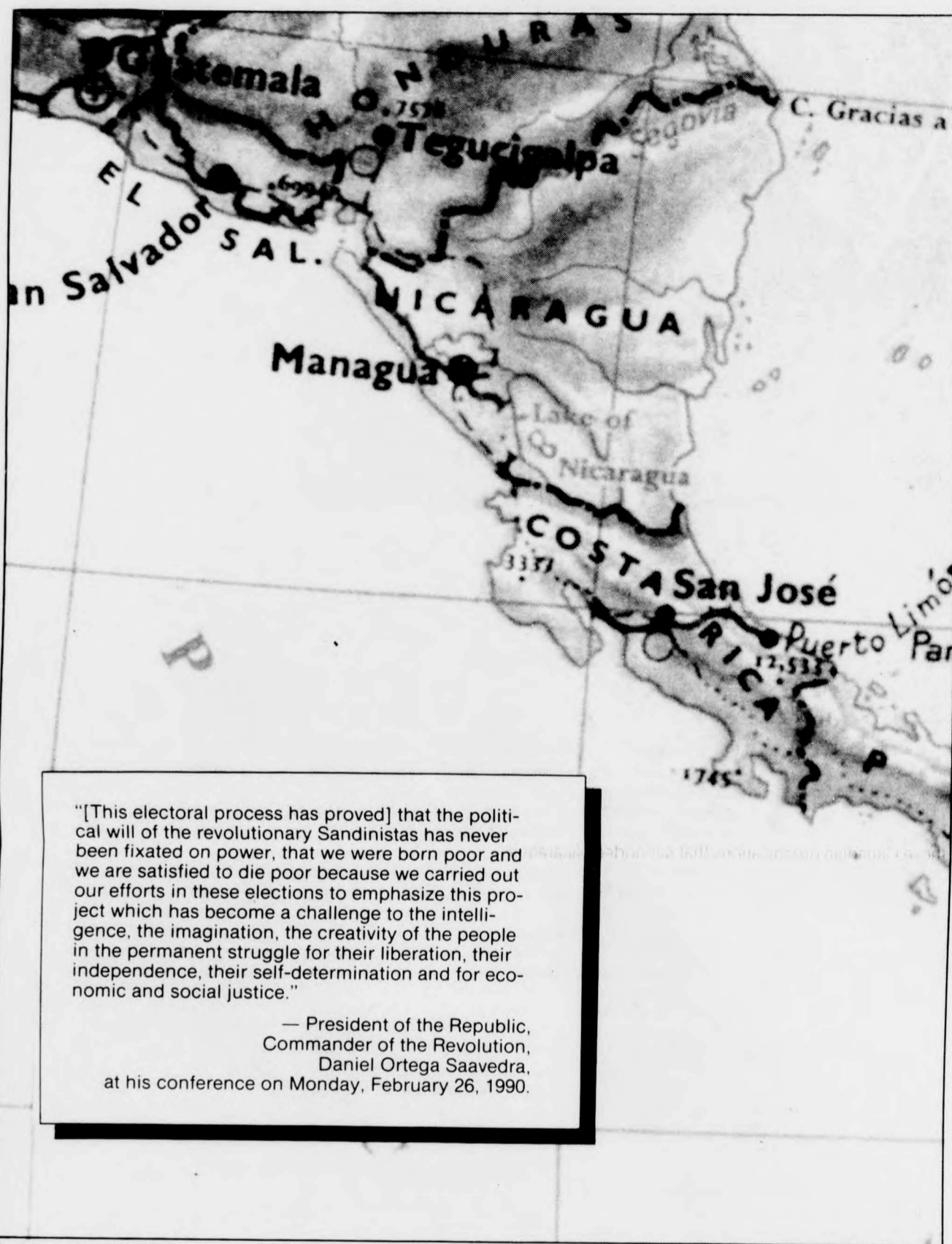


# Nicaragua: chaos will be the result of the UNO's win



by Maximilian C. Forte

Although the National Opposition Union (UNO) of Violeta de Chamorro won 55 per cent of the vote against Daniel Ortega's Sandinista National Liberation Front (FSLN) in the Nicaraguan elections of February 25, there have been far worse setbacks that the Sandinismo have overcome.

