

AGENDA SETTING :  
The Intellectual Corollary of the Reagan Doctrine

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*NICARAGUA: REVOLUTION AND DEMOCRACY.* By José Luis Coraggio. (London: Allen and Unwin, 1986. Pp. 109. \$12.95 paper.)

*THE POLITICAL ECONOMY OF REVOLUTIONARY NICARAGUA.* Edited by Rose J. Spalding. (London: Allen and Unwin, 1987. Pp. 256. \$39.95 cloth, \$13.95 paper.)

*CONFLICT IN NICARAGUA: A MULTIDIMENSIONAL PERSPECTIVE.* Edited by Jiri Valenta and Esperanza Durán. (London: Allen and Unwin, 1987. Pp. 441. \$49.95 cloth, \$21.95 paper.)

*PEOPLE IN POWER: FORGING A GRASSROOTS DEMOCRACY IN NICARAGUA.* By Gary Ruchwarger. (Granby, Mass.: Bergin and Garvey, 1987. Pp. 340. \$39.95 cloth, \$16.95 paper.)

*SANDINISTAS: THE PARTY AND THE REVOLUTION.* By Dennis Gilbert. (New York: Basil Blackwell, 1988. Pp. 234. \$27.95 cloth, \$13.95 paper.)

*ELECTIONS AND DEMOCRACY IN CENTRAL AMERICA.* Edited by John A. Booth and Mitchell A. Seligson. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1989. Pp. 214. \$29.95 cloth, \$10.95 paper.)

*REPRESSION AND RESISTANCE: THE STRUGGLE FOR DEMOCRACY IN CENTRAL AMERICA.* By Edelberto Torres-Rivas. (Boulder, Colo: Westview Press, 1989. Pp. 165. \$28.95.)

The Reagan era is over but the Reagan Doctrine is still with us.<sup>1</sup> During the Reagan years (1980–1988), struggling Third World revolutionary states the world over (like Nicaragua, Angola, and Mozambique) faced high-intensity U.S. military intervention by proxy in wars that were low-intensity for the United States. President Ronald Reagan's belligerent policies, particularly in regard to Central America, did not receive widespread international support, and one of the outcomes of the implementation of national-security-centered policies has been a progressive distanc-

1. For a comprehensive exposition of the Reagan Doctrine, see Fred Halliday, *Beyond Iran: The Reagan Doctrine and the Third World* (Amsterdam: Transnational Institute, 1987).

ing from the United States by its allies and persistent U.S. isolation in world forums.<sup>2</sup>

Yet paradoxically, the longer-lasting legacy of Reagan's "total war" approach to revolution, which has included as an integral element an ideological onslaught designed to quell or silence dissent or doubters at home and abroad, may have been an intellectual and political agenda that could relegitimize U.S. intervention in the Third World. The reason for this legacy is that ideological onslaught has developed as a more or less sophisticated battle for "democracy" as defined by U.S. administration ideologues. Although U.S. intervention in the internal affairs of other smaller nations was once condemned by the international community, it can now be deemed acceptable if such intervention can be presented as in pursuit of this version of democracy. Thus the Bush administration can easily gather bipartisan congressional support for a policy toward Nicaragua that continues the economic blockade as well as "humanitarian" funding to the armed counterrevolutionary opposition (the Contras). Such pressure on the Nicaraguan government is now considered legitimate because it has not yet made enough progress toward "democracy."

The Reagan Doctrine has profoundly affected contemporary politics. In the field of political practice, implementation of the Reagan Doctrine has dominated the political agenda of revolutionary policy-makers who must respond to military attacks and economic embargoes. In the field of political theory, the legacy has been the setting of a framework for current political and intellectual debate about revolution and democracy.

U.S. administration policies vis-à-vis Nicaragua originally were directed ostensibly toward preventing Sandinista arms shipments to the liberation movement in El Salvador, the Frente Farabundo Martí de Liberación Nacional (FMLN). When the Reagan administration took office in January 1981, it adopted the conservative national security strategy outlined in the (in)famous Santa Fe report.<sup>3</sup> The Republican strategy demanded the establishment of "democracy" in Nicaragua, the eradication of "Communism" in Central America, and the replacement of the "present structure" of the Nicaraguan government.<sup>4</sup> The political goal is to "eliminate" the Sandinistas, and the political agenda that of "democratization" and "anti-Communism."<sup>5</sup>

2. See Daniel Siegel and Tom Spaulding with Peter Kornbluh, *Outcast among Allies* (Washington, D.C.: Institute for Policy Studies, 1985).

