

HALF A DECADE OF SANDINISTA POLICY-MAKING:

Recent Publications on Revolutionary Policies in Contemporary Nicaragua*

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THE END AND THE BEGINNING: THE NICARAGUAN REVOLUTION. By JOHN A. BOOTH. Second edition, revised and updated. (Boulder, Colo.: Westview, 1985. Pp. 363. \$38.50 cloth, \$14.95 paper.)

THE SANDINISTA REVOLUTION: NATIONAL LIBERATION AND SOCIAL TRANSFORMATION IN CENTRAL AMERICA. By CARLOS M. VILAS. (New York: Monthly Review Press and the Center for the Study of the Americas, 1986. Pp. 317. \$27.00 cloth, \$12.00 paper.)

NICARAGUA: A REVOLUTION UNDER SIEGE. Edited by RICHARD L. HARRIS and CARLOS M. VILAS. (London: Zed Books, 1985. Pp. 256. \$18.95 cloth, \$6.95 paper.)

ENTRE LA CRISIS Y LA AGRESION: LA REFORMA AGRARIA SANDINISTA. By JAIME WHEELOCK ROMAN. (Managua: Editorial Nueva Nicaragua, 1985. Pp. 148.)

NICARAGUA: WHAT DIFFERENCE COULD A REVOLUTION MAKE? FOOD AND FARMING IN THE NEW NICARAGUA. Second edition. By JOSEPH COLLINS, with FRANCES MOORE LAPPE, NICK ALLEN, and PAUL RICE. (San Francisco: Institute for Food and Development Policy, 1985. Pp. 292. \$7.95.)

POST-REVOLUTIONARY NICARAGUA: STATE, CLASS, AND THE DILEMMAS OF AGRARIAN POLICY. By FORREST D. COLBURN. (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1986. Pp. 145. \$17.50.)

In a period when the overthrow of Nicaragua's revolutionary government is an implicit, if not an explicit, goal of the Reagan administration, it behooves those concerned with the future of Latin America

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and the United States to become informed about the nature of the contested government. As newspaper coverage of Nicaragua has grown, so has the academic literature on the subject. This review will focus on recent publications that analyze policy-making in revolutionary Nicaragua.¹ The essay will attempt to provide an overview of the state of the literature on Nicaragua and to offer tools for evaluating Sandinista policy-making in terms of the revolution's goals. Several of the books under review describe the social forces and events that led up to the overthrow of the old regime as well as the orientation and objectives of the new. An assessment of these general studies will be followed by a review of four studies addressing one critical issue, agrarian reform, a policy area representing profound change and controversy.

Setting the Stage

In order to understand the current state of affairs in Nicaragua, one must go back much earlier than July 1979. Extreme inequality of wealth and underdevelopment, elite party corruption, an overwhelming U.S. presence, and a family dictatorship of almost half a century characterized prerevolutionary Nicaragua. A number of recent publications describe this essential background prior to addressing the current period.

John Booth's revised and updated *The End and the Beginning: The Nicaraguan Revolution* is one of the richest sources on the unfolding of "the end." His carefully documented narration of the Somoza era and the insurrectionary period are especially useful for scholars interested in prerevolutionary Nicaragua. This second edition differs from the 1982 first edition primarily in its expanded discussion of "the beginning," which provides a much stronger basis for understanding contemporary events in Nicaragua. Yet it remains clear that Booth's real interest lies in comprehending the reasons why the revolution developed rather than its nature and evolution once established.

Booth begins his discussion of government in revolutionary Nicaragua by summarizing the goals of the revolution. Given this section's importance in describing the political orientation underlying specific government policies, this discussion is disappointing. Booth argues that the consensus within the revolutionary coalition that took power in 1979 was limited to the need "first to assure the destruction of the Somoza regime and its economic power base and to replace the old regime's exploitation of and brutality toward the people with a more humane relationship. Second, . . . to reconstruct the economy, which had been left reeling by the war. Third, . . . to replace the corruption of the old regime with an ethos of public honesty, frugality, and service to the public" (pp. 185–86). All of these elements indeed formed part of the new government's platform. But a simple perusal of the *Programa de*

la Junta de Gobierno de Reconstrucción Nacional de Nicaragua of 9 July 1979 demonstrates that the agreed-upon changes went far beyond the destruction of Somoza's power base and reconstruction.² A concept of social transformation was inherent in the revolution's three basic tenets as set forth in the program: political pluralism, nonalignment, and a mixed economy. This conception was particularly well articulated with respect to the economy in calling for government control over national resources and foreign trade, regulation of domestic prices, and agrarian reform.