On February 21, 1934, Augusto Cesar Sandino, leader of the Army for the Defence of National Sovereignty (EDSN) was assassinated by General Anastasio Somoza Garcia. This put an end to Sandino's agrarian nationalists rule until the 1960s when Sandino's heirs, the founders of today's FSLN, began the hard and heroic struggle to remake Nicaragua. The Sandinistas have proven themselves over and over to be strong, committed, relentless and highly motivated combatants. Anyone who thinks these elections spell the end of the FSLN is seriously deluding himself. Unlike Sandino, the FSLN is not dead and buried; 41 per cent of the population, suffering unimaginable hardships, have decided to stick with it.

The Sandinistas, once and for all, have proven to the whole world they are devout democrats. On February 26, Ortega said, "Since we are committed to democracy, we will accept the will of the voters. The best victory is the pride that I feel; the vote on February 25 has opened up a new road in Nicaragua — the road that we promised the people on July 19, 1979."

In the last 10 years, Nicaragua has instituted a process of "popular power" which has seen the emergence of new mechanisms through which the people have determined

their own destiny. The FSLN has constantly proved that it pursued purely democratic goals, namely, in their own words, "The substitution of the traditional paternalistic principles of government . . . with government actions that stimulate the participation, both individual and collective, of all Nicaraguans in the solutions to their problems."

The Sandinista Revolution sought to empower workers and peasants and, as in the distribution of rifles to 250,000 peasants, it also gave them the means to defend their rights and benefits. This is what Chamorro will be forced to bear in mind.

Nicaragua's mass organizations were central to its people's democracy and they will also prove to be central in holding the UNO regime at bay. The Sandinista mass organizations consisted of several hundred unions and were comprised of 900,000 members (in a country of 3 million) — more people than there were in the workforce. These organizations were not defeated in any elections and will be a tremendous obstacle to any UNO plans of undoing the revolution.

Why did the FSLN lose the election? The only valid explanation, the one most commonly agreed to, is that no incumbent could win with an economy as shattered as Nicaragua's. The UNO had built its campaign around popular unhappiness over years of hyperinflation, falling wages and scarcity of basic goods. In a country where the buying power of wages dropped more than 70 per cent during the past decade and where inflation was over 33,000 per cent in 1988, it's quite logical that Nicaraguans

chose the party with the "special relationship" with the U.S. There is hope the UNO will now bring a windfall in U.S. aid.

Fear and misery drove people to vote for the UNO. Attacks by the U.S.-backed Contras have destroyed or damaged huge segments of Nicaragua's social and economic infrastructure.

In addition to the economic destruction wrought by war, Nicaragua, like other Third World countries, was hit by deteriorating terms of trade, inflated international lending rates and debt troubles. Nicaragua's terms of trade gravely suffered as a result of a steep fall in commodity prices and the soaring cost of imported manufactured goods. Reagan managed to cut all credit lines to Nicaragua.

Nicaragua was forced to ration oil and such staples as sugar, flour and meat. Moreover, there were food lineups, hoarding, speculation, pay freezes and moves to end government subsidies on electricity and other services in 1982. In February 1984, food subsidies on basic goods for the poor majority had to be removed to curb the black market. Defence spending reached 50 per cent of the gross domestic product.

On May 8, 1985, a U.S. trade, transport and general economic embargo went into effect cutting off Nicaragua's major source of imports and primary destination for its exports. The war diverted labour and resources from the productive sector and destroyed irreplaceable means of production.

One cannot even begin to imagine the numerous obstacles the UNO government will face. It has to be recognized that amongst all the political parties in Nicaragua, the FSLN received the most votes. It took a coalition of 14 parties and a totally collapsed economy to defeat the Sandinistas. Yet, the FSLN, with over 40 per cent of the vote, will be a strong enough force in the National Assembly to block any constitutional amendments (which require a two-thirds majority). Should any of the UNO parties break away, Chamorro may find her hands tied in an assembly controlled by the opposition.

