

CONTENTS

Why a *Journal of Interdisciplinary Studies*? . . . . . 1  
Oskar Gruenwald

2001: THE FUTURE OF INTERDISCIPLINARY RESEARCH

Is There a "Christian Sociology"? . . . . . 5  
David O. Moberg

Toward a Christian Metaanthropology . . . . . 24  
James O. Buswell III

Interdisciplinary Research: The Quest for New *Gestalts* . . . . . 45  
Natalie Isser & Lita Linzer Schwarz

Reflections on The Limits of Science . . . . . 55  
William R. Marty

Der Ursprung der schoenen Kuenste . . . . . 70  
Zygmunt Stankiewicz

The Return of the Grand Inquisitor: A Critique of Solzhenitsyn . . . . . 85  
Mihajlo Mihajlov

ORWELL & HUXLEY:  
BEYOND TWENTIETH-CENTURY TOTALITARIANISM?

Human Genetic Intervention: Portent of a Brave New World? . . . . . 103  
Robert H. Blank

Pretotalitarian Values: Escape From Freedom? . . . . . 122  
Jeffery L. Geller

Orwell's 1984 Society and Human Rights . . . . . 135  
Wayne P. Pomerleau

The Golden Rule and Paternalism . . . . . 145  
James W. McGray

God, Suffering and the Anti-Utopian Character of *Brave New World* . . . . . 162  
Andrew Ward

Transcending Totalitarianism: The Logotherapeutic Approach . . . . . 174  
Michael F. Shaughnessy

The Nicaraguan Revolution:  
From Autocracy to Totalitarian Dictatorship? . . . . . 183  
Alfred G. Cuzan

"For we know in part, and we prophesy in part."  
*I Corinthians 13: 9*

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## THE NICARAGUAN REVOLUTION: FROM AUTOCRACY TO TOTALITARIAN DICTATORSHIP?

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*In **Totalitarian Dictatorship and Autocracy**, Friedrich and Brzezinski present a model of a totalitarian regime. It is the fusion of a revolutionary ideology, an elitist party, and a secret police which sets off the dynamics of totalitarianism, implemented by means of terror. Using the model as a guide, this article evaluates the nature of the regime that has emerged in Nicaragua since the 1979 revolution against the Somoza autocracy. The ideology, party, and police of the Sandinista state fit the model in most respects, but other totalitarian traits are not fully developed. It concludes that the Sandinista regime has not completed the process toward mature totalitarianism.*

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### AUTOCRACY AND TOTALITARIANISM

**I**n *Totalitarian Dictatorship and Autocracy*, Carl J. Friedrich and Zbigniew K. Brzezinski distinguish between traditional autocracy and ancient tyranny, on the one hand, and totalitarian dictatorship, on the other. In their view, totalitarian regimes exemplified by communist and fascist dictatorships are qualitatively different from traditional autocracy in that they harness modern means of communication and a mass party in a systematic effort to exert control over the subject population, primarily for ideological purposes. Totalitarianism is, thus, a 20th century phenomenon, "an autocracy based upon modern technology and mass legitimation" (Friedrich & Brzezinski 1965: 4; hereafter F & B).

In a traditional personal or military dictatorship, the ruler leaves non-political institutions relatively free to pursue economic, religious, and cultural ends, provided the regime is not challenged. An autocrat is concerned with maintaining the established order and enriching himself, not with carrying out fundamental changes in society. In contrast, a totalitarian tyranny aims at the thorough politicization of all life, demanding not just passive

acquiescence to the regime, but active support. A "totalitarian movement having seized power, seeks to extend this power to every nook and cranny of society," not so much to benefit the rulers personally as to advance a revolutionary ideology envisioning total destruction of the old order and a new society that is constantly in the making (F & B: 161). The Soviet Union and its East European satellites, Nazi Germany and fascist Italy, Mao's China, and Castro's Cuba are given as examples of totalitarian regimes.

Totalitarian systems have seven major traits: (1) An ideology that is the declared enemy of religion, or which seeks to subsume religion within itself, turning churches and clergy into collaborators of the regime; (2) A single mass party, typically led by one man, consisting of no more than ten percent of the population, which acts as a political vanguard, infusing all parts of society and state with official doctrine; (3) A reign of physical and psychological terror extending over the entire nation, including essential parts of the party-state such as the military, bureaucracy, and the cadres; (4) Central control and direction of the entire economy by the party-state, with industry, labor unions, agriculture, commerce, science, all becoming subordinated to ideologically conforming *apparatchiki*; (5) A near monopoly of mass communication by the party-state which turns the press into propaganda outlets and uses the schools and universities to indoctrinate the young in the ruling ideology; (6) A near monopoly of the effective use of arms in combat, which the regime exploits to suppress all acts of resistance or rebellion, executing or "reeducating" in slave labor camps the ideologically obstinate; and (7) A tendency--which, unlike the previous six traits, is usual but not universal--to want to invade other countries ideologically or militarily, and to incorporate additional territories and peoples into the rule of the party-state in a type of imperialism (F & B: 22-23).

These major characteristics delineate a model of a mature totalitarian regime. Together they constitute "a syndrome of interrelated traits or features, the emergence of which signalizes the consummation of the totalitarian evolution" (F & B: 368). However, a totalitarian regime usually does not come into being full-fledged, but passes through stages of development. It may begin as a coalition government in which the totalitarians gain control of key instruments of power in the armed forces, police, courts, education, and the mass media, after which their former allies are purged and all opposition is destroyed. It is the fusion of ideology, the party, and secret police that sets off the dynamics of totalitarianism,

culminating in total planning of the economy. Notwithstanding the great power which a totalitarian regime is able to amass, it never fails to encounter passive or active resistance by individuals and groups.

