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Power and Consolidation in the Nicaraguan Revolution

by STEPHEN M. GORMAN

At the end of its first year, the revolutionary process in Nicaragua must be considered a success from several different perspectives. The war-torn economy has been stabilized, a progressive agrarian reform program initiated, a large state sector formed on the basis of expropriated *Somocista* property, an independent foreign policy adopted, and a massive literacy campaign launched throughout the country. Most important, however, has been the imposition of a high degree of political stability coupled with, and partially growing out of, the consolidation of power in the hands of a cohesive revolutionary vanguard. The ability of the Sandinista Front of National Liberation (FSLN) to establish its hegemony in post-Somoza Nicaragua has permitted the government to move decisively on a number of critical fronts and to escape power-sharing formulas that could have turned the policy-making process into a protracted struggle against entrenched interests. The foundation of Sandinista control over the government is simple: as *Comandante* Humberto Ortega explained, 'We took power by arms, and it should be clear who has power in Nicaragua today.'[1]

Immediately following the Sandinista victory, there was some concern that the revolutionary elements would surrender, or in some fashion lose, power to the national bourgeoisie. Writing in late July 1979, James Petras warned that because of the composition of the government and the institutional arrangements established by the FSLN, 'the transitional period is likely to be dominated by petty bourgeois democrats supported by the social democratic Tercerista faction of the FSLN, while the left (GPP and TP factions) avoids challenges to power and acts as the loyal opposition.'[2] But the prognostication proved completely incorrect, first because Petras misunderstood the institutional arrangements established by the FSLN upon assuming power and, second, because the so-called *Tercerista* faction of the FSLN

[1] *El Nuevo Diario* (Managua), Año 1, No. 19 (6 June 1980), p. 5.

[2] James Petras, 'Whither the Nicaraguan Revolution?', *Monthly Review*, Vol. 31, No. 5. (Oct., 1979), p. 14.

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proved to be more leftist than social democratic. Petras was no doubt worried that Nicaragua might follow the course of the Bolivian Revolution, where workers and miners defeated the oligarchy in 1952 only to turn power over to a petty bourgeois party (the MNR) which eventually excluded the revolutionary classes from decision-making.[3] Nicaragua under the FSLN, however, has followed a different course.

Our concern in this paper is to provide an analysis of the processes by which the FSLN consolidated its hegemony within the Nicaraguan Revolution. It is the consolidation of power by this vanguard that has made the policy successes of the Nicaraguan revolution possible. There are primarily three overlapping areas in which the FSLN moved simultaneously during the first year to consolidate its power: the political sphere, the military sphere, and the social sphere. Before discussing each of these separately, it is useful to review briefly the evolution of the Sandinista Front in order to highlight its more salient features, and provide a basis for understanding its behavior after the fall of Somoza.

The Evolution of the Sandinista Front

The FSLN was formed in 1961 under the leadership of Carlos Fonseca, Silvio Mayorga and Tomás Borge. It drew its nationalistic inspiration from the example of the anti-imperialist guerrilla war waged by Augusto César Sandino against US troops in Nicaragua (1927–1933), and its military inspiration from the Cuban Revolution. Cuba provided material, personnel and a base of operations to the FSLN during its formative years as it attempted to implement the *foco* theory that grew out of the Sierra Maestra experience. The defeat of Ernesto 'Che' Guevara in Bolivia caused the FSLN to deviate somewhat from the *foco* theory to counter the threat of the increasing effectiveness of US-trained counter-insurgency forces throughout Latin America. Urban organizational activities were increased to complement continued guerrilla warfare in the countryside after 1967 and, by the early 1970, the FSLN was able to begin armed urban actions to support those in the provinces.[4]

Between 1970 and 1975 the Sandinista Front executed a number of urban

[3] See James M. Malloy, *Bolivia: The Uncompleted Revolution* (Pittsburgh, University of Pittsburgh Press, 1970); and René Antonio Mayorga, 'National-Popular State, State Capitalism and Military Dictatorship in Bolivia: 1952–1975,' *Latin American Perspectives*, Vol. 5, No. 2 (spring 1978), pp. 89–119.

[4] See Humberto Ortega Saavedra, *50 años de lucha sandinista* (Managua, Ministerio del Interior, 1979), pp. 77–110; and Eduardo Crawley, *Dictators Never Die: A Portrait of Nicaragua and the Somoza Dynasty* (New York, St Martin's Press, 1979), Chapter 20.

terrorist actions that freed political prisoners, gained ransoms and increased its political visibility. This period culminated with a raid on a party given in honor of the US Ambassador to Nicaragua where several leading politicians and members of Somoza's family were taken prisoner.[5] This action succeeded in its political objectives, but also provoked a major counter-offensive by the Nicaraguan National Guard (GN) against the FSLN. Between early 1975 and late 1977, the Sandinista Front was severely repressed and some leaders were either killed in battle (Carlos Fonseca) or captured (Tomás Borge).

