SOCIAL MOVEMENTS AND REVOLUTION:

THE CASE OF NICARAGUA

José Luis Coraggio*

I. Theorizing about social movements and social struggle.

The decade of the 1960's witnessed the emergence of new ideas a-
bout social struggle. These ideas were inspired by the new orga-
nizational practices and forms of development which social forces
in Europe and the United States were adopting. These forces or 'so-
cial movements' as they are usually referred to, are organized
around specific demands (housing, urban services, the liberation of
women, environmental conservation, the anti-nuclear struggle etc.).
In many cases, these movements are engaged in a struggle with State
institutions; sometimes however, their actions are directed at
other types of organizations.

The multi-class nature of these movements, their great mobilizing
capacity plus the fact that their demands were acquiring a radical
character - and could therefore not be met without a profound trans-
formation of the existing social system - all these things attrac-
ted the attention of political parties and social theorists alike.

The political parties saw a challenge which consisted of trying to
articulate, to strengthen, and to regulate these forces in line
with traditional forms of political struggle. The theorists were
faced with the need to understand the consequences of these deve-
lopments for political theory, in particular for theories of a
revolutionary character which claimed to be providing a scientific
basis for the practice of social transformation. In some cases,
pressing political circumstances have led researchers to reach

theoretically questionable conclusions, based perhaps more on ideological predispositions than on scientific analysis.[1]

In both instances, the fact that social movements became fashionable led to their proliferation at the conceptual level. Classification systems were developed and various attributes of given populations (gender, age, territorial situation, consumption of particular goods, ethnic identity, nationality, fiscal status etc.) were measured and categorized in order to nourish speculation on their 'agitational or anti-system potential'. Simultaneously, these ideas, along with their corresponding political practices, spread to other continents, particularly to Latin America where in some situations - by no means in all of them - they were in line with local developments.[2]

This process can be characterized as an *analytical moment* when societies are 'pulverized' - in conceptual as well as in organizational terms - into these simple determinations situated in a variety of social contradictions. However just as theoretical analyticism represents a failure of scientific practice if the movement towards *synthesis and reconstruction of the object* is not completed, so practical-organizational analyticism rapidly leads to a waste of energy and loses its effectiveness, in the absence of a *conjunctural accumulation of social forces* able to effectively challenge the existing system.

From this perspective, it becomes theoretically necessary, on the one hand, to reconstruct the concepts of *'people'* as a synthesis (articulation) of a multiplicity of determinations and, on the other hand, politically necessary to critically reconsider the role of the *revolutionary party* as the articulator (synthesizer) of the various social forces which demonstrate a potential for action directed against the system.

To characterize the 'people' as a social class with a theoretically pre-determined 'historical destiny', and to assign to a particular party, viewed as the vehicle of this 'objective conscience', the role of *subject* of the social revolution, can now be done in a way which brings new elements to the discussion of the social revo-

lution. Nevertheless, as long as the 'problem of the people'
continues to be seen as a mere question of conceptual definition,
separate from the real problem of self-perpetuation of the van-
guards, our progress would still remain limited. It should also be
said that the need for a vanguard cannot be put into question with-
out falling into the trap of spontaneism.

In our opinion, a real break takes place when the concept of 'peo-
ple' is redefined in terms of identity and organizational factors,
and when this is coupled with the idea of a *complex subject* which
corresponds neither to a class, a party or a movement, but rather
to a *hegemonic system*.[3] Here, the concept of 'people' does not
rest on what is basically an economistic theory of the inevitable
tendenciesof capitalist society which, in any case, would be acce-
lerated by the actions of the vanguards. On the contrary, the con-
crete contradictions which run through the State and civil society,
the differential positions of the *social agents* in material, ideo-
logical or organizational terms, will provide the 'objective' ba-
sis for an analysis which - from the perspective of power relat-
ions - will make it possible to develop a strategy of popular he-
gemony. This primacy of the political in relation to revolutionary
practice does not make it any less necessary - quite the contrary -
to take account of class oppositions and to move towards an even-
tual theoretical reconstruction of economic laws and their histo-
rical tendencies.

By observing practice as such, we see the impossibility of esta-
blishing one-to-one correspondences between concrete agents and
specific identities (determination of gender, class, age, ethnic
identity etc.). Given that the diverse contradictions underlying
these identities do not necessarily converge, neither in a single
individual-agent or organization nor at the level of the people
as a whole, it becomes impossible to reduce the identification of
the 'popular' to a single determination. At the same time, an
effective hegemonic practice does not presuppose a given complex
subject but sets out to reconstitute the people. This, in turn,
requires the elaboration of an articulated discourse, the *popular
project*, which makes explicit in concrete terms the content of

the new society yet to be constructed. Far from being a utopia, the popular project is a viable proposal for a struggle waged in solidarity against an oppressive system, where effectiveness of action and possible outcomes can be foreseen, and where conjunctural analysis and prospective allow popular ideologies to advance. This must take place in a climate of respect for existing autonomies and identities where there is a simultaneous articulation and development of these same identities.

Moreover, insofar as power relations are not reduced to relations 'between' the State and Civil Society, but are seen to be present in various instances and institutions of society as a whole, the liberation project of the people cannot be reduced to the idea of 'seizure' of governmental power by a given oppositional social entity; rather it presupposes a permanent *revolution of civil society* and thus a continuous *transformation of the subject*, that is, the people.

In this paper, we shall attempt to discuss the question of whether the perspective described so far can have universal application, basing our discussion on the experience of the Sandinista Popular Revolution, some of whose specific features are described further on. Then, towards the end of the article, we shall return to the theoretical problematic.

IL The practice of social transformation in Nicaragua.

IL1. Armed struggle, contrahegemonic practice and insurrection

Popular insurrection, involving a breakdown of the economic system, a permanent state of siege directed at the enemy and the coming together of all the identities of a population rising against an oppressive regime, represents a moment in the history of a people. Specifically, it is a moment when contradictions become fused together and social forces have but a single objective : the overthrow of a regime.