3. Committee of Santa Fe, *A New Inter-American Policy for the Eighties* (Washington, D.C.: Council for Inter-American Security, 1980). For a critique of the premises, see Richard R. Fagen, "United States Policy in Central America," *Millennium* (London) 13, no. 2 (Summer 1984):105-15.

4. On 21 Feb. 1985 at a televised press briefing, President Reagan stated that the United States wished to remove the "present structure" of the Nicaraguan government.

5. See the Kissinger Commission report, *Report of the National Bipartisan Commission on*

This U.S. foreign-policy agenda forms the conceptual basis for *Conflict in Nicaragua: A Multidimensional Perspective*, a compilation of papers presented at a Chatham House conference in April and May of 1986. Participants included former Contra leaders Arturo J. Cruz, Sr., and Alfredo César. Arturo Cruz, Jr., who shares the opinions of his father, also contributed to this volume. Editors Jiri Valenta and Esperanza Durán note that the book was published with “generous support, with no strings attached” from groups including the Heritage Foundation and the U.S. Information Agency, two organizations scarcely known for their neutrality regarding the Central American conflicts (p. xvii). And unfortunately, with two or three honorable exceptions (such as Margaret Crahan’s thoughtful essay on legitimacy and dissent in the light of international law), what *Conflict in Nicaragua* actually presents is a strikingly one-dimensional analysis of the problems and contradictions of state, society, and international system in relationship to the Nicaraguan Revolution.

The general argument presented in *Conflict in Nicaragua* is Manichean. In Alfredo César’s view, since the 1979 revolution, the Frente Sandinista de Liberación Nacional (FSLN) has been implementing a “totalitarian project” (p. 91) and the “original goals” of the revolution have been abandoned or betrayed (p. 93). Alvaro Taboada Terán characterizes the FSLN as having no regard for the rule of law because of its “Marxist Leninist ideological foundations and its corresponding political goals” (p. 68). The Sandinistas are characterized as dishonest at best<sup>6</sup> and “just as evil” as Somoza, according to Arturo Cruz, Sr. (p. 42).

The consensus of the contributors seems to be expressed in Valenta’s conclusion that the November 1984 general elections were “clever tactics, aimed at concealing and confusing democratic supporters at home and abroad” (p. 263). All in all, the Sandinistas (government and party) are presented as a pretty nasty lot, running an undemocratic, repressive, one-party state, supported by a partisan army and security forces, stifling popular discontent at home, frightening their peace-loving neighbors in the region through an unprovoked military build-up, debatably lacking in international legitimacy, and most definitely threatening U.S. security interests by way of the Managua-Havana-Moscow axis. This analysis leads to the perfectly logical conclusion expressed by Valenta: “Even those

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*Central America* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1984). For a useful critique, see Aníbal Romero, “The Kissinger Report and the Restoration of Hegemony,” *Milennium* 13, no. 2 (Summer 1984):116–28. To cite one example, “The picture the report draws of the Sandinista movement is that of a dogmatic Marxist-Leninist organization, paying no attention to the complexity of the Sandinista Movement’s social composition and the diversity of its ideological strands. The conclusion is inescapable: given the nature of the enemy, the only alternative is to eliminate it” (p. 125).

6. See Vernon V. Asparturian’s comment, “The elements of deceit and duplicity in the consolidation of Sandinista power are more evident and perhaps necessary for success than in Cuba” (Valenta and Durán, p. 214).

who criticize the policies of the U.S. administration rarely dispute the undemocratic, oppressive nature of the FSLN regime" (p. 261).

Beyond the limitations of analysis evident in *Conflict in Nicaragua*, the field of inquiry it defines is narrowed to studying the revolutionary party and its policies and practice as the self-evident root of regional conflict. But even given this limited scope, any responsible inquiry into the nature of the revolutionary state and party and into the domestic relations of political, social, and economic power should be welcomed. In fact, the setting of the intellectual agenda, as corollary and legacy of the Reagan Doctrine, has contributed in a dialectical fashion to the body of recently published socialist and liberal theory, which seeks to interpret and explain the Nicaraguan revolutionary process and to discuss the diverse and often brief historical moments and experiences of democracy in the rest of Central America. Costa Rica boasts the longest democratic experience and is often held up as a "model" for the rest of the region. But even this vaunted system of liberal or representational democracy is barely four decades old, having been established at the end of the Costa Rican civil war in 1948.