The political-military setback suffered by the FSLN caused it to splinter into three rival groups, each supporting a different revolutionary strategy. The prolonged Popular War (GPP) faction called for the continuation of guerrilla warfare in the countryside which would eventually drain the power of the dictatorship and promote its internal decomposition. The Proletarian Tendency (TP), in contrast, called for a concentration on urban organizational activities. It viewed the proletariat as the class with the greatest revolutionary potential, but, like the GPP, it considered the revolutionary process to require a prolonged period of accumulation of forces. The largest faction was the *Terceristas* (Third Force, also known as *Insurreccionales*), who favored the immediate initiation of widespread urban insurrections which could be led by the FSLN. The GPP and the TP vigorously opposed the *Tercerista* strategy for fear that it would involve the FSLN in a confrontation with the GN at a time when the government held a decided advantage in strength.[6] Nevertheless, the *Terceristas* proceeded to provoke several simultaneous urban insurrections throughout the country during October 1977 that drew all three *Sandinista* factions into major armed clashes. Although the GN gained the military victory in the October insurrection, the Sandinista Front achieved the political victory. It demonstrated to the country that the dictatorship had not destroyed the armed opposition, and increased its popularity with the masses.

The FSLN was able to reassume the offensive after the October 1977 insurrection. The ability of the armed opposition to increase the tempo of the struggle was aided by the assassination of the conservative opposition leader, Pedro Joaquín Chamorro in January 1978. Almost overnight, the political equation in Nicaragua changed profoundly. The entrepreneurial class in Nicaragua had begun to enter into conflict with the dictatorship after the 1972 earthquake that leveled Managua. (Somoza monopolized the foreign

[5] See Jaime Wheelock, *Diciembre victorioso* (Managua, Secretaría Nacional de Propaganda y Educación Política, 1979).

[6] See 'Sandinista Perspectives: Three Differing Views,' *Latin American Perspectives*, Vol. 6, No. 1 (winter 1979), pp. 114–27.

aid and new business opportunities that resulted from the disaster to expand his own business empire.) The suspicion that Somoza was behind the assassination of Chamorro, in turn, caused the bourgeoisie to abandon the dictatorship almost *en masse*. In the first instance, the solidification of a bourgeois opposition challenged the Sandinistas' aspirations to head the struggle against Somoza. In the final analysis, however, the failure of the bourgeois opposition to extract even the smallest concessions from the Somoza regime strengthened the position of the FSLN as many moderate groups despaired of a peaceful solution to the crisis of the dictatorship.

In August 1978 the FSLN carried out a raid on the National Palace that captured hundreds of *Somocista* politicians, who were then ransomed for money and the release of prisoners. The action contributed to the outbreak of a spontaneous popular rebellion the following month which again drew FSLN columns into action against the GN. The willingness of the Sandinista guerrillas to engage in fixed-location warfare against the National Guard in defense of the popular classes (to protect them from the full force of GN reprisals) was crucial in establishing the FSLN's leadership of the masses in the insurrectionary period that lay ahead. The first consequence of the September insurrection was the temporary strengthening of the bourgeois opposition's negotiating position vis-a-vis the dictatorship. But even with US support the bourgeois Broad Opposition Front (FAO) was still unable to extract concessions from Somoza, and, therefore, lost all possibility of circumventing Sandinista leadership of the struggle against Somoza. Between September 1978 and February 1979 most of the leading political and labor organizations threw their support behind the FSLN, which had succeeded in unifying the three Sandinista tendencies or factions under a nine-member supreme command, the FSLN National Directorate (*Dirección Nacional Conjunta* – DNC). For all practical purposes, the bourgeoisie was forced to accept the Sandinista demand that the dictatorship and its National Guard be completely destroyed, and not merely restructured (*Somocismo sin Somoza*) under US mediation.