In Nicaragua,   this moment would not have arrived in 1979 had it not been for the long standing presence of the Sandinista National Liberation Front (FSLN) on the political scene. Its very survival

as a guerrilla force, through good and bad times, served as a
constant reminder of the possibility of challenging the Somoza
regime. But its organic ties with the masses only became fully
developed during the two years before its triumph. Until that
time, the FSLN conducted military actions as well as partial con-
trahegemonic practices through becoming involved in organizing
students, women, workers, neighbourhoods, in what could be called
a passive accumulation of forces.[4] 'Accumulation of forces is
only possible in specific conjunctural situations, otherwise it
cannot take place'.[5] A strategy of insurrection implies that or-
ganization no longer precedes action since the challenge to all
of the institutions which reproduce the system of repression is
simultaneous, involving unequal forces, growing as events unfold,
establishing spontaneous solidarities against a common enemy, one
which is so obvious that it does not require any form of codifi-
cation. To have shown up the repressive and exploitative nature
of the regime, dooming to failure any attempt at camouflaging or
reforming it, to have demonstrated its political and military vul-
nerability, these are undoubted achievements of the FSLN acting
as vanguard. However, in the context of the insurrection, the
FSLN often follows and acts in support of the masses rather than
the opposite.[6]

Even were the FSLN to have had a more global vision of the secon-
dary contradictions and their possible articulation, at the mo-
ment of insurrection the various identities of the people came
together and the common objective was seen to predominate : to
destroy the regime and its various politico-military agents. The
popular organizations have served more as a network of communi-
cation than as a channel for conducting specific struggles. It
is important to understand that even though organizations with
specific demands conducting the struggle in particular ways were
present, this was not a universal phenomenon and, in any event,
tended to vary according to the conjunctural situation. For exam-
ple, the main demands underlying the struggle of AMPRONAC (Associa-
tion of Women concerned with the National Problem) were related
to the question of human rights, of the disappeared and of support
for the mothers of victims of the National Guard, rather than

typical feminist demands. Again, while students and workers did
organize within their places of study and work, as the struggle
developed unemployment increased dramatically and the schools
were closed down. Students and workers then moved back into
their neighbourhoods and the CDC (Civil Defence Committees) be-
nefitted from this new organizational capacity coming to supple-
ment the neighbourhoods' existing organizational base. In fact,
the various mass organizations did not so much affirm and defend
specific interests on the basis of their particular identities
but rather they used these identities as a means of mobilizing
social forces for a frontal struggle against the Somoza regime.
Thus, the student organizations came to play a fundamental role
by providing cadres for the rural guerrilla struggle.

We are thus faced with a momentary universalization, a massifi-
cation of the people, and a contradiction in the attempt to organize
specific social movements and to salvage their differentiate
demands; one which was to continue after the triumph, in some
cases - as that of the Association of Nicaraguan Women Luisa A-
manda Espinoza (AMLAE)- leading to differences in outlook between
the Nicaraguan organizations and equivalent organizations abroad.[7]
Moreover, when the FSLN reached the moment of triumph with the
people, it was at the centre of a broad anti-Somocista front,
something which would apparently imply a *fading out of the class
content* of the revolutionary project. Nevertheless the concrete
conditions of the triumph, involving the total dismantling of
the National Guard and the creation of the Popular Revolutionary
Army as well as unceasing efforts to consolidate the popular or-
ganizations, were to ensure the defeat of an emergency project
articulated by the financial bourgeosie designed to convert it
into a hegemonic or 'dictatorial force without Somoza'.[8] At the
same time, by ensuring the unity of a broad range of social for-
ces struggling against *somocismo* and its substitutes - supported
until the last moment by the United States Administration - the
FSLN succeeded in neutralizing the imperialist project in all of
its variants, in such a way as to ensure that the class content
of the revolution could not be put into question, given the cha-

racteristics of its social base.

II.2. Popular hegemony as revolutionary practice.

The experience of the Popular Unity government in Chile is often
quoted to support the thesis that it is impossible to 'have power'
if control of government structures is not coupled with control of
the repressive apparatus. According to this vision, the revolutio-
nary forces in Nicaragua have indeed 'taken power'. The difficul-
ty is that this vision is based on a rather limited definition of
power which is seen to reside in one part or another of the State
apparatus.

This vision, which makes a sharp distinction between political
and civil society and which views power relations as belonging to
the sphere of the former (and not that of relations between it
and civil society), has been criticized by those who point to the
political content of relations which take place inside various
institutions of society (thefactory, the school, the family, the
Church, corporate organizations etc.). Again according to this
view, far from having achieved popular power, the triumphant re-
volution against the *somocista* regime is only now beginning to
build this power. The slow destructuring of the inherited power
relations had to be done simultaneously with the construction of
a new system of social power. As long as this is not achieved,
the old relations will tend to be reproduced and with them, the
corresponding ideology of domination, within the revolutionary
process. From this perspective, the process of building popular
power implies that the masses must deny their own existence through
a process of organization, of self-transformation, of developing
its identities and creating new identities while others disappear.
Having been 'massified' by generations of repression and ideolo-
gical domination, the masses also carry identities which must be
overcome and transformed (racism, machismo, authoritarianism and
individualism are not exclusive qualities of the dominant classes).

While the FSLN was again to play a fundamental role in this pro-
cess, the masses with their incipient organizations and their day
to day struggles would continue to have the same kind of variable,

dialectical relation with the vanguard that it had before the
triumph ; at times under the guidance of the FSLN, at other times
ahead of and autonomous from it, generally without a neatly defi-
ned formula specifying the relationship between revolutionary par-
ty and mass organization. And in this process, both terms of the
relationship between mass organizations and revolutionary party
were to undergo modifications in both form and content.

Just as it did during the insurrection, the role of the FSLN was
to point towards the strategic objective. In this case, to build
a new society based on a *negation of the global logic of capital*
ensuring that the imperatives of social accumulation remain sub-
ordinate to the satisfaction of the basic needs of the population,
achieving an effective democracy, popular sovereignty and national
self-determination. At the same time, it was to indicate the imme-
diate priority task : the *consolidation of revolutionary power*
which is necessary to face up to external and internal enemies
and leave open the possibility of transforming society. However
within this broad orientation, the masses, increasingly organized,
were to put forward their own answers, thus enriching and giving
concrete content to the revolutionary project and translating the
idea of *popular power* into reality. This, in turn, was to produce
changes in the very structure of the revolutionary party.