José Luis Coraggio argues in *Nicaragua: Revolution and Democracy* that the Nicaraguan Revolution opens up "the possibility of a new way of thinking about democracy and socialism" (p. xvi). Other studies also discuss the nature of democracy in the revolutionary state, in some instances connecting the revolutionary processes at work in the capitalist periphery with the "new" social movements of the industrially developed countries.<sup>7</sup>

Five of the publications reviewed here deal solely with Nicaragua. The remaining two—the anthology of essays on elections and democracy edited by Booth and Seligson and the compilation of essays by Edelberto Torres-Rivas—take the regional framework as their focus. The twin themes of all seven publications are democracy and economic and social justice. The five books that limit their discussion to Nicaragua consider these twin themes in the context of the small and poor revolutionary state, specifically Nicaragua, but generally without losing sight of a broader perspective that includes reference to the difficulties facing other such societies. The international context is an important factor. Nicaragua, like many small Third World states, relies on two or three agro-exports to generate vital foreign exchange to sustain its economy. The Nicaraguan state is therefore inextricably linked to an open world-market trading system.

Edelberto Torres-Rivas's incisive essay, "The Possible Democracy,"

7. See, for example, José Luis Coraggio and George Irvin, "Revolution and Pluralism in Nicaragua," *Millennium* 13, no. 2 (Summer 1984):194–204; and Roger Burbach and Orlando Núñez, *Fire in the Americas: Forging a Revolutionary Agenda* (London and New York: Verso, 1987).

provides a rare and much-needed comparative and historical reference point for the discussion of democracy, whether in Central America or elsewhere. He points out that “democratization processes of any society are historical processes,” and in Central America, the Nicaraguan Revolution has triggered a frequently polarized debate on the nature of democracy in the region: “The problem of democracy [has become] the primary subject of both theoretical debate and civic practice” (p. 133). In a more opaque exposition of the same theme, Coraggio underlines the fact that the democracies of the industrially developed world have not resolved all their own political and representational problems.<sup>8</sup> In Nicaragua, according to Coraggio, the context and possibilities for revolutionary Nicaragua are bounded by the historical factors of the backward state and an underdeveloped civil society. Decades of gross exploitation by the Somoza dictatorship were unmediated by even minimally democratic institutions or by social and economic redistributive reforms.

The objective factors provide one-half of the equation of possibilities for the revolutionary state. The subjective factors—the revolutionary party and its political project—are the other half of the equation. They provide a key to understanding the likely parameters of revolutionary development. In the FSLN, the political project synthesizes the nationalist and anti-imperialist heritage of Augusto César Sandino (the national liberator of Nicaragua assassinated by the first Somoza in 1934) with elements of liberation theology through the widespread involvement of Christian activists in the revolution and a flexible, undogmatic Marxism. The FSLN draws its guiding principles from this amalgam of theory and also from its actual political practice in the revolutionary struggle that overturned the dictatorship. These principles include commitments to a mixed economy, political pluralism, and international nonalignment.<sup>9</sup>

Dennis Gilbert’s *Sandinistas: The Party and the Revolution* attempts to situate the Sandinista political project within an explanatory framework that credits Marxist Leninism as the overarching and dominant factor of FSLN ideology, strategy, and policy. Gilbert emphasizes the FSLN as the vanguard party: “nothing is so central to the Sandinistas’ conception of themselves and their place in history as their definition of the FSLN as a revolutionary vanguard” (p. 177). He discusses the ideology and structure of the FSLN and describes the party’s relationships to the state and

8. For instance, see Coraggio’s statement on the relationship between single-issue social movements and the political parties: “the Sandinista Peoples’ revolution attempted to seek a provisional form for a process that has still to be resolved in Europe: the articulation between political parties and social movements” (p. 38).

9. Antoni Kapcia argues that pluralism is inherent in Sandinismo because the FSLN came together from three separate political currents, an obviously partial analysis. See Kapcia, “What is Sandinismo?” paper presented at the conference “Puebla y Cultura,” 1984, at All Saints College, Leeds, England.

the mass organizations. The second part of *Sandinistas* looks at the FSLN in action in the areas of agrarian policy, the bourgeoisie, the church, and the United States.