Churches, in particular, if they remain true to their faith, cannot help finding themselves in opposition to the ideological demands of the totalitarian dictatorship, and "much of the impetus toward building an effective resistance has originated in religious circles" (F & B: 288). Christianity has acted as more of a bulwark to totalitarianism than Oriental religions such as Buddhism. Large-scale resistance movements whose purpose is to overthrow the regime and replace it with a freer system are more likely to occur at the beginning or the end of totalitarian rule, and "when the totalitarian system is challenged from without by a force powerful enough to encourage organized resistance from within" (F & B: 284). Although resistance to totalitarian regimes is universal, successful revolution against such regimes is extremely rare, since the web of controls enforced with the political police makes it virtually impossible for the resistance to organize and communicate effectively.

This model of totalitarian development is useful for evaluating the change in regime in Nicaragua during the 1980s. In 1979, the Somoza dynasty, a traditional autocracy which had governed Nicaragua for over 40 years, collapsed in the face of internal and external pressures--political, military, and diplomatic. It was replaced by a Government of National Reconstruction dominated militarily by the Sandinista National Liberation Front (Gorman 1981). The Sandinista regime, having undergone a series of mutations in which non-FSLN members quit or were purged, is said by some to be "well down the totalitarian road traveled by Fidel Castro" (*New York Times* 10 Jul 1986). Others disagree, saying that "the Sandinistas are resisting what Jeane Kirkpatrick calls 'the totalitarian temptation' and refuse to be pushed into making the same mistakes as the Cubans" (Hodges 1988: 21).

The purpose of this paper is to explore the nature of the regime that has emerged in Nicaragua since the revolution, inquiring whether, or to what extent, it fits the totalitarian mold. Due to space limitations, it shall concentrate on the ideology, the party, and the police of the Sandinista regime, since it is the welding together of these elements into one iron-clad organization which purportedly brings about "the totalitarian breakthrough" (F & B: 373).

## NICARAGUA, THE SOMOZAS, AND THE SANDINISTAS

Nicaragua is located in mid-Central America, astride the Pacific Ocean and the Caribbean. It borders Honduras to the North and Costa Rica to the South. It is about 49,000 square miles in area (about the size of North Carolina), with some three million inhabitants (half that of North Carolina). From its beginnings as an independent nation, Nicaragua experienced a great deal of internal strife. These domestic divisions made the new nation vulnerable to foreign powers interested in Nicaragua's strategic location. Great Britain exercised a protectorate over Nicaragua's Atlantic Coast inhabited by Indians and blacks (Creoles) through the 19th century, and struggled with the United States for the opportunity to build a transoceanic canal through Nicaragua, a struggle resolved by treaties. Between 1855 and 1857, William Walker, an American adventurer, tried to become Nicaragua's president, following an invitation by one faction in a civil war to come to their aid with a force of "filibusters" recruited in the United States. Except for a brief period, the United States continuously maintained troops in Nicaragua from 1912 to 1933 (Millett 1982).

During its second occupation of Nicaragua, 1927-1933, the United States supervised two national elections and organized a National Guard which was hoped would become a nonpartisan constabulary obedient to constitutional authority. These efforts came to naught due to Augusto C. Sandino and Anastasio Somoza Garcia. Sandino refused to accept U.S. peace-keeping efforts or participate in the elections, taking instead to the mountains of north-central Nicaragua whence he waged a guerrilla war against the American Marines and the Nicaraguan government which, in his view, had sold out to "Wallstreet."

Sandino's war won him international communist support in Latin America, Asia, and the USA (Tierney 1982). Between 1928 and 1930, Sandino "worked on close terms with the Comintern," but they eventually broke with him, since "he refused to bend completely to Communist demands" (Hodges 1986: 105). Although not a Moscow-line Marxist-Leninist, Sandino espoused an ideology mixing elements of anarchism, what he called "rational communism," spiritualism, and "Yankeephobia." Sandino managed to avoid capture by the Marines, treating harshly those who collaborated with his enemies. Eventually, Washington tired of the chase. Preoccupied with the Great Depression, the USA withdrew its forces from Nicaragua, leaving an elected president, Dr. Juan Sacasa, in charge.

Sandino made an uneasy peace with Sacasa while refusing to recognize the authority of the National Guard headed by A. Somoza Garcia. Married to Sacasa's niece, Somoza had ingratiated himself with the Marines and the American Ambassador. A year after the withdrawal of American forces, Sandino was seized one night after dining with Sacasa by soldiers of the National Guard on orders (Millett 1982: 29) or with the complicity of Somoza (Christian 1986: 25), and murdered. Sandino's brother was killed, too, and the remnants of his army massacred. Two years later, in 1936, Somoza did what countless Spanish-American military caudillos have done: he staged a coup, becoming *de facto* ruler of Nicaragua. Later that year, Somoza had himself elected president.

From 1936 to 1979, three Somozas, Anastasio and two of his sons--Luis and Anastasio Jr.--ruled directly or through a puppet president, one of them remaining always at the head of the National Guard. Anastasio Sr. was assassinated in 1956, but Luis succeeded him to the presidency. In 1967, following a term in office by a puppet president, Anastasio Jr. became president, an office he would fill (except for a brief two-year period), while simultaneously heading the National Guard, until his overthrow by revolution in 1979 (Millett 1982).

