

Time Running Out for Sandinistas Nicaragua at the Crossroads

“When one makes a Revolution, one cannot mark time; one must always go forward—or go back.”

—V.I. Lenin, quoted in *Ten Days That Shook the World*

The Nicaraguan revolution today stands at a crossroads. Time is running out for the Sandinistas' utopian dream of “peaceful coexistence” with the domestic bourgeoisie and its imperialist backers. The economy is strained to the breaking point by the necessity to divert thousands of urban and agricultural workers and 40 percent of government expenditure to the war against the CIA-funded contra terrorists. Hoarding and black market speculation fuel steep inflation, as working-class living standards plummet and the country's gross national product contracts for the second year in a row. Meanwhile the Sandinista rulers squander precious resources futilely trying to conciliate the contras' fifth column, the Nicaraguan capitalist class.

Last October the Sandinista Front for National Liberation (FSLN) junta declared a “state of emergency”—directed primarily at the left and workers movement. The entire leadership of the left-wing ex-Maoist Popular Action Movement, which in the past has led strikes of several thousand workers and is the FSLN's largest leftist opposition in Nicaragua, was briefly arrested and taken in for questioning. The right to strike and even the right to demonstrate were indefinitely suspended, including for the FSLN's own mass organizations. Leaders of the big bourgeoisie's “Democratic Coordinator” (which is openly linked to the contras) and counter-revolutionary Roman Catholic primate Cardinal Obando y Bravo got slapped on the wrist—“lectured” according to the *New York Times*—while Aljandro Solorzano, leader of the 10,000-member Carpenters, Bricklayers, Fitters and Related Workers Union (SCASS), was thrown in jail for two days. Solorzano's “crime” was that he had been on a hunger strike to protest the Sandinistas' decision to subsidize the capitalists at the expense of the workers.

This response is typical of the bonapartist balancing act which the FSLN has been engaged in since it took power. The Sandinistas' commitment to preserving the property of Nicaragua's capitalists has repeatedly brought it into conflict with the urban working class, rural proletariat and poor peasantry. At the same time it is not trusted by the big capitalists, who resent the curbs which the new government has imposed on their “right” to exploit.

The 1979 revolution which overthrew U.S.-supported dictator Anastasio Somoza effected real improvements for the workers and peasants of Nicaragua. Unemployment was halved in the first year. Government health care programs cut infant mortality by 40 percent, virtually eliminated polio and vastly reduced the incidence of measles, malaria and other contagious diseases. A massive educational drive reduced illiteracy from over 50 to 12 percent. Per capita food consumption rose sub-

stantially in the early years of the revolution. (It has since declined somewhat as a result of the war with the contras and the consequent fall in real wages, but it remains considerably higher than it was under Somoza.) The urban masses benefited from a 50 percent rent reduction as well as subsidized food, transportation, medical care and education.

The FSLN's Agrarian Reform

One of the slogans which the FSLN used to mobilize the rural masses for the insurrection was “Land to Whoever Works It.” In a number of cases the FSLN's Farm Workers Association (ATC) organized land seizures. But once in power the Sandinistas hesitated to antagonize the big landowners for fear that they would cease planting and thereby endanger the foreign exchange dollars earned by coffee, cotton and sugar exports. The large farms depended on the availability of cheap agricultural labor and “the fear that, once people could make a decent living from their own land, they would no longer seek wage labor in the export harvests, helped slow the pace of the land reform” (Joseph Collins, *What Difference Could a Revolution Make?*, 1985). Thus the government began to use the ATC to actively discourage further takeovers.

The FSLN initiated a program of easy credit which the agricultural capitalists responded to by massive decapitalization. Money borrowed for seed, farm equipment, etc. was used to buy dollars on the black market which were then deposited in Miami banks for safekeeping. Many owners with heavy equipment simply drove it across the border into Costa Rica or Honduras and sold it. Nicaraguan beef herds also began to “disappear” as Honduran beef exports suddenly increased by 20 percent.