The Sandinista mass organizations, labour unions, the army and the armed peasants are not going to stand idly by, in the event that the UNO should engage in a counterrevolution.

Xavier Gorostiaga, a Nicaraguan political analyst, said on February 27 that "[Chamorro] has to make a social pact with the real power of the Sandinistas — the labour force, the popular organizations, and the army. Otherwise, there will not be peace in this country." As if to underline this basic reality, at a large and militant Sandinista rally the same day, Ortega loudly declared that the election results " . . . do not mean, in any way, the end of the revolution." Should the Contras not disarm and disarm, Ortega promised the FSLN would not release control over the Interior Ministry and the Defence Ministry.

There are problems within the UNO. Now that it is in power, all the conflicting aims and demands within the UNO may cause an implosion. The parties within the UNO range from the Democratic Conservative Party to the Marxist-Leninist Popular Action Movement. Moreover, if people thought these elections would remove socialists from power, they should realize the Nicaraguan people, by voting the UNO into power, also voted four parties into power that are further to the left than the FSLN.

The FSLN may benefit from a limited absence from power. As John B. Oakes, a former editor of *The New York Times* noted, "A Chamorro victory would . . . relieve the Sandinistas of the impossible task of reviving the economy by themselves or with whatever help they could still squeeze out of the European democracies. It would shift a major part of the burden to the U.S., which would be morally bound to shoulder it. The Sandinistas could relax while watching the bitterly divided Chamorro coalition fall apart between now and the next election. Nothing more than U.S. support and the hope of ousting the Sandinistas holds it together."

The UNO's programme, based on close ties to the U.S. along with capitalist development, is not a suitable option. Nor is it an alternative. Nicaragua has been through the capitalist phase which resulted in a revolution. Peripheral capitalism, U.S. aid and investment, the Alliance for Progress in the 1960s and the Caribbean Basin Initiative in the 1980s have all failed to eradicate illiteracy, massive poverty, homelessness, unemployment, disease and powerlessness. If anything, a century of ties to capitalism have either created or worsened those conditions.

Nicaragua will go through some very ugly moments before the 1996 elections. One can easily foresee Sandinista-led general strikes, spontaneous riots and grassroots uprisings, army mutinies, daily protests and the disintegration of the UNO. It may be that the UNO's only alternatives to Sandinismo are chaos and the loss of national sovereignty.

The following is an interview with York language professor Pastor Valle-Garay, the former Consul-General of Nicaragua and a long-standing member of the FSLN.

**Excalibur:** What is your personal reaction to the election? Is this the end of Sandinismo?

**Valle-Garay:** I believe a lot of good can come out of these elections. Our defeat at the polls is one of the unique ironies of the Nicaraguan revolution. We have seen the people go to the polls; the people desired change and they now have the means to effect that change. The people I've spoken with in Managua this morning — people in the party — are not in such a bad or defeated mood as the press would indicate.

These elections mean more than just the loss of the FSLN — they are an intrinsic part of the democratization process in a country that has not known democracy [until the Sandinistas came to power]. This is a new style of government that Nicaragua has never experienced before. Yet, the legacy and power of Sandinista institutions remain; Sandinismo's power base and all its political machinery are there and are not going to change.

The people of Nicaragua have not so much expressed their discontent with the FSLN or with Daniel Ortega. Rather, their's was a vote of desperation — a hope for change, for economic aid, a hope for the lifting of the U.S. embargo and all the other mechanisms used by the U.S. and its allies to devastate the Nicaraguan economy.

**Excalibur:** Does the defeat of the Sandinistas mean that the FSLN will simply become a mere party, one of many?

**Valle-Garay:** The FSLN is a tremendous force to contend with. The Nicaraguan people, under the leadership and guidance of the FSLN, have become politically more mature — and that is what has devastated us today — that same maturity was used by the opposition to express discontent with the FSLN.

If the president-elect is wise, she will continue with that process, established by the FSLN. Under Sandinista direction, the people's rights — gained and earned at tremendous loss and sacrifice — all form part of an irreversible process. That process cannot be destroyed by a party or a group of parties.