In 1961, several disaffected members of Nicaragua's Moscow-line communist party, the Nicaraguan Socialist Party (PSN), were encouraged by Fidel Castro to found what became the Sandinista National Liberation Front (FSLN) to wage war on the Somozas (Millett 1982: 35). For almost two decades, the *Frente* did just that, attacking the National Guard, robbing banks, kidnapping for ransom, murdering members or collaborators of the regime, as well as infiltrating schools and churches where it won sympathizers and recruited new members (Belli 1985). Twice the movement was dealt near fatal blows by the National Guard in the 1960s and 1970s. Yet, the *Frente* managed to survive with the help of its mentor and patron, Castro, who sheltered Sandinista leaders in Cuba for long periods (Nolan 1984, Belli 1985, Valenta & Valenta 1987--hereafter V & V).

Between 1977 and 1979, at a time when the Somoza autocracy was crumbling "for reasons having little to do with the Sandinistas' own actions" (Nolan 1984: 85), the FSLN entered into an alliance with a large segment of Somoza's political opposition. The murder of Pedro Joaquin Chamorro Cardenal, editor and publisher of *La Prensa*, Nicaragua's leading newspaper, and a long-time critic of the dynasty, on 10 January 1978--a crime popularly

attributed to Somoza--was the spark that set off a year and a half of protests, demonstrations, and violent clashes culminating in calls for Somoza's resignation by Nicaragua's Catholic Bishops and the Organization of American States. The United States cut off military assistance to Somoza and pressured him to leave the country. The denouement came in July 1979, when Somoza fled Nicaragua (he was murdered in 1980 in Paraguay), and a Government of National Reconstruction dominated by the FSLN came into being, promising *inter alia* political pluralism and early, free elections (Payne 1985b: 20).

In less than a year, the two non-FSLN members of the five-person provisional junta resigned, joining the ranks of a growing number of former Sandinista sympathizers disenchanted with the direction taken by the *Frente*. On 23 August 1980, the Sandinista Minister of Defense, Humberto Ortega, announced that the promised elections would not take place until 1985 (they were held in November 1984), claiming that the elections would be:

very different from the elections desired by the oligarchs and traitors, conservatives and liberals, reactionaries and imperialists . . . Never forget that *our elections will be to perfect revolutionary power, not to hold a raffle among those who seek to hold power, because the people hold power through their vanguard--the FSLN and its National Directorate* (quoted in Payne 1985b: 28).

Ortega's speech added to the fears of many Nicaraguans that the Sandinistas were bent on taking Nicaragua down "a totalitarian route" (Christian 1986: 198). It persuaded a number of people who had helped to overthrow Somoza to begin conspiring against the Sandinistas. A month after the speech, mass demonstrations took place in the Atlantic Coast region inhabited mostly by Indians and Creoles demanding the removal of Cuban technicians and soldiers, but were violently suppressed. In the next two years, multiple movements aided and abetted by the United States rose to challenge the Sandinistas militarily. These forces were not pacified by the 1984 election in which the Sandinista party took 67 percent of the vote (Payne 1985b: 77), while the main opposition coalition opted for boycotting the election (Cruz 1988).

Between 1982 and 1987, the conflict between the Sandinistas, supported by the Soviet bloc, and the Nicaraguan Resistance (known as Contras), backed by the United States, escalated into a civil war fought in two-thirds of the country (Purcell 1987). The anti-Sandinista forces,

including the civic opposition, accuse the FSLN of being "totalitarians" (Radosh 1987: 12). Does this charge hold up under careful scrutiny?

### THE SANDINISTA IDEOLOGY

According to Friedrich and Brzezinski, a totalitarian ideology is "a reasonably coherent body of ideas concerning practical means of how totally to change and reconstruct a society by force, or violence, based upon an all-inclusive or total criticism of what is wrong with the existing or antecedent society" (1965: 88-89). Since it is dedicated to total destruction and total reconstruction, typically by force, a totalitarian ideology is utopian. It resorts to simple symbols such as colored emblems and pseudo-scientific myths about the past and the future. Particular persons, past or present leaders of a totalitarian regime or movement, especially "martyrs" and "heroes," become identified with or woven into the myths of the ideology in order "to give concreteness and consequent appeal to the masses" (F & B: 93).

Communist ideology adheres to pseudo-scientific myths about history, society, economy, and the state derived from the alleged "findings" of Marx and Engels. It holds that all history is the history of class struggle, that the proletariat is invested with the historical mission to overthrow capitalism, and that the proletarian revolution will usher in a classless society. Communist ideology is universalist, justifying the extension of power by communist regimes. Soviet ideology is communist, with the added feature that Lenin is the symbol of the regime (F & B: 92).

The Sandinista ideology is manifest in the intellectual foundations of the FSLN, statements by its leaders, and key documents intended for its members. The FSLN was founded in 1960 (Belli 1985: 9, Nolan 1984: 157) or 1961 (Hodges 1986: 162; V & V: 8) by several young former militants of the Moscow-line, Marxist-Leninist, Nicaraguan Socialist Party (PSN). Two of the founders, Carlos Fonseca Amador (killed by the National Guard in 1976) and Tomas Borge loom large in the movement even today: Fonseca as a symbol (Palmer 1988), and Borge as Minister of the Interior, directing the Sandinista state security apparatus, including the secret police.

