvio Mayorga, shared several attributes: they had all (1) been student activists in the late forties and fifties; (2) come from Matagalpa where they attended the Instituto Nacional del Norte; (3) been victims of imprisonment or torture for their real or suspected political activities; and (4) become Marxists during the 1950s. Borge and Fonseca, however, came to their revolutionary beliefs from divergent beginnings, a foretaste of the FSLN's later ideological eclecticism. Material on the origins of the FSLN and on the early political careers of its leaders appears in abundance in Blandón (1979), Miranda M. (1979), Ortega et al. (1980, pp. 9–43), Wheelock (1979?), Robleto Siles (1979), Ruiz (1980), Ortega Saavedra (1978), and López et al. (1979). Blandón (1979) sheds con-

siderable light upon the student movement origins of the FSLN as far back as the 1944–48 period.

Despite early guidance from a former aide to Sandino himself, Santos López, the sixties was a hard decade for the Frente Sandinista. Small, poorly integrated among the rural populace of the North, insufficiently funded, and with an inadequate urban support network, the FSLN acted precipitously and chalked up several failures, including the 1963 campaign at Bocay and the 1967 Pansacán campaign. The FSLN survived these setbacks, however, and by the 1970s its urban arm and support organizations, rural support network, leadership, and recruitment system had improved enormously. Beginning with the Zinica offensive of 1970, the now more experienced and cautious FSLN began to achieve military successes. The most valuable single description of the FSLN's evolution as a military and political organization is Ortega Saavedra's *50 años de lucha sandinista* (1978), which gives a yearly chronicle of major changes and actions, as well as detailed analyses of strategy, tactics, and ideological evolution. Also extremely useful in understanding the organization and evolution of the Frente as a military organization are interviews by Ruiz (1980) and Ortega Saavedra (1980). Robleto Siles (1979) describes the FSLN from a quite different vantage point—that of an officer in the Guardia Nacional during the late 1960s and most of the 1970s.

Accounts of two spectacular FSLN operations give considerable insight into the nature of the organization—both as to its weaknesses and its strengths. In December 1974 the Frente stormed the house of Somoza cohort Chema Castillo and seized as hostages several high regime officials and ambassadors. With this successful operation the FSLN gained the release of several companions from prison, a large ransom, mass publication of communiques to the Nicaraguan people, and free passage out of the country. Wheelock (1979?) describes this operation in detail, and Ruiz (1980) discusses its preparation. In a large scale rerun of 1974, in August 1978 the Tercerista faction of the FSLN seized the National Palace of Nicaragua, taking as hostages most of the Congress and the employees of several ministries. Two of the hostages subsequently described this event (Eugarrios 1978, Mendieta Alfaro 1979a), as have many others, including Gabriel García Márquez (in both Fajardo et al. 1979, pp. 29–48; and Miranda M. 1979, pp. 97–134). Once again the Sandinistas obtained a large ransom, freed several comrades, embarrassed the regime, and scored an enormous publicity coup.

In the 1975–78 period, the FSLN divided into three wings or “tendencies,” differing mainly over strategy and (somewhat less) over ideological matters. This schism stemmed from several factors: (1) the heavy military pressure applied by the government after the imposition of a state of siege in 1974, which made communication among the differ-

ent operational fronts difficult; (2) necessary strategic and tactical differences imposed by the distinct operating environments of the isolated fronts; and (3) ideological divergences brought into the FSLN by its rapid growth in the 1970s, and nurtured by the increasingly broadly based opposition elements that fed the FSLN with recruits. The tendencies reunited in late 1978–early 1979 under the pressure of the rapid swelling of mass participation in the insurrection. Subsequently the Frente's National Directorate has downplayed the earlier differences among the tendencies, but the evidence available indicates that the split was quite serious in 1977–78. For discussions of the differences between them see interviews with Henry Ruiz and Daniel Ortega in Fajardo et al. (1979) and with Humberto Ortega Saavedra (1980).

