

the social movements and groups founded to resist Somoza became the core groups in which government development programs were channeled to. The Philippine government, on the contrary, was not quick enough to seize the revolutionary fervor stirred by the February 1986 incident into nation building. Now it is slowly dissipating itself into a manifestation of our "ningas-cogon" attitude.

The Nicaraguans are daily being bombarded by radio and television shows from their next-door neighbors. Oftentimes, these shows are planted disinformation by the Contras which the Sandinist government cannot even combat because of its weak communication infrastructures. Surprisingly, they have only seized the radio, TV stations and theaters owned by Somoza and his cronies in Nicaragua and retained private ownership of the rest. Even the famous La Prensa newspaper which was closed by Somoza now reappears as a virulent oppositionist to the present government. This reconciliatory stance is in keeping with the backgrounds of the new leaders despite their new ideological leanings. Thus, the Western line that there is no freedom of the media in Nicaragua should not be taken at face value. Indeed this book is an informational counter propaganda against the Western media stories about Nicaragua.

The problem of integrating the indigenous Miskito Indians forms the last article of the book. Before reading this part, this reviewer got the impression from news reports that these Indians were just pawns in the war between the Contras and the Sandinistas. The article explains that the Miskitos are not passive. A Miskito chieftain, a former Somoza henchman, for example, lead some Indians into the Contra army.

The new government's policy therefore is to evacuate the Miskitos from the war zone (where their tribal land is) in order that they will not be affected by the war. With the disparate populations living in the Atlantic and Pacific coasts, the government has no choice but to try to incorporate them into a "popular hegemony" which "implied the integration of minorities under the direction of the majority". All means of communication available are needed to achieve this, particularly because the United States, the Contras rich ally, has waged a propaganda war against the Sandinistas using powerful transmitters. This is part of their systematic undermining of the Sandinista population using communication lines. The ideological battle between the Sandinistas and the Contras are thus taking place in the airwaves. The winner will most likely be the one whose message is most acceptable to the Nicaraguan people **K**

Confronting the Irony of a Revolution

Danilo Sibal

Revolution and Intervention in Central America, edited by Marlene Dizon and Susanne Jonas: Synthesis Publications, 1983.

On two occasions in 1979, our peer group found the rare, excellent reason for inebriated celebration: the first in January, when a broad Iranian front dominated by fundamentalist Islamic clergy overthrew the authoritarian regime of the Shah. The second was in July, when the Sandinista concluded their bloody insurrection with the defeat of dictator Anastacio Somoza and his National Guard.

We greeted the Iranian event with a mixture of awe and anxiety. Here was the unusual case of a modern revolution led largely by a fundamentalist Islamic clergy winning power through predominantly unarmed means. Only the suspicious medieval rhetoric of Islamic spokesmen tempered our enthusiasm.

Our fiercest euphoria was reserved for Nicaragua. There we saw novelty of the encouraging kind. In Nicaragua, it

seemed that radical liberation theologians had achieved their first practical success. We also saw a genuine revolutionary coalition come to power. Rather too quickly, we drew the favored conclusions that with authentically distinct Marxist organizations of roughly equal strength we might see the birth of a pluralist socialism. Nicaragua was, in our imagination, going to be an implicit critique of the revolutions that came before it. The Sandinistas almost ever-generously forbade capital punishment even for the most vicious National Guardsmen. They showed a surprising tolerance for their bourgeois enemies. Nicaragua was going to realize, then the socialist vision of not abolishing "bourgeois" liberties, but of endowing them with substance and expanding their enjoyment.

In Iran, our hopes came to grief within a year. The post-Shah regime put on inquisitorial robes and turned highly intolerant, physically eliminating not only proven counter-revolutionaries and SAVAK stragglers, but even erstwhile allies like the Mujahideen and the Tudeh party. It was a

theocracy gone berserk. It turned into a tragedy and a shame, and not only because all the Marxists there ended up being liquidated (which, strangely, appears to be the editors' only serious lament).

If we someday share cause to be disappointed with Nicaragua, on the other hand, our own naivete and blindness to history will have to take to blame. In retrospect, we were guilty of projecting into the Nicaraguan reality our cherished fantasies. We itched to see a democratic Socialism, and believed, if only the orthodox communists saw it our way, if only they were not so enamored of their own "correctness", if only they could come to terms with popular initiative outside their control — such a vision could be willed into being.