The agricultural workers, seasonal laborers and peasants sounded the alarm. The ATC led a march of 30,000 campesinos on Managua in February 1980 demanding that “not one single inch of land be returned.” They also demanded a crackdown on landowners who refused to produce, pay the minimum wage or abide by the recently legislated improvements in working conditions. This mobilization coincided with a series of demonstrations and plant occupations by factory workers pressing similar demands. Under massive pressure, the Sandinistas announced an agrarian policy the next month which guaranteed, for the first time, that land already seized (mostly in the course of the revolution) would remain in the public domain. But at the same time the FSLN pledged to actively discourage any further expropriations of “productive” landowners.

The Sandinista Agrarian Reform Law of 1981 is extremely conservative. “Virtually unique among land reforms, it places no ceiling on land ownership and emphatically reiterates the state's guarantee to protect the

right to private property” (ibid). It explicitly forbids land seizures by workers and peasants. As of July 1984 twenty government employees were doing time in jail for “abusive confiscations” among other things.

With the stepping up of contra attacks and the consequent food shortages the FSLN accelerated the previously sluggish pace of land redistribution. “In the three weeks leading up to the revolution’s fifth anniversary [July 1984], as many families received property titles as in the first two years of the land reform” (ibid). In all, some 20 percent of the country’s farmland has been titled over to some 60,000 beneficiaries either as individual family owners or through co-ops. But the recent redistributions have been conducted in a craven and deliberately non-revolutionary fashion. The FSLN has mostly been parceling out state-owned land, much of it from the holdings of Somoza. These were among the most highly mechanized and most productive farms in the country. Breaking up these lands, rather than making further inroads on the holdings of the big agrarian capitalists, is *counterposed* to the interests of the workers and poor peasants.

Nicaragua and the Permanent Revolution

The impasse which the Nicaraguan revolution finds itself in today stands as a negative confirmation of Leon Trotsky’s theory of Permanent Revolution, i.e., that even purely democratic questions, like breaking up semi-feudal land ownership, cannot be solved short of the conquest of power by the working class. The notion that socialist revolution would be “premature,” and that it is therefore necessary to locate a “patriotic” section of the bourgeoisie to ally with, is as fallacious in Nicaragua as it was in Allende’s Chile, Chiang’s China or Kerensky’s Russia. The Nicaraguan capitalist class is intimately bound up with the landowners and thus opposes the classical bourgeois-democratic solution to the agrarian question (“land to the tiller”) and opts for U.S. dominance and contra terror.

The FSLN took power convinced that with a monopoly of arms it could control the bourgeoisie. Jaime Wheelock, a former leader of the FSLN’s Proletarian Tendency (which in the late 1970s had opposed the majority’s popular-frontist strategy in favor of an independent working class orientation), explained the “strategy” to exiled Chilean journalist Marta Harnecker in 1983:

“Here what has to be posed theoretically is whether it is possible that the bourgeoisie simply produce, without power, that they limit themselves as a class to a productive role. That is, that they limit themselves to exploiting their means of production and use these means of production to live, not as instruments of power, of imposition.”

“I think it is possible in Nicaragua.”

—*Nicaragua: The Sandinista Peoples Revolution*, 1985

Events have proved that it is not.

Tomas Borge took a rather different tack in his 1982 May Day address:

“...in Nicaragua, the power of imperialism and of the bourgeoisie has been decapitated...”

“There are some workers who believe that the main enemy of the working class is the bourgeoisie. But the bourgeoisie as a class has been mortally wounded in this

country, and the dying have never been dangerous enemies. The main enemy of the working class is the division of the working class.”

—ibid

Borge has since discovered that the “dying,” like Mao’s famous “paper tiger,” can be very dangerous indeed. If in 1982 he wasn’t worried about the “mortally wounded” bourgeoisie and its backers, by 1985 he was singing a different tune:

“The Sandinista revolution took place in a certain geopolitical area, in the United States’ backyard....This geopolitical factor forced us, independent of our own will, to encourage political pluralism and a mixed economy. The development of this tactic became transformed into a strategy and today the mixed economy, for example, is no longer an operational choice or a camouflage, it is a strategy.”

—*International Viewpoint*, 14 October 1985

But the “strategy” of endless concessions to the capitalists is not at all “independent of [the FSLN’s] will”—it is a conscious policy, deliberately chosen. It is a policy which can only end in defeat with the best militants of the FSLN, the unions and the workers movement dead or in jail, and the leadership of the urban and rural working class crushed.