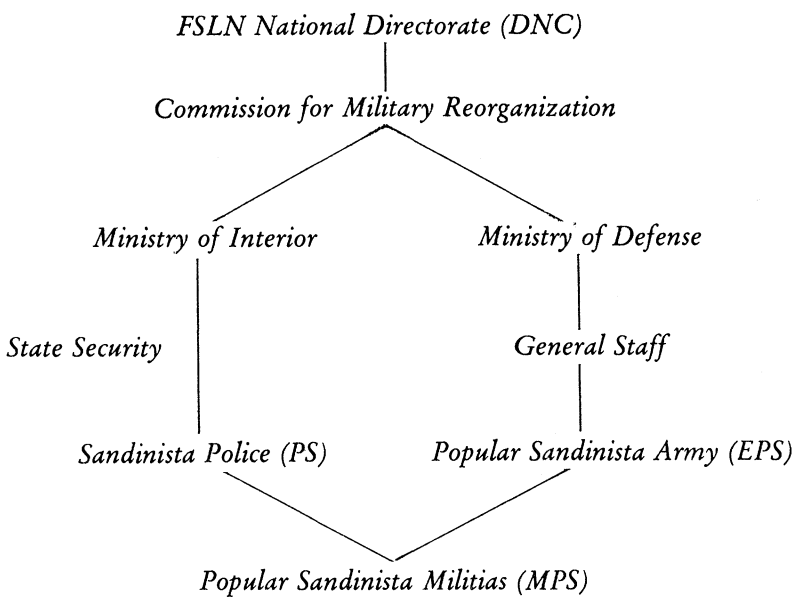
With the dictatorship politically isolated at home and abroad, and the FSLN in undisputed command of the armed opposition, the final offensive was launched in May with the opening of three military fronts. On June 8 the Battle for Managua was initiated as Sandinista guerrillas joined FSLN-led popular militias in fighting in the *barrios*. The final confrontation against the National Guard involved pitched military battles in over fifteen leading cities. Somoza's 15,000-man National Guard was militarily defeated by approximately 2,000 Sandinistas guerrilla veterans, 2,500 Sandinista-led popular militias, several hundred members of the ultra-leftist Anti-Somoza

Popular Militias (Milpas), a detachment of foreign volunteers who entered the fighting during the final offensive, and an indeterminable number of *barrio* residents who spontaneously took up arms against the dictatorship. By July 5 the GN had been defeated almost everywhere outside Managua.[7] Unable to secure foreign military intervention to rescue his regime, Somoza abandoned the country on July 17, and the Sandinista Front assumed power on July 19, 1980.

The Consolidation of Political Power

Figure I provides a schematic representation of the formal and informal political relationships that emerged in post-Somoza Nicaragua. The Sandinista

FIGURE I



National Directorate (DNC), which came into existence in early 1979 with the reunification of the FSLN, succeeded in dictating the institutional struc-

[7] For an account of the Battle for Managua, see Roger Mendieta Alfaro, *El último marine: la caida de Somoza* (Managua, Editorial Unión, 1980).

ture of the new government and defining the authority and composition of its organizational units. In this section we will discuss the factors that allowed the DNC to establish its control over the composition of the new government and dominate the policy-making process while avoiding the use of openly authoritarian tactics.

A month before the overthrow of Somoza, the DNC announced the formation of a provisional five-member junta, issued a Program of Government outlining policy objectives, and proposed the formation of a 33-member quasi-legislative Council of State which would include members of all political groups which had opposed the dictatorship. Shortly after assuming power, the DNC formed a ministerial cabinet in which moderate and conservative members greatly outnumbered leftist members.[8] The apparent numerical superiority of moderate and conservative members in the new government led some observers to anticipate a gradual diminution of leftist influence in policy-making. Yet, in practice the Sandinista National Directorate succeeded in tightening leftist control of the government.

The DNC prevented the representatives of the bourgeoisie from usurping political power by (1) retaining exclusive control of all military and police forces; (2) preventing them from using their governmental positions to pre-empt leftist leadership of the popular organizations that grew out of the insurrection, and (3) forging an effective political alliance with small groups of so-called moderate members included in the new regime.

The first critical test of the DNC's capacity to dominate the political process was its effort to prevent the five-member Government of National Reconstruction (JGRN) from establishing an independent political existence. The JGRN contained two representatives of the Nicaraguan bourgeoisie (Alfonso Robelo and Violeta Barrios de Chamorro); two *presumed* social-democratic moderates (Sergio Ramírez and Daniel Ortega); and one known leftist (Moisés Hassan). The potential existed for one of the social-democratic moderates to align with the two conservative members to dominate the JGRN, which could then assert its political autonomy from the DNC and compete for effective control over the cabinet.

