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## On "the Second Stage" Of The Nicaraguan Revolution: Interview With Alejandro Bendana, Part 1, Section 2

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BENDANA: Basically, we see the continuation of class struggle. The class interests of the campesinos are not those of the government, which is fundamentally geared to agro-export interests. Objectively, the differences, the demands, the social background, and the expectations, of a contra campesino are not that much different from a Sandinista campesino. Ironically, it is the same international economic system and the very same government policies that are bringing these two groups of campesinos together. Of course there are right-wing forces which are going to try and perpetuate differences and try to manipulate the demands of landless contras, just as there were all these right-wing forces trying to manipulate the demands of other landless campesinos who are not contras. You have right-wing parties that lack a genuine social base and they are trying to create an artificial one by using the contra movement. But the contra leadership is split in this regard. One faction is trying to build a party with contra campesinos. But such a grouping can't have its feet on both sides, or supporting both the demands of the contras, and right-wing policies or extreme right-wing politicians. [The latter] don't have the interests of the campesinos at heart and are against further land reform. They are demanding the return of all expropriated lands to former owners. So you have a situation in which over the next few years the campesinos are going to once again recover a class identity and coalesce around organizations that represent their class interests. This is already happening. The [Sandinista-oriented] National Union of Farmers and Cattle Ranchers (UNAG) is picking up on the contras' demands and channeling them towards the government, demanding that the government comply with its promises of land and credit to the demobilized contras. Nobody else is pushing for these demands. To put it in other words, we expect the contra campesinos to vote for the FSLN in 1996, as a result of their own class interests, and as a result of the FSLN's fundamental roots in the popular classes. LADB: In the Mexican experience, you had a situation where one part of the peasantry supported radical agrarian reform, yet another faction was so immersed in supporting the Catholic Church and the anarchist movement that the peasants were split. Are there any elements of the contra movement that may hinder such a coalition in Nicaragua? BENDANA: I think there will always be some groups who can be manipulated, or who are still affixed to old mentalities and old lines of patronage that can be manipulated by the old landlords or by the right wing of the Church. Yet the levels of political consciousness are so high in Nicaragua that it is going to become increasingly difficult for persons to be manipulated against their own sectoral, and their own economic interests. The campesinos are not stupid. They know what they want. They know what their rights are. We have to trust their capacity to interpret what political or organizational movement is going to best channel their demands and best secure an answer to their grievances. We hope the phenomenon of rural violence in Nicaragua, which has developed over 160 years, is going to subside as a result, in part, of sustaining the agrarian reform, of opening up new lands to new development, and of generous credit policies to the small farmer and the small rancher. LADB: How have the diverse political forces that made up the National Opposition Union (UNO) electoral coalition evolved since the elections? How has the FSLN inserted itself into those relations? BENDANA: Violeta Chamorro and the principal members of her cabinet are not members

of any political party. The coalition of political parties chose Violeta as their candidate principally at the urging and pressure of the US Embassy. But that is about as far as unity went. Virgilio Godoy, on the other hand, was more representative of the traditional right-wing party groupings. Violeta and her immediate cabinet might not have parties at their command, but they have something much more powerful, which is government. And government offers patronage. So what you see is the weakening of the right-wing political party coalition which expected to play the role of Council of Government in the new regime. The government has been able to pull individual legislators into operating under executive control and its political machine. For example, the UNO majority in the National Assembly voted in favor of reinterpreting that article of the constitution which says when the president leaves the country, the vice president would assume executive command. This was totally unacceptable to Violeta and her circle. Their worst nightmares is Virgilio being in command, even if only for a few days. Interestingly enough, a majority of the UNO members [of the Assembly] including those who had previously voted with Virgilio and with the old parties, passed legislation that effectively bars Virgilio from ever assuming the highest office, even in the case of mental or physical incapacity on the part of the president. Where did the FSLN stand on this? Well, very comfortably on the sidelines. We just watched them slug it out on this issue, and on other issues that have divided the UNO coalition. This is a government that lacks direction, lacks organization, lacks coherence, and worse yet, it lacks imagination. The FSLN, on the other hand, is more tightly knit together. It is the largest voting bloc in the National Assembly. It has been able to exploit divisions between the blocs to the advantage of the gains of the revolution, in order to pass legislation, or to stop legislation that would have a negative impact on [the Nicaraguan people's] rights. The divisions within UNO have given the FSLN an even greater relative influence in the country. LADB: Recently there was a shake-up of Chamorro's cabinet, and Central Bank President Francisco Mayorga, who was earlier hailed as the saviour of the Nicaraguan economy, was replaced. What factors explain his removal? BENDANA: The sacking of Francisco Mayorga was the clearest admission [by the Chamorro government] that its right-wing "un-economic" policies cannot be implemented in political and social terms. The sacking of Mayorga was a victory for the popular forces, which by way of strikes, political mobilization and negotiating persuasion, conveyed to the government and to the United States, in no uncertain terms, that the IMF's structural adjustment policies simply are not going to be rammed down the throats of the Nicaraguan people. Mayorga thought he could do this and get away with it. He also promised to end inflation in 100 days, which was a ridiculous proposition, even to professional economists. The reshuffling of government positions, as well as the "concertacion" (social pact) agreement reached in the last week of October, reflect the political recognition that the interests of the popular sectors, of the unions, have to be taken into account when economic policies are being made. LADB: How would you characterize the changes underway in the FSLN? What does programmatic development involve? BENDANA: The FSLN now has to make a transition from a military-political apparatus, to an electoral-political apparatus. It was a transition that began in 1979, when it overnight transformed itself from a guerrilla movement into a government. Yet on account of the declaration of war by the Reagan administration in 1981, the FSLN had to reassume its old military and centralist structures and ways of functioning in order to defend national sovereignty and the revolution itself. The time has now come for the FSLN to deal with the question of how best to defend the revolution within new national and international political conditions following the February elections, and in the wake of the defeat of the contras, the defeat of the Reagan administration's policy that sought to destroy the FSLN, and of assurances given to the FSLN that space inside Nicaragua would remain open for it to develop as a political force and reestablish its democratic credentials. This is not simply a reorganization, or a mere

redefinition of its program as a result of being in opposition for the first time. Rather, it means adapting to the 1990s and adapting to a new scenario in which we hope that the military conflict within Nicaragua has been permanently set aside. We hope that, indeed, there have been sufficient changes in the international scenario for the United States to not feel mortally threatened by the continuation of Sandinismo as a strong political, democratic force in Nicaragua. Within these conditions we are proceeding to best prepare to win the 1996 elections. This means developing a platform which can appeal to a majority of Nicaraguans. Yet at the same time this program must cater to the fundamental interests of the poor, maintain the nationalist stance, defense of national identity and a continuing process of social transformations. [The FSLN] must also defend the scheme of multi-party democracy and mixed economy. The FSLN feels more than ever that this was not only the correct path to have defined in the Seventies and implemented in the Eighties, but that it has also been vindicated by developments in Eastern Europe and elsewhere as the path for the 1990s. This will be reflected in the platform. The objectives of the struggle continue to be the same but fortunately, the means will now be political, civic, organizational, ideological, and hopefully never again military.

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