

Twisted statistics

By Alfred G. Cuzán

Like the fellow travelers who once discovered "the future" in Stalin's Russia, Sandinista supporters abroad defend the new dictators of Nicaragua with statistics purporting to show the lot of the masses has improved under communism. In a recent article published in *The Times of the Americas*, history professor William S. Linsenmeyer argues that "life in Nicaragua has improved under Sandinista rule." As evidence he cites increases in literacy and life expectancy in Nicaragua since 1979.

Like all communist regimes, the Sandinista directorate has manufactured a literacy myth to justify its despotic rule. The Sandinistas claim that in the first year after the fall of Somoza, illiteracy was cut in half in one giant national literacy campaign. United Nations and other data-gathering agencies appear to have accepted this outlandish claim at face value.

It behooves a professional educator like Linsenmeyer, however, to treat these data with a heavy dose of skepticism until independent researchers are permitted the freedom to confirm or disconfirm Sandinista claims in a rigorous and objective study. Furthermore, he might reflect on sociology professor Paul Hollander's comment in *Commentary* magazine that in Nicaragua "as the rate of literacy expands, so does censorship; according to recent reports, Trotsky and Gramsci are among the authors the newly literate will not have access to."

In support of the claim that life expectancy has improved under the Sandinistas, Linsenmeyer refers to an article by two physicians who wrote that health conditions under Somoza had been "abominable" and that the Sandinistas had done more for social welfare in the first two years after they seized power than the Somozas had accomplished in four decades.

Historical statistics belie that assertion.

Although in all but one of the years between 1930 and 1970 Nicaragua had a lower life expectancy than neighboring Honduras and Costa Rica, the rate of improvement was highest in Nicaragua; life expectancy nearly doubled between 1930 and 1979.

Compared to Costa Rica, life expectancy was low in Nicaragua under Somoza — but compared to Costa Rica, life expectancy is low in Sandinista Nicaragua, in Guatemala, Honduras, El Salvador, and several other Latin American countries. Though far from ideal, life expectancy under the Somozas was not unusually low and its rate of improvement was actually high.

On per capita income, an indicator not discussed by Professor Linsenmeyer, Somoza's Nicaragua was doing well before the revolution. Between 1972 and 1977, real per-capita income in Nicaragua was, among Central American countries, second only to that of Panama. By 1983, after only four years of Sandinista communism, Nicaragua had fallen behind Guatemala and was being overtaken by Costa Rica.

In short, it is not true that life did not improve for the mass of the people under the Somoza "dynasty" in Nicaragua. Life did improve, and at a rate that compared favorably to that of other Central American countries. Those improvements do not justify *Somocismo* any more than the bogus literacy claims made by the Sandinistas justify their imposing communism in Nicaragua. You would think a historian like Linsenmeyer would have an intellectual and moral responsibility to report accurately what conditions were like in Nicaragua before and after the Sandinistas seized power and began to rewrite their country's history to make it appear that the Somozas could do no right and the Sandinistas can do no wrong.

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