Gilbert's not unsympathetic account of the Nicaraguan Revolution deals best with the extraneous factor of U.S. involvement. His comment, "again there is disingenuous talk in Washington of defending democracy in Nicaragua," reveals a historically grounded appreciation of the dynamics of U.S.–Nicaraguan relations (p. 175). The reader also will appreciate his observations as a social scientist in his Matagalpa case study of the interrelationship of party, mass organizations, and state. This Matagalpa miniature offers an insight into these contradiction-ridden relationships that cannot always be provided by the analysis that forms the conceptual framework for the book. Gilbert perceives an unresolved problem between the contradictions of theory (ideology) and practice (pragmatism). How can the Sandinista organization and theory, whose "formal outlines . . . suggest a monolithic force driven by a rigid ideology—a Leninist organization imposing its Marxist vision of history on Nicaraguan society," maintain their pragmatic approach to revolutionary policy? Gilbert predicts a "growing tension" between ideology and policies and emerging divisions within the Sandinistas (p. 178).

An alternative view might be that Sandinista practice has been enriched by these contradictions and that the acknowledged pragmatism of the Sandinistas is as grounded in Marxist theory as were their earlier programmatic statements. If historical materialism is about anything, it is about analyzing specific conditions that inevitably change over space and time, rather than trying to apply dogma to changing circumstances. The Sandinistas' adaptability and success have not come about because they have abandoned Marxism (although they have never adopted Marxism as dogma) but rather because they have resuscitated Marxism as a tool of analysis. This latter interpretation may be difficult to understand from a liberal perspective, but it probably has more explanatory power for understanding the Nicaraguan revolutionary process than Gilbert's analysis, which views the contradictions of theory and practice as inherently problematic.

In terms of democratic practice, Coraggio finds that the unique aspect of the revolution is that new participatory ways are being found to incorporate previously alienated citizens into decision-making processes: "The crucial political element is that systematic search for an implementation of paths for making it possible for the increasingly more organized people to become the revolutionary subject, thus losing their condition as a 'mass' of atomized citizens without identity, who are summoned together but who lack autonomy" (pp. 4–5).

In Coraggio's schema, power was not "taken" by the FSLN on 19 July 1979 simply because its cadres were able to occupy the key state

apparatuses.<sup>10</sup> Instead, power is in the process of being taken through the establishment of the popular hegemonic project within the revolutionary democracy. Power is being assumed by the popular classes represented in part by the vanguard party (the FSLN), which defines the national project, and in part by the popular subject directly via the mass organizations. Armed struggle combined with hegemonic practice brought victory in 1979, and it is this combination of armed defense against the U.S.-backed Contras and the attempt to establish popular hegemony that provides the base for the defense and consolidation of the revolutionary state.

No easy correspondence exists between the concept of popular hegemony and the theory and practice of Western parliamentary or presidential democracy. In fact, it is the political clash between differing perceptions of democracy that underlay the Reagan agenda and its unspoken grievance.

In Nicaragua members of the bourgeoisie are divided amongst themselves, between those who support the revolution and those who do not and also among the various groups that make up the fractured political opposition. Yet the continued activity of a bourgeoisie organized through political parties, business organizations, and the hierarchy of the Catholic Church, albeit with a minority share of political power, suggests the existence of political pluralism. It also suggests a potentially powerful internal opposition force, sections of which have given economic and political support to the Contras.

Coraggio predicts that the process of political and social revolution will involve the progressive transformation of Nicaraguan society, yielding strengthened popular control over the government, the army, and the state bureaucracy. This process will also lead to a progressive popular hegemony over the institutions of civil society, for example, the schools, the church, and the family. The problematic thus shifts from a consideration of how the bourgeoisie could or should be able to regain control of the state (the Reagan agenda) to a discussion that is concerned more with the possibilities and opportunities for political pluralism within the popular sectors (the revolutionary agenda).

It should be noted nonetheless that the Nicaraguan elections of 1984 did not simply institutionalize revolutionary power by giving expression to popular pluralism but also incorporated the organized bourgeoisie into the legislature (the National Assembly). Although the FSLN

10. Coraggio and Irvin assert, "The fundamental objective of the revolution is not to consolidate power in the hands of the state; rather it is to transform civil society, creating an autonomous institutional base for the majority from which the state derives its legitimacy, and from which political power is mandated." See Coraggio and Irvin, "Revolution and Pluralism in Nicaragua," 201.

received some two-thirds of the vote, opposition parties of both the Left and the Right were also elected. Despite various factors that included intimidating attacks by the Contras on civilians (going so far as to abduct the FSLN candidate for the South Zelaya region in September 1984), the campaign for abstentionism led by the Reagan administration and headed by Arturo Cruz, Sr., and the fact that voting was noncompulsory, 75 percent of those registered voted—a percentage comparable to general election turnouts in Western Europe.<sup>11</sup>