The political program of the FSLN is laid out at length in several books, including Ortega Saavedra (1978), Fajardo et al. (1979), and López et al. (1979). The political coalitions formed during the 1978–79 insurrection—the Frente Amplio Opositor (FAO), to which the FSLN did not belong, and both the Movimiento Pueblo Unido (MPU) and the Frente Patriótico Nacional (FPN), organized in 1979 by the FSLN—are discussed in López et al. (1979) and Mayo Antonio Sánchez (1979). The ideology of the Frente emerges directly from interviews, articles, and speeches by Sandinista leaders found in Fajardo et al. (1979), Miranda M. (1979), Wheelock (1979?), Ortega et al. (1980), and indirectly from Carlos Fonseca's primer on Sandino's writings (1980). The FSLN's statements of policies and goals for the new Nicaragua after the victory of the insurrection may be found in the speeches in Ortega et al. (1980), and in Wheelock (1980).

The Insurrection of 1978–1979

The assassination of *La Prensa* editor Pedro Joaquín Chamorro Cardenal on 10 January 1978 (Vélez Bárcenas 1979), sparked a massive outbreak of popular hostility toward the Somoza regime. This hostility took the form of demonstrations, aid to the FSLN, and participation in acts of violence against the Guardia and the government. Spontaneous uprisings soon occurred in *barrio* Monimbó in Masaya and in Chinandega, then subsequently in other cities; the first wave of the insurrection had begun. The FSLN in late 1978 and early 1979 hastened to organize itself to take advantage of this rebellious energy and to channel it in coordination with other opposition elements. Many authors describe various aspects of the insurrection in Managua, Estelí, Chinandega, Masaya, Rivas, and elsewhere. The insurrection is described from the standpoint of the FSLN in Ortega Saavedra (1978), César Sánchez (1979), and Miranda M. (1979). The war as seen by the journalist/participant observer

is recounted briefly by Dávila Bolaños (1979) for Estelí, and at greater length and detail by Mendieta Alfaro (1979b) for Managua. Vignettes of the last moments of the Somoza regime appear in Morales Henríquez (1979, 1980?). López et al. (1979, pp. 185–293) and Urcuyo Maliaño (1979) describe both from within the regime and without the process of dissolution of the political institutions and economic underpinnings of the Somoza government. Chronologies or recountings of major events and phases of the insurrection of 1978–79 appear in Ortega Saavedra (1980), Vig (1980), Mayo Antonio Sánchez (1979), Fajardo et al. (1979), Ignatiev and Borovik (1980), and López et al. (1979).

Public Policy in the Nicaraguan Revolution

Although the production of books and articles concerning Sandino, the Somoza regime, the FSLN, and the insurrection have been prodigious, the volume of publication concerning the public policy of the new regime has been considerably larger. Dozens of ministries and national agencies have produced documents concerning the problems confronting them and the programs to be implemented to correct them. It would be virtually impossible to catalogue this flood, much less to analyze it here. However, some sense of the nature of the material available may be gleaned from a few representative examples. Moreover, the general shape of policy in the first year of the Sandinista revolution may be obtained from the vast number of interviews and speeches given by leaders of the new government.

Two major policy areas may be illustrated with government planning documents. The Ministry of Education coordinated the National Literacy Crusade in 1980, which the government officially designated "Literacy Year." In preparation for the crusade, several national agencies collaborated in a nation-wide literacy census (Sistema Estadístico Nacional 1979), which arrived at a nationwide illiteracy figure of 44 percent of the population of school age or older. The Ministerio de Educación (1979) published a lengthy analysis of education policy under the Somozas, with projections for future policy and expenditure. The National Literacy Crusade of 1980 was both described and promoted in a special edition of the *Encuentro* (1980), the journal of the Universidad Centroamericana. Another important policy area was overall budget planning for the entire central government and autonomous public entities. The Ministerio de Planificación (1980) reviewed the budgets of the last several years of the Somoza regime and outlined projected public spending and programs in its *Programa de emergencia y reactivación en beneficio del pueblo, 1980–1981*. This report may well be the single most important document published on the public policy of the revolution because of

the wealth of data it provides on debt, foreign assistance, revenues, and expenditures (with projections)—not only for the revolutionary government, but for the end of the old regime.

