



## Letter From Managua

by Wallace Kaufman

### A Devil's Dictionary From Nicaragua

Revolutions attempt to give new meaning to life. Sometimes changing the definition of words is part of the attempt to change reality. At other times, reality changes first. Nowhere does the traveler have more old words with new meanings than in revolutionary Nicaragua. To help those whose first days in the country are as confused as mine, here is an abridged dictionary of the revolution (with apologies to Ambrose Bierce):

*Agricultural loan*: a government loan to large or small farmer carrying the patriotic interest rates of 20 to 30 percent rather than the 10 percent rate that the government considers "imperialistic" in international lending.

*Air conditioners*: machines that cool people as they do in other countries, but here they are also political markers found mainly in the following places: pro-government radio and television stations, offices of high government officials, and Marxist-Leninist bookstores. In this classless, workers' state where most people dress alike, seeking out the air conditioners is a good way to find the important communists.

*Alfabetizacion*: the national literacy campaign somewhat like the U.S. program "Hooked on Books" but based on the theory that politics makes good reading if it is full of revolutionary action and party politics: C is for Carlos (founder of the Sandinista Party); G is for Guerrillero; F is for Fusil (rifle); by Lesson 4 a student can read "The FSLN (Sandinista party) is the organization of the vanguard of the Nicaraguan people."

*Blue jeans*: one of the few permissible statements of affection for U.S. capitalism and its culture; the pants pre-

ferred by the younger government officials from middle-class backgrounds who still have some family money, relatives in the U.S., or who have traveled abroad on government junkets. Sometimes available on the black market for about five months' wages.

*Brigadistas*: members of the American and European middle class or bourgeoisie who come to the workers' state where they work for nothing (\$10 a month less than the native workers) building schools and clinics or picking coffee for two weeks or a month before returning home to their bourgeois jobs or to attend college on the money provided by their bourgeois parents or their imperialistic government.

*Burguesia*: anyone who used to make a living without a government license or economic aid; people who used to have air conditioners; in the Marxist-Leninist literature of Nicaragua, *bourgeoisie* has the same function as the word *devil* in Christian writing, although it appears more frequently.

*Bus*: a relatively rare species of vehicle in which crowds are often used to immobilize and numb travelers so wealth can be redistributed manually. Recently riders have complained that drivers have developed a Fagan-like patronage for pickpockets.

*Cordoba*: the official currency and the best bargain in Nicaragua since every day an American dollar buys more and more. A one cordoba coin is used for pay phones, the world's greatest phone bargain. But since it takes 100 of them to equal a nickel, almost no one carries them and you can never find one when you need to make a call.

*Democracy (workers')*: the process whereby workers and campesinos may offer constructive Marxist ideas to improve production and the Sandinista system of government.

*Democracy (capitalist)*: distinguished from workers' democracy by its diversionary emphasis on elections to decide what party and which persons will run the government. Commandante Bayardo Arce called the 1984 elections "a nuisance" necessary to placate foreign observers.

*Free speech*: "Thought that is correct, that is with the revolution" (President Daniel Ortega).

*FSLN (Sandinista National Liberation Front)*: the political party whose red and black flag flies on government buildings more often than the national flag; that political party which allows the fewest number of official members but which controls the greatest number of guns; the only political party in

### BOOKS IN BRIEF

*Thomas De Quincey: Bicentenary Studies*, edited by Robert Lance Snyder, Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press; \$29.50. Sixteen critics look at a troubled Romantic whose works "bristle with the images of an imperial self."

*William Shakespeare* by Terry Eagleton, New York: Basil Blackwell; \$14.95. Marxist, feminist, and semiotic theories combine to show us that the witches are "the heroines" of *Macbeth* and the center of "positive value"—even if a "conservative patriarch" like Shakespeare could not see it this way. "This way madness lies. . . ."

*The Language of the Heart: The Body's Response to Human Dialogue* by James L. Lynch, New York: Basic Books; \$19.95. A leading psychophysicist explains why we pay for stressful speech with our heart's blood—unless we're schizophrenic.

*Hollywood: Legend and Reality*, edited by Michael Webb, Boston: Little, Brown; \$19.95. An engrossing collection of memorabilia, gathered for a Smithsonian Traveling Exhibition, gives us a close-up on the world of stardom, from the days of Fatty Arbuckle and Mary Pickford to Meryl Streep and Clint Eastwood.

Latin America with its own army; the political party that "exercises control in the name of the workers . . . or to put it another way, the workers control power through the FSLN" (Sandinista National Directorate, 1979).