This task required certain material conditions as well as a poli-
tico-ideological framework. Through oral and written discourse,
but more fundamentally through its actions, the FSLN showed the
political nature of the revolution ; this was not the path lead-
ing to the 'dictatorship of the proletariat - nationalization of
the means of production, single party system - but another road
leading to 'popular hegemony'.[9] But this was a hegemony still
being constructed along with the historical subject of the Revo-
lution : the Nicaraguan People. Rather than moving towards homo-
geneity of the popular sectors, differences were acknowledged
and indeed reflected within the various mass organizations, indi-
cating the principal liberating demands ; the peasantry, rural
and urban salaried workers, women, youth, indigenous communities
and, at the same time, consolidation of a new identity which, in

embryonic form, will be found in revolutionary struggles, and the Sandinista Defence Committees representing the possibility of self-government, of *direct* social relations in community work, without mercantile mediations.[10]

The accumulation of forces is only possible in particular conjunctural situations. The revolution sets up tasks that are assumed by the masses, though not without contradictions. Throughout this process, new identities are created and others that lay dormant and oppressed are transformed and liberated. For example, the literacy campaign gives great social influence to the July 19th Sandinista Youth Movement as a political organization under the direction of the FSLN, through a process which is transforming the traditional relations between city and countryside, family relations and relations inside the schools. The resistance which develops in the wake of the National Literacy Campaign leads to an accumulation of this new social force. Then new identities begin to emerge ; the popular teachers - there are 19,000 voluntary organizations in Nicaragua - the fundamental subjects of the post-literacy period,demonstrate the possibility of breaking with professionalism and educational monopoly while at the same time showing the people's capacity for innovation and autonomous action in relation to the State apparatus.[11] When they had to take charge of local government, the new Municipal Councils for Reconstruction provided another example of this process of discovering the people's capacity for selfgovernment ; 136 municipalities previously under the control of local *caudillos* or representatives of local economic interests were taken over, after the revolution, by agricultural workers, peasants or urban workers, many of whom did not even have a primary education.[12] The task of defending the Revolution has given rise to the Sandinista Popular Militias, probably the best example of the same process, though one that cannot be appreciated by those who continue to see power as residing by definition in certain parts of the State apparatus. The transfer and subsequent consolidation of the capacity for combat to the masses was not limited to weekly training courses but also involved real struggle against the counter-revolutionaries constantly being infiltrated

from Honduras. In fact, during a first phase, the armed struggle against the *somocistas* - supported by the Reagan Administration and the Central American oligarchies - was conducted mainly by the militias and not by the Sandinista Popular Army. An organized people learnt how to defend itself, first by organizing extraterritorial batallions, then by setting up territorial militias, again breaking a professional monopoly which the capitalist State guards jealously.[13]

In other cases, the revolutionary context has made it possible for an identity that had previously been subjected and alienated to become qualitatively transformed and come to play a crucial role in the revolutionary process. Under *somocismo*, Nicaraguan peasants had not been allowed to organize in defence of their interests. Until the end of 1980, a year after the triumph, their interests were still 'represented' by agricultural corporations controlled by the large producers. Then in December 1980, the small producers of the Department of Matagalpa decided to break with the Central Cooperative of Coffee Producers and to set up a provisional committee of small and medium producers which then set out to organize meetings of small producers in other departments. These meetings provided the impetus for the formation of the National Union of Farmers and Cattlemen (UNAG). Not only did UNAG immediately begin to put economic demands to the government, but it also asked to be represented on the Council of State and on various bodies dealing with problems of the agricultural sector. From then on, this mass organization has gained increasing political space, maintaining a critical attitude to what it considered to be deviations from the policy of agrarian reform. During the first year of the revolution, there was a discussion of the *choice* which would have to be made between the cooperative model or a Statist management model based on socialization of the productive forces. The development of a peasant identity made possible by the revolutionary process has had an impact on the agrarian strategy until the year 2000 : both models would be implemented in equal measures.[14] However it has been the coming together of production and defence needs as a result of increasing external agression which has given UNAG an enormous impulse and set it firmly at the

centre of the revolutionary process. The agrarian reform in fa-
vour of the peasantry is being accelerated, and it involves much
more than simple technical criteria. Peasants are demanding and
being given both land and arms, and this is taking place within
an irreversible process of class consolidation in the context
of an authentic social and political revolution.[15]

In July 1984, UNAG took another step which consolidated its pos-
ition as a significant social force within the revolutionary pro-
cess. It decided to incorporate agricultural producers *regardless
of the size of their holdings*, with the only condition that they
should productively support the process of national liberation.[16]
In other situations, such a measure would have undoubtedly led
to a situation where a few large landowners came to dominate the
mass of small producers and to use the organization for their
own benefit. In the context of a social revolution however, it
implies the reverse : *popular hegemony presupposes the integra-
tion of the minorities under the direction of the majorities.*

The case of the Association of Nicaraguan Women Luisa Amanda Es-
pinoza is a different one. This organization has been especial-
ly active whenever issues mainly concerning women were being
discussed, such as the law on the family or more recently the law
on compulsory military service which made service optional for
women. In general, however, the association has not enjoyed the
kind of increasing political influence which European feminist
movements in particular had hoped for and expected. This can be
attributed to the difficulties involved in breaking the ideolo-
gical and material structures which perpetuate women's subordi-
nation in comparison with demands voiced by youth and workers'
organizations. However, as the leaders of AMLAE have themselves
stated, their priority task is to contribute to the defence of
the revolution by other means, and thus prepare the grounds for
the subsequent struggle for women's liberation.[17]

To be sure, the government - in this case the Revolutionary go-
vernment - is in a position to regulate, block or promote de-
mands voiced by various groups. Going beyond that, however, our
hypothesis is that the *conjunctural situation, through a dialec-*

tical relation between revolutionary party and mass organizations
determines which identities will be developed, at what speed and
in which direction. The advance of the peasant sector can be ex-
plained in terms of the fact that their specific demands coincide
with the material and ideological needs of the revolution (planning
alternatives to capitalist sectors that are reluctant to produce,
placing restraints on the State bureaucracy, developing production
and consolidating defence against external invasions). In the case
of the specific demands put forward by women, on the other hand,
a new and complex area of struggle would have been opened up, not
only against opposition forces such as the Church hierarchy but
also within the popular front. The party sees this, and the orga-
nization itself is prepared to voice only limited demands while
waiting for more favourable circumstances to develop when the
'general interest' will no longer clash with its specific interest.
Thus, there is nothing structural about the revolutionary project
which is likely to prevent the full liberation of Nicaraguan women.