Nicaragua and the Cuban Model

The situation in Nicaragua today is similar, in its essentials, to that in Cuba *before* the definitive expropriation of the capitalists. In both countries a patriotic petty-bourgeois radical formation, repulsed by the effects of imperialism, insurrected with the intention of establishing a society in which the grotesque inequities of neo-colonial development would be eliminated and everyone could live happily ever after—a kind of non-exploitative capitalism.

With the victory of the insurrection the radicals find that although they have a more or less complete monopoly of the means of repression, they are far from being in control of social relations. The workers and landless peasants, taking the rhetoric of the new regime as good coin, and mobilized in the course of the insurrection, begin to demand that the changes they fought for be implemented. The capitalists and large landowners, frightened that their “executive committee” has been deposed, attempt initially to co-opt the new regime. The radicals, attempting to balance between these two conflicting pressures, procrastinate. U.S. imperialism, fearing that things may be getting out of hand, begins to put pressure on the new regime to get-along and go-along. If the radicals resist, Washington starts to turn the economic (and military) screws.

At this point, in both the Nicaraguan and Cuban revolutions, the insurrectionary armed force is faced with a decision. It can either decide to “play ball” with the domestic capitalists and their imperialist backers—and turn on their plebian base—or it must expropriate the holdings of the propertied class and establish a collectivized economy. In other words, it must decide the class nature of the state which it is trying to consolidate, i.e., determine the property forms which it will defend. Until they cross this Rubicon there is *no state* in the

Marxist sense of a body of armed men who defend a particular set of property relations.

In Cuba this whole process was settled in the first two years of the revolution. Faced with the refusal of U.S. oil monopolies to refine Soviet oil and the cancellation of the traditional sugar quota by the Eisenhower administration, the Castro regime responded by wholesale expropriation of American property in Cuba. Ultimately the Cubans went on to expropriate all the major holdings of the Cuban bourgeoisie—right down to the movie houses. In doing so the Fidelistas established a deformed workers state, not qualitatively different from those of Eastern Europe, China or Vietnam. In all these states capitalist property has been uprooted and the means of production collectivized (thus establishing the working class as the dominant class economically) without establishing the direct political rule of the proletariat.

FSLN Expropriations

The Sandinistas' expropriations have thus far been limited to the properties of Somoza and his immediate circle. While this included the banks, mines, textiles, plastics, metal working, foodstuffs and other industries, it still amounted to only a quarter of the country's industrial enterprises. In agriculture, which dominates the Nicaraguan economy, less than 20 percent was in the state sector in 1981. Some 60 percent of the economy remains in private hands today (*NACLA Report on the Americas*, May/June 1985).

The Nicaraguan bourgeoisie was not overly concerned that the Sandinistas proposed to run Somoza's holdings as state enterprises. Nor did they make much fuss about the nationalization of the banking system, particularly as the state bank was flat broke and many of the capitalists traditionally depended on it for credit. Furthermore the heads of the two major banking groups had already been expelled from the main employers' federation (Superior Council of the Private Sector—COSEP) for their ties to the Somacistas.

Similarly, the FSLN's move to control exports (and its subsequent attempts to regulate imports) is characteristic of many dependent Third World economies. By consolidating the marketing of the products of a given industry or economic sector it is often possible for the state to obtain better terms of trade (and therefore higher profits for the individual capitalists) than if the atomized producers, each with a small amount to sell, attempt to compete directly on the international market.

The sort of planning and economic control exercised by the Nicaraguan government over capital accumulation, investment priorities, corporate organization and even the rate of profit is not at all incompatible with the continued existence of a market economy. Nor is the degree of state intervention in the Nicaraguan economy at all exceptional in contemporary Latin America. As Sandinista commandante Henry Ruiz explained: "The term mixed economy belongs to capitalist economics. Here, a modern capitalism exists in which the state is not afraid to be a property owner. In our case, the state owns less property than in Bolivia, in Allende's Chile, or even in Mexico, Venezuela or Costa Rica" (*Barricada Interna-*

cional, 30 April 1984).

