

In discussing my personal background with a Sandinista woman my age, she was puzzled by both the "Historic Peace Churches," and a "Peace Studies Major." On explaining those, she commented, "We're all nonviolent, you know, but we did what we had to do." As in that young woman, there was an amazing lack of hatred or vengeance in the people following victory. The people told me out of their own experiences that hate is counter-revolutionary. They knew that hate and vengeance will not bring about a more equitable and just life for the poor.

Why does hate immediately come to our minds when revolution is mentioned? Is it possible to plan a military strategy, to take up arms out of love? (I ask that question still very much opposed to the Christian Crusade theology.) The Sandinistas were not hate-filled terrorists. They were motivated by human solidarity, by compassion for their people. The important aspect of the revolution was not the armed struggle. Granted, that was chosen as the only possible means to get rid of the dictatorship. However, the emphasis of the insurrection was always the carrying through of the revolution to its ultimate goals: constructing a society based on economic, social and political justice. That translates into democracy for all, not just the few; equitable distribution of goods and services; freedom not only to walk the streets at night, but to do so with a full belly; freedom from fear of death or torture for speaking one's mind; and the opportunity for full-time, meaningful employment.

I would venture to say that those FSLN objectives grew out of the Sandinistas' knowledge of and experience in the life of the poor. The FSLN was the vanguard in the insurrection, but it was grounded in the people. How else, and why else, could the Sandinistas reject the excesses of post-victory retaliation which characterizes some revolutionary struggles,

such as Iran? The first post victory slogan I heard proclaimed was, "Unyielding in war, generous in victory."

FSLN leader Tomas Borge, soon after being placed in charge of the prisons holding the National Guard after victory, came face to face with the man who had tortured him during seven long years in Somoza's dungeons. Before the entire crowd of Guardsmen and Sandinistas in that prison he said, "You will live with my forgiveness. That is my only revenge."

I must ask how Nicaragua kept from being a hate-filled individualistic nation after four decades of *somocismo* and so many years of organized armed resistance. The importance of cultural revolution is clear. The people—both leadership and at the grassroots—experienced a change of consciousness through the long period of civilian resistance. The Sandinistas came to realize that the rank and file National Guard were as much victims of U.S. imperialism as were the civilian poor. Many in the middle class learned that too. By joining with the poor, they learned that the few material benefits they had known were achieved at the expense of the poor, and that the system represented by Somoza had raped them all alike. Two months after victory, I rode through the poor *barrios* of the capital city with an upper-middle class, 20-year-old woman. Unlike anything I had heard from her class in any part of Latin America, she said, "You see those shacks? Somoza got rich by squeezing them dry. It is precisely for those people that we made the revolution, and with them we will build the new Nicaragua." I was humbled by her passion and willingness to sacrifice. She had carried a weapon with the Sandinistas.

The experiences of Nicaragua have left me with a political realism. I have learned a great deal about U.S. imperialism. By that I mean that the ruling class in our country will support any kind of regime in order to maintain the