For overviews or summaries of the specific policies of the revolution in a broad array of fields, see Gilly (1980), and Vig (1980), bearing in mind that both of these sources bring strong ideological biases to their presentations (see below). Collections of speeches and interviews of enormous value in gleaning the direction of public policy of the revolution abound. Among the more useful of such collections are the FSLN's Ortega et al. (1980), and the Consejo de Estado's (1980). (In English, see also Camejo and Murphy 1979.) *Nicaráuac*, a new national cultural review, published a valuable interview on agrarian reform policy (Wheeler 1980).

Other than by visiting ministries and institutions in Managua concerned with policy in specific areas, the best way to obtain information is from several periodicals: one is the FSLN's magazine *Poder Sandinista*, with regular analyses from the Frente's perspective of critical problems and programs. There are three major newspapers: *La Prensa*, though strongly supportive of the revolution, has reverted to its traditional role of an opposition voice, critical of the FSLN and more favorable toward other parties; *El Nuevo Diario*, an offshoot of *La Prensa* organized by its more radical staffers, strongly supports the government and the FSLN; and *Barricada* is the official organ of the Frente Sandinista, but its editorial line has often been much more radical and combative than the policy of the FSLN's National Directorate, especially on matters concerning other power contenders and other more independent sectors of the national press. *Barricada's* great value to scholars, however, lies in its verbatim presentation of all important speeches delivered by major FSLN and government figures and important international visitors, as well as its consistently thorough coverage of government agency press conferences and reports.

Interpreting the Revolution

The variety of ways in which different analysts interpret the Nicaraguan revolution constitutes a fascinating theme. Conflict and controversy are the essence of any revolution—both before and after the capture of power, and for its portrayers as much as its protagonists. Lively theoretical disputes have already sprung up around the Nicaraguan revolution. Anastasio Somoza Debayle, his successor for two days Francisco Urcuyo Maliaño, and the Reagan administration have all tagged the Sandinista-led revolution as completely communist dominated and in thrall to Cuba and the Soviet Union. From the Marxist end of the spectrum come some equally inaccurate and self-serving interpretations. The

plethora of interpretations of the revolution in Nicaragua stems in part from the uniqueness of the process under study. The rebellion and its coalition involved a massive social mobilization from a huge variety of political poles, and the leadership of the FSLN has been highly pragmatic and flexible, a tendency reinforced by its own pluralistic makeup and past internal strains. Some of the disagreements over the Nicaraguan revolution come from opportunistic efforts to take undue credit for it, or to discredit it by those whose guidance has been found unwelcome. Since the revolution is still unfolding and heavily influenced by both internal and external events in great flux, more serene and definitive readings lie far in the future. But for now, at least, some positions for future debates have already appeared.

Critics of the revolution from the right include Francisco Urcuyo Maliaño (1979), who succeeded Somoza briefly and fleetingly entertained the delusion of finishing Somoza's term of office. Urcuyo, having occupied ministerial positions in previous Somocista cabinets, recounts his political career. He engaged in some anti-Somoza activism in the 1940s, but later married a member of the dictator's family and opted into the regime. He gives us considerable insight into the Liberal Nationalist Party, as well as the regime's view of the insurrection. He, like Anastasio Somoza Debayle, saw a Cuban inspired communist in every opponent, including the United States Department of State. This book is extremely self-serving for Urcuyo, but it usefully portrays what the government knew and believed about its opposition, as well as much about the dissolution of the regime. Urcuyo ultimately excoriates Somoza Debayle for abandoning the struggle against the rebels and the Carter administration for abandoning the regime. Similar in ideological tone, and similarly self-serving, is Anastasio Somoza Debayle's account of his own fall from power (Somoza and Cox 1980).³

On the Marxist end of the political spectrum one finds three interpretative works which intensely disagree with one another about the nature of the insurrection and subsequent revolution. From the Soviet Union's Progress Publishers comes Ignatiev and Borovik's (1980) account of revolution. Of true value is the book's relatively detailed recounting of the major events of the insurrection of 1978–79. However, in their interpretation of the insurrection Ignatiev and Borovik slant things rather severely. Attempting to attribute as much credit possible for Somoza's overthrow to the pro-Moscow Partido Socialista Nicaragüense (PSN), these authors write some remarkably creative history. Among other things, they overlook the resignation of Carlos Fonseca Amador from the PSN before forming the Frente Sandinista in 1961. Ignatiev and Borovik also overlook the critical role of the Catholic and Protestant churches, clergy, and laity in the 1978–79 insurrection. They claim the FSLN's struggle dragged on for eighteen years not because of the

gradual alteration of political and economic conditions, the FSLN's own organizational maturation, and the deterioration of the regime itself, but rather because of the "ideological extremism" of the FSLN. They suggest that the Sandinistas refusal to adopt the PSN's conservative posture favoring mass organization instead of armed insurrection actually retarded the revolutionary cause and by implication delayed the Somozas' downfall.