But the fact that the FSLN intends to create a rationalized *capitalist* economy does not endear it to the bourgeoisie. It is not theirs, and they know it! It is a radical populist government with "socialist" pretensions which in many instances checks their profiteering. It controls the arms, the courts and the jails, not COSEP. The FSLN in power reflects the massive inroads on bourgeois rule made by the workers, peasants and urban poor since the July 1979 insurrection. Like the bourgeoisie under the Spanish Republic in 1936, the Nicaraguan bourgeoisie is currently forced to rely on the Sandinistas to prevent the masses from completing the revolution. But they don't trust the FSLN, so just as the Spanish capitalists financed Franco to guarantee their dominance, the far weaker Nicaraguan propertied class looks, albeit with misgivings, to the U.S.-funded contras to restore its dominance.

The contra/U.S. military encirclement, the reluctance of the Soviets to subsidize another impoverished Latin American country and, above all, the absence of a revolutionary party in Nicaragua to polarize and therefore decide the issue, has prevented a definitive resolution to the crisis. At this point Nicaragua could still go either way. What is certain is that the Sandinistas' plan for national liberation in this century and socialism in the next is pure fantasy. The conflict of social forces dictates that the issue must be resolved in favor of one of the two fundamental social classes: the working class or the bourgeoisie.

The Sandinistas have proven their willingness to defend the radical egalitarianism of the revolution against the armed forces of the old, neo-colonial bourgeois order. It is not yet clear that in a decisive showdown the FSLN would turn the full force of its armed might against the workers to guarantee the property of the capitalists. While the FSLN has not hesitated to harass and even jail its working class opponents, there is a big difference between the police actions which have occurred so far and the type of force the Spanish Popular Front used in Barcelona in May 1937 to crush the workers' revolution. Given the Sandinistas' contradictory history and ideology such a move could very well result in a deep split. The successful application of such force against the proletariat would mark the definitive consolidation of a bourgeois state.

The Nicaraguan Revolution: A Mass Urban Insurrection

One important difference between the Cuban and Nicaraguan revolutions was the extent of mass participation in the insurrection. The central irony of the Nicaraguan revolution is that it was far more sweeping in its insurrectionary scope than the 1958-59 Cuban revolution and yet it has to date resulted in qualitatively less social change. Where the Cuban rebel army inflicted the decisive military defeats on Batista's armies in the field, the crucial battles in Nicaragua were the urban insurrections in Managua, Esteli, Leon and Masaya. Workers and the urban poor organized themselves in neighborhood Civil Defense Committees (CDCs) from the unsuccessful September 1978 uprising to the final conquest of power

in July 1979. In Cuba, by contrast, the urban CDCs were only established in the *aftermath* of the revolution.

Women's organizations also played a key role in the Nicaraguan revolution. They took root in the early 1970s in the urban struggle to save the lives of political prisoners, as well as in campaigns for purified water and for electricity in the barrios. Women accounted for almost 30 percent of all Nicaraguan wage earners and thus played a significant role in workplace organizations as well. During the insurrection women's organizations played key coordinating functions and women participated in large numbers in actual combat. This too far outstripped the Cuban model.

Most importantly the workers themselves formed Workers Fighting Committees (CLTs) beginning as early as 1977. These incipient factory councils cut across party lines and drew new layers of the class into the struggle. Under the leadership of the FSLN's Proletarian Tendency, which had recruited a significant number of Socialist Party industrial cadres in the early 1970s, armed detachments of workers harassed Somoza's National Guard in a number of urban areas. In the course of the final uprising the working class played a key role. The insurrection in Managua began with a general strike which was 90 percent effective from day one. The strike forced Somoza to send a quarter of his troops into that city at a moment when they were under attack on several other fronts. The armed uprising began on the sixth day of the strike.

Despite its small size (in 1979 there were 90,000 workers in industry and construction and another 230,000 employed in commerce and the service sectors) the urban proletariat has proven its combativity. The active role played by thousands of workers in the victorious 1979 insurrection is a potentially highly significant factor for the future of the revolution. The political passivity of the working class, due to Stalinist misleadership and historic defeats, which characterized the Cuban, Chinese and Vietnamese revolutions, was an essential precondition for the monopolization of political power by parasitic nationalist bureaucracies.

The FSLN and the Working Class

Almost from the day it took power the FSLN has been in conflict with the working class. The Sandinistas see themselves as a vanguard organization "at the service" of the workers but with a higher consciousness than the class. They openly justify the suppression of working class dissent on the grounds that the workers often act against their own best interests.