Daniel Ortega, as a leading member of the supposedly social-democratic *Tercerista* faction of the Sandinista Front was suspect because of his willingness to form alliances with the progressive bourgeoisie during the insurrec-

[8] Petras, 'Whither the Revolution?' devotes considerable attention to the composition of the post insurrectionary government and the distribution of power between 'left' and 'right.' His primary error, however, was in evaluating *Los Doce* and the *Terceristas* as essentially social democratic reformists. In practice, both became supporters of radical programs.

tion.[9] In retrospect, however, the *Terceristas*' willingness to cooperate with the bourgeoisie in the armed struggle against a superior enemy grew strictly out of tactical considerations. In the post-insurrectionary period (especially with the disappearance of factional identities within the FSLN), Ortega proved to be fully committed to the radical reform program formulated by the DNC. Sergio Ramírez also turned out to be a firm supporter of DNC leadership. As a member of the socially prominent exile group *Los Doce*, Ramírez's identification with the Sandinista Front was expected to wane after the unifying influence of opposition to the dictatorship was removed. Instead, he joined together with Ortega and Hassan to provide the DNC with a firm majority on the JGRN. By early 1980 the conservative members of the junta were forced to realize their political isolation and accept the impossibility of establishing a political base in the JGRN. In April, Robelo and Chamorro both resigned. This posed the threat of an open political split between the Sandinista Front and the bourgeoisie, but a crisis was averted by the appointment in May of two new conservative members to the JGRN which preserved the *appearance* of private sector participation in the government.[10]

Although nominally under the authority of the JGRN, the Cabinet actually remained fully under the influence of the DNC. Still, the potential existed for the DNC to lose power by permitting conservative office holders to consolidate their control within key ministries. The original Cabinet appointed by the DNC in late July 1979 (see Chart I) appeared to include more conservative and moderate ministers than leftist ministers, and gave three of the most sensitive portfolios (Economic Planning, Industry and Agriculture) to representatives of the private sector. Equally important, the Ministry of Defense was given to a former colonel in Somoza's National Guard, Bernardino Larios.

But, in reality, conservative control of key economic ministries did not retard radical reforms which the DNC issued by decree. Within a few months of the fall of Somoza, the DNC had nationalized export, exploitation of natural resources and domestic banking; expropriated over 180 industrial and commercial companies, and nearly 50 percent of the arable land; and initiated a number of social services designed to improve health and welfare among the masses.[11] By January 1980 the DNC had devised a comprehensive plan for national reconstruction and placed two of its own members in control

[9] For a clearer exposition of Ortega's position see his interview in 'Sandinista Perspectives.'

[10] The two new members of the JGRN were Arturo Cruz and Rafael Córdova Rivas, appointed on 18 May 1980.

[11] Pedro Camejo and Fred Murphy (eds.), *The Nicaraguan Revolution* (New York, Pathfinder Press, 1979), p. 38.

CHART I

Original Cabinet and Ministerial Status Positions

Conservative	*Moderate*	*Leftist*
Bernardino Larios (Defense)	Miguel d'Escoto* (Foreign Affairs)	Tomás Borge (Interior)
Roberto Mayorga (Economic Planning)	Virgilio Godoy Reyes (Labor)	Ernesto Cardenal (Culture)
César Amador Kheel (Health)	Carlos Tunerman* (Education)	Leah Guido de López (Social Welfare)
Noel Rivas Gasteasoro (Industry)	Miguel Ernesto Vigil (Housing)	Jaime Wheelock (Agrarian Reform)
Manuel José Torres (Agriculture)	Reyando Antonio Tefel* (Social Security)	
	Joaquín Cuadra Chamorro* (Finance)	
	Ernesto Castillo López* (Justice)	
	Dionisio Marenco (Transport and Public Works)	

* *Los Doce* members

of two important portfolios originally intrusted to conservative businessmen: the Ministries of Agriculture and Economic Planning.[12] At the same time, Larios was replaced in the Ministry of Defense by DNC member Humberto Ortega. By early 1980 it had also become apparent that at least two of the members of *Los Doce* appointed to the cabinet who had been considered moderates (d'Escoto and Tunerman) were more than willing to back radical programs and accept the political leadership of the DNC. Thus, by February 1980, the political configuration of the cabinet had changed considerably. Most of the conservatives had been removed, several of the moderates had become radicalized, and at least nine important portfolios (Interior, Defense, Economic Planning, Agrarian Reform/Agriculture, Social Welfare, Culture, Foreign Affairs and Education) were in the hands of leftists (five of them going to four members of the DNC – See Chart II).

The conservative and moderate-conservative members of the original cabinet were unable to use their positions to undercut Sandinista political support among the masses or to present policy alternatives largely because of the DNC's calculated delay in creating the Council of State. The premature formation of a Council of State as provided for in the June 1979 Program of Government could easily have provided conservative Cabinet members with

[12] The portfolios of Agriculture and Agrarian Reform were combined under the direction of Jaime Wheelock.