One mass organization which is not generally regarded as such is
the Catholic Church. It also corresponds to a deeply rooted ident-
ity of the Nicaraguan people. What we shall have to say about the
Church also applies to other mass organizations. Pluralism and de-
mocracy are not just features of the external linkages of various
organizations, they also have something to do with what happens
inside these organizations. In the case of the Church, we have an
institution which existed before the revolution and which in prin-
ciple, is governed internally in accordance with strict rules of
hierarchy. In fact it would be difficult to imagine a more verti-
cally oriented organization than the Catholic Church. However in
practice, there is a certain degree of pluralism within the Church,
and different currents representing secondary contradictions within
Christian thought co-exist. In the context of a country struggling
against imperialism, these come to assume great significance for
the conjunctural situation of the Church. With a Catholic population
engaged in a process of liberation ready to fight to the death
against its oppressors, the internal equilibria of the Catholic
hierarchy cannot be dealt with out of context without alienating

its own popular base.

In reality, while the highest authority of the Church states explicitly that it disagrees with the development of the revolution, the Christian and the revolutionary identities have entered into a special relationship, to the point where several obviously Christian principles have been incorporated as revolutionary ideology by the FSLN; at the same time many priests and many of the faithful are prepared to challenge the counter-revolutionary political orientations of their own hierarchy without abandoning their apostolic mission or their Christian faith. The counter-revolution has tried by every possible means to break this unity and to use the Church as the ideological platform which the weak bourgeois opposition is unable to provide.[18] Paradoxically, it is the FSLN which is involved in maintaining the unity of Christianity and the Revolution and which sees no contradictions between the two identities.

The clearest evidence that the identities of the masses do not automatically develop in a way which contributes to the consolidation of the revolution is offered by the case of the indigenous communities (Miskitos, Sumos and Ramas) and the *criollos* of the Atlantic coast. In 1981, the FSLN and the government issued a statement of principles by which they pledged themselves to support the maintenance of indigenous cultural traditions, to guarantee participation in the affairs of the nation as a whole (the Misurasata organization immediately took its place on the Council of State) and in those of the Atlantic coast in particular, to provide legal guarantees of ownership of their landholdings, either as communal lands or in the form of cooperatives, and to 'support the organizational forms coming from the communities themselves in order to achieve the degree of representation which is necessary in the social, political and economic institutions which direct the affairs of the Atlantic zone'.[19] However these principles were not taken to heart by a community whose relations with the State had always been marginal, whose dealings with multinationals had led to exploitation and loss of resources, and who were used to see the inhabitants of the rest of the country

as 'the Spaniards'. Another negative inheritance from the past
was the fact that their participation in the struggle against
Somoza had been marginal. Moreover a revolutionary transforma-
tion of the indigenous identity implied not only a change in
the communities' articulation with the outside world but also
a change in outlook on the part of the revolutionary forces,
something which is very difficult to achieve when judged by the
long series of unsuccessful attempts to deal with the ethnic
question, not only in Latin America but in other parts of the
world as well. The fact that contra infiltration takes place
via the Atlantic zone while, at the same time, certain religious
leaders of the communities began to identify the revolution with
'the devil', gave rise to situations in which the response of the
FSLN or the government cannot always be seen as an 'error'. In
many cases, this response was the inevitable result of the real
contradiction between the need to defend territorial integrity
against external aggression and the desire to allow self-deter-
mination and a gradual re-articulation of the indigenous communi-
ties to the society-in-revolution.[20]

The case of the indigenous communities illustrates how the *process
of liberation of identities requires a transformation of the rela-
tion (in this case inter-ethnic) by both parts*, and how its evo-
lution is not exclusively dependent upon the decisions of a govern-
ment or a revolutionary party.

One case where the FSLN has played an important role in placing
limits on the 'natural' development of a popular identity is that
of the salaried workers. The economic difficulties inherited from
the past as well as those which emerged as a result of a deterior-
ation in the terms of trade and the rise in interest rates, the
obvious weaknesses of a State which is being constructed, the
natural disasters plus the economic and financial boycott imposed
by the Reagan Administration, all these factors to which must be
added the political decision to maintain a broad internal front
under popular hegemony, required that certain forms of the class
struggle had to be slowed down. These forms included the old eco-
nomic demands by the trade unions that had been suppressed before

the revolution and a generalized demand for workers' control of the means of production. These limits placed upon the forms of struggle were also made to apply to land occupations by the peasantry.[21]

The decision to opt for popular hegemony implied the maintenance of a pluralist social system which, in turn, had to accomodate the demands of private proprietors for property guarantees as well as for the chance to make a profit without being stigmatized as exploiters. The revolutionary government provided these guarantees on condition that private property should fulfil its social function: to produce under acceptable conditions of efficiency.[22]

Thus the class struggle was not arrested, it simply took other forms; workers' control of the *use* of property [23], demands for improved working conditions, demands for an indirect salary on the part of the State and, fundamentally, something which workers' organizations still had to delegate to parts of the government apparatus: control of the economic surplus through economic policy as well as through the State monopoly of both the financial system and the commercialization of major products. This new expression of workers' identity required an understanding of the conjunctural situation and a clarity of vision with respect to the revolutionary project which not all workers possessed. The situation was made worse by the general crisis of the industrial sector in Central America which also hit Nicaragua and slowed down the planned expansion of urban employment. It is not surpising, therefore, that the government had to resort to legal measures in order to suppress certain strikes, given the emergency conditions which affected the country, even though the principle of trade union pluralism had allowed the survival of certain trade unions who tended to voice demands of a classical kind, as well as that of certain opposition unions who were now waving banners which they had never raised during the Somoza dictatorship.[24]