Borge and Fonseca joined the PSN at the National Autonomous University of Nicaragua (UNAN), a public institution of higher learning located in Leon, a city about 50 miles northwest of the capital, Managua. There they joined a Marxist cell, studying the writings of Marx and Engels,

as well as Nikolai Bukharin's 1919 textbook of the Bolshevik program, *The ABC of Communism*. Fonseca traveled to Moscow as PSN delegate to the Sixth World Youth and Student Festival in 1957. Upon his return, he published *A Nicaraguan in Moscow*, a pamphlet defending the Soviet system. This was the precursor of a "Sandinista literature" which, "from the birth of the FSLN to the present, is entirely lacking in criticism of the Soviet Union" (Belli 1985: 17).

Inspired by the new Marxism-Leninism of Castro and Che Guevara, Fonseca, Borge, and Silvio Mayorga, another PSN militant, quit the old party to form the FSLN after Castro seized power in Cuba (Hodges 1986: 174-96). The differences between the newly formed *Frente* and the PSN were not ideological, but strategic and tactical (Belli 1985: 9). Both sought to establish Soviet-style socialism in Nicaragua. But, as with Castro's disputes with other Latin American communist parties, the FSLN differed with the PSN over the most effective means to create a Marxist Nicaragua. The FSLN adopted Castro's and Guevara's concepts of making revolution in the mountains, a la Sandino (Hodges 1986: 167-68).

First Fonseca and, after his death, Humberto Ortega (current Sandinista Minister of Defense) creatively "Marxified" Sandino, re-interpreting his thought in a manner useful for introducing Marxism-Leninism to Nicaragua through a man who had by now become a national myth (Nolan 1984: 16-18, Hodges 1986: 186; cf Palmer 1988 for a somewhat different view). Sandino's guerrilla war was likewise reinterpreted as "a vital historical phase" in a 50-year long "Popular Sandinista Revolution" against capitalism and "Yankee imperialism," a revolution now led by the FSLN vanguard (FSLN 1977 Political-Military Program in Valenta & Durán 1987: 290-92). Like Castro, the FSLN adopted Sandino's red and black emblem. Also absorbed from Sandino was his Yankeeophobia which the FSLN turned to song in their anthem with chants: "Let us fight the Yankee, enemy of mankind" (Belli 1985: 17).

Adopting Sandino as their historical forerunner and Castro and Guevara as their mentors in revolution, the FSLN took to the mountains of central Nicaragua to fight Somocismo. In their years in the wilderness, the FSLN developed another myth, that of the invincible guerrilla. "The mountain" became a training ground and a symbol in which Sandinista militants, mostly middle-to-upper class university students (Nolan 1984: 22, 41-43, Belli 1985: 11-13), could purge themselves of their "bourgeois habits"

and steel themselves into real revolutionaries. It was in "the mountain" where the Sandinista "new man" was born, a cross between Sandino and Che, who found happiness in killing human beings of the enemy camp. Omar Cabezas, the present national coordinator of the Sandinista Defense Committees, recalls his first combat experience against the National Guard: "It was the first time I killed a man and what I felt was an immense joy . . . and we slept joyfully all night" (quoted in Ybarra-Rojas 1985: 9). Thus, violence became an integral part of the FSLN ideology. As Nolan put it, "the commitment to armed struggle was fundamental to the *Frente's* ideology"; for the Sandinistas, "the armed struggle was more of an ideological matter than a strategic one" (1984: 22, 34).

Throughout FSLN's history, its leaders stated at various times publicly in interviews, speeches, and documents that Marxism-Leninism was their ideology. In a 1968 "message to revolutionary students," Fonseca wrote that: "Marxism is now the ideology of the most ardent defenders of Latin American man" (quoted in Nolan 1984: 37). Between 1967 and 1975, Fonseca repeatedly stated that the *Frente's* ideology is the "Marxism of Lenin, Fidel, el Che, and Ho Chi Minh" (quoted in Nolan 1984: 38). In a *Playboy* interview in 1983, Tomas Borge recalled telling his mother 25 years earlier that he was a communist (Belli 1985: 8). A year later in Madrid, Borge said: "I believe that it would be frivolous, and even dishonest, to say that no one here talks of Marxism-Leninism . . . I believe we are Marxists" (quoted in V & V: 14). Humberto Ortega, chief Sandinista strategist and now Minister of Defense, asserts in an essay published by the FSLN in 1978 that the Sandinista nucleus:

should use the scientific doctrine of the proletariat, Marxism-Leninism, as an absolute and unquestionable guide in the action undertaken for the transformation of society (quoted in Belli 1985: 22).

The kind of social transformation the Sandinistas had in mind was spelled out before the revolution in the 1969 "Historic Program of the FSLN" (Borge 1986: 13-22). This was the first detailed statement of FSLN goals, at once a thoroughgoing rejection of Nicaragua as it had developed since the 1930s, and a comprehensive program for revolutionary change touching virtually every aspect of the country's life--government, agriculture, education, economy, culture, the family, religion, and foreign policy. In the economic field, the program commits the "revolutionary government" to wholesale expropriations of land, factories, mines, banking, and transportation, replacing "the anarchy characteristic of the capitalist system

of production" with national planning. In education and culture, the program vows, *inter alia*, to:

immediately wipe out "illiteracy" [sic] . . . root out the neo-colonial penetration in our culture . . . nationalize the centers of private education that have been immorally turned into industries by merchants who hypocritically invoke religious principles . . . rescue the university from the domination of the exploiting classes . . . (Borge 1986: 16-17).

In the field of foreign policy, the FSLN program proclaims that the Sandinista revolution "is for the true union of the Central American peoples in a single country" and pledges to:

put an end to the Yankee interference in the internal problems of Nicaragua . . . expel the Yankee military mission, the so-called Peace Corps (spies in the guise of technicians) . . . actively support the struggle of the peoples of Asia, Africa, and Latin America against the new and old colonialism and against the common enemy: Yankee imperialism . . . support the struggle of the Black people and all the people of the United States for an authentic democracy and equal rights . . . (Borge 1986: 20-21).