Coraggio goes beyond presenting the 1984 elections as free and fair according to Western European or U.S. models to emphasize a theme developed from an earlier essay coauthored with George Irvin: that elections per se cannot be equated with democracy.<sup>12</sup> After all, elections were held regularly in Nicaragua during the forty-three years of the Somoza dictatorship. As former U.S. Secretary of State Dean Acheson pointed out in 1952, “while the Nicaraguan government is democratic and republican in form, President Somoza runs it largely as a one-man show. His methods have often been criticized in the United States and Latin America.”<sup>13</sup>

John Booth develops this point in his opening comments to his framework of analysis for the volume *Elections and Democracy in Central America*, a compilation of essays edited by Booth and Mitchell Seligson. Booth notes that political scientists have routinely ignored elections in Central America because except in Costa Rica, these elections have been fraudulent or have resulted in governments soon replaced by military coups: “for decades dictatorial regimes in Nicaragua, Guatemala, and El Salvador have periodically held elections that merely reinforced or justified authoritarian rule” (p. 7).

Yet the Central American elections of the 1980s have received enormous international attention. Seligson identifies the Sandinista Revolution and the civil war in El Salvador as the two factors that have caused Central America to become “a key center of geopolitical attention for the U.S. government.” He implies that high-profile U.S. government attention explains current scholarly preoccupation with Central America.

11. For a West European journalist's account of the Nicaraguan elections of 1984 that includes election results by party, see Carlos Ferrari López, “Des elections, pour quoi faire?” in *Editions la découverte: Le Volcan nicaraguayen*, edited by Marie Duflo and Françoise Ruellan (Paris: La Découverte, 1985). According to Ferrari López, “The numerous foreign observers who oversaw the voting and afterward the counting of the votes verified that voting procedures were in order. The accusations of fraud from *La Prensa* did not convince the most skeptical observers. The voters had been able to approach the voting booths, often discovering to their surprise the ongoing ritual of a Western-style election.”

12. Coraggio and Irvin, “Revolution and Pluralism in Nicaragua,” 194.

13. Memorandum to the President, 1 May 1952, in *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1952-1954*, 4:1369-70. From an excerpt published in *The Central American Crisis Reader*, edited by Robert S. Leiken and Barry Rubin (New York: Summit Books, 1987), 96.



Seligson comments that the 1986 seminar at the meetings of the Latin American Studies Association that spawned *Elections and Democracy in Central America* was filled by a "standing-room-only audience . . . [when] only a decade before . . . audiences . . . were sometimes smaller than the number of panelists" (p. 3).

Booth finds it a "remarkable coincidence" that elected governments have appeared in Central America in the 1980s while the United States has been developing a policy orientation encouraging some elections and trying to block others, "all in the name of democracy." This coincidence "requires that Central American elections be the subject of serious scholarly study" (p. 8). Yet it is not really surprising that scholars are suddenly packing seminars on the subject of democracy in Central America, nor is it coincidental that the elections of the 1980s have taken place with much U.S. participation. The reality is that elections are being used by U.S. governments to legalize, if not legitimate, what Torres-Rivas calls "façade democracies" in Central America. As for the upsurge of intellectual interest, scholars are now faced with the ideological onslaught of the Reagan Doctrine that is threatening to devalue the much-debated conceptual categories that political scientists and philosophers have developed since Aristotle and Plato to try to explain and theorize about democracy. Those interested in saving the integrity of their discipline from propagandistic superimposition will be attempting to reclaim and perhaps reinvestigate areas of thought and practice that may have been neglected.

Booth's analytical framework asks the essayists in this volume to review the contribution of elections to the strengthening of democracy, which he defines as "popular participation in rule." The contributors are thus asked to review not just electoral procedures in each of the five Central American republics but to discuss the range, breadth, and depth of participation in the elections. They are also asked to consider whether the elections were fair and were conducted in an environment favoring full participation, whether the elections helped to consolidate stable regimes under democratic rules, and whether the elections contributed to a political culture of support for participation and democratic rules.

The seven chapters of *Elections and Democracy in Central America* reveal a variety of viewpoints. Their empirical detail is useful, particularly on the less-known electoral processes in Honduras. These introductory explorations on the role of elections in the democratic and democratization processes in Central America raise questions that colleagues will wish to pursue further. For instance, José García concludes that elections in El Salvador in the 1980s were relatively free and fair by downplaying the intimidating affects of the death squads (which are closely linked to the armed forces in El Salvador) and by minimizing the continuing violations of civil liberties. Leaving moral considerations aside, this ana-

lytical hole in García's analysis is troubling. An environment free from coercion or threat of coercion is almost universally accepted—and is certainly included in Booth's introductory framework—as a necessary prerequisite for pluralist or representative democracy.