In December 1979, while the government was providing easy credit to the bourgeoisie, it called on the working class to give up its *treceavo mes*, or "thirteenth month" of pay, to create jobs for the country's 200,000 unemployed. (The *treceavo mes* was a bonus payment instituted by Somoza to placate the workers after a major strikewave shook the regime in early 1978.) Faced with the nearly unanimous opposition of the unions, the Sandinistas were forced to back down. Shortly thereafter the government tried to cut the working hours and wages of the construction workers organized by the

SCASS—ostensibly to create jobs. When they struck in response, the FSLN publicly criticized itself and again backed down.

In February 1980, seven months after the insurrection, a wave of militant strikes and factory seizures swept the country. The workers raised two demands: opposition to decapitalization by the employers and calls for improved working conditions and higher wages. The government responded to the factory takeovers against decapitalization much as it had to the land takeovers: it appealed to the bourgeoisie to act patriotically, warned them they risked confiscation if decapitalization persisted and occasionally sanctioned union demands to open the books. In some cases where the workers had seized, reorganized and were operating factories deserted by their owners, the government paid up to a quarter of the wage bill until the enterprise began to break even. In other factories it was left to the ingenuity of the employees and the solidarity of other unions in the same industry to get things operating again. In most cases these plants still function under workers management.

But when the Communist Party-affiliated Federation of Trade Union Action and Unity (CAUS) led a strike over wages at FABRITEX, a textile plant which is 48 percent government controlled, the labor minister threatened to outlaw the strike. After much public debate and harassment, the strikers went back to work, but the government hadn't finished—it turned a 50,000-strong demonstration against the CIA into a demonstration against the CAUS. CAUS headquarters were seized in both Leon and Managua.

The Situation Today

Today the FSLN once again finds itself locked in conflict with the Nicaraguan proletariat. It is simply not possible for the government to continue to subsidize the capitalist parasites, and provide the necessities of life for the plebian masses while it is forced to drain the treasury to finance the war against the contras. Something has to give, and thus far the commandantes in Managua have decided that it will be working-class living standards. Last winter the government announced "a credit policy that will provide incentives to businessmen and an end to subsidies on basic goods" for the population (*Barri-cada Internacional*, 21 February 1985). This resulted in the price of milk, for example, going up by 50 percent. Meanwhile hard-currency (dollar) subsidies have been resumed for large capitalist livestock producers as well as cotton growers.

Last May the FSLN announced that wage supplements in kind (which enabled workers to barter some of the products they produced for the necessities of life which their wages didn't cover) were to be abolished. The regime is now attempting to tie future wage hikes directly to increases in productivity, a policy which U.S. corporations bent on concessions often employ. A form of piecework has also been introduced, partially disguised as a guaranteed hourly wage. Under new "equal pay" provisions, wages for new-hires in certain job categories have been slashed.

The consequence of these measures is that the eco-

conomic situation of the FSLN's plebian base is deteriorating rapidly. According to the 5 March 1984 issue of *Barricada Internacional*, "Since May 1981, real wages have fallen about 35 percent due to Washington's war against Nicaragua, higher import costs and increased demand among previously impoverished sectors without a corresponding increase in production." *International Viewpoint* (14 October 1985), the organ of the Sandinista boosters of the fake-Trotskyist United Secretariat, reported that "In May, the minimum wage went from 3,000 cordobas to 4,500 cordobas, while the rise in prices is estimated at around 100%. Thus, the decline in buying power has been about 50%." As a consequence increasing numbers of Nicaraguans are forced to engage in activity in the "parallel" economy. It is estimated that over half of Managua's economically active population is engaged in retailing or production of goods and services for the underground economy which operates outside the control of the regime (see box). *International Viewpoint* reports that: "The gap between this sector and the productive workers has so widened that today the minimum income of an ice-cream vendor is at least three times the minimum wage of a productive worker."