In brief, the Historic Program commits the FSLN to the revolutionary transformation not only of Nicaragua, but of three continents, and even of the United States itself.

The Sandinistas' Marxism-Leninism becomes even more explicit in the 1977 "General Political-Military Platform of the FSLN for the Triumph of the Popular Sandinista Revolution" (Valenta & Durán 1987: 285-318). The Platform views Nicaraguan history since 1856 as a constant struggle, going through several phases leading to the "final liberation from the yoke of both local and foreign exploitation." It decries "the present capitalist system of exploitation and oppression," announcing that the Sandinistas' "destination is socialism." The type of socialism advocated by the Platform is revealed where it says that "the establishment of the first socialist state" occurred "in Bolshevik Russia in 1917," and that the "cause of the proletariat has triumphed" in "revolutionary Cuba." Moreover, the Platform states that the Sandinistas' cause "is the sacred and historical cause of Marx, Engels, Lenin and Sandino," and portrays the FSLN as a "Marxist-Leninist vanguard armed with the revolutionary theories of the proletariat and the Sandinista historical legacy."

Sandinista intellectual history thus confirms all the traits of a totalitarian ideology. Both the FSLN Historic Program and the Political-Military Platform reject Nicaragua's institutions and sketch a radical plan for revolutionary reconstruction. The Sandinista ideology Marxifies Sandino, mythologizing his guerrilla war and making him a symbol of the party. In the FSLN historic myth, Sandino began a popular revolution which they have been called upon to complete. It glorifies violence, romanticizing guerrilla warfare and "the armed struggle." From the beginning, Sandinista leaders embraced Marxism-Leninism and identified themselves with the Bolshevik takeover in Russia, the Soviet system, and Castro's revolution and regime in Cuba. For all of them, the United States, the Yankee, is "the enemy." In sum, the Sandinista ideology, dedicated to the total destruction of capitalism and Soviet-style "socialist" reconstruction not only in Nicaragua but in all spheres of American influence, is totalitarian.

#### THE FSLN: A TOTALITARIAN PARTY?

An ideologically unified, elitist, and hierarchically stratified party, purged periodically, is a central feature of communist totalitarianism. The party bureaucracy penetrates the state administration, blurring the distinction between party and state, or subordinating the latter to the former. The party is typically led by one man who achieves dominance by overcoming rivals in struggles within the party sanctum, out of sight of the masses and the party's rank and file. Friedrich and Brzezinski doubt that "anything like group control or collective leadership" can permanently substitute for monocratic leadership in a totalitarian regime. Collective rule is typical of transition periods, after the death of a dictator, while a succession struggle is taking place. In time, a new dictator emerges due to a "logic of power" pointing toward its monopolization (F & B: 73, 80).

From its beginnings in the early 1960s, the FSLN put a premium on ideological purity, insuring that all its militants subscribed to Marxism-Leninism. As a former Sandinista recalls: "In the FSLN, we took ideology seriously. Ideological commitment was a prerequisite for positions in the higher echelons of the organization" (Belli 1985: 3). Fonseca, a founder and, until his death, chief ideologist of the movement, "warned against allowing 'the enemy' to infiltrate the organization with 'democratic' Sandinistas who lacked Marxist political commitment" (Nolan 1984: 38). By the end of the decade, the *Frente* was structured as a Leninist organization, with a membership hierarchy differentiating between:

true militants of advanced political development, pre-militants, and collaborators. The ideological and disciplinary requirements for militants were quite strict, and helped prevent the organization from growing much beyond 50 activists during this period (Nolan 1984: 35).

Decision-making in the reorganized FSLN was centralized in a small group, the National Directorate (DN), whose membership included Fonseca, Borge, and Humberto Ortega. In the mid-1970s, bitter feuds broke out over strategy, which split the *Frente* into factions, with Borge and Fonseca purging the movement of "pseudo-Marxists." In 1979, only months before Somoza's overthrow, the DN was reorganized into a nine-man body, merging the three factions into which the Sandinistas split in previous years. This was done to meet one of Castro's conditions for military assistance in the final offensive against the autocracy (Nolan 1984: 57, 97-98).

Between 1977 and 1978, with Fonseca dead and Borge in prison, the *Frente* came under the direction of Humberto Ortega, who devised a "popular front" strategy calling for a temporary alliance with Somoza's "bourgeois opposition." As the dictatorship began to crumble, the number of FSLN combatants grew from a few hundred in 1977 to 5,000 in mid-1979. Thousands of other Nicaraguans came to identify themselves as "Sandinistas." However, this rapid growth in the number of combatants and sympathizers did not change the Leninist structure of the party, whose method for maintaining a "vanguard" status in the face of growing popularity was admitted in the 1977 Political-Military Platform:

Due to the enormous prestige of our vanguard, the people that in one or another way are aligned with this vanguard feel themselves immediately to be *militants* of the FSLN. This aspect is of enormous importance in terms of morale and should not be curtailed. What is important is to ensure that those elements that are not truly members of vanguard structure—even though they may *feel* a part of the same—not be allowed to assume the responsibilities, duties, rights, etc., of the vanguard's true militants. In time, the people will understand the difference between the vanguard and the masses, the vanguard and co-operants, the vanguard and activists, the vanguard and support networks, etc. (Valenta & Durán 1987: 309).