This weak beginning is followed by Booth's extensive, balanced description of the government's structure and functioning. The main addition to this section is a discussion of the political opposition (both external and internal) and the 1984 general elections. Perhaps the most important statement made here is that the Nicaraguan Revolution can be distinguished from other governments at war by its tolerance of internal opposition. Booth argues that "overall, the freedom of the domestic opponents of the FSLN appears to have varied in inverse proportion to the level of external pressure experienced by the Sandinistas" (p. 210).

Issues that are of great concern to North Americans when analyzing the Nicaraguan Revolution—freedom of the press, human rights, and the political opposition's right to organize—are addressed in Booth's evaluation of the policies and performance of the revolutionary government. His analysis is generally well balanced, and he correctly situates these concerns within the context of the Contra war. Yet the chapter might have begun, rather than concluded, by discussing the policies that most directly affect the lives of the majority of Nicaraguans: land reform, food policies, education, health services, and housing (the last two topics are dealt with only cursorily). Nevertheless, *The End and the Beginning* is still the most accessible, comprehensive study of the transition from the old regime to the new.

The Sandinista Revolution: National Liberation and Social Transformation in Central America, by Carlos Vilas, is a new study of the revolutionary process underway in Nicaragua. Vilas's book benefits from his being an "insider" in that process because of his work for various government agencies during the past seven years. He presents some fresh data gleaned from a number of government studies. Yet fellow social scientists will encounter difficulties in following up on his data, particularly if they are not insiders. *The Sandinista Revolution* also lacks the rigor facilitated by having more distance from one's object of study.

Vilas opens by discussing the four basic issues raised by revolutions in dependent capitalist societies, the questions of class, national sovereignty, development, and democracy. His excellent first chapter captures the complexity of dependent class structure, class-state rela-

tions, and the consequent contradictions that arise in the revolutionary process. In this respect, Vilas's theoretical discussion is much more integrated with the rest of the text than is the case with *The End and the Beginning*.

The theoretical material is followed by a lengthy description of Nicaragua's socioeconomic structure, setting the stage for an analysis of the social forces and processes that gave rise to the insurrectionary struggle of 1977–1979. Vilas cites three crucial factors that led to Somoza's overthrow: first, an accelerated process of capitalist development that drastically altered the living conditions of the rural and urban working masses; second, a dictatorial state; and third, a vanguard organization. Booth and Vilas generally agree on the first two of these factors. Vilas goes a step further, however, in arguing that the tensions generated by increasing poverty and repression in the 1970s would never have led to more than sporadic uprisings without the existence of an organization that could channel the frustrations of the popular classes. Tellingly, Booth's discussion of the Frente Sandinista de Liberación Nacional (FSLN) comes at the end of a lengthy description of the various groups opposing Somoza, not at the beginning.

Booth and Vilas also differ in their assessments of the relative importance of certain social sectors in the opposition movement. Vilas gives much less weight than Booth to the role played by the bourgeoisie in Somoza's overthrow: "The bourgeoisie's disputes with Somocismo were always economic, while it agreed to leave political management to the regime" (p. 130). According to Vilas, when the bourgeoisie did begin to express its wishes, it demanded "a modern capitalist state that would efficiently fulfill its political-economic functions" (p. 12). Vilas's critical analysis of the bourgeois opposition explains the lack of cooperation from this sector after the revolution. The bourgeoisie agreed to the new government's program in July 1979 only because all its efforts to exclude the FSLN from the anti-Somoza alliance had failed. Ultimately, it was the bourgeoisie who scrambled to be part of the winning alliance. Thus the bourgeois opposition's current claims of having had "their" revolutionary project "betrayed" bear little relation to the role they played in defining and fighting for that project in prerevolutionary Nicaragua.