Readers may also question Susanne Jonas's perhaps unwitting slide toward cultural relativity in discussing "elections and transitions" in Guatemala and Nicaragua.<sup>14</sup> Jonas rightly observes that "Nicaraguan democracy cannot be discussed exclusively in terms of Western-style representative democracy." But it is more problematic to infer, as she does, that democracy in socialist states of the periphery (like Nicaragua) "will never be understood if . . . evaluated from a narrow framework appropriate only to advanced nations." This reservation applies even if one can agree with her subsequent analysis that Nicaraguan democracy also cannot be understood "from an ideological framework designed to delegitimize and provide arguments for overthrowing the Nicaraguan revolution" (p. 145–46). Perhaps the author meant to say that these elections could not be understood if they were "only" evaluated from a framework appropriate to advanced nations, rather than a framework which is appropriate "only" for advanced nations (a very different proposition). Jonas later refers to "Western standards," which she says the Nicaraguan elections come closer to meeting than those of Guatemala. Is Western democracy more "advanced"? If so, in what way? Certainly, Western democracies have generally achieved an elite hegemonizing impact on their civil societies and electorates that rules out coercion as a necessary or efficacious method of ensuring societal acceptance of elite goals. Yet Western democracies have not achieved and have actively discouraged political pluralism combining representative democracy with a political participation that Jonas correctly identifies as taking place "*autonomously* from the state apparatus"—in the Nicaraguan case, through the mass organizations (p. 145, emphasis in original).

Yet Jonas, along with other contributors like Robert Trudeau on Guatemala and Mark Rosenberg on Honduras, succeed in their intention to provoke thought rather than to draw definitive conclusions. Jonas, for instance, raises the issue of the democratization of civil society, a key concern of the Nicaraguan revolutionary project. If the relations of exploitation and domination inhere as much in the institutions of civil society as in state institutions, then representative forms alone cannot guarantee democratic and popular involvement in the hegemonic project. Some

14. Cultural relativism claims that values differ according to the society studied, making it difficult to attempt comparative analysis and almost impossible to develop general conceptual categories on issues like democracy. In another context, Philip Windsor has referred to "the intellectual vacuity of cultural relativism." See Windsor, "Women and International Relations: What's the Problem?" *Millennium* 17, no. 3 (Winter 1988):458.

combination of representative and direct democracy is necessary to deal with what may appear in civil society to be relations of political equality but are actually relations of domination.

According to Coraggio:

The monopoly of scientific and technical knowledge accompanying the separation between manual and intellectual labor, ethnic, gender based or generational subordination, the despotism of capital in labor relations, the despotism exercised by teachers in educational centers, the authoritarianism of the hierarchy in religious communities, the unequal trade relations imposed by monopolies, and the like are but forms that coercion and repression take on in the very heart of so-called civil society, in addition to those that more obviously occur inside corporative organizations or political parties. (Pp. 19–20)

The Nicaraguan elections of 1984 were therefore not the result of some complex Machiavellian FSLN scheme but rather the outcome of changed power relations within the state and society. The previously economically exploited and politically marginalized majority ratified not just the FSLN's election manifesto but the new changed power relations of society. Using Coraggio's lexicon, the Nicaraguans took another step toward establishing popular hegemony in all the institutions of society.<sup>15</sup>

Thus the Reagan administration's attempts at political and intellectual agenda setting have engendered not simply a defense of democratic practice within revolutionary Nicaragua but a theoretical investigation, reexamination, and revaluation of democracy itself. This conceptual revaluation is pursued by Coraggio in his analysis of the theoretical and practical development of the revolutionary process in Nicaragua as "a deepening political and social democratization" (p. xiii).