At the time of Somoza's overthrow, there were fewer than 500 FSLN militants, full-fledged members of the Sandinista party (Payne 1985a: 13). The number today is estimated from 4,000 (Staar 1988: 71) to 12,000 (Muravchik in Falcoff 1987: 347) to 20,000 (U.S. Department of State 1988:

4--hereafter USDS). Total membership, including individuals who have not achieved militant status, may be as high as 50,000 (Payne 1985a: 13). Taking the latter figure, less than 2 percent of the Nicaraguan population belongs to the FSLN. The smallness of the party notwithstanding, the DN announced in November 1985 a "purification" of the *Frente*, explaining that it had become too large and attracted "some softies, some wimps," as a DN member put it (*Miami Herald* 29 Nov 1985: 26A).

The Sandinista party is, therefore, an elitist, hierarchical organization. Levels of membership start with aspirant and rise through pre-militant, militant, cadre, member of the Sandinista Assembly, to members of the National Directorate, the FSLN inner sanctum, whose decisions must be obeyed "unhesitatingly" by the rank and file, as a DN member put it (V & V: 17). Together, the National Directorate and the Sandinista Assembly "play a role equivalent to that of the Central Committee in the Communist Party of the Soviet Union" (USDS 1988: 4). Members of these two party organs occupy executive positions in the government, media, and a host of "mass organizations." The DN has "a number of functional departments dealing with various aspects of domestic and foreign policy and the economy" (V & V: 14). In Nicaragua, the government, to the extent that it has a separate identity of its own, is subordinate to the FSLN, a relationship firmly established in the wake of the revolution (Gorman 1981: 139-42).

Working through the FSLN's mass organizations, party activists function as the capillaries of the regime, infusing Nicaraguans with Sandinista sentiment where they live, work, and study. These mass organizations target women, university students, workers, peasants, local residents, and youth. Young people are brought under Sandinista ideological tutelage in two organizations, one for teenagers and young adults, the "Sandinista Youth-July 19" (JS-J19), and another for children six years and older, the Sandinista Children's Association (USDS 1988; Gorman 1981). Indoctrination in Marxism-Leninism takes place at all levels of the party-state. The National Directorate has a department of political education; political officers are found throughout the military and the police; and party classes are held for the rank and file. Ideological indoctrination is also carried out through the mass media, with the FSLN in control of two newspapers, most radio stations, and the only two television channels (Muravchik in Falcoff 1987: 351).



The educational system, from elementary school through secondary education, is infused with Marxism-Leninism, militarism, and Yankeeophobia. Like the public schools, the private Catholic schools must also use textbooks glorifying the FSLN, its martyrs, heroes, and leaders, and vilifying the USA (Joe 1988a: 4). Children are taught arithmetic from a workbook which has them add and subtract rifles, and handwriting by copying Sandinista slogans (Muravchik in Falcoff 1987: 351). Public school students must salute the Sandinista flag, sing the FSLN anthem (including the phrase: "Yankee, enemy of mankind"), and, in an act of obeisance to the nine-man FSLN National Directorate, shout: "Let the nine command me!" (Joe 1988: 3). Most professors who taught at Nicaragua's two universities before the revolution resigned under pressure or were purged. The higher education curriculum has also been transformed to meet the ideological demands of the FSLN: student admissions, the awarding of degrees, and faculty appointments are all contingent on ideological conformity with Marxism-Leninism (Chenoweth 1988).

The Sandinista party--its elitism, self-proclaimed historical mission, hierarchical organization, insistence on ideological unity and indoctrination, and bureaucratic control of state and society--fits closely the model of a totalitarian party. However, the FSLN is atypical in one respect: it is an oligarchic, not a monocratic party. The FSLN has never been ruled by a single man. The party has always been under a collective leadership of two or more men of nearly equal power or status.

At present, three of the nine DN members stand out. Ranked according to real power (V & V 1987: 16), they are: Tomas Borge, Humberto Ortega, and Daniel Ortega. Borge heads the police and state security apparatus and Humberto Ortega the military. Daniel Ortega was elected president in 1984. The U.S. State Department notes that most "analysts believe that Borge and the Ortega brothers are the poles around whom the other six members of the Directorate move" (1988: 4). Borge and the Ortega brothers are part of a five-member DN executive commission which also includes Bayardo Arce, who directs the party apparatus, and Jaime Wheelock, Minister of Agriculture and Agrarian Reform.

Whether the FSLN continues to be ruled oligarchically or might, in time, come under the exclusive sway of one man is an open question. If Friedrich and Brzezinski are right, then one should expect an eventual power struggle within the *Frente* involving Borge, the Ortega brothers, and

perhaps others as well, until one man emerges victorious as dictator of the Sandinista party-state. On the other hand, if the FSLN is in every other aspect a totalitarian party, but continues to be ruled oligarchically, then the hypothesis about a "logic of power" pointing toward its monopolization by a single man would be disconfirmed.

### SANDINISTA REPRESSION

A "passion for unanimity" springing from the pseudo-religious nature of its ideology pushes the totalitarian regime to the use of organized terror (F & B: 163). Dissent is intolerable to a totalitarian regime. In order to deter dissent, the regime creates an atmosphere of fear with the political police, which in the case of Italian fascism was supplemented by armed bands of party activists, the *squadristi*, who violently broke up opposition meetings. The work of the political police is facilitated by a pliant judiciary doing the party's bidding. Totalitarian terror waxes and wanes during the life of the regime and may oscillate in an unpredictable manner.