Vilas's analysis of class participation in the insurrection in *The Sandinista Revolution* also sheds light on several aspects of the functioning of the mixed economy. Given the unenthusiastic response of the large agro-export bourgeoisie to the developing revolutionary process, farmers with small and medium-sized holdings have emerged as "the principal type of private property owner . . . in the context of the mixed economy" (p. 164). The book also illuminates the dilemmas that have arisen for the government vis-à-vis the political development of the

working class. According to Vilas's data, after the student population, tradespersons and workers were the most important participants in the insurrectionary struggle. While the FSLN has promoted the development of the union movement since 1979, its response to demands for salary increases and greater worker participation in management have been strongly tempered by economic plans emphasizing austerity and the delicacy of the mixed economy.

Vilas provides many conceptual categories that capture the complexity of Nicaraguan society, and he applies them in analyzing specific programs, including the agrarian reform, and labor and educational policies. Vilas's final discussion of the contradictions that arise out of the nature of the Sandinista model (that is, the mixed economy, political pluralism, and nonalignment) and the dependent social structure inherited by the revolution is extremely valuable for ongoing analysis of the transformation process. As Vilas concludes, "rather than a transition to socialism, the Sandinista revolution is entangled in a difficult transition to development" (p. 268). The book has some rough edges, and the logic of the book's development is not as clear as it might have been. Nonetheless, *The Sandinista Revolution* is important reading for more advanced students of Latin American social change.

Vilas's perspective on the revolution is echoed in a volume he recently coedited with Richard Harris, *Nicaragua: A Revolution under Siege*. A Spanish edition was also published as *La revolución en Nicaragua: liberación nacional, democracia popular y transición económica*.³ The English version brings together studies of specific revolutionary programs with a thoughtful analysis of the Sandinista model of social transformation. Following a brief introduction by the editors, seven chapters of uneven quality address agriculture and agrarian reform, industrial development, mass organizations, the workers' movement, ideology, the Miskito question, and U.S.–Nicaraguan relations.

Prior to their concluding epilogue on U.S. aggression against Nicaragua, Vilas and Harris present a more theoretical analysis of the revolutionary process that offers some useful conceptual tools. They argue that the key aspects of the "problematic" confronting the Sandinista revolution are three: the creation of a modern nation-state by a block of social forces composed principally of the working masses; simultaneous economic accumulation and transformation; and national liberation and social revolution. In describing each of these aspects of the revolution, Vilas and Harris raise a number of important issues, such as the relationship between the state and the party, the distribution of sacrifices among classes in a mixed economy when austerity measures must be imposed, and the nature of the transition the Nicaraguan revolution is undergoing.

Rhetoric and some lack of rigor aside, this chapter and the book

as a whole provide an accessible introduction to the Nicaraguan revolution. While not as complete as other lengthier edited volumes on the subject,⁴ several of the substantive analyses in this book present informative in-depth discussions of key issues in the revolutionary process. Finally, in their ninth chapter (which might have proved more beneficial earlier in the volume), the editors come to the conclusion that many have had difficulty grasping: the Nicaraguan revolution is a multiclass project seeking to transform Nicaraguan society into an independent nation-state in which the interests of the popular majority (the peasantry and the working classes) are given priority over enrichment of the few.

The Transformation of Agriculture in the Nicaraguan Revolution

Agricultural transformation occupies a central role in the Sandinista revolutionary project. Given agriculture's importance in the national economy, changes occurring in this sector profoundly affect the rest of the society.⁵ Four recent publications by Jaime Wheelock Román, Joseph Collins, Forrest Colburn, and Eduardo Baumeister discuss the achievements and limitations of the Nicaraguan agrarian reform.

Jaime Wheelock Román's *Entre la crisis y la agresión: la reforma agraria sandinista* provides a bird's-eye view of the model of agricultural development and agrarian reform guiding Sandinista policy-making. The author heads the Ministerio de Desarrollo Agropecuario y Reforma Agraria (MIDINRA) and is one of the nine members of the FSLN Dirección Nacional. In *Entre la crisis*, Wheelock (a social scientist by training) presents the logic and nature of the agricultural model that he is helping shape. Unlike his work prior to 1979, this book is oriented toward a popular audience.⁶ Although this popularized approach suffers from excessive idealism and a lack of academic rigor, *Entre la crisis* is nevertheless the clearest expression yet published of a Nicaraguan leader's viewpoint on the changes being effected in Nicaraguan agriculture today.

