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## Nicaragua: Commentary On Fsln Election Loss, Aftermath

by Deborah Tyroler

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[Excerpts from article by Xabier Gorostiaga, titled, "Nicaragua: la sorpresa electoral y sus consecuencias," distributed 03/08/90 by Regional Coordination for Economic and Social Research of Central America and the Caribbean-CRIES, Managua.] \* The results of the Feb. 25 election in Nicaragua reflect the complexity of a prolonged conflict suffered by the Nicaraguan people. Electoral polls are incapable of capturing the meaning of an election for a population lacking an "electoral culture" and experience with opinion surveys, and in the midst of strong polarization created by war, political tensions, and economic crisis. Nicaraguans' yearning for peace and economic survival clashed with aspirations for national dignity and sovereignty. A majority were convinced that Violeta Barrios de Chamorro, friend of President Bush and Cardinal Obando y Bravo, would have greater potential than Sandinismo for ending the war, and resuming economic development. Betrayal, deceit, resignation, fear, illusion all had a part in the vote. \* On Feb. 25, Nicaraguans also acted to punish the Sandinista National Liberation Front (FSLN) for the military draft, economic austerity, arrogance and insensitivity. The National Opposition Union (UNO) received a majority of the vote in some cases even in districts where military personnel were concentrated. Poor Nicaraguans, including many public employees, voted for UNO. They had suffered the most from the austerity measures. Some Nicaraguans including FSLN sympathizers, weary of deprivation and the daily grind of survival, were disgusted with the omnipresence of Sandinista militants, and their insensitivity and arrogance seen in excessive campaign propaganda and festivities. They voted for UNO. \* Never has the possibility of peace, or of social chaos, including civil war and US intervention, been more present in Nicaragua. The electoral process was difficult, but the transition is even more so. The most pragmatic grouping within the 14-party coalition headed by Violeta Barrios de Chamorro and Antonio Lacayo confronts a revanchist faction who wish to see Feb. 25 be transformed into the inverse of July 1979. They seek the total eradication of Sandinismo, principally through the dismantlement of the army and security forces, privatization of the state sector, and control of existing popular organizations. They count on US support to attain their objectives. Barrios de Chamorro has demonstrated pragmatism, tempering her campaign discourse and the aggressive tone of La Prensa. Will she be able to control the old Somoza era politicians, the contras, and US pressure in their attempts to coopt her into destroying Sandinismo? \* The vitality of the FSLN after the election, and its importance as the majority party in the National Assembly confronting a divided, ideologically inconsistent coalition, reflect the tension of transition process. Concern and uncertainty about the future are shared by winners and losers. Clearly, political governability of the country will depend on the FSLN, and economic reconstruction on UNO and Washington. UNO has 52 seats in the National Assembly, less than the 60% necessary to implement constitutional amendments. Thus, the constitution has become a juridical weapon wielded by the FSLN invoking the state of law proclaimed by UNO in the elections. The new government will be able to negotiate institutional modifications, but not substantive changes in the armed forces, the nationalized banking system, nationalized foreign trade, and social welfare arrangements incorporated into the constitution. On the other hand, control of the government, state budget, foreign policy, a large sector of the nation's economy, groups such as the Superior Council on Private Enterprise (COSEP), and Washington's support give the UNO administration

power to negotiate that the FSLN has not had to content with in the past decade. [Excerpts from article by Pedro Rioseco, broadcast 03/03/90 by Cuban news agency Prensa Latina. Rioseco headed Prensa Latina's office in Managua from 1986 to mid-1989.] \* Half a million votes for the FSLN in the election, 40.8% of the total, should not be dismissed. The FSLN vote demonstrates the strong political commitments of many Nicaraguans and the effectiveness of FSLN organizing skills, in spite of economic devastation and the promise of continued contra attacks in isolated regions, and the promise of continued hostility by the US on several fronts. In the week before the election, the White House and influential US newspapers, including the Washington Post, acknowledged the possibility of an FSLN win. Secretary of State James Baker said that if the Sandinistas were re-elected in a "clean" election, the US would nonetheless require that the new government's "good behavior" be demonstrated over an unspecified period of time before relations between the two countries could be normalized. Meanwhile, the contras in Yamales, Honduras, asserted that if the FSLN won the election, clean or not, they would not disarm. Next, was the always latent threat of US invasion, apparently to be carried out with impunity as evidenced in the Dec. 20 exercise in Panama. This development may have persuaded fearful and undecided Nicaraguans that a vote for the FSLN would mean more war. \* The vote for UNO and other opposition parties does not necessarily mean support for UNO economic policies. Frustrated Nicaraguans remember the buoyant economic growth of the first two years after the 1979 revolution. Development loans from international organizations were closed off to Nicaragua by 1983. In 1985, the Reagan administration formally imposed an economic blockade that had been in effect for some time. Foreign reserves plummeted, Nicaraguan public and private companies dependent on US-made parts stumbled along. The contra war entered its most devastating phases. In the 1980s, the entire Latin American region was impacted by low export prices, the foreign debt crisis and economic recession. In this context, even if the Nicaraguan government had continued to the present to implement policies of direct benefit to workers, including basic foodstuff subsidies, such attempts to tackle a steadily deteriorating economic situation could not have been more than palliative. Peace and economic stability in Nicaragua were ultimately dependent on Washington's will, not decisions by the Central American presidents or Nicaraguan leaders. \* Political instability led some Eastern European nations, including the German Democratic Republic, to unilaterally suspend contracts signed with the Nicaraguan government for 1990. This brought an additional factor of uncertainty to many Nicaraguans whose main concerns are peace and economic survival. \* As a compensating factor for the organizational weaknesses of the disparate UNO coalition, the support of the Catholic Church should not be underestimated. Ninety percent of all Nicaraguans are Catholic. Cardinal Miguel Obando y Bravo used his right to vote for the first time in his life. Throughout the campaign, Radio Catolica clearly supported the UNO. \* Those who believe that Nicaragua will now join other Central American countries, where new technocratic rightist leaders have taken over, are forgetting the roots of the revolutionary process that has shaped Nicaraguan society in the past decade.

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