In the absence of seasonal migratory movements from outside the

country and thanks to unprecedented levels of coffee production
and a recovery of cotton production, rural workers were in a po-
sition to achieve some of their traditional demands (improved
working conditions, a social wage, fair payment for the work
done etc.) and even to place limits on the progress of mechani-
zation of the cotton harvest whenever there was availability of
labour. The identity of the rural worker as proletarian was main-
tained and the possibility of organizing a movement back to the
land (reconstitution of the peasantry) was never raised. One
thing which did affect the availability of wage labour over the
short term was the external aggression, not only because it gave
rise to a strong migratory movement towards the cities, but also
since it resulted in the movement of soldiers and members of the
militias for the purpose of defending the country. These labour
shortages were constantly being filled through voluntary work.[25]
Given the importance of the Area of Public Ownership (AOO) for
permanent rural employment, one of the increasingly widespread
demands was in favour of effective worker participation, which
gave rise to a contradiction with the bureaucratic tendencies of
certain government officials.[26]

The construction of popular hegemony presupposes not only the
development but also the articulation of the identities of the
people as subject of the revolution. Moreover, and in contradic-
tion to this, it also involves the reproduction-transformation-
rearticulation of identities which, historically, had been con-
sidered antagonistic to the popular project. In the particular
case of the first phase of the Sandinista revolution, the figure
of the rentier was hit hard by the new revolutionary laws because
of the impact of what they were doing to both agricultural and
urban property.[27] The popular project would find no place for
that identity except in a form under which it had lost most of
its economic significance. In 1984, it is the shopkeeper given
to speculation who is most affected by the new mechanisms and
regulations designed to ensure the supply of food and other goods
to the population.

On the other hand, from the very beginning the revolutionary dis-

course has referred to the idea of a 'patriotic bourgeoisie' as
a fundamental element of the hegemonic system and of economic,
political and ideological pluralism. Independently of the fact
that members of the government may be of bourgeois origin and
that they may even continue to enjoy the ownership and use of
means of production, the question is whether it will be possible
to maintain the identity of the bourgeoisie as a class, or whether
the changes which it will have to undergo before becoming inte-
grated into the hegemonic system will in effect lead to the dis-
solution of its class identity. The Sandinista project involves
setting up a system of relations (identities) within which the
private ownership of the means of production may be regulated by
the profit motive in terms of particular decisions, while
at the same time, when taken globally, remains subordinate to
the satisfaction of the material and spiritual needs of the people
and to the maintenance of popular sovereignty. In this context
the process of accumulation is regarded as a means rather than an
end. This is by no means impossible, particularly in view of the
history of the Nicaraguan bourgeoisie. It could therefore repro-
duce itself as an *economic class*, putting forward its own parti-
cular demands on questions of public policy regarding the economy
or industrial relations etc. However *in actuality*, the popular
hegemonic project, that is the new system of social and political
relations,would prevent the bourgeoisie from achieving its class
project of imposing its own particular intersts over those of the
majority. It would thus be an 'alienated' *political class*.[28] This
would not prevent the bourgeoisie from participating in various
government bodies, either as individuals or as representatives of
a class which is organized corporatively, or else through the
political parties. The pluralist project which is part and parcel
of popular hegemony makes it legally possible for the bourgeoisie
to seek governmental power. However the development and consoli-
dation of popular power are such that this objective cannot be
achieved as a result of a correlation of forces which ensures
that the interests of the majority remain dominant.

Theory tells us that capital, as it develops, invades every sphere

of society, transforming all relations into mercantile ones and using the liberal State and parliamentary democracy as instruments of ideological and political domination over the masses, thus ensuring the atomization of the masses into individuals-citizens. The challenge to which Nicaragua is responding is that of arresting these global tendencies while at the same time ensuring the continued existence of private capital, albeit in a 'deformed' state as a result of its subordinate situation within the hegemonic system.

Another issue which must be raised and which applies to the so-called non-capitalist middle sectors is the question of conspicuous consumption. In a certain sense the 'achievement' of much of the bourgeoisie has been associated with the maintenance of privileged levels of consumption rather than with accumulation as such. This aspect of the identity of the bourgeoisie should perhaps be controlled, in view of the need to further the general interest; however a certain degree of *inequality* may be allowed (though not related to a project of domination).[29]

II.3. The open character of the hegemonic system.

A few decades ago, we were told in Latin America that economic theories based on the notion of a closed economy were not applicable to our societies, showing as they do an exaggerated degree of openness and dependence upon shifts in external markets and in the distribution of transnational power, as well as in the economic policies of the centre (as opposed to the periphery) States. However openness and dependency also affect political systems. To think of hegemonic relations 'as if' the national society were a closed system in which one can calculate correlations of forces on the basis of their social importance, their degree of organization and the ideological relations among social sectors, is to deny the reality of our societies.

The case of Nicaragua is an obvious one. Faced with the popular project expressed by the FSLN and the mass organizations, the domestic bourgeoisie had no opportunity of competing for a hegemonic role. With limited control of the means of mass communica-

tion, with no possibility of obtaining support from the armed forces, lacking any strategy for economic development and for pulling the country out of the crisis other than continued dependence on the United States, the bourgeoisie was unable to put forward a real political alternative. The two possibilities open to it were either to leave the country or to become actively incorporated - with all the contradictions implied by such a move - into the 'patriotic bourgeoisie' within the popular hegemonic system.