Wheelock's model is based on three simultaneous processes. The first is what is commonly thought of as agrarian reform, the modification of land tenancy. Confiscation of lands belonging to Somoza and his close associates in July 1979 initiated this process. In 1981 the Ley de Reforma Agraria extended the area of possible confiscation to include unused and underutilized land on latifundios. This land was subsequently made available to landless and land-poor peasants. When *Entre la crisis* was first published in late 1984, the area held in large private estates (farms larger than 148 hectares) had been cut in half, dropping from 52 to 26 percent of the cultivated land (p. 119, t. 4). Cooperative and state-farm sectors had been created that represented 36 and 19

percent respectively of the cultivated land. By mid-1986, almost one hundred thousand campesino families had benefited from the reform's land redistribution and titling programs, with two million hectares having been affected.⁷

The second process accompanying land redistribution in Nicaragua is the reordering of land-use patterns in agricultural areas. One of the goals of this process has been to return basic grain production (for domestic consumption) to the fertile Pacific Coastal plain. The dramatic expansion of agro-export production in the 1950s and 1960s had displaced basic grain production from the Pacific region to the less fertile central mountain and agricultural frontier regions. This dislocation ended Nicaragua's food self-sufficiency. According to Wheelock, "the land in the Pacific must be reserved for food crops" in order to assure that Nicaragua once again will achieve food self-sufficiency (p. 53). Intensive technology is planned to permit the double usage of cultivable land for agro-export and food crops.

The third process is the achievement of Nicaragua's technological revolution. The level of technology employed in agriculture is to be upgraded dramatically, thus facilitating the government's overall strategy of developing processing facilities that will allow Nicaragua to move up a step in the international division of labor. The idea is that Nicaragua will thus cease being an exporter of raw agricultural products and become an exporter of processed agricultural products.

According to Wheelock, this model fits within the Sandinista's fundamental program of mixed economy, political pluralism, and non-alignment. The model he describes specifically allows for private, cooperative, and public ownership of production—thus the mixed economy. It proposes to improve Nicaragua's position in the international economy, thereby facilitating nonalignment, and lay the groundwork for democracy by providing Nicaragua's population with the means to develop itself economically, politically, and culturally. Finally, Wheelock places this agrarian transformation within the context of the Contra war and the regional economic crisis. The appendix offers extensive new data, particularly on land redistribution patterns. For those interested in understanding the gist of the revolutionary government's proposed economic model, *Entre la crisis* is worthwhile reading.

Another recently published book on the agrarian reform is the second edition of Joseph Collins's *Nicaragua: What Difference Can a Revolution Make? Food and Farming in the New Nicaragua* (the first edition appeared in 1982). This edition contains ten new chapters and a post-script. Collins is another insider in that he has made numerous trips to Nicaragua as a consultant to MIDINRA. This experience enriches his description of agrarian policy-making, providing a window into the informal discussions that preceded the formulation of certain policies.

Collins's book is written in a popularized form, making it accessible to those without an extensive background in either agriculture or Latin America. For readers with more background, it provides the most comprehensive discussion of the Nicaraguan agrarian reform, its accomplishments, and its limitations. But the book's simplified reference system is not helpful to scholars interested in conducting further research on specific issues touched on in the book. Moreover, some of the data Collins presents are overly optimistic.

The new material begins by placing the agrarian reform in the context of the Contra war, that is, by identifying the agrarian reform and those implementing it as Contra targets: "The contras (and the CIA) reason that the Sandinistas' unprecedented developments in health services, schooling, farming assistance and food distribution form the basis for support of the revolution in the countryside. These services, then, must be destroyed" (p. 145).

