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## **Nicaragua: Latin American Studies Association Delegation Comments On Likely Post-election Developments**

*by Deborah Tyroler*

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The Latin American Studies Association (LASA) sent a 12-member team of scholars to observe the Feb. 25 elections. On Monday afternoon, the delegation gave a press conference at the Olof Palme Conference Center in Managua. Summarized below are selected questions and answers compiled by Gen Howe, coordinator of Casa Benjamin Linder. [LASA is a professional organization of scholars from throughout the world who specialize in Latin American studies.] Q.: What is likely to happen to the [Nicaraguan] military? Dr. Michael Conroy, associate professor of economics and director of the Latin American Economic Studies Program at the University of Texas-Austin: "The role of the United States is absolutely crucial. If the United States plays a very heavy-handed role in trying to push the UNO [National Opposition Unity] into bringing rapid changes to the military, it could result in some sort of conflictive relationship. If the United States plays a moderate role, and decides to allow some sort of accommodation between the Sandinistas and the UNO government over the matter of the military, then there may well be peace." Q: Even if these elections were mechanically perfect, in the context of the military, economic and political pressure of the US government against Nicaragua during the last 10 years, can these elections really be said to be democratic? Dr. Martin Diskin (co-chair of the delegation), professor in the anthropology-archeology program, Massachusetts Institute of Technology: We are discussing the technical perfection of the election after having assumed the context in which Nicaragua has faced what some would call a Hobson's choice neither alternative of which is a decent and humane path for a sovereign country to have to undergo. That is to say, on the one hand to have to refuse the overwhelming pressure of the United States, and through its allies and client states, to demand some kind of electoral exercise supervised internationally; and on the other hand, to have to go through this somewhat coerced exercise. Neither one is an alternative that any country in the modern world has ever had to face. Q: Why did the FSLN lose or why did the UNO win? Dr. Richard Fagen, Gildred professor of Latin American Studies, director of the Center for Latin American Studies, Stanford University: The 40 plus percent that the Sandinistas won is true Sandinista support. The Sandinistas got all their supporters and no one else. That 40% is very solid and is going to be with Nicaragua for a very long time. The votes for the UNO are of a very different nature. This is just a guess perhaps 30% or 25% of the total votes are UNO supporters in the same sense that the 40% are Sandinista supporters. The rest is more tenuous, subject to change...There is a very real possibility that although this is an UNO government, in the sense of solid citizen support over the longer run, it will be a minority government. Dr. Charles Stansifer, professor of Latin American history, University of Kansas, currently visiting professor at the US Air War College in Montgomery, Alabama: The most important issue is the economic situation. It is almost impossible for a government that can be blamed for a bad economic situation to continue in office. Second is the draft. There were a lot of rumors about possibly ending the draft just before the election. That was not done, but it would have resulted in many more Sandinista votes if it had been done. The third point is that Daniel has been around for a very long time. It sort of reminds people of the long Somoza period and so there was a feeling that it was time for a change, certainly a change in

personal leadership. Perhaps there was overkill on the campaign so much expenditure for billboards and paintings and things of that sort, which would not have been bad for itself except for the poor economic situation. There was a contrast between the heavy expenditures for the campaign and the bad economic situation. The last point would be the desire to improve relations with the United States and there was a general feeling among the people that the UNO could improve relations with the United States better than the Sandinistas." Tom Walker, professor of political science, Ohio University: "The cry uncle factor may have been important here...Some of the polls were very good polls from a methodological point of view...There may have been a group of people who were so badly affected by the economic situation that they were willing basically to surrender. Nevertheless, they were not particularly proud of doing so and would not even say so when polled...People were simply ashamed to be doing what they themselves probably thought was unpatriotic but what was in their own personal interest. It was obvious that the economic situation would get better if Uncle Sam came in and pumped money into Nicaragua and it wasn't going to do that with the Sandinistas in power. Q: What kind of impact will the UNO victory have on the Atlantic Coast? Diskin: This is the most explosive region in the country because of the nature of the ethnic conflict. Armed Miskito groups are under the leadership of Brooklyn Rivera and Steadman Faggoth, both of whom returned to Nicaragua under agreement with the Nicaraguan government to not support armed activities...Since their arrival the supply of arms and ammunitions has increased so that there are more weapons now than there have been in the past 10 years. The leaders of the Yatama movement have been threatening armed reprisals if the vote didn't go their way. They have been discouraging the electoral process by accusing the Sandinistas of every type of fraud you can imagine, increasing tensions that already existed. Now with the turn of events brought by the election, it is probably that Yatama for the moment considers itself the winner because of its recently formed alliance with UNO. Q: What will to foreign volunteers working in Nicaragua? Dr. Laura Enriquez, President's Post-Doctoral Fellow, Department of Sociology, University of California-Berkeley: I can speak from many years of hearing opinions expressed by top leaders of what is now UNO about the kinds of foreign cooperation that have been provided to Nicaragua in the past 10 years. They don't have a very high opinion of these people, and in fact, consistently want them out. It is not part of their platform what they see as the future role of foreign cooperation. I would imagine that their concept of foreign cooperation will be quite different from that of the Sandinista government until now, and will be replaced by US AID [Agency for International Development] kinds of cooperation. Conroy: "The attitude of the new administration to the internationalists who are present in Nicaragua is going to depend very much on who within the UNO coalition in fact governs. We have seen considerable differences in attitude and opinion among various people close to Mrs. [Violeta Barrios de] Chamorro...From the point of view of creating a unified economic policy, this is a virtually impossible coalition. Regarding whether the internationalists will be encouraged to stay and continue providing technical assistance, it is going to depend upon whether the hard line or the more accommodationist line within the UNO in fact governs.

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