In truth, however, the PSN had collaborated with Anastasio Somoza García during the 1944–1948 period, and in the sixties and seventies had engaged heavily in internecine fighting within the labor movement. The PSN from 1961 until 1978 systematically attacked the FSLN's armed efforts as "adventurist" and "premature." The PSN ultimately climbed on the revolutionary bandwagon only late in 1978, after collaborating with the unsuccessful international mediation efforts designed to keep the FSLN from capturing power. In sum, Ignatiev and Borovik's interpretation represents the Soviet Union's attempt to assist its client party in Nicaragua, the PSN, to insinuate itself into the Sandinista revolution. Their book also seeks, among Spanish readers outside Nicaragua, to give to the Socialist Party credit for a role in the overthrow of Somoza far greater than the PSN actually played.

Another Marxist interpretation of the revolution that must remain open to question is that compiled by Vig (1980) and published by the Colombian wing of the Socialist Workers Party, a Trotskyist splinter. This collection of articles contains many useful pieces on the insurrection and the history of leftist opposition to the Somozas. However, Vig's interpretation of the revolution and its policies takes a highly biased turn. The Colombian Socialist Workers (Partido Socialista de los Trabajadores) organized the international Simón Bolívar Brigade to fight in Nicaragua in 1979. Following the victory, however, the Brigade refused to cooperate with the FSLN in the consolidation of revolutionary forces, and began to promote strikes and land invasions opposed by the FSLN. For these actions, the FSLN expelled the Brigade from Nicaragua.

The Colombian backers of the Brigade thence began to denounce the FSLN as having betrayed the Nicaraguan revolution, citing as evidence the expulsion of the Simón Bolívar Brigade, and the presence of "bourgeois elements" in the government and FSLN leadership. Moreover—and, one suspects, most damning of all the FSLN's sins—Vig and his contributors cite the inclusion of the pro-Moscow PSN in the MPU and FPN coalitions. So, for this particular Trotskyist socialist faction, the FSLN has undermined the true Nicaraguan people's revolution. The refusal of the FSLN's leadership of nearly two decades to follow the radical line of this Colombian faction has led these spurned radicals to tag the Sandinista government with the scornful label of "reformist." It is, of course, true that the FSLN's highly pragmatic lead-

ership chose to consolidate quickly and to press for quick economic recovery rather than to radicalize further the war-ravaged nation. Nevertheless, the Sandinistas and their collaborators have replaced the organizing myth of the society; they have abolished the Somozas' Guardia Nacional, Liberal Nationalist Party, and economic base; and they have nationalized 40 percent of the economy, implemented major redistributive policies, and completely reorganized the government. To interpret such changes and their potential for the further transformation of Nicaraguan society to be mere reform risks arousing the incredulity of objective observers.

Another Trotskyist tendency backs the FSLN-led Nicaraguan revolution fully, and denounces the Colombian faction's interpretation. Camejo and Murphy (1979), claiming to represent the true position of the Trotskyist Fourth International, argue that the Colombians and the Brigade have played into the hands of the world's "big business press" in its efforts to discredit the Nicaraguan revolution. Camejo and Murphy describe the FSLN as truly revolutionary: "Far from drawing back, the FSLN leaders are moving forward in mobilizing and arming the masses to fight for their interests" (1979, p. 20). They describe the actions of the Simón Bolívar Brigade as "in direct opposition to the policies of the Fourth International, which is carrying out an international campaign in solidarity with the Nicaraguan revolution in collaboration with the FSLN" (1979, p. 21).