*"Heroes and Martyrs"*: a phrase used to distinguish government-approved organizations from their privately organized counterparts, e.g., CONAPRO is the independent Council of Professionals, and CONAPRO Heroes y Martires is the government-approved council allowed to participate in debate on the new constitution.

*Hotel*: the main interface between police and visitors. Hotels must report daily to police the names of all visitors in residence.

*Inturismo*: the tourist bureau whose official mission is to publicize and promote the Marxist-Leninist principles of the Sandinista party to bourgeois visitors from capitalist countries. Inturismo recently announced that its contribution to Nicaragua's "mixed economy" would be a \$40 million gambling casino and resort on the Pacific coast, where all spending will be in dollars.

*Lake Managua*: the big empty lake that lies near Managua and one of the world's most polluted bodies of water. Government officials blame the pollution on the capitalists of Somoza's time, but seven years after the Revolution all the storm sewers and toilets of the capital still empty into the lake. It may be that some people's . . . doesn't stink.

*Private sector*: a pejorative term referring to backward, paranoid, or greedy people who do not believe that their countrymen trained in Bulgaria, Romania, and the Soviet Union can run the Nicaraguan economy; also in the body politic of a Marxist workers' state, a vestigial economic structure similar in utility to the body's appendix; that part of the prerevolutionary business community whose survival serves as evidence of a "mixed economy."

*Somocista*: the name commonly used for anyone who suggests that communism might not be the best form of government for Nicaragua; also a legal term whose application to any person allows the government to legally confiscate his property and personal assets.

*Taxi*: a car that looks like it is taking a vacation from a demolition derby. The

owners are actually waiting for spare parts to appear at the government parts depot. Visitors do not have to worry about a taxi breaking down on a long trip since the government will not let them leave their home town limits any day except Sunday.

*Unions (independent)*: capitalist workers' organizations whose economic self-interest leads them to "separate themselves from the collective interest . . . because they do not see the whole picture with a patriotic conscience" (Minister of Labor).

*Winter*: one of the two seasons in Nicaragua, being the dry season when the temperature usually hovers near 100 degrees and when the country's failing pumps leave people without water two to five days a week. Summer is the rainy season by the end of which there is a little more water in the reservoirs but no more parts for the pumps.

*Wallace Kaufman travels frequently in Latin America.*

## Letter From the Heartland

by Jane Greer

### What Ever Happened to Basket Weaving?

I try to be a calm and charitable person. But just when I have some of my smaller base urges under control—my flippancy, my latent cynicism—I trip in some new droppings of those sincere, well-meaning U.S. citizens whose rhetoric can't be distinguished from the Kremlin's, and am freshly undone. This time the Boy Scouts and Camp Fire, Inc., have sabotaged my resolve: I grow reckless with despair at such folks.

Let me say first that, judging by their handbooks, the Girl Scouts are as innocent as when I was one. They do not appear to deserve mention here. It's the Boy Scouts and Camp Fire persons (no longer is membership restricted to those of the female persuasion) who have bought—lock, stock, and loaded barrel—the peacenik point of view.

The Boy Scouts are by far the lesser

of the two evils. To their credit, they don't once talk about the "arms race" in their handbook for the "Citizenship in the World" badge. In their discussion of different types of government, they start out straightforwardly enough on democracy and even begin well when they get to communism: "Communism is both an economic system and a political system. In these countries, political power lies in the hands of relatively few. Opposition to government is severely limited and there are few individual rights."

But did you know that:

—"Central planning is the chief feature of communism"?

—"Cuba is the only communist nation in the Western Hemisphere"? (This, in a handbook claiming to be a 1985 printing of a 1984 revision.)

—"Tension and conflict arise between democratic nations and communist nations because their ways of life are based on different *ideologies*"?

—"The aim of communism is the equal distribution of goods and wealth"?

There is no mention of communism's imperative atheism, which, since "A Scout is reverent," surprises me. And the Boy Scouts also wear green blinders (or are they red?) when examining "military dictatorships": "Examples of countries ruled by a military dictatorship are Libya, Ethiopia, Afghanistan, and Chile."

Maddening as this is, the *correct* parts are perhaps a beginning of enlightenment. We can't give our kids the kind of history books we proffer now and expect them to swallow whole the *real* truth of the world; they need it in little doses. This is especially true if, as the Camp Fire handbook "In Pursuit of Peace" claims, "Young people are crying out for a chance to interact with caring adults who are not afraid to admit that they are scared, too."

Here are some examples of what Camp Fire, Inc., obviously thinks is wrongful, counterproductive thought expressed by misled "adolescents recently interviewed about war, peace, and nuclear issues":