CHART II

Key Positions Held by DNC Members After First Year

Tomás Borge	Minister of Interior
Daniel Ortega	Member of the Government of National Reconstruction
Humberto Ortega	Minister of Defense and Commander of the Sandinista Popular Army
Bayardo Arce	President of the Council of State
Jaime Wheelock	Minister of Agrigulture and Agrarian Reform
Luis Carrión	Vice Minister of Defense and Second in Command of the Sandinista Popular Army
Henry Ruiz	Minister of Economic Planning
Carlos Núñez	Involved in popular organization
Victor Tirado	Involved in popular organization

a forum for presenting alternatives to DNC policies. Similarly, the projected make-up of the Council meant that even the slightest political shift to the right by certain constituent groups would have produced a legislative body dominated by conservative interests. And a conservative Council of State could then have provided the political backing needed for private sector representatives in the original Cabinet to resist the DNC's control of the state apparatus.

The Program of Government issued by the DNC in June 1979 called for the formation of a 33-member council whose seats were to be apportioned among 1) the Sandinista Front of National Liberation; (2) the seven groups belonging to the leftist National Patriotic Front; (3) the seven groups united in the bourgeois Broad Opposition Front; (4) the six member organizations of the Superior Council of Private Property; (5) the Autonomous National University of Nicaragua, and (6) the National Association of Clergy.[13] Although the left would have gained a slight majority under the proposed formula, the DNC decided to postpone formalizing the institution for two basic reasons. In the first instance, some of the parties and unions organized into the National Patriotic Front which had accepted FSLN leadership during the insurrection were expected to compete with the Sandinista Front for political leadership in the post-insurrectionary phase. Equally important, some of the more radical parties which closely identified with the FSLN and which were guaranteed representation in the Council of State (like the United Peoples Movement) had ceased to exist, while new entities such as the Sandinista Defense Committees and the Association of Rural Workers were excluded from participation by the formula proposed in June 1979.

[13] *Programma de gobierno* (Managua, Dirección de Divulgación y Prensa de la Junta de Gobierno de Reconstrucción Nacional, 1979), p. 2.

Working through its sub-committee on popular organizations, the DNC endeavored to strengthen its control of a number of new mass-based organizations before elaborating a new formula which would provide for their inclusion in the Council of State.

A 47-member Council of State was finally instituted in May 1980. Popular organizations either controlled by, or closely associated with, the FSLN received a decided majority of the 47 seats, and Bayardo Arce of the DNC was appointed presiding officer. The decision to expand the membership of the Council and increase the representation of Sandinista-led organizations was one of the factors contributing to the resignation of Alfonso Robelo from the Government of National Reconstruction the previous month, but the willingness of other private sector representatives to participate in both the JGRN and the Council of State permitted the regime to preserve its pluralistic image and escape political polarization between the right and left.

The Consolidation of Military Power

The National Guard was replaced after the revolution with the Popular Sandinista Army (EPS) which was organized around a core of FSLN guerrilla veterans and Sandinista-led popular militias. Police and State Security Forces, which had been incorporated into the National Guard under Somoza, were given a separate institutional existence from the army under the Ministry of Interior. Finally, to strengthen the defense of the revolution, a significant number of citizens from the popular classes were organized into Sandinista Popular Militias (MPSs) which served as reserves for the army and auxiliaries to the Sandinista Police. The institutional relationship between the EPS, Sandinista Police and MPSs is illustrated in Figure II.