The working class has responded to the offensive on its living standards with a series of strikes. These have been met with a wave of CIA-baiting, a tactic which the FSLN also used in response to the 1979-80 strike wave. Justifying the state of emergency Daniel Ortega was quoted in the 19 October *New York Times* as saying that the U.S. was "rebuilding its mercenary army with the goal of launching new aggressions in the northern part of the country....To coincide with this offensive, the United States is planning to develop an internal front, using leftist and rightist political parties, the Catholic Church and some news media." Clearly the intent of the CIA-baiting is to isolate those sections of the working class who are resisting the government's attempt to depress their living standards in pursuit of the chimera of "unity" with COSEP.

Since the FSLN's unity declaration of December 1978 which stated explicitly that the projected insurrection was to be the first step toward socialism, the FSLN has virtually disappeared its programmatic commitment to socialism. Its 1984 election program entirely omitted any mention of socialism, even as a perspective for the remote future. The document also conspicuously omits the "right to strike" from its list of "Human Rights and Public Liberties." The section entitled "Workers, trade unions and jobs" emphasized that:

"The Sandinista front has promoted the unity of the working class and will go on doing so, in a constant struggle against divisionism, opportunism, low productivity, indiscipline, and work inefficiency.

"All these are vices that the agents of imperialism and capitalism try to preserve among the most backward sectors of the working class. It will be necessary to combat them energetically."

In contrast to this, the mass meetings of the Sandinista Trade Union Confederation (CST) in Managua last summer reflected widespread discontent with mismanagement (government and private) and lack of response to workers proposals for technical innovations to replace

the spare parts made unavailable by the U.S. embargo. According to the 19 August 1985 issue of *Barricada*, CST members "called for a review of the workers wages and for a rapid solution to pending cases. In the application of the austerity and economy measures, they have found resistance from the administrators, and they demand that these measures be applied not just to the workers but to all sectors."

The Contra War: Bleeding the Revolution Slowly

The contras wage war openly and directly on the gains of the revolution, with scarcely a pretense of trying to win the loyalties of the population. The Nicaraguan working people hate the contra/National Guard forces with a passion born of decades of murderous repression and memories of the 50,000 who died during the revolution. The contras have been unable to seize and hold a single town in the entire country. Their strategy is one of attrition through terror and sabotage.

The toll in the war with the contras has been staggering. Daniel Ortega told the U.N. last fall that 11,000 citizens had been killed, 5,000 had been wounded and another 5,000 had been kidnapped. Two hundred and fifty thousand people have been forced to relocate. Contra attacks on grain storage facilities, agricultural exports, oil depots, and the country's transportation network have done enormous damage to the economy. To sap morale, the contras have also targeted schools and health care facilities, and their personnel—which in many cases the government has been unable to replace.

To date the dominant sections of the U.S. bourgeoisie have contented themselves with bleeding the revolution slowly with the contra war. But the Sandinistas in power serve as a daily reminder to the impoverished masses throughout Latin America that U.S.-backed dictatorships can be overthrown. The Reaganites would prefer a blitz-rape Nicaraguan "solution" on the model of Grenada in 1983 or the Dominican Republic in 1965. Several considerations have so far stayed Reagan's itchy trigger finger.

The Nicaraguan people are armed and ready to take on a U.S. invasion. The masses of the population still firmly support the revolution and lay the blame for its problems primarily at the feet of U.S. imperialism and the contras. This was demonstrated by the turnout of 500,000 at the 19 July anniversary celebration last summer. The Sandinistas have widely advertised their intention to defend Managua street by street and then carry out a protracted guerrilla resistance designed to bloody U.S. occupation forces and provoke opposition domestically.

The Pentagon is acutely aware that it has only a narrow "window" of popular support for a Rambo-style adventure in Nicaragua. They know that they will have to win quickly or else risk becoming bogged down in another unpopular and politically costly Vietnam-style quagmire. One widely circulated scenario done by former high-ranking U.S. officers projected American casualties at 1,950 dead and almost 10,000 wounded in the first four weeks of fighting with a total of 4,000 killed

after the first four years (*Village Voice*, 25 June 1985).

Memories of Vietnam, together with high unemployment, slashed social services, union-busting and a general decline in living standards contribute to widespread mistrust of the government and its intentions in Central America. Some polls have indicated that as many as four out of five Americans oppose military intervention in the region. If Reagan were to go ahead with a military assault on Nicaragua it is virtually certain that he would have to contend with significant domestic opposition almost from the outset. A combination of respect for the military capabilities of the Sandinistas and fear of the domestic "Vietnam syndrome" as well as the potential repercussions in the rest of Latin America and in Europe has led important elements in the American ruling class to counsel caution.