The activities of both the Contras and the government appear to confirm the agrarian reform's strategic importance. On the one side, the Contras have targeted the agrarian reform: fifty-five cooperatives were attacked; more than two hundred cooperative members were killed or kidnapped; and some eight hundred MIDINRA employees (including state farm workers) were killed, wounded, or kidnapped between January 1983 and June 1984 (p. 264). On the other side, the government has realized the importance of bringing tangible benefits to the campesino population in order to foster allegiance to the revolution.

Collins is openly sympathetic to the revolutionary process and strongly opposed to the U.S.-financed and -trained counterrevolution, yet he is not an uncritical apologist for the Sandinistas. He discusses at length his concerns about a number of specific policies and questions the overall Sandinista development strategy. One such informative discussion addresses the government's much-heralded food program, which was supposed to improve food production and distribution through a series of specific measures and projects. Collins concludes that its overall performance has been disappointing, largely due to shortcomings in government policy-making. Collins's criticisms of the Sandinista agricultural development strategy are even stronger. He argues that instead of improving Nicaragua's position in the international economy, the development of large agro-industrial projects could lead to increased dependence on foreign financing, materials, and "know-how." Given the country's economic crisis, Collins's concerns are being echoed in numerous circles in Nicaragua analyzing policy today.

In conclusion, Collins's revised edition provides a thoughtful assessment of the agrarian reform for those concerned with development strategies and alternatives. The revolution is experimenting in many areas that are relevant for policymakers and researchers throughout the

Third World. This book offers a welcome analysis of the Nicaraguan experiment at a time when the agenda set by the Reagan administration allows little such stimulating discussion.

Forrest Colburn's new book, *Post-Revolutionary Nicaragua: State, Class, and the Dilemmas of Agrarian Policy*, contrasts strongly with Collins's *What Difference Can a Revolution Make?* Whereas the Collins book openly states the author's agenda and perspective, *Post-Revolutionary Nicaragua* presents itself as an objective assessment of the Sandinista agrarian reform. Instead, the book uncritically presents the perspective held by the tiny, overtly political agrarian upper class. Colburn's sympathy with this point of view is illustrated by such statements as: "As it became clear that the state was committed, in the words of one producer, to the disappearance of this class [the large agro-export producers], investment halted and production began to decline" (p. 124).

Colburn's basic hypothesis is that the new government's inept economic policies and certain structural constraints doomed the Sandinista economic model even before the Contra war began to take its toll. According to Colburn, the government has an ideological preference for the campesinos as opposed to the agro-export bourgeoisie. Yet foreign exchange must be generated for the economy to remain solvent. Consequently, the government squeezes resources from campesinos and rural wage laborers, favors the big cotton growers, and appropriates so much profit from small hostage coffee growers that they have no incentive to invest.

Most of *Post-Revolutionary Nicaragua* is devoted to four "sectoral" analyses that supposedly substantiate this hypothesis. Colburn asserts that this kind of analysis reveals the effects of Sandinista agrarian policy on the key agricultural sectors of large cotton and small coffee growers, peasant subsistence farmers, and agricultural laborers. In his view, "these sectors provide a cross section not only of different agricultural strata but also of different social classes" (p. 5). The problem is that Colburn's sectoral analysis does not provide a representative assessment of Nicaraguan agriculture. Colburn argues that the state's policies toward the "rural elite" and cotton production and the rural elite's responses to those policies are revealed in studying the large private cotton producers. Likewise, an examination of Nicaragua's small coffee growers captures the essence of state policies toward coffee production and producer responses. Beginning with the issue of representativeness, it is clear from Colburn's data that cotton producers' holdings vary in size from one manzana (three-quarters of a hectare) to more than a thousand manzanas (p. 48, t. 2). While the number of manzanas harvested was concentrated in farms larger than one hundred manzanas in 1977-78, a not insignificant proportion of production was carried out on medium- and small-sized farms (21 and 9 percent,

respectively).⁸ Consequently, focusing on one producer size obscures the nuances found in the large range of producer sizes.