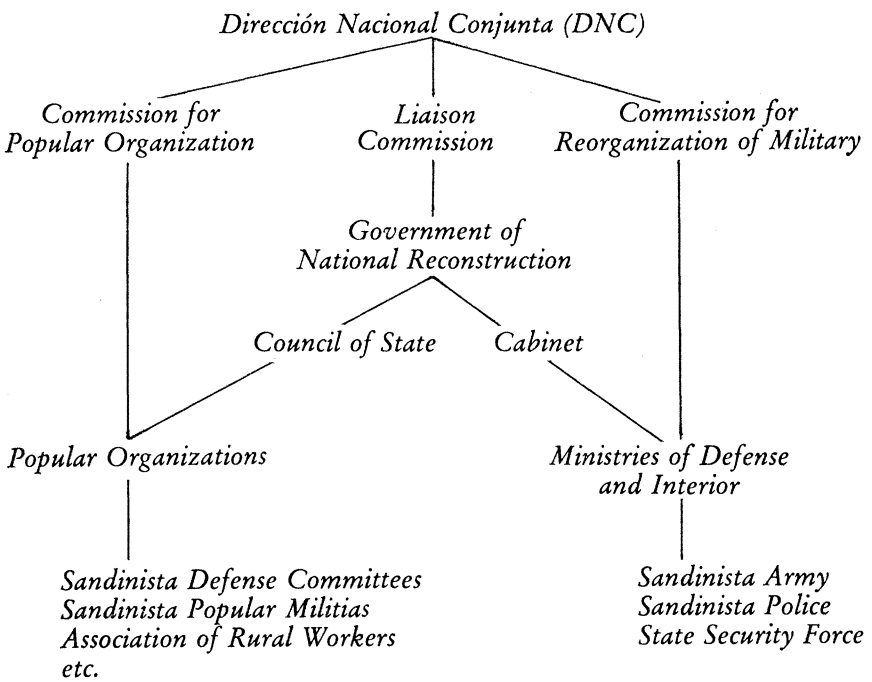
The organization of the new armed forces (including the police and security forces) was the responsibility of the DNC sub-committee on the military. Although the Ministry of Defense was initially given to a former colonel in the GN (who had fled Nicaragua in 1978 after an abortive coup against Somoza), the DNC actually kept the new armed forces under direct Sandinista control. This was accomplished in a number of ways, beginning with the appointment of a General Staff in July consisting exclusively of FSLN guerrilla veterans.[14] More important, each of the three DNC members on the military sub-committee assumed key positions within the emerging command structure: Tomás Borge became Minister of Interior, Humberto Ortega, Commander-in-Chief of the EPS, and Luis Carrión, second-in-command of the EPS. After an initial five-month transition period, during

[14] *Latin America Political Report*, Vol. XIII, No. 32 (17 August 1979), p. 251.

which the diverse forces that had participated in the insurrection were integrated with a small number of GN members who had accepted the change in regimes, Ortega took over as Minister of Defense and Carrión as Vice-Minister of Defense (while retaining their positions as commander and second commander in the EPS).

FIGURE II

Structure of Post-Somoza Government



Although Figure II suggests a certain degree of structural differentiation between the chain of command for the EPS and that for the police and security forces, there existed in reality a close interrelationship between the army and police at nearly every level. At the top, both the Minister of Interior and the Minister of Defense participated in the DNC and the DNC sub-committee on the military, thus allowing for a constant exchange of information and co-ordination of activities. At a lower level, several ranking Sandinista veterans held posts in both ministries or in both the military command structure and the police command structure. For example, two of the members of the General Staff of the EPS were also important figures in the Ministry of Interior: Edén Pastora, Vice-Minister of Interior; and Hugo

Torres, Chief of State Security. Finally, at the level of operations, EPS soldiers, Sandinista Police and MPS members frequently engaged in joint actions during the first year of the new regime.

In order to consolidate FSLN control over the armed forces, Political and Cultural Sections were established in all units of the EPS and the Sandinista Police. Political indoctrination was viewed by the EPS General Staff as essential to ensure that the new army 'know whose interests it is protecting and who the enemies of those interests are.'[15] This emphasis on political indoctrination of the armed forces provoked criticism from conservative politicians who called for the complete depoliticization of the military. The response of the Sandinista leadership, however, was unequivocal:

> ... there is no apolitical army in the world. This is a sophism.... There are no apolitical armies: every one serves some determinant political purpose. In the case of Nicaragua, the EPS is a Popular and Sandinista army. It is not by accident that we call it such.[16]

To limit countervailing political influences in the military, United States' offers of training and assistance were refused during the first year.

Efforts to professionalize the armed forces were hampered from the beginning by the composition of the troops, the majority of whom were drawn from the lower social classes. A study in late 1979 of the EPS revealed an illiteracy rate of 45 percent. The General Staff endeavored to correct this situation through an intensive literacy program within the military which made use of literate troops to tutor illiterate troops.[17] The scarcity of skilled recruits also slowed down efforts to develop communications and transport within the army, but these handicaps were largely overcome with the assistance of approximately 200 Cuban military advisors. Overall, the EPS evolved quite quickly into an effective fighting force, partly as a result of its combat experience and partly because of its cohesion and loyalty to the Sandinista leadership.

The transition of the rebel forces into a regular army committed to DNC policies provided the new regime with the necessary power to resist armed attacks on the revolution. There were three primary threats to the post-Somoza government: ex-National Guard units operating near the Honduran frontier, ultra-leftist *milpas* under the control of the Workers Front, and right-wing guerrillas operating in the central provinces.