However the Somocista system of domination had not been a 'national' system but a sub-system operating within a network of imperialist relations of domination; here, Central America was regarded as the 'back-yard' of 'Uncle Sam' and Somoza was made to play a policing role in the region on behalf of the United States. Moreover a defeat for *somocismo* did not necessarily imply a defeat for imperialism. Once the battle was lost, the U.S. Administration *immediately* began to lay siege, economically and politically, around the revolutionary government, with the intention of influencing the way in which power was distributed in the country. Economic aid from the United States flowed towards sectors of the bourgeoisie and their allies in order to promote their activities and their organizations. The aid ceased when the revolutionary government decided to put a stop to these direct relations. The obvious consolidation of the popular forces in Nicaragua soon persuaded the Americans that the only way to stop the revolution in its tracks was to reactivate the Somocista National Guard, which had already been expelled from the country. Washington set out to do this with the support of the regional oligarchies. Finally the aggression took the form of a relentless process of U.S. intervention in the internal affairs of Nicaragua. It is difficult to say what the popular hegemonic project might have yielded under other conditions, but the fact is that imperialist initiatives helped to determine the subsequent development of events and to define with greater clarity the anti-imperialist ideology of the Nicaraguan people.[30]

II.4.Parties and movements: the problem of articulation.

The social project which is emerging in Nicaragua is being developed on the basis of popular hegemony. The central elements of this project are the mass organizations and their dialectical relations with the FSLN and with the revolutionary government. These relations have been mediated by laws and institutions - often of a provisional nature - that have facilitated the regulation of conflict, the establishment of instruments of participation and the anticipation of the consequences of specific types of behaviour.

Nicaragua is now on the verge of taking an important step towards institutionalization[31] by organizing elections to a National Assembly which will be made up of 90 representatives elected on the basis of territorial constituencies.*

A Law on Political Parties has already been approved. The electoral system will be based on universal suffrage, electoral competition among *political parties* and pluralism through a system of proportional representation. The question which arises is this: how will the social movements be represented in these political structures ? Or rather, which other structures must be created in order to ensure that some of these social forces will be able to participate in the political process at the level of government ? At the present time, political parties and social movements are both represented on the Council of State. By establishing suffrage as the instrument of representation, it no longer seems possible to treat parties and movements within a common dimension, competing for social representation. This becomes obvious, not only because of the multiple identity of the social agents but also because of the need to maintain the specificity of movements and parties. The former are more oriented towards the expression

*This was written before the Nicaraguan general elections which were held on November 4th, 1984. The results of the elections to the National Assembly were as follows: FSLN 61 seats; Democratic Conservatives 14; Independent Liberals 9; Social Christians 6; Communists 2; Socialists 2; Marxist Leninists 2. The FSLN obtained just under 67 per cent of the vote in both the Assembly and the Presidential elections.

of partial demands while the latter have the function of synthes-
izing demands and integrating them into a national project which,
in turn, involves many dimensions which do not take the form of
identities and of social movements.[32]

One possibility is that the political parties should include on
their lists representatives of various mass organizations which,
in a system of proportional representation, involves a process
of negotiating the order of names on the lists and the incorpora-
tion of the movements' demands into the party programmes. However
if the social movements and their leadership are transformed into
vote catchers for the political parties, there could be a tenden-
cy towards something which can be observed in its extreme form
in the United States. A party can become overloaded with contra-
dictions and particular interests that are translated into a
salad of partial promises which, taken together, not only fail
to make up a proper national project but are also incompatible
with each other and not viable as a package, with the result
that they tend to slow down social change rather than inject
into the social situation the dynamism which it requires.

On the other hand, while organizational autonomy of the social
movements as the expression of certain social forces seems to
be desirable in a popular democracy, at the same time, given
the open-ended nature of the process of construction/transform-
ation of popular identities, it becomes difficult for these to
crystallize in clearly defined qualitative and quantitative situ-
ations.

Another institutional alternative that might be considered is
that of a second Chamber of a consultative-deliberative charac-
ter, where issues of national significance would be debated and
where the principal social forces of the country could express
their points of view. In any case, direct participation by the
mass organizations in various decision-making bodies would not
be incompatible with these new forms of government.

This problematic has also other consequences. The dialectical
relation between the revolutionary party and the mass organiza-

tions, in the context of a pluralist system, can take two forms: either the party is maintained as a *cadre party*, made up of selected cadres who, in many cases, emerge from the practice of the mass organizations, or else it becomes transformed into a *mass party*. This has important implications for the question of the articulation of the People. The cadre party does not only set tactical and strategic objectives but it is also physically present in the *leadership* of the mass organizations through the process of incorporating the outstanding leaders who wish to become militants of the party. The mass party is present among, and in symbiosis with, the masses, seeing and absorbing their contradictions and achievements, where the figure of the "representative of the people" is doubly articulated with the party and with its specific bases. We must then ask ourselves whether - given a prolongation of imperialist pressure on Nicaraguan society - the first model, which could be represented in the form of a tree with the FSLN at the top and the mass organizations lower down, might not be more vulnerable than the second, which would allow direct horizontal contacts among the various social movements.[33]

As a final observation, it is possible that the Church, as a current and also as an organization rather than as a social movement standing "next to" all the others, should be seen as an articulator of social movements, to be found at the base of the movements as well as among various levels of the leadership. In this sense, the FSLN and Christianity could converge (or compete) in the task of consolidating and giving form to the subject of the new Nicaraguan society.

III. Epilogue: some theoretical questions arising out of revolutionary practice in Nicaragua

We have tried, in the introduction, to present a theoretical discussion of social movements based on developments in Europe. Then in the second part of the paper, we discussed the experience of the Nicaraguan revolution from this perspective and in doing so, we pointed to a number of limitations of the original conceptual framework, sometimes explicity and sometimes only implicity. In

what follows, we shall consider some of the theoretical issues
raised by the Nicaraguan revolution which theories of social
movements must take into account.

In the first place, the identities referred to in the concep-
tual framework cannot be viewed as 'attributes' which permit
us to classify (or organize) individuals into groups (social
movements). It is much more productive to think of them as
interpersonal or social *relations*. In addition, they must not
be seen as oppressed or alienated 'essences' that must be liber-
ated but rather as situations that are constantly transformed
by the revolutionary process. Moreover, these identities are not
given, either in an embryonic or in a fully developed form, in-
deed new identities can spring up and others disappear as a re-
sult of the process.