Of equal importance is Colburn's serious methodological error in defining the "sectors" used in his analysis. Whereas he uses manzanas harvested to underline the importance of large cotton farms, he uses number of producers to justify the importance of small coffee producers. Relying on Colburn's data and cutoff point of fifty manzanas (p. 48, t. 2), one could just as easily argue that because the vast majority of cotton producers are smallholders (76 percent), they are clearly the most representative spokespersons for the cotton subsystem. Colburn does not present the parallel data for manzanas harvested in coffee according to producer size. Consequently, it is difficult to evaluate the weight of the small producers in terms of landholdings. A number of studies, however, have concluded that medium-sized producers comprise the most important stratum in terms of landholdings.⁹

The accuracy of these definitions is crucial because they determine the representativeness of Colburn's analysis generally and his description of "producers' responses" in particular. His model of the agricultural class structure fails to capture the great diversity of both producer strata and producer responses to the government's policies. It overrepresents large cotton and small coffee producers and ignores the significant stratum of medium-sized producers.

A second problem encountered throughout *Post-Revolutionary Nicaragua* stems from Colburn's data selection. It is probably true, as Colburn argues, that "at least occasionally [government] statistics are manipulated for political purposes" (p. 6). But it is no less true that data published by the Consejo Superior de la Empresa Privada (COSEP), the organization representing large private producers, is also subject to political manipulation. COSEP is an overtly political actor in Nicaragua today, with well-known ties to external and internal opposition.¹⁰ Thus Colburn's extensive reliance on COSEP data to substantiate his arguments biases his assessment of the agrarian reform.

The problems with Colburn's quantitative data go beyond his sources, however. To cite a few examples, Colburn uses questionable practices in calculating some of his data, such as calculating producer gain in dollars according to the black-market exchange rate and combining government and private-sector data to reach certain conclusions; and some of his data are simply incorrect. For example, Nicaragua's rural economically active population is not 70 percent of the total EAP as Colburn asserts (on p. 24) but 45–48 percent.¹¹ Colburn's data, which are mainly limited to the period up to the 1982–83 agricultural cycle, are also dated, given the book's 1986 publication date. Much of what Colburn describes, if it contains some elements of truth for 1982–83, is no longer accurate in 1987. Land distribution has escalated dramatically

since 1983. The Unión Nacional de Agricultores y Ganaderos (UNAG) has gained increasing prominence; agro-export producers now receive partial payment for their crops in dollars; and producer prices generally have been increased. In sum, any attempt to evaluate the revolution must acknowledge its changing nature if the evaluation is to remain relevant after the researcher has left the field.

Despite these criticisms, Colburn's book raises several issues worth addressing. The first is the crisis in domestic terms of trade that government policies played a central role in worsening. Another important issue is the tense relationship between the government and large private growers. Finally, Colburn's uncritical recounting of the agrarian upper-class attitude toward the revolution inadvertently provides some interesting raw data. In the last analysis, however, Colburn's conclusion brings to light his real agenda: to situate Nicaragua on the Eastern side of the East-West conflict. Nicaragua's position is established in a table (calculated from interviews) outlining the international loans and donations that Nicaragua received in 1981 and 1983 (p. 130). This instance is merely one example of the extraneous information, often patently incorrect, that Colburn weaves into his analysis of Sandinista agrarian policies. It is unfortunate that while it identifies some of the structural difficulties encountered by the Nicaraguan agrarian reform in its first few years, Colburn's work fails overall to enhance understanding of the alternatives and limitations posed by the agrarian transformation in Nicaragua.

Fortunately, a growing body of literature is making such a contribution. Eduardo Baumeister's chapter in the Harris and Vilas collection, "The Structure of Nicaraguan Agriculture and the Sandinista Agrarian Reform," is part of this literature. Baumeister has served on the staff of Nicaragua's agrarian reform research center, the Centro de Investigación y Estudios de la Reforma Agraria (CIERA), since 1979. His experience enhances his well-informed, balanced analysis of the agrarian reform process.

This essay illuminates Nicaragua's agrarian transformation in several important ways. First, Baumeister shows how the country's agrarian structure differs from the rest of Central America and how these differences have shaped the Nicaraguan agrarian reform. Briefly, several kinds of social relations coexisted in Nicaraguan agriculture prior to 1979: extensive capitalist cattle-raising and coffee production; a significant sector of small- and medium-sized farms on the agricultural frontier; land-leasing capitalist cotton production on the Pacific Coast; and intensive capitalist plantations producing sugarcane, irrigated rice, and tobacco.