The Sandinista secret police, known as the Directorate General of State Security (DGSS), is housed within the Ministry of Interior (MINT), headed by Borge. MINT employs between 15,000 (USDS 1987: 2) and 30,000 (Child 1982: 227) personnel. It controls the secret police, the regular police, all prisons, special troops comprising an elite army, fire protection, the national telephone and postal systems, and immigration. In addition, MINT is in charge of maintaining ideological and political discipline in the armed forces, and press censorship. MINT also maintains close relations with several Sandinista mass organizations, using many of its members as informants in an intelligence-gathering capacity.

Borge, the sole surviving founder of the FSLN, is close to Castro, and has modeled MINT after Cuba's security apparatus (Child 1982: 213-14). Cuban operatives helped establish MINT soon after the revolution; hundreds of them, along with Russians, East Germans, and Bulgarians were incorporated into the ministry (USDS 1986b: 9; 1986c: 16). As early as 1980, Borge boasted that the FSLN was in control of the "real power" in Nicaragua, which consisted, in addition to the party, of "the army, the police, and the state security bodies" which enabled the Sandinistas to "do whatever we want . . . We can remove the government and replace it with another if we like" (V & V: 18).

Early in the life of the regime, "Borge defined the main function of the state security apparatus as 'the prevention, arrest, and repression of the counterrevolutionaries'" (Child 1982: 226). The term "counterrevolutionary," as well as the charge of "conspiracy and taking steps to submit the nation to foreign domination" (*NYT* 5 April 1985: 5), is vague and, in practice, applied to anyone who refuses to join Sandinista mass organizations or fails to embrace the ruling ideology. Two departments within the secret police, one dealing with "counterrevolutionaries" and another with "ideological diversionism," target a wide variety of groups, including Catholic and Protestant churches, opposition political parties, non-Sandinista labor unions, minority Indian groups, and the independent press for surveillance, telephone taps, and verbal, written, and even physical attacks (USDS 1987: 3-4; V & V: 19-20).

The Sandinista secret police may arrest a suspect, hold him incommunicado without charges indefinitely, and sentence him without trial for up to two years in prison for a variety of "offenses against the state" (USDS 1986d: 6; *NYT* 5 April 1985: 5). There is no habeas corpus for political prisoners. Reports claim that the DGSS has carried out mass arrests and summary executions, that it tortures prisoners, and that it has participated in forcible relocations and involuntary internment of tens of thousands of people (Puebla Institute 1987a: 5-22). Some 7,000 political prisoners are behind bars, while 35,000 Nicaraguans are estimated to have been processed through the Sandinista prison system. Thousands of people are part of a "floating prison population," arrested frequently for ideological or political deviance, kept in jail for a short time, released, only to be re-arrested at a later date in a pattern of intimidation (USDS 1986d: 6).

The Sandinista secret police is assisted in carrying out its functions by neighborhood watchdogs, *turbas*, and special tribunals. Within weeks of Somoza's demise, the FSLN announced the formation of a nationwide system of neighborhood activists, the Sandinista Defense Committees (CDS), modeled clearly after those set up by Castro in Cuba, whose most important functions are political and military (Gorman 1981: 146). Half a million Nicaraguans are organized in about 9,000 units, some of which work closely with DGSS (V & V: 19). In April 1988, Omar Cabezas was appointed new CDS coordinator. Previously, he served as "Vice Minister of Interior and Chief of its office responsible for indoctrination and enforcement" (USDS 1988: 15). Cabezas' appointment to head the CDS appears to strengthen the ties between MINT and this "neighborhood watch" network of Sandinista

informers. In addition to serving as ideological and political watchdogs, the CDS supply many of the shock troops known as *turbas*. The *turbas* are Sandinista gangs, similar to the fascist *squadristi*, directed by DGSS to break up opposition rallies and attack the persons and destroy or deface the property of "counterrevolutionaries," while the regular police look on, refusing to intervene (V & V: 19; *Washington Post* 7 Mar 1988: A23-24).

Another instrument facilitating secret police work are the "people's tribunals," established outside the regular court system to try persons accused of "counterrevolutionary" activities. Each tribunal consists of "three Sandinista party members, two of whom have no legal training and are delegates from the Sandinista Defense Committees. The president of the Tribunal is a lawyer and a member of the Sandinista Lawyers Association" (Puebla Institute 1987a: 9; cf *NYT* 5 April 1985: 5). The tribunals routinely convict the accused, and although the right to appeal to a higher people's tribunal exists, there is no appeal to the regular judiciary or to the Supreme Court.

Working in concert, the secret police, *turbas*, CDS, and the people's tribunals constitute a system of "repression" (to use Borge's term), amounting to terror. The system instills fear in the general public, punishing people not only for opposing the Sandinista party or dissenting from its ideology, but simply for failing to support it actively in its mass organizations. However, the terror has not constantly increased, but has oscillated with periods of relaxation coinciding with Sandinista attempts to win external support. After rising steadily for five years, the terror was relaxed several months before the 1984 election for president and a constituent assembly. During the electoral campaign, a 1982 national emergency decree was partially lifted and press censorship became somewhat less stringent.

According to Bayardo Arce, FSLN National Directorate member charged with overseeing the electoral process, the 1984 election was "a nuisance" demanded by the United States, which the Sandinistas could turn into "one more weapon of the revolution to bring its historical objectives gradually into reality" (USDS 1986a: 4, 7; cf Payne 1988: 32-33). After the election, boycotted by the main opposition coalition and marred by *turba* attacks on opposition parties (Cruz 1988), the terror escalated again, culminating in the closing of Catholic Radio and the newspaper *La Prensa*, the last two independent voices, in 1986. In 1987, following the signing of the Central American peace accords in Guatemala, authored by Costa Rican

president Oscar Arias--which won him the Nobel Peace Prize--Sandinista terror was relaxed once more. *La Prensa*, Catholic Radio, as well as several other private radio stations were allowed to reopen. *La Prensa* took advantage of the relaxation to mount outspoken, defiant criticism of the Sandinista regime (*Miami Herald* 19 Feb 1988: 21A), something unthinkable in a country under total terror.