Coraggio's argument in *Nicaragua: Revolution and Democracy* is convincing even though he leaves open a number of questions that invite further theoretical and practical consideration. For instance, it is difficult to conceive from the point of view of any Marxist analysis that the bourgeoisie, while maintaining any form of class identity if not cohesion, will ever give up the struggle for power. Moreover, that struggle takes place not just in the context of the revolutionary society but in an international system of capitalist economic and political relations. What are the consequences for the revolution, given the historic ties of the Nicaraguan bourgeoisie to the possibly less than hegemonic United States, in this

15. On the question of the Sandinista decision to wait until 1984 to hold the elections, Coraggio and Irvin have pointed out, "The decision taken by the Sandinistas in 1980 to hold elections in five years time was not tactical; if anything 'tactics' would have called for holding immediate elections. It was instead a decision of principle which argued that, until ordinary people had been given the opportunity to build their own representative institutions and participatory practices within civil society, most particularly in the workplace and in the community, they would have little effective weight within the formal political institutions of the state." See Coraggio and Irvin, "Revolution and Pluralism in Nicaragua," 198.

overall context? If the mass organizations and the state institutions share power in the revolutionary democracy, how can the inevitable, although not necessarily unhealthy, tensions be resolved, given that the institutional sharing of power embodied in the pre-1984 colegislative body (the Council of State) no longer exists? Can the development of a "mass party" (as Coraggio seems to suggest) as opposed to a "cadre party" really resolve these issues?

Some practical implications of the questions raised regarding the competition for economic and political power between the bourgeoisie and the popular classes are investigated in the excellent collection of essays entitled *The Political Economy of Revolutionary Nicaragua*, edited by U.S. political scientist Rose Spalding. Eschewing simplistic arguments based on either the supposed ideology of the Sandinistas or "laudatory proclamations, derived from a sympathetic reading of the Sandinista vision" (p. 2), these eleven essays offer differing insights and perspectives on the problems facing the Nicaraguan economy. The common thread of these essays is the commitment to economic and social justice. As Rose Spalding observes, "There is a broad agreement that the cessation of the counterrevolutionary war is a central starting point for any measure of economic progress. Beyond that, the reigning contradictions and dislocations must be a matter of internal discussion and negotiation, as the revolutionary leadership continues its search for a viable economic strategy" (p. 10).

For those who still concern themselves with whether or not the "original goals" of the revolution have been betrayed, John Weeks's discussion of one objective, the mixed economy, may be of particular interest (pp. 43–60). He identifies one simple but salient point: Western European and Latin American countries characterized as mixed economies operate under political systems that give "unrestricted political rights for the propertied classes [who] control the state by virtue of their ownership of the means of production and the channels of communication" (p. 46). These are mixed economies "under the control of capital," a distinction that places Nicaragua in a category of its own. Weeks observes that in Nicaragua, "Capital is out of power, but capitalist property continues on a large scale." Other contributors to this volume include Claes Brundenius, Michael Conroy, E. V. K. FitzGerald, Bill Gibson, and Carlos Vilas. Their essays should be read by all those interested in the possibilities and options for the revolutionary subject (whether defined as state, party, popular hegemonic project, or a combination of all three) in a generally hostile political and economic international system.

A particularly innovative study by Laura Enriquez and Rose Spalding questions any presuppositions that banking systems can be "politically or socially neutral" (pp. 105–25). They describe the difficulties of transforming a key institution of capitalism into an instrument of social

and economic justice. The issue of the role of the financial sector is part of the wider debate on how to ensure that the revolution has the mechanisms to actually redistribute wealth according to the “logic of the majority.” This point raises the fundamental issue that the FSLN has had to readdress continually since 1979: the revolution has awakened expectations that cannot always be fulfilled. How the revolutionary party, state, and the mass organizations have dealt with this basic issue opens up a perhaps more fruitful agenda for debate than the rather facile accusation on the Reagan administration’s agenda: that popular discontent has arisen from political repression by a totalitarian state.<sup>16</sup>

On the question of the contradictions and tensions involved in the mass organizations’ role in the revolution, Gary Ruchwarger’s *People in Power: Forging A Grassroots Democracy in Nicaragua* is both illuminating and disappointing. The author presents useful details on the history and structure of the most influential of the mass organizations: the CDS (Comités de Defensa Sandinista), AMNLAE (Asociación de Mujeres Nicaragüenses “Luisa Amanda Espinoza”), UNAG (Unión Nacional de Agricultores y Ganaderos), the CST (Central Sandinista de Trabajadores), and the ATC (Asociación de Trabajadores del Campo). He also describes the mass participation in defense.

