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## **The New Post-cold War Contradiction & North & South, Rich Vs. Poor: Interview With Alejandro Bendana, Part Ii**

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Alejandro Bendana Rodriguez was one of the principal architects of Nicaraguan foreign policy in the 1979-1990 revolutionary government and a well-known international spokesperson for the Sandinistas. The former Secretary General of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Bendana was also Ambassador to the United Nations and to the Non-Aligned Movement, and is the author of several books on Latin America and international affairs. He now directs the Center for International Studies (CIE), of the Jesuit-run Central American University in Managua. In the following, Bendana addresses the Sandinistas' perspectives on the emerging redefinition of international relations in the post-Cold War era, and on the "lessons" that the Nicaraguan experience offers for other developing countries in the 1990s. [See CAU 11/28/90 for Part I of interview, titled, "On 'The Second Stage' of the Nicaraguan Revolution: Interview with Alejandro Bendana."] LADB: What are the prospects for Nicaragua to achieve a modicum of social and political stability in the next few months, or years? BENDANA: Unfortunately, that may just have more to do with external factors than with internal ones. We are seeing that there are definite limits to what governments and principal opposition movements the two prime political forces can do obtain political stability, which in turn has to be geared to economic stability, i.e., political stability is linked to the elimination of economic crisis and continued social polarization. Given the terms of our insertion into the world capitalist system, we may make progress politically and open up greater possibilities of democratic institutionalization, while continuing to face economic crisis. There is a contradiction between these two tendencies. Our power to correct those negative elements in the international economic scenario is limited. The Cold War may have ended strategically between East and West, but economically, it continues, and it has been aggravated between North and South. This is the new contradiction of our times. Unless movements and governments in our countries converge with movements and governments in the North in order to address this fundamental contradiction, then indeed the chances for viable democracies in the developing countries, as well as in Eastern Europe, are going to be severely curtailed. LADB: What lessons of a political nature can revolutionary, leftist organizations in Latin America arrive at from the events in Eastern Europe? BENDANA: The question deserves a couple of caveats. First, let's not exaggerate the impact of developments in Eastern Europe and the socialist bloc on the Third World, either in theoretical or in practical terms. Secondly, we must resist and combat the tendency of western, right-wing ideologues to now try and interpret the struggles in the developing countries through the prism of Eastern Europe. One could point to positive and negative factors stemming from the collapse of the Eastern European regimes, and the developments in the Soviet Union, which are totally distinct. On the positive side, it is helping us to "clear the deck" of old notions, old dogmas, old rigidities, to give us a breath of fresh air in our thinking, which is always welcome. We Sandinistas feel very much vindicated, because we never paid much attention to the Eastern models. We always thought we had to evolve in accordance with our own conditions, with our own historical development and to our own geographical position. Second, developments in the Soviet Union, and the contributions of someone like Gorbachev, are restoring