Just as a correct theoretical outlook must move towards a synthe-
sis and reconstruction of the object, which in this case means
that the concept to be determined is that of *people*, this move-
ment is incomplete unless it is coupled with the perception of
a complex subject, incorporating contradictions and brought to-
gether by an internal hegemonic system. The fact that the work-
ing classes make up a majority determines the class content of
this system, and the people emerge as *revolutionary subject*
through a complex network of organizations and institutions.
At the level of political practice, where the objective is not
to wipe out all forms of power but rather to ensure that social
power is exercized by the people, the movement towards synthesis
referred to earlier correlates with the process of articulation
of social movements in which the political parties have histori-
cally played a central role. In particular, in reflecting on the
process of achieving a correlation of power which would lead to
a break with the structures which subjugate the people, we must
reintroduce the role of the *revolutionary party*. Not only because
it articulates specific movements into a front of social forces
but also because in many cases, it is a product of these move-
ments and of the way in which they operate. And this is no less
true of situations that are as different from that of Nicaragua

as the European societies, where political parties have not been di-
vorced, either in the past or in the present, from the process of
creating and giving content to social movements.

In that sense, the people sees itself as a *historically deter-*
mined category, changing in line with the structural develop-
ment of society and with changing circumstances, which is not
to be reduced to a pre-determined class nor to a collection of
universally determined identities. And its internal structure
as a hegemonic system includes articulation between part(y)ies
and social movements and leaves no room for 'choosing' between
one or another form of collective action. The historicity and
the conjunctural character of the movements (and identities)
leave open the possibility that they might disappear, lose their
effectiveness, become rearticulated as a result of these same
processes of transformation. Should this be the case, it becomes
difficult to come to terms with the tendency that can be ob-
served in certain authors to predict (or indeed wish) that the
political party system will be replaced by the social movements.
Neither can we sustain the idea that the former might provide
a favourable and exclusive access to democracy or might have a
greater capacity for developing the people as a subject. It is
far more useful to think in terms of a hypothesis which would
posit that the presence of social movements on the political
scene is indicative of a genuine critique of the parties' abil-
ity to provide a channel for the expression of contradictory
social developments, and that their actions will, of necessity,
result in a transformation of this political system. In the con-
text of an authentic social revolution, in a society where the
civil sphere has another kind of density, these dialectical re-
lations can take other forms, also historically determined. We
begin to see this when we raise the issue of moving from a cadre
party to a mass party, as we move from a phase of organization
and accumulation of forces against the dominant regime to a phase
of building popular power in the presence of a revolutionary
government.

Finally as we have accepted that political parties must be incorporated into the analysis, we must examine in particular the *form of articulation* between parties and movements. Here, we find a 'verticalist' option which places the mass organizations in a subordinate position vis-a-vis the parties, even when they feed it ideas and information, and we have the option of a party which articulates the various identities and their corresponding popular organizations 'horizontally'.

The preceding discussion does not represent an attempt to innovate in the area of theories of social movements. However we have tried particularly to touch on certain aspects of the question that have not received the attention they deserve in recent forums. We also believe that Nicaragua is a unique laboratory that might allow us to test whether certain propositions - sometimes extrapolated from other societies to Latin America rather precipitously - have universal application, while still keeping in mind that this comparative analysis can also put into question the validity of certain academic views with regard to Europe itself.

NOTES

1. See the pioneering work of Manuel Castells and J. Lojkine on urban social movements and their 'explanation' on the basis of the concepts of reproduction of the labour force or of the general conditions of production.

2. To the point where we have asked ourselves during this Workshop whether *Sendero Luminoso* in Peru is a 'social movement'.

3. See: Ernesto Laclau, 'Socialisme et transformation des logiques hégémoniques', in C. Buci-Glucksmann (ed.), *La gauche, le pouvoir, le socialisme,* Paris, PUF, 1983; Chantal Mouffe, 'Socialisme, démocratie et nouveaux mouvements sociaux', in the same work; Laclau and Mouffe, 'Socialist Strategy - where next ?' in *Marxism Today*, January 1981; Bob Jessop, 'The Political Indeterminacy of Democracy', in A. Hunt, *Marxism and Democracy*. In fact this problematic of the social movements is closely related to the critique of 'real socialism' and of 'real democracy', as well as with the current which sees the struggle for democracy in Latin America as a popular, not necessarily a bourgeois, struggle.

4. See Humberto Ortega Saavedra, *Sobre la insurrección,* La Habana, Ed. de Ciencias Sociales, 1981. On the origins of the mass organizations associated with the FSLN before the triumph, see CIERA, *La Democracia participativa en Nicaragua,* Managua, May 1984. Certain organizations were under the FSLN's direct control, such as, in the trade union area, the Trade Union Movement of the Working People (MSPT), the Revolutionary Workers' Committees (COR), and the Committee for Workers' Struggle (CLT), all these in urban areas; then the Committee of Rural Workers organized initially in 1977 and which comprised workers, semiproletarians and small agricultural producers, later to become the Association of Rural Workers (ATC); on the student front, the Revolutionary Student Front, the Revolutionary Christian Movement, The Sandinista Revolutionary Youth, the Nicaraguan Revolutionary Youth, the School Students' Movement, the Association of Secondary School Students and the Managua Federation of Youth Movements; at the neighbourhood level, the FSLN called for the setting up of the Civil Defence Committees (CDC) which were to play a crucial role during the insurrection. Also in 1977 the Association of Women concerned with the National Problem (AMPRONAC), clearly directed by the FSLN, was created.

5. Humberto Ortega Saavedra, op.cit.

6. Ibidem, Passim.

7. See Maxine Molyneux, 'Mobilisation without Emancipation? Women's Interests, State and Revolution in Nicaragua',- the following chapter.

8. See *Nicaragua: la estrategia de la victoria,* Mexico, Ed. Nuestro Tiempo, 1980. See also Amalia Chamorro Z., *Algunos rasgos hegemónicos del Somocismo y la Revolución Sandinista,* Cuadernos de Pensamiento Propio, Serie Ensayos, 5, INIES/CRIES, Managua, June 1983.