Ruchwarger points out some of the problem areas, such as the general lack of progress on incorporating women into decision-making processes. But he avoids any profound analysis of conflictual relations between state and mass organizations, an approach evident in his not discussing the groups that have caused most difficulty for the revolution in terms of expressing and representing social identity—the Black and minority ethnic groups of the Atlantic Coast region. This topic is a vital one, not because the issue was raised by U.S. administrations to discredit the Sandinistas but because it shows that despite early policy ineptitude, the FSLN and the Sandinista government were able to reassess and reorient their own philosophy and political practice and thus expand the realm of popular political pluralism. The revolutionary project eventually succeeded in incorporating initially unfamiliar Atlantic Coast social, ethnic, and political relations of power, thus enriching revolutionary theory generally and the Nicaraguan political project specifically.<sup>17</sup>

Social and political scientists need to respond to the attempts by the Reagan administration to set the intellectual agenda. Analysis of the kind that predominates in the collection edited by Valenta and Durán

16. According to Enriquez and Spalding, “The contradiction between the broad development objectives of the Sandinista government and the nations’ profound resource limitations, and between the government’s aspirations and its realm of control, remain central problems of the Nicaraguan revolution” (p. 125).

17. See Hazel Smith, “Race and Class in Revolutionary Nicaragua: Autonomy and the Atlantic Coast,” *Institute of Development Studies (IDS) Bulletin* 19, no. 3 (July 1988):66–72.

represents an obvious effort to provide a quasi-theoretical veneer for U.S. policy toward Nicaragua. Yet exposing such a motive is hardly an adequate response. As E. J. Hobsbawm has pointed out, the notions of "revolution" and "counterrevolution" are not simply opposed—they are "dialectically related."<sup>18</sup>

Any theory that counters the Reagan agenda (the intellectual corollary of the Reagan Doctrine), at its best, extrapolates from simple refutation to expand our understanding of state, society, and the nature of democracy in the revolutionary state. Edelberto Torres-Rivas's collection of essays entitled *Repression and Resistance: The Struggle for Democracy in Central America* provides a richness and profundity of analysis that does just that. His six chapters review the "Central American crisis," which he views as both political and economic in origin, as well as the nature of democracy in the region and its prospects.

Those who are concerned with limiting the field of inquiry to the study of the revolutionary party vis-à-vis state and society should pay particular attention to Torres-Rivas's discussion of "revolutionary popular movements" as distinguished from national liberation movements, populism, and popular national movements in other societies. Because even mild demands for reform have been rejected by dictatorial or military-dominated governments (often by means of violence and terror), the revolutionary popular movements have mobilized and evolved as genuinely national multiclass movements. According to Torres-Rivas, the revolutionary popular movement, rather than adopting a totalitarian project, demonstrates "one primary ideological characteristic . . . its profoundly antiauthoritarian and prodemocratic character" (p. 64).

Torres-Rivas argues that the Central American experience (except in Costa Rica and Nicaragua since 1979) has consisted of "authoritarian liberal" states with only brief historical moments of democracy. But he does not discount the changes that have taken place in the "façade democracies" (p. 65). In his view, developments in El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras since 1982 "have intimated the beginnings of a tolerated dissidence" (p. 153). Torres-Rivas also points out to those with a modicum of a historical perspective that there is no universal model of political democracy: "There have only been democratic experiences" (p. 134).

Challenging the Reagan agenda requires theoretical rigor that avoids the intellectual cul-de-sacs of cultural relativism, historical myopia, or worse, ahistorical abstraction. There are lessons to be learned from the mistakes made by Sandinista revolutionary and Costa Rican representa-

18. According to Hobsbawm, "'Revolution' and 'counterrevolution' may share much of the same analysis . . . The two terms are not simply opposed . . . but dialectically related." See E. J. Hobsbawm, "Revolution," in *Revolution in History*, edited by Roy Porter and Mikulás Teich (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 11.

tional democrats. But scholars should not confuse these mistakes with the civilian subterfuge practiced by those who have not yet been able to break away from the real power holders in El Salvador, Honduras, and Guatemala—the military establishments of those states.

The ultimate irony is that the Reagan agenda of democratization has brought an intellectual agenda to Central America that has mostly discounted the claims against the Reagan administration's target state of Nicaragua. U.S. Republican administrations have achieved some success by using "democracy" as a catch-all term to rationalize counterrevolutionary interventions intended to forestall revolution (as in Haiti and the Philippines) or to contain it. But in the theoretical battle for democracy, which is equally if not more important for its practical manifestations as for its intrinsic merit, analysts are increasingly focusing on the glaring disparities between rhetoric and practice—not in Nicaragua but in the "façade democracies." Political scientists can thus look forward to a body of literature that will develop further the critical analysis of democracy and democratization in Central America that we see beginning in the books reviewed here.