the good name of socialism throughout the Third World. We can be proud notwithstanding the Western press at what is happening in the Soviet Union. We can be proud of the courage, the vision, the far-sightedness of an individual, a grouping, and a movement, within socialism itself, that addresses head-on, self-critically, and forcefully, very serious shortcomings of previous models. These shortcomings and distortions have been confronted within the Soviet Union at a very high risk, and yet with a certainty that all of this will further serve the cause of socialism by restoring to it something that should never have been taken away its essential democratic character. The democratic credentials of the left, of socialism, have received a new acceptance. Contrary to what the Western [press] says, this is not the collapse of socialism, but rather the setting up of new conditions on which to continue to build socialist democracy in the Soviet Union, and in the developing countries. And perhaps even once again in Eastern Europe, after they fiddle around for 10 years with the capitalist system, which isn't going to function for them. On the negative side, the withdrawal of the Soviet Union and Eastern European countries from the Third World has left revolutionary nationalist movements more isolated than before. This is dangerous. Also, since the Soviet Union and Eastern European countries have in a certain sense "joined" the Third World they are also going to compete for resources that are ever further concentrated and more scarce than ever. This is going to affect the possibilities of sustained development in many countries of the Third World. In a very preliminary general way, we think the positive will prevail over the negative. Yet it is by no means a sure proposition that the era of perestroika inaugurates a new era of peace among international relations, as the Persian Gulf crisis proves. It does open up the possibility of a new chapter in international relations and in human relations, in a rediscovery of the principles of the United Nations Charter, of the banishment of the use of force in the settlement of disputes among nations. It gives a new stimulus, as we saw in Central America, in Southern Africa, and elsewhere, to negotiating political differences that previously had been played out on the battlefield. This, too, is positive. But for this opportunity to be realized, a little perestroika, or "yanquistroika" in the United States, is required. US relations with the developing countries must take a leaf from Gorbachev's book. They must also be governed by genuine respect for self-determination. And in the Latin American context, this means respect for the right and the duty of the left as a movement to, in a democratic way, put forward its alternative vision of how to build social justice. LADB: What would be is the timetable for the Sandinistas to win a new plurality in Nicaragua through elections? And if that plurality were achieved, how would the United States react? BENDANA: We are bound by the terms of the constitution which we drafted, and which stipulates elections once every six years. Maybe the new modality that Latin America should discover is parliamentary systems, or that the people should have the right to bring down governments whose momentary confidence they lose. The possibility that elections may take place for a Central American Parliament is interesting. So far, most of the Central American governments don't want them. But this will be something extraordinary which might produce a correlation of forces throughout the region that could be more popular or more favorable to the left than some would concede. It may be in those elections that you are going to have the vote of frustration with current structural adjustment programs proposed by all five Central American governments. This vote could be expressed by way of support for a left opposition. Maybe we can even dream of a Central American Parliament in the 1990s assuming a role similar to that of the European Parliament, which is much more progressive than respective governments and which offers a solid platform for alternative thinking. What will the United States do about this? That depends, as it always has, more on internal political conditions inside this country, and on the capacity of people to mobilize, than it does on us. Maybe it's not too early to think of the positive things that may come out of this Persian Gulf involvement in terms

of heightening popular awareness as to the danger and recklessness of a rash, militaristic foreign policy that resorts to force before negotiations. LADB: You mentioned Nicaragua's insertion into the world market economy... BENDANA: In 1979-1981 we had the illusion that we were going to join the COMECON and form part of an alternative international market system. But for reasons that had as much to do with the United States and Nicaragua as with the socialist countries, this was never really viable. The thinking at that point was that by diversifying our links, and multiplying them with the socialist bloc, we would acquire a better economic basis on which to maintain political independence and to sustain social transformation without getting choked by the US. We were looking at Cuba's experience, in a way, and trying to derive the benefits from it. It was wishful thinking and much of it could never be implemented, given the policies of the Reagan administration. The point is, following the disappearance of the socialist bloc, we just don't see any alternatives to insertion into the global market economy. Governments and the left are going to have to find the best possible terms of greater integration into that economy. This is going to require collective, transnational thinking in order to improve our bargaining position. We should not get too theoretical about these things. Capitalism has no monopoly on the marketplace. Socialism and the marketplace are compatible. They always have been. The marketplace has always been there; it is not as if Gorbachev and the Eastern Europeans have only now just recognized it. The new task of socialism is how to better orient or to restructure economic systems around market forces, while at the same time neutralize and counteract the immoral, negative aspects inherent in the market system. This presumes a strong dose of regulation and of state control. This sounds very social democratic but it is not. It would be social democracy acquiring a new content. We have no alternative but to deal with the market domestically and internationally. That does not mean that the market has to control us. And it does not mean that the profits generated by the market system necessarily have to be accumulated in a few hands. Even the most advanced developed countries now accept the need, for example, of strong international regulations around matters such as ecology, such as the preservation of natural resources, not to mention regulation of the international monetary system itself. It is ironic is that all these people preaching free and unfettered capitalism in Western Europe and the United States have not been practicing it for the last 50 years. LADB: How does all of this relate to Cuba? Is it realistic for Cuba to resist insertion into the world market and the political changes that this requires? BENDANA: You have to adjust political systems and give up on closed economies. There is going to be a necessary process of adjustment, but it is not so black and white. I think the Cubans are in a much better position to adjust than are, indeed, most of the Latin American and developing countries. [The Cubans], too, have to go through a structural adjustment program, but unlike us, they have by and large, a basic social cushion with regard to health, education, employment. The ugly face of capitalism may not show itself as easily in Cuba, nor are structural adjustments, therefore, going to take the form of riots [in the streets] as they could in Latin American countries. The consequences of adjustment policies in Latin America are going to be outright hunger, generalized misery, and outright rebellion. I don't think you will see that in Cuba. You may see more grumbling, more cutbacks, but remember, they've got that basic cushion. Adjustment is not going to be a matter of life and death for them, as it will be for millions of Latin Americans.

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