9. On this question see José Luis Coraggio, *Revolución y Democra-cia en Nicaragua*, Cuadernos de Pensamiento Propio, Serie En-sayos, 7, INIES/CRIES, Managua, May 1984.

10. The Sandinista Defense Committees have performed such tasks as organizing the supply of rationed products or night watch duties. Originating in the CDC, they now have approximately 600,000 members and are both multi-class and non-partisan.

11. See Rosa Maria Torres, *De alfabetizando a maestro popular: la post-alfabetización en Nicaragua*, Cuadernos de Pensamiento Propio, Serie Ensayos, 4, INIES:CRIES, 1983.

12. See Charles Downs and Fernando Kusnetzoff, 'The changing role of local government in the Nicaraguan Revolution', mimeo, April 1982; also published in *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, vol.6, no. 4, 1982, pp. 533-548.

13. The 1983 Law on Compulsory Military Service, had the result of socializing the task of national defence, breaking down the mechanisms which used to ensure that the Sandinista Popular Army was made up principally of people coming from the less well-off classes.

14. See *Estrategia de desarrollo agropecuario y reforma agraria*, MIDINRA, Managua, December 1982.

15. The most explicit forms which this phenomenon has taken are the almost 200 Cooperatives for Defence and Production, with almost 7,000 members, in the border areas.

16. See the statements by Daniel Nuñez in *Barricada*, official or-gan of the FSLN, on July 7th, 1984, and the announcement made at the second assembly of UNAG and published in *Barricada*, July 9th, 1984.

17. See Maxine Molyneux, op.cit.

18. See Ana Maria Ezcurra, *Agresión ideológica contra la Revolución Sandinista*, Mexico, Ediciones Nuevomar, 1983.

19. See '*Declaraciones de Principios de la Revolución Popular San-dinista sobre las comunidades indígenas de la Costa Atlántica*' which appears in CIERA, op.cit., p. 156.

20. For an objective report on this problem, see Trabil Nani, *His-tory and Current Situation in Nicaragua's Atlantic Coast*, CIDCA, April 1984. A summarized version is available in ENVIO, Year 3, No.36, Instituto Histórico Centroamericano, Managua, June 1984.

21. On November 21, 1979, the FSLN issued a communique ordering 'The immediate and complete suspension of all confiscations and interventions of residences, vehicles and rural and urban properties...' (See *Barricada* of that day). Through the Sandi-nista Workers' Central (CST) and the Association of Rural Workers (ATC), the FSLN impressed upon the population that it was necessary to maintian production, but in the face of the external aggression which was already looming, the Revolution-ary Government had to resort to the Law on Social and Economic State of Emergency (Degree 812) of September 9th, 1981, which

penalized land invasions, the occupation of places of work
and strikes. See *Leyes de la República de Nicaragua*, Minis-
terio de Justicia, Volume V, July-December 1981.

22. See the Law of Agrarian Reform (Decree 782 of August 10th,
    1981 which was characterized as 'productivist' by critics
    of the extreme left. In *Leyes de la Republica*...op.cit.

23. The Law on Decapitalization (Decree 805 of August 28th, 1981
    was going to allow workers to maintain a strict vigilance
    over the management of private capital in this area.

24. In fact the trade unions multiplied after the revolutionary
    triumph. From 133 trade unions with 27,000 members, numbers
    rose (by December 1983) to 1,103 trade unions with 207,391
    members, of which approximately 80 percent accept the leader-
    ship of the FSLN. See CIERA, op.cit., p.45.

25. The 1983-84 harvest witnessed the mobilization of approxima-
    tely 40,000 voluntary workers who joined in the coffee and
    cotton harvests, which constitutes a new identity of the
    Nicaraguan people. See CIERA, op.cit., pp. 64-65.

26. On the question of worker participation in management, see
    CIERA, op.cit., pp. 100-123.

27. The Governing Junta for National Reconstruction fixed the
    maximum rent at a level several times lower than what was
    normal for the best land (300 cordobas per manzana for pro-
    duction of export crops and 100 cordobas for products design-
    ed for the internal market). See decrees 230 and 263 of January
    1980. *Leyes*...op.cit.. Moreover urban rents were reduced by
    a figure of up to 50 percent by Decree no. 216 of December
    29th, 1979. While these levels have not been maintained as
    a result of the operation of market factors, the initial
    political-ideological effect has not been lost.

28. On the 'bourgeois question' in Nicaragua, see J.L. Coraggio,
    op.cit. One of the increasingly significant features of the
    relationship between the Revolutionary government and the
    bourgeoisie is that the government maintains a continuous
    dialogue with and responds to demands from specific fractions,
    but it does not regard the associations which claim to speak
    on behalf of the class as a whole as valid spokesmen.

29. With this aspect as with many others, it is impossible to
    crystallize a revolution in accordance with a projected 'model'.
    One of the results of the economic and military aggression of
    the Reagan Administration, coupled with the crisis of world
    markets, has been to lead the government to introduce a prog-
    ram of macroeconomic adjustments which tends to drastically
    reduce conspicuous and non-basic consumption, while the con-
    sumption of mass goods and salaries has been affected relative-
    ly less.

30. On the question of this identity which was forged during
    Sandino's struggle, see Sergio Ramirez, *El Pensamiento Vivo
    de Sandino*, San José, EDUCA, 1974, and Carlos Fonseca, *Obras,*

Editorial Nueva Nicaragua, 1982.

31. See the Law on Political Parties and the Electoral Law which were promulgated recently.

32. This is not always clear. In other countries, social movements organized around issues such as peace, human rights or natural resources transcend the level of specific demands and take on the role of critics of the course which humanity has taken.

33. In fact, recent developments seem to indicate that the need to strengthen the internal front and the very dynamics of the electoral process will have to move closer and closer to the mass party model, even though the term vanguard may remain.

    In a certain way, this implies a partial 'internalization' of the confrontation of identities and particular interests within the revolutionary party. We should not confuse the cadre/mass opposition with the vanguard character of *the party*. A mass party can perfectly well play a vanguard role in relation to the social forces within a conscious process of building a new society.