At least 2,000 members of the National Guard escaped to Honduras after

[15] Interview with Roberto Sánchez of the Dirección de Divulgación y Prensa del Ejército Popular Sandinista, de Managua, June 2, 1980.

[16] Interview with Tomás Borge, 'El poder lo tienen las clases tradicionalmente explotadas,' *Cuadernos de Marcha*, Vol. 1, No. 5 (January-February 1980), p. 87.

[17] Interview with Roberto Sánchez.

the collapse of the dictatorship, where they posed an armed threat to revolutionary officials in the northern provinces. To defend the country against periodic incursions by these ex-GN troops, the EPS concentrated on organizing and training the Sandinista Popular Militas in frontier districts before the rest of the country. The MPSs were organized by districts and weapons remained in the possession of MPS leaders until a militia unit was called into action. By the end of the first year, over 100,000 citizens had been incorporated into MPSs throughout the country, serving as a powerful deterrent to foreign military intervention.

A more complex threat to the regime was presented by the ultra-leftist members of the Anti-Somoza Popular Militis (*Milpas*). *Milpa* actions fell into two broad categories: enforcing strikes against the government through armed intimidation, and carrying out 'expropriations' from banks to finance Trotskyist groups. The first problem was largely dealt with through the formation of MPSs in factories to enable workers loyal to the new regime to resist the pressures of the *milpas*. The second problem was contained by police operations. Since the objective of the *milpas* was to push the revolution forward faster than the Sandinista leadership deemed prudent, and not to restore the pre-insurrectionary order, they did not constitute the same kind of threat to the regime as other groups, and the Sandinista leadership was able to enter into a dialogue with their leaders by mid-1980.

At the opposite end of the political-military spectrum, the right-wing guerrillas of the Democratic Armed Forces (*Fuerzas Armadas Democráticas* – FAD) attempted to initiate a protracted struggle against the revolutionary regime in the central province of Boaco during the first half of 1980. The largest FAD action involved an attack on the town of San Ramón de los Remates, which 20 FAD guerrillas succeeded in holding for about eight hours.[18] This attack, however, was followed by a combined EPS–Sandinista Police operation that captured several leading private sector figures who were accused of financing and co-ordinating FAD activities. By the first anniversary of the revolution, the revolutionary armed forces appeared to have completely contained the activities of the FAD.

Overall, it would appear that the Sandinista success in consolidating control within the military can be attributed to three factors. First, leadership positions were concentrated in the hands of a small group of Sandinista combat veterans to the total exclusion of other elements. Second, the new military was shielded from potentially non-revolutionary influences. For example, not only were offers of US military advisers turned down, but, after February 1980, US Embassy personnel were prohibited from communicating

[18] See *Barricada* (Managua), 31 December 1979, p. 9.

with members of the EPS without the prior approval of the Ministry of Defense. Finally, the revolutionary spirit of the new armed forces was reinforced through political-cultural indoctrination and the establishment of direct linkages with the popular classes. The formation of the Sandinista Popular Militias and their complete integration into the defense structure of the country is the best example of the latter point.

The Consolidation of Political Support

The two dominant political coalitions after the revolution were the National Patriotic Front (FPN) on the left, and the Broad Opposition Front (FAO) in the center. The FPN had been formed in late 1978 to provide political support to the FSLN and consisted of seven groups: the United Peoples Movement, the Independent Liberal Party, *Los Doce*, the Popular Social Christian Party, the Nicaraguan Workers' Central, the Workers' Front, and the Syndicate of Radio Journalists. The FAO included the more traditional parties and two conservative trade unions. Had the Sandinista leadership decided on an electoral approach to building political support for the new regime, these two fronts would have been driven into open competition for votes. Instead, each front was accorded representation in the new government (and promised participation in the Council of State), while the FSLN attempted to organize the popular classes under its own leadership. The decision not to work through the FPN to mobilize support for the regime deprived the front of its political purpose, and it ceased to exist by the end of 1979 (together with one of its leading members, the United Peoples Movement).

Although there was considerable talk during the first six months following the revolution of establishing a Sandinista Party, no move was made in that direction. In place of creating a monolithic political party that would rise up alongside the state, the Sandinista Front opted for organizing the popular classes directly under the government, thereby dispensing with the need for political intermediaries and, by extension, political parties. The basic unit of popular organization became the Sandinista Defense Committees (CDS) organized block by block, each with its own meeting-place and officers. Although clearly modeled after the Cuban Committees for the Defense of the Revolution, the CDSs showed greater potential for political autonomy than was achieved by the CDRs in Cuba.