A final interpretation from the Marxist camp is much more independent, intellectually sophisticated, and attentive to the realities and necessities of Nicaragua. The works that exemplify this approach to the Nicaraguan revolution are by López et al. (1979) and Gilly (1980). Gilly flays theoretical extremists and opportunists alike: "Both extremes share the same conviction: the belief that to adopt the Marxist program means to become owner of the truth. There is no idea more sterile or more hostile to the construction of a revolutionary organization in the real life of the masses and of any country" (1980, p. 141). López et al. display great sensitivity to the special conditions of Nicaragua because they are Sandinistas; they wrote their analyses in the difficult dual roles of strategic analysts of social forces and propagandists. Gilly, an outsider, escapes much of the necessary tension and logical inconsistency inherent in the approach of López et al. and therefore withstands both logical scrutiny and comparison to the evidence rather better. He concludes that the FSLN's strategy of alliances was probably the only valid way to victory. He views the developing Nicaraguan revolution under the FSLN as a lesson to revolutionary Marxists elsewhere; he argues that "it is necessary to comprehend the particular ways of each nation . . . , to know how to form alliances without fear of losing identity, and to appear in all phases of the struggle with their identity, program, and organiza-

tion'' (1980, p. 140). Ultimately, from his own socialist perspective, Gilly lauds the Nicaraguan revolutionaries for finding their own way, a reasonable posture indeed for one of such clear theoretical commitments.

Whether or not Gilly's or any other analyst's or critic's sense of Nicaragua's future direction proves accurate only history will reveal. I suspect, however, that Gilly would find considerable wisdom in a notion expressed to me in an interview by Orlando Nuñez, one of the authors of the López et al. volume. Nuñez repeated Sergio Ramírez's idea that it might take Nicaragua under the FSLN a hundred years to reach socialism, and acknowledged the many mistakes and missteps of the fledgling revolution. "Pero por lo menos aquello (el somocismo) no es eterno."⁴

NOTES

1. This list is not definitive—though it is representative—nor is it comprehensive; but it does cover most of what was available in Nicaragua and other Central American countries during 1979–80. The material reviewed spans historical, political, and economic topics, eschewing entirely the massive literary and artistic production generated by the upheaval in Nicaragua. Several valuable works on Nicaragua and the revolution are also in press or forthcoming in the United States. Monthly Review Press is publishing Gregorio Selser's biography *Sandino* (New York, 1981), translated by Cedric Belfrage. Three works emphasize the nature of the new regime in Nicaragua: (1) Thomas W. Walker has edited *Nicaragua in Revolution* (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1981), a collection of articles concentrating on the insurrection itself, plus power and interests, public policy, and foreign relations in the new system; (2) Walker's *Nicaragua: Profile of the Land of Sandino* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1981) reviews briefly the historical background of the revolution and the insurrection, then explores in a before/after format the issues of economics, culture and society, politics, and foreign policy; and (3) American University's Center for Foreign Area Studies is preparing a new area handbook on Nicaragua, *Nicaragua: A Country Study* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1982), edited by James Rudolph. Two studies concentrate on the Somoza dynasty and the insurrection that overthrew it: Richard Millett's *The Death of the Dynasty: The End of Somoza Rule in Nicaragua* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1982) will focus on the Somoza dynasty, its relations with the U.S., and its downfall; and John A. Booth's *The End and the Beginning: The Nicaraguan Revolution* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1982) explores the historical evolution of Nicaraguan political and economic structure from independence through the Somoza dynasty, as well as the development of opposition to the regime, the insurrection, and the revolution.
2. References herein are to the Spanish edition of Millett's book.
3. Somoza claims to have "factual evidence that the United States of America has actually aided and abetted the evil forces of Communism." He sees a "planned and deliberate conspiracy in the United States of America to destroy . . . [anti-Communist nations]." President Carter is cast as a collaborator with Marxist terrorists, and his foreign policy is viewed as pro-Communist. These affirmations must come as a surprise, indeed, to the FSLN, to whose leaders Carter's reluctant and deliberate cut-backs in aid to the regime seemed more like support for Somoza than for them. Somoza and Cox (1980) is being distributed through the John Birch Society's American Opinion Bookstores.
4. "But at least that (Somocismo) is not eternal."

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