The *Wall Street Journal* observed on 2 October 1985 that "Most Western allies and the nations of Central and South America, which were receptive to President Kennedy's embargo of Cuba in the early 1960s, aren't going along on this one [i.e., Reagan's embargo]. Some are even boosting trade with Nicaragua." America's imperialist allies and regional semi-vassals chose instead to put their faith in the now-defunct "Contadora process" to "promote regional democracy and contain Nicaragua's Marxist regime" (*New York Times*, 8 January). They seek to coax the Sandinistas into consolidating a "radical" neo-colonial bourgeois state (as happened in Algeria) and fear that Washington's belligerent posture could push Nicaragua down the Cuban road.

The hesitancy of the American rulers to pursue the military option poses an important, if limited, opportunity for the left and the workers movement in the U.S. to prepare to respond to a Yankee invasion. The American working class has the power to stop an invasion dead in its tracks. The 1984 San Francisco longshoremen's 10-day boycott of South African cargo points the way forward. Similar political strikes, on a far larger scale, would give a massive boost to the battle against intervention.

Expropriate the Fifth Column! Extend the Revolution Throughout Central America!

The gains which the Nicaraguan revolution has achieved to date are threatened by the FSLN's attempts to placate the COSEP fifth column. After a meeting with COSEP representatives and other businessmen last winter FSLN head of state Daniel Ortega "acknowledged that, despite their differences, all the participants share 'a patriotic spirit, a sentiment of national unity and of being Nicaraguan.' And it is to this spirit that the government is appealing" (*Barricada Internacional*, 28 February 1985). But there can be no "unity" between the exploiters and their victims. The Nicaraguan bourgeoisie is actively involved in economic sabotage and political subversion. The attempt to find a "third road" for Nicaragua between integration in the imperialist world market and a centrally planned collectivized economy has proved to be impossible. The socialist expropriation of the bourgeoisie is the only program which can resume the forward march of the Nicaraguan revolution.

It is conceivable that in the event of a wholesale invasion by the U.S., the Sandinistas themselves could move to expropriate the bourgeoisie. Like Salvador Allende's decision to pick up a sub-machine gun on 11 September 1973, it may well then be too late. In any case a decision by the FSLN to establish collectivized property forms would only, in the best case, result in a deformed workers state on the Cuban model run by a nationalist bureaucratic caste inimicably hostile to the political rule of the working masses.

Expropriation of the capitalists would represent a tremendous leap forward for Nicaragua, but even this cannot by itself eliminate backwardness. In the early years of the Russian revolution Lenin and Trotsky constantly stressed that the survival of the revolution ultimately depended on its extension into the advanced capitalist countries of Western Europe. The need to spread the revolution is posed even more sharply in tiny underdeveloped Nicaragua than it was in Bolshevik Russia. Yet the Sandinistas are moving in the opposite direction. In the name of "preserving" their revolution the FSLN has adopted the self-defeating—indeed suicidal—policy of cutting off aid to revolutionary struggles elsewhere, in an attempt to reach a *modus vivendi* with imperialism.

The FSLN has maintained ties to the rest of the Central American and Mexican left and periodically threatens that a U.S. invasion will be the signal for insurrectionary uprisings in neighboring states. But revolution cannot be turned on and off like a faucet. The left is on the defensive in Guatemala and Honduras, while the civil war in El Salvador may be reaching a critical phase. The conservative British *Economist* noted with satisfaction in its 30 November 1985 issue that "The one solid thing the Americans have achieved in Central America has been to limit the spread of the revolutionary fire that started in Nicaragua in 1978-79 and at one stage threatened to burn up El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras and singe Mexico. That firefighting exercise has been a success."