However, the terror, while diminished, has by no means disappeared. Nicaragua's Roman Catholic Cardinal Miguel Obando y Bravo charged in January 1988 that since the Sandinistas began implementing the national reconciliation provisions of the Arias peace plan:

a vast range of human rights violations has been reported, ranging from physical and psychological tortures to atrocious murders and including persecutions, unjust imprisonments, refusals to obey the Supreme Court, abuses of authority, killings of peasants, harrassments, mistreatment of prisoners, kidnappings perpetrated by state security agents, the existence of secret prisons, etc. (quoted in *NYT* 11 Jan 1988: 4).

The Sandinista press "has been crudely threatening" *La Prensa's* publisher, Violeta Chamorro (*NYT* 12 Feb 1988: A35). In April 1988, Borge, angered over anti-government broadcasts on a Managua radio station, summoned the station manager to Borge's home where he punched the offending broadcaster on the forehead and chin (*Miami Herald* 1 May 1988: 8A). In July 1988, the Sandinista police violently broke up an opposition rally in Nandaime, south of the capital, arresting dozens of demonstrators and confining them under harsh conditions (Joe 1988b; *Miami Herald* 17 Jul 1988: 1A). Accused of fomenting the Nandaime rally, the American ambassador was expelled, along with several embassy officers. In the months following the Nandaime demonstration, hundreds of alleged Contra supporters in rural areas were arrested and held without trial (*NYT* 18 Nov 1988: 5).

#### IMMATURE TOTALITARIANISM?

In conclusion, as early as 1980, the Sandinista regime appeared as an embryonic totalitarian dictatorship. Upon coming to power, the FSLN was and remains an exclusivist, elite party imbued with a totalitarian ideology: Marxism-Leninism. Even before the collapse of the Somoza autocracy, Borge, the sole surviving FSLN founder, was appointed Minister of the

Interior, in charge of state security. After the revolution, Borge erected rapidly, with the help of hundreds of operatives from Cuba and other Soviet bloc regimes, a state security apparatus capable of terrorizing the population. Thus, within a year of the revolution, Nicaragua was under the rule of a regime that had completed the first requirement of a totalitarian dictatorship: the fusion of a revolutionary ideology, an elite, hierarchical party, and the secret police. It was also during their first year in power that the Sandinistas initiated "a military buildup without precedent in Central America" (USDS 1985: 3), entered into a series of agreements with the Soviet bloc (Schwab & Sims 1985), and embarked on a policy of expansionism, aiding communist guerrillas in Central and South America (Coll in Falcoff 1987, Moore 1987, Turner 1987).

Since then, the Sandinistas have extended ideological and political controls over most aspects of Nicaraguan society, destroying, taking over, or building parallel organizations in the economy, media, schools and universities, the arts, and even in the area of religion. A Sandinista-sponsored "popular church," partly financed and staffed with foreign aid, preaches that a true Christian must be a Marxist and a Sandinista, and accuses the Catholic Church--to which most Nicaraguans belong--of being a "church of the rich" (Belli 1985: 137-211). Individuals and organizations who have resisted Sandinista demands have been harassed, arrested, attacked by mobs, vilified in the Sandinista press, or killed. Having to flee Sandinista terror is one of the reasons given by many of the estimated 300,000 Nicaraguans who have left the country since 1979 (Puebla Institute 1987b).

Yet, a decade after the onset of the regime, the Sandinista party-state fails to meet all the criteria of mature totalitarianism. The FSLN does not have a total monopoly of the media, or of the educational system. Neither does it have total control of the economy: about a third of the economy remains in private hands (*Times of the Americas* 7 Sep 1988: 5). Although subject to severe harassment, independent business associations and labor unions still function. Nor has Sandinista terror silenced all dissent, there being opposition parties and an adversarial newspaper, the legendary *La Prensa*, which regularly criticize the regime.

Between 1982 and 1988, the Sandinista regime was challenged by thousands of armed anticommunist guerrillas aided by the United States. Encouraged by President Ronald Reagan, the Contras made considerable progress on the ground against the Sandinista military (Purcell 1987). But,

in 1988, following the signing of a Central American peace plan, the U.S. Congress voted to end military aid to the Nicaraguan Resistance. Peace talks between the Sandinistas and the Resistance followed, but no agreement was reached. As 1988 drew to a close, most Contra guerrillas had withdrawn from Nicaragua and were encamped in Honduras, their fate uncertain (Garvin 1988). The decline of the Resistance as a fighting force may enable the Sandinistas to fulfill a key totalitarian requirement: monopoly of weapons. Once this monopoly is consolidated, the Sandinistas may feel secure enough to do away with the remaining "islands of separateness" which have not yet been inundated by "the totalitarian sea" (F & B: 279), such as *La Prensa*, Catholic schools, and other vestiges of non-Sandinista association.

In sum, the Sandinista regime has fused a revolutionary ideology, an elite party, and a secret police in a totalitarian system which has not, however, completed the developmental process toward mature totalitarianism delineated by Friedrich and Brzezinski. Only time will tell whether the Sandinistas consummate the evolution toward totalitarianism intimated by their Marxist-Leninist ideology.

#### NOTE

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