The agrarian bourgeoisie was divided between those directly involved in production and those who monopolized agro-industry, com-

merce, and banking (the last group being dominated by the Somozas). Political and economic tensions existed between the two groups, facilitating the formation of a broad anti-Somoza alliance. The property confiscated from Somoza and his close associates following the dictator's ouster formed the basis of the state sector. Given the limited nature of this first phase of the reform process, it found support among even the non-Somocista agrarian bourgeoisie. The agrarian reform's second phase targeted the unproductive latifundio sector. Most of the land affected in this second phase was located in the country's central region, where coffee production and cattle-raising are concentrated. The goal was to redistribute land that was not being used productively to the landless and land-poor.

Second, Baumeister differentiates the larger capitalist-oriented producers into two categories of medium-sized capitalist producers and *latifundistas*.¹² According to Baumeister, Nicaragua's medium-sized producer sector distinguishes it from the rest of Central America and has profoundly affected the nature of the Nicaraguan agrarian reform by guaranteeing an important role for the private sector in the country's future: "The presence of well-off peasants and medium-sized capitalist producers, the strengthening of the poor and middle peasantry through cooperatives and the general support of agriculture through new investments makes possible a broad-based democracy and non-oligarchical capitalism."¹³ In contrast to Colburn's conclusions, Baumeister argues that small- and medium-sized production has been greatly strengthened by the agrarian reform. Baumeister recognizes a number of problems that have arisen in the reform's first five years, such as a less-than-successful recovery of the agro-export sector following the war against Somoza. He also questions the wisdom of relying on large investment projects to develop the country's agriculture. Baumeister concludes, however, that it would still be premature to judge the significance of these issues or to assume that the agrarian reform has yet reached its definitive form.¹⁴

Nicaragua's agrarian reform lies at the center of the revolutionary process. Given its importance, it represents the dilemmas and accomplishments produced by this process. Policy-making in the agrarian sector has encountered the same structural, cultural, and ideological barriers found in other areas of Nicaraguan social life being transformed by the revolution. As a number of the books reviewed above point out, agricultural policy-making also expresses the pragmatism characterizing the revolutionary government. That pragmatism makes definitive statements about the Sandinista development model impossible. Another few years' results are needed before scholars can begin to look for fundamental patterns that capture the essence of this revolutionary model.

Yet given the urgency of the moment, it is crucial that serious, balanced assessments of Sandinista policy-making be carried out. Only on this basis can the images of the Nicaraguan revolution presented by the Reagan administration be evaluated and countered. In addition to the books reviewed above, a number of recent publications have focused on policies affecting education, ethnic minorities, and the economy.¹⁵ Several studies have also been published recently that detail the effects of the Contra war on the revolutionary process.¹⁶ This growing literature is only the beginning of the kind of ongoing analysis required to comprehend the nature of the regime that the Reagan administration has decided it must destroy.