So far perhaps, but most of the capitalist regimes in Latin America are balancing precariously on the edge of a \$350 billion debt volcano. In one country after another the governments, at the instruction of the imperialist International Monetary Fund (IMF), have remorselessly ground down wages and living standards even as economic recession has thrown hundreds of thousands of workers onto the scrap heap of the unemployed. A revolutionary regime in Managua which broke its connection with the imperialist world by eliminating capitalist exploitation once and for all would serve as a beacon of hope for the region's combative and desperately oppressed workers movement. Such a government could take the offensive in spreading the revolution to earthquake-devastated Mexico and south by raising a call to cancel the debt payments to the Wall Street blood-suckers. A wave of strikes to reverse the IMF-ordered cuts in real wages and for a shorter workweek to combat unemployment (as opposed to the impotent Castro-initiated strategy of mass marches) could ignite a conflagration which would singe the imperialist colossus north of the Rio Grande and unite the victorious Nicara-

guan proletariat with the workers of the more developed countries of the region.

For a Trotskyist Party in Nicaragua!

Nicaragua is today on the front line of the international struggle against imperialism. A victory for Reagan over the courageous and embattled Nicaraguan masses would only embolden the imperialists in their attempts to roll back the gains won by working people around the world, and would fuel the drive toward war against the U.S.S.R., the first country in which the proletariat successfully seized power.

The workers and poor peasants of Nicaragua are caught between a rock and a hard place. On the one hand the contras and their imperialist backers and domestic fifth column intend to reverse all the gains achieved to date by the overthrow of Somoza. On the other, the ruling Sandinista junta itself, in a desperate and futile attempt to placate COSEP and its friends in the CIA, pursues a policy of driving down working-class living standards.

In this situation isolated strike actions are no answer. What is urgently necessary is the construction of a broadly authoritative organization which can unite the Nicaraguan toilers across political, provincial, trade-union and craft divisions. Such a workers council composed of directly elected and recallable delegates from every workplace must be completely organizationally independent from the FSLN junta (while being open to representatives from CST unions and other FSLN mass plebian organizations). In revolutionary Russia such workers councils were called "soviets." Leon Trotsky referred to these as the "highest form of the united front." In Nicaragua, as in Russia in 1917, these organizations could constitute the framework of a workers and peasants government. In order to function as such they must be organizationally flexible enough to draw in all sectors of the working class and its allies. The workers must actively reach out and incorporate representatives of tenants groups, rank-and-file soldiers committees, women's organizations, poor peasants councils and other mass plebian organizations into a broadly based and democratic national soviet which would unite the oppressed against their capitalist masters.

Mobilizing and drawing into active political life the mass of Nicaragua's oppressed and exploited (exactly the opposite of what the FSLN is doing with its across-the-board ban on strikes and demonstrations) would

give enormous impetus to the struggle against the contras and their backers. The workers councils would naturally establish organs of self-defense. These workers militias would participate in the struggle against the contras and capitalist sabotage. A national network of workers councils would also serve as an effective mechanism to block the economic sabotage of COSEP and to ensure that the productive resources of the country are used to benefit the working masses—not to pad Miami bank accounts.

The decisive precondition for such a soviet to displace the vacillating and increasingly anti-working class FSLN and proceed to the creation of a workers and peasants government based on the expropriation of the capitalists and big landowners is the formation of a revolutionary leadership. As Trotsky noted in *Lessons of October*, his classic study of the conditions which enabled the Russian workers to successfully seize power in 1917: "Without a party, apart from a party, over the head of a party, or with a substitute for a party, the proletarian revolution cannot conquer."

A revolutionary party in Nicaragua would struggle to shatter the illusions of the masses in the FSLN, to polarize and split the Sandinista mass organizations into their class components and to mobilize the workers, soldiers and peasants to break the power of the Nicaraguan bourgeoisie once and for all. A Leninist-Trotskyist vanguard can only be forged by regrouping left-wing militants from the unions, the leftist organizations and the FSLN itself on a program of hard opposition to the Sandinista project of class collaboration and a recognition that the only way to defend the revolution is to complete it and extend it internationally.

- ***Defend the Right of the Working Class to Organize Itself Independently of the FSLN!***
- ***For Workers, and Poor Peasants Councils! For Elected Rank and File Soldiers Committees Linked to the Workers Movement! For Workers Militias!***
- ***Smash the Contras! Break With the Bourgeoisie! For a Workers and Peasants Government to Complete the Revolution by Expropriating COSEP and the Big Landowners! For a Trotskyist Party in Nicaragua!***
- ***Extend the Revolution Throughout Central America! Forward to the Socialist Federation of Latin America!***