Central American realities have once again shown up these notions for the empty fancies they are, which would be long dead by now were they not periodically resurrected by unreconstructed utopians.

The most well-meaning revolution today must contend with the cynical brutality of U.S. imperialism. Facing at least 10,000 counter-revolutionaries on its borders and pressured by international banks for precious little resources, Nicaragua's leaders know better than to defend their Revolution with an unregulated press and total magnanimity. Not in a state of siege.

Compounding their difficulties with imperialist intervention, revolutionaries rapidly discover that national liberation and domestic class struggle are one continuous process. As the editors rightly contend, the revolution cannot maintain its integrity, indeed cannot survive, if it is unwilling to deal decisively with its own bourgeoisie. In the socialist era, no nation has known prolonged peace with its supposed national bourgeoisie; the revolution must conquer or perish.

There is yet another imperative that militates against the libertarian socialism we pine for: the need of a grossly underdeveloped country to pick itself up by the bootstraps and build a self-reliant, self-sustaining economy overnight.

With few exceptions, Third World revolutionaries will inherit countries of abysmal poverty and backwardness. Under adverse political and economic circumstances, they must carry out accumulation quickly and *internally* (not having colonies of their own to plunder and hardly any friendly credit sources). The situation compels them to restrict the consumption of their own populations, which in turn ranges them against the heightened expectations and material demands of the masses. Arbitrating over the distribution of scarce resources is a highly centrifugal duty; hence, no sooner does a coalition of revolutionary classes come to power than it threatens to fall apart on account of such contradictions. Hence also, the virtual necessity of forced collectivization, trade-union emasculation, and, over-all, regimented enthusiasm.

It may well be that even such an ironic history cannot absolve a Stalin or a Pol Pot. But it should sober up those who think a libertarian alternative is easily available to them. Though socialists did not preside over the creation of this world of cruel choices, they must, willy-nilly, choose. It is no

mitigating comfort, moreover, that they are armed with no guarantees of a coming millenium that might justify their choices. Every post-revolutionary actuality is fated to be a pale shadow of the hopes and visions that animated it in the first place. So if socialist still do what they do, it can only be because in our world an increment of betterment is achieved only by a flood of blood and sweat.

Knowing the gravity of their tasks and the limits of their real power, socialists have not just the right but the duty to be critical of each other's revolutions. The editors are wrong, therefore, in equating US Democratic Socialist criticism of increasing centralization in the Sandinista state with support for the counter-revolution. Such logic is disquietingly similar to the single-alternative logic of Stalinist blackmail: either you are completely with us or against us.

Marxist hardliners reveal their hypocrisy when they preach unity purely on these terms, when they demand complete acquiescence to their positions. It is particularly appealing for them to demand silencing of socialist criticism in the name of "proletarian internationalism"; in truth, such an attitude is closer to the hearts of pragmatic nationalist in China and the Soviet Union. In those countries, criticism of their bureaucratic states is routinely blasted as "interference in internal affairs" and objective alignment with imperialism.

Socialists need to be critical of each other even if this be temporarily comforting for imperialism. As a conscious, deliberate enterprise, socialism cannot grow with only its self-congratulatory self-appraisals to guide it. Indeed socialist criticism is a form of self-protection against twin evils: that of falling for the millenarian illusions that drove Stalinist and Kampuchean zealots to such murderous excesses, and that of cultivating the cynicism, selfishness and hypocrisy of the ex-fellow traveler.

Aside from the provocative essays of the editors, the other articles in *Revolution and Intervention* are useful for the look they afford into the various forms that US intervention has taken in the Carter and Reagan eras. In El Salvador and Guatemala, the features of US policy in the Philippines are mirrored, though in bloodier proportions; in Nicaragua, one might say the Philippine future is prefigured.

Also noteworthy is the refreshing analysis of US foreign policy which tries to veer away from the simplistic and takes account of the contradictions — even if not fundamental — within the US ruling class and among the imperialist states, along with the implications of both for revolutionary practice.

Readers will probably have causes to be disappointed in some ways. For one, there is little discussion of the dynamics of the revolutionary coalitions in Nicaragua (FSLN) and El Salvador (FDR) much less those in Guatemala and Honduras. For another, almost nothing is offered in analysis of the role of the radical clergy.

For all that, it should be a pleasure to know that many of the contributors are leaders and theoreticians of the revolutionary movements in Latin America. One tires of reading secondary interpretations too often. **K**