NOTES

1. *Nicaragua: The First Five Years*, edited by Thomas Walker (New York: Praeger Books, 1985), has been left out of this review because I contributed one of its chapters. The notes below refer to a number of additional recent publications that address some aspect of Sandinista policy-making.
2. In Comisión Económica para América Latina (CEPAL), *Nicaragua: el impacto de la mutación política* (Santiago, Chile: CEPAL, 1981). The assumptions underlying this program accorded with the critiques of prerevolutionary Nicaragua developed over many years by the FSLN. See Jaime Wheelock Román, *Nicaragua: imperialismo y dictadura* (Havana: Editorial de Ciencias Sociales, 1980); and Orlando Núñez Soto, *El somocismo y el modelo capitalista agro-exportador* (n.p.: Departamento de Ciencias Sociales de la Universidad Autónoma de Nicaragua, n.d.).
3. The Spanish edition of this volume was published by Ediciones Era (Mexico City, 1985). It contains four additional chapters on the contradictions of the mixed economy, the transformation of the state, worker participation in state enterprises, and women in Nicaragua. The first of these additional chapters in particular makes reading the Spanish edition worthwhile.
4. See *Nicaragua in Revolution*, edited by Thomas Walker (New York: Praeger, 1982), and his *Nicaragua: The First Five Years*.
5. Agriculture generates 70.6 percent of Nicaragua's foreign exchange earnings and employs 47.2 percent of the total economically active population (EAP). See Fondo Internacional de Desarrollo Agrícola (FIDA), *Informe de la misión especial de programación a Nicaragua* (n.p.: FIDA, 1980).
6. See Wheelock Román, *Nicaragua: imperialismo y dictadura*.
7. See further, MIDINRA, "Transformación de la tenencia de la tierra para 1986," *Informaciones Agropecuarias* 2, no. 17 (June–July 1986):4.
8. Colburn divides cotton growers into those with more or less than 50 manzanas, and coffee growers into those with more or less than 10 manzanas. The Nicaraguan banks (which provide credit to farmers) and MIDINRA (which makes agrarian policies) recognize a third important category of production—that of medium-sized producers. My analysis will rely on the following definition employed by MIDINRA: "Small Producers are those who possess up to 15 manzanas in basic grains, 10 in coffee or cacao, 3 in vegetables, 20 in cotton, or 10 in other perennial crops. Medium producers are those with 15–75 manzanas in basic grains, 10–30 in coffee or cacao, 20–100 in cotton, or 10–20 in other perennial crops. Large producers are those with more land in any of these categories." See MIDINRA, *Plan operativo de granos básicos: ciclo agrícola, 1982–83* (Managua: MIDINRA, 1982), 172.
9. A review of the various studies that stratify coffee producers can be found in Alicia Gariazzo, "El café en Nicaragua: los pequeños productores de Matagalpa y Carazo," *Cuadernos de Pensamiento Propio*, Serie Avances no. 2 (Dec. 1984):21–29.
10. See "U.S. Role in Nicaraguan Vote Disputed," *New York Times*, 21 Oct. 1984, p. 12; and *La Nación*, 25 Aug. 1985.

11. FIDA, *Informe*; and Banco Central de Nicaragua, Ministerio de Economía, Industria y Comercio, *Censos Nacionales, 1971: Población*, 1 (Oct. 1974):v.
12. Baumeister defines medium-sized multifamily farms as having between 50 and 500 manzanas. Small producers (which cover several categories from micro-finca to family fincas) have less than 50 manzanas, and large producers have more than 500. Note the difference between Baumeister's and Colburn's definitions.
13. Baumeister, "Structure of Nicaraguan Agriculture," 24.
14. In a more recent article, Baumeister explains the significance of amendments to the agrarian reform law approved in early 1986. See Baumeister, "Estado-mundo agrícola: una relación cambiante," *Pensamiento Propio* 4, no. 34 (July 1986).
15. See Rosa María Torres, *Nicaragua: revolución popular, educación popular* (Mexico City: Editorial Línea, 1985); Valerie Miller, *Between Struggle and Hope: The Nicaraguan Literacy Crusade* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview, 1985); Martin Diskin, Thomas Bossert, Salomon Nahmad S., and Stefano Varese, "Peace and Autonomy on the Atlantic Coast of Nicaragua: A Report of the Latin American Studies Association Task Force on Human Rights and Academic Freedom," *LASA Forum* 16, no. 4 (Spring 1986) and 17, no. 2 (Summer 1986); and Rose Spalding, *The Political Economy of Revolutionary Nicaragua* (Winchester, Mass.: Allen and Unwin, 1986).
16. See Reid Brody, *Contra Terror in Nicaragua: Report of a Fact-Finding Mission, September 1984–January 1985* (Boston: South End Press, 1985); E. V. K. FitzGerald, "An Evaluation of the Economic Costs of U.S. Aggression against Nicaragua," in Spalding, *Political Economy of Revolutionary Nicaragua*, 195–213; and Raúl Vergara Meneses, José R. Castro, and Deborah Barry, "Nicaragua: país sitiado (guerra de baja intensidad: agresión y sobrevivencia)," in *Cuadernos de Pensamiento Propio*, Serie Avances no. 4 (June 1986).