CDSs performed a wide variety of functions, including improving neighborhood infrastructures, enforcing minor ordinances and assisting government officials to implement public welfare programs. Their two most important functions, however, were political and military. Each CDS held

periodic meetings to discuss revolutionary objectives and ways of participating in their achievement. Such meetings were frequently presided over by a volunteer from the university or one of the government agencies whose responsibility was to raise the political consciousness of the CDS members. In most instances, the political message focused on the popular character of the revolution and the need to accept the leadership of the Sandinista Front as its legitimate vanguard. But CDS also functioned as pressure groups which effectively protected members from arbitrary actions by minor government functionaries. The general responsiveness of the upper echelons of government to letters seeking redresses of grievances served to deprive the traditional political parties of their customary role as brokers for clientele groups. In a military capacity, CDSs served as the recruitment point for the Sandinista Popular Militias which were organized at the neighborhood level in the cities.

The CDS became the focal point of community activities in many *barrios*, participating prominently in all public festivities, and regulating most commercial activities such as the operation of markets. Association remained essentially voluntary, but, in those neighborhoods where CDSs became strong, social pressure and self-interest made participation somewhat compulsory. The development of CDSs was by no means uniform either throughout the country or within particular cities. Effectively, it was the more politically-mobilized neighborhoods which formed the strongest CDSs, while in other areas participation was sporadic and low.

The DNC paid close attention to the organization of the popular classes, primarily through its sub-committee on popular organization composed of Henry Ruiz, Carlos Núñez and Víctor Tirado. Significantly, two members of this sub-committee did not assume governmental posts as did the remaining seven members of the DNC, thus leaving them free to concentrate exclusively on promoting popular organization. One of these two, Carlos Núñez, had been one of the leaders of the Proletarian Tendency of the FSLN which had concentrated on the organization of the urban working masses long before the defeat of the dictatorship. Below the DNC sub-committee on popular organization, a Secretariate for Mass Organization was established under the direction of *Comandante* Mónica Baltodano, a Sandinista guerrilla veteran.

The government also promoted other forms of organization, such as the July 19 Sandinista Youth, and the Association of Nicaraguan Women, both strong political supporters of the Sandinista vanguard. Most notable, however, was the organization of workers. The Association of Rural Workers (*Asociación de Trabajadores del Campo*), in particular, became an impor-

tant political force by the end of the first year. It is not possible here to give the attention to popular organization that the subject deserves, but we can give an indication of the success of government efforts to mobilize support for its programs by mentioning the Literacy Campaign begun in March 1980. After carrying out a national census of illiteracy, an intensive five-month campaign was launched, in which secondary students were organized into units and sent into the countryside to live with the people and provide tutorial instruction in the basics of reading and writing. Even though participation in the Literacy Campaign was not completely voluntary (students who did not participate were barred from matriculating the following year, and those scheduled to graduate could not receive their diplomas), the program enjoyed a ground-swell of popular support in spite of the emotional hardship it imposed on parents whose children were sent to remote areas of the country.

Conclusions

The success of the Sandinista Front in consolidating power in post-insurrectionary Nicaragua must be attributed in large measure to the nature of leadership and the attitudes of the vanguard toward private sector representatives. The Sandinista National Directorate functioned during the first year in power as a truly effective collective decision-making body which in turn strengthened the cohesion within the FSLN. The formation of three DNC sub-committees with responsibilities in the three sensitive areas where power could have slipped away from the left after the revolution suggests a great deal of planning and foresight on the part of the Sandinista leadership. The effectiveness of the DNC was aided by the fact that the factional identities within the FSLN disappeared quite quickly after the fall of Somoza, and no visible conflicts had emerged between DNC members by the first anniversary of the revolution.

The Sandinista leadership's treatment of the bourgeois political parties also facilitated the consolidation of power. By neither excluding private sector representatives from government, nor allowing them to acquire control of key political institutions, the DNC avoided a premature political polarization between right and left, and legitimized the new regime. The Sandinista Front was able to contain bourgeois political participation in government by moving quickly to secure exclusive control of the military and preempt political leadership of the mobilized masses. Most importantly, the delay in the creation of the Council of State, coupled with the absence of elections, deprived the traditional political parties of both a possible independent political base in the new government and a public forum for policy debates.

The defection of Alfonso Robelo from the government in April 1980 and the increasing political disaffection on the right that followed are both indications that the private sector is beginning to reject what it sees as purely symbolic participation in decision-making. Indications are that political conflict in the second year of the new government will grow over the pace and direction of revolutionary programs. But our analysis of the consolidation of power suggests that the Sandinista Front now occupies a hegemonial position within the new political system.