Under the FSLN there had been great improvements and advances in the fields of health, education, agrarian reform and the breaking of monopolies, so as to have a redistribution of wealth. The realization that the people have earned those rights is irreversible. Not a single Nicaraguan is willing to give up any of those benefits, or go back 10 or 15 years or back to the feudalism that existed in Nicaragua, precisely under the Chamorros, 50 or 60 years ago when Nicaragua was run by a handful of aristocrats and oligarchs — of which the Chamorros were an intrinsic part.

The revolutionary process is irreversible. The Nicaraguan people have gained a new perspective of what they can do as individuals and as a group. This is the best tribute to Sandinismo. When the people can vote out of power those people [the FSLN] that created those very conditions, then this is something which is astonishingly unique to the Sandinista revolution. Our loss at the polls has nothing to do with what is going on in Eastern Europe, because we haven't copied anybody. We have never copied anybody. These elections are a continuation of the process of institutionalizing democracy which began with the 1984 elections — a process which is, anywhere in the world, the highest form of democratic socialism.

**Excalibur:** Don't you think that Chamorro will come under intense pressure by the U.S. to dismantle the revolution brick by brick?

**Valle-Garay:** There will be U.S. pressure; there is no question. The U.S. will try to point out to the rest of the people of Latin America that those are the consequences that they should be prepared to expect. That is, the U.S. will and can undo a revolution.

The U.S. will try to destroy the revolution — but they underestimate the people of Nicaragua, and the people of Latin America in general. This revolution was not won by the U.S. and these elections were not won by the U.S.

**Excalibur:** Why did the FSLN lose?

**Valle-Garay:** These elections were lost by the economic conditions, which have been particularly disastrous in the last five years, due to this immoral and cruel war by the United States. U.S. intervention was a contributing factor by backing the Contras, killing and wounding 60,000 civilians [and] isolating Nicaragua from most other Latin American and Central American countries through economic blackmail and military actions.

This economic disaster, the fear and desperation, induced the people to opt for change.

There are some areas where we exercise real political

control. What we lost was, essentially, the presidency. As a party, we control a number of other institutions. It is almost impossible to visualize Violeta Chamorro trying to run Nicaragua without the FSLN institutions when these institutions and processes are now part and parcel of the make up of Nicaraguan political life.

**Excalibur:** Is Ortega to blame for his defeat?

**Valle-Garay:** Nobody likes to lose, especially the Sandinistas. But one cannot really place the blame on the Sandinista leadership. There exists a set of circumstances which made the people of Nicaragua vote against the FSLN. And these circumstances, disastrous social and economic consequences of a war, were beyond the control of our people.

There are 150,000 people around the country with one leg, one arm, no legs, no arms, no sight, other wounds — all of which are a sombre reminder of a criminal war that was fought against us. The people have become afraid. Once you create those conditions for change, those that are scared and hungry want somebody else. But in the process, they have elected perhaps the most incompetent person in the history of Nicaragua.

The significance of these elections and our revolution is that people can live with a sense of dignity and hope. The Nicaraguan people will not stand for old ways. The people are now empowered and realize, "If we can vote the Sandinistas out of power then we can vote this woman out of power." Fifteen years ago you never would have seen 90 per cent of the country going to the polls to vote and to determine their destiny.

In the end, this whole process was encouraged and brought about by the FSLN and this is the beauty of the Sandinista revolution.

**Excalibur:** What would you like to say to Latin Americans?

**Valle-Garay:** Latin Americans should not despair. I would like to tell all our comrades and friends in the region to take a few days to reflect but not to just give up.

**Excalibur:** What is the message you would like to send to people here in Canada?

**P. Valle-Garay:** What we would like to see as a party, more importantly as Nicaraguans, is that the international community that supported Nicaragua, and particularly those Canadian organizations that supported Nicaragua — Oxfam, Tools for Peace, Canadian Save the Children Fund, and all the churches that supported Nicaragua, that they continue to do so. These were the organizations that kept Nicaraguans from floundering in absolute despair when faced with the enormous destruction by the U.S.

Ultimately, the government of the people is not that important. What is important is the well-being of the Nicaraguan people, which was the sole aim of the FSLN.



York professor Pastor Valle-Garay