

## DIALOG

# Free speech is often a cover for issue of property rights

THIS IS OUR MISSION— WE WILL RUN AN OPERATION AGAINST NICARAGUA THAT VIOLATES U.S. LAW

WE WILL KEEP THE AMERICAN PUBLIC IN THE DARK ABOUT OUR ACTIVITIES



WE WILL BRING TO THE NICARAGUAN PEOPLE THE NATIONAL GUARD THEY JUST THREW OUT

DO WE HAVE A CODE NAME?

PROJECT DEMOCRACY



WASSERMAN  
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By Saul Landau

**A**S IS FREQUENTLY THE case in his reporting, John Judis (*ITT*, Jan. 25) misses the point. Or I should say points. In his reference to my article in *Socialist Review* (September), he claims I dismissed criticism of Nicaragua's lack of political freedom. He then bunches me into a category called "these leftists." First, I was trying to ex-

plain the dynamics behind revolutionary processes, and clarify the obvious point that when revolutions redistribute property they must also redistribute power, and that the issue of property rights is often disguised behind "free speech" issues. Further, Judis ignores the fact that Nicaragua is at war and that the war is sponsored by the CIA. If not for that backing, the Nicaraguan political struggle would not necessarily take an armed struggle form, which in turn forces resort to repressive measures—as it would in any society.

The Sandinistas have opened up their society far more than even its harsh so-called left critics could have imagined. A British Labour Party report called *Kissinger's Kingdom?* cites the remarkable openness of the society and comments that Nicaraguan press censorship is far less severe than the ones imposed by Her Majesty's government during the Falklands war, and by the U.S. during the Grenada operation. In Nicaragua, the items that are censored are posted on a wall for all who care to read them, and are mailed to all the embassies in Managua.

## Even so, it's a basic socialist principle

By John Judis

**S**AUL LANDAU DOES discount ("dismiss" is his word) any criticism of Nicaragua's lack of freedom by distorting and exaggerating what I wrote: I did not "assume there is no free speech" in Nicaragua, nor ignore "the fact that Nicaragua is at war," nor simply apply "American standards of civil liberties" to Nicaragua. When I said Nicaragua had "close ties" to the Soviet Union, I was referring to political, not economic, ties. If trade determined political affinity, then France and West Germany would, indeed, have close ties to the Soviet Union. And my use of the term "these leftists" was simply meant to distinguish Landau's viewpoint from that of the Carnegie authors, some of whom are also leftists.

The Carnegie position was that the Sandinistas jeopardized the Nicaraguan revolution (which was *not* a socialist revolution) by adhering to a rigidly pro-

Soviet foreign policy (to the extent of establishing relations with Taiwan but not China and publishing only Tass' or *Prensa Latina's* reports on Poland in their newspaper), by trying to overmanage the mixed Nicaraguan economy and by suppressing or harassing their political opponents at home.

They argued that the Sandinistas could best meet the threat of a CIA-backed Somocista counterrevolution by opening the political process at home and coming to terms with Eden Pastora's non-CIA, non-Somocista opposition forces. I ended my description of the Carnegie position with a question rather than an answer: is it possible, contrary to Landau *et al.*, that the Sandinistas risk more by continuing to throttle their opposition at home than by acceding to the opposition's demand for full civil liberties and elections and by negotiating with Pastora?

Landau and those Sandinistas (now presumably in a minority) who opposed elections could be right in this respect: that in present conditions full political freedoms would simply accelerate the counterrevolution. But I hope they are

not right. While I do not believe every society should have a Congress and President and a Republican and Democratic parties, I do hold, with that great American jurist Rosa Luxembourg, that the democratic political process, of which multi-party elections are an integral part, is an essential means of political education and can provide a "powerful corrective" to the "innate shortcomings of social institutions," whether in Managua, Moscow or Cedar Rapids.

Landau's contention that the "class struggle" justifies political repression (which appears to emanate from transposing Marx and Lenin's concept of the dictatorship of the proletariat to semi-developed Central America) deserves a lengthier discussion than I can afford in a Dialog response. A few brief comments: first, even if the demand for political democracy were simply a pretext for the restoration of lands and businesses, that would not justify by itself a revolutionary leadership's rejection of those demands; the Sandinistas could accede to those demands from either expediency (taking the wind out of their opponents' sails) or principle. Second, the demand for democratic rights in Nicaragua cannot be so reduced. The opposition to the Sandinistas includes Pastora's forces, Miskito Indians, various orders of the Church and small merchants and business people as well as large exporters and former *latifundistas* hankering for the *ancien regime*. Third, the Sandinistas' success will not depend on their winning or re-

The critics of all the socialist revolutions, like Ronald Radosh and John Judis, place their priorities on abstractions that they do not analyze. Radosh spent a few days in Nicaragua and called for support of the dissidents. Judis assumes that there is no free speech. Neither of them seems concerned with a serious study of the facts or the victims of bombing, kidnappings, rapes and massive destruction that is a result of the CIA backed war.

Is it not a bit strange that the most vocal advocates of "free speech" in Nicaragua are the very people who have lost their property and privilege? The "private sector" and its newspaper, *La Prensa*, the upper class Catholic officials and the wealthy businessmen and bankers all attack the Sandinistas for denying free speech. It might inspire a reporter writing for a socialist newspaper to look beneath those claims for the real interests.

Nothing I have written means that I don't think free speech is important. It is. It is also important to examine the issue substantively and not simply classify "these leftists" as somehow beneath the level of reason and right.

Finally, Judis reports on the Sandinistas' "close ties" with the Soviet Union. This is baffling. The level of trade between West Germany or France and the Soviets is immense. Does this make ties "close"? The level of aid and trade with Cuba certainly merits the description "close." By contrast, the Sandinistas have closer ties with the West. Sixty percent of Nicaraguan aid since July 1979 has come from non-socialist countries. Sweden has recently doubled its aid. The point that Judis misses is that if the West responded by aiding Nicaragua more, the Sandinistas would not be forced to turn to the Soviets. It is precisely through Western aid that Nicaragua can remain non-aligned and the issues facing her people can be contained in the North-South and not the East-West context. Judis applies the Cold War criteria and measures emerging nations not by the realities of their lives, but by American standards of civil liberties and closeness to the Soviet Union.

This is unworthy of one of the few socialist newspapers in the U.S. *In These Times'* reporters have an obligation to be different from AP, UPI and *Washington Post* journalists, and offer a more ample context for readers so that they can understand rather than just react to world events. Labelings like "these leftists" and measuring by the above standards hardly do justice to American socialism in thought or practice.

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solving the "class struggle" but upon their ability to manage it, that is, to rule within the context of a mixed economy and political pluralism.

Let me say—to avoid misunderstanding—that I firmly oppose American intervention in Nicaragua, no matter what direction the Sandinista regime takes. Landau and I are not arguing about American foreign policy, but about freedom and revolution in Nicaragua and, by extension, those other countries whose leadership identifies itself as "Marxist-Leninist." Our disagreement is about the alternatives available to those leaders in a world still dominated by American military and economic power.

*The issue is the revolutionary principle of democratic pluralism, not intervention by the U.S., which isn't justified in any circumstances.*

By Eldon Kenworthy

**“Y**OU HAVE BEEN individually selected from among the qualified voters in your state...” begins a fundraiser from the Democratic National Committee now making its third appearance among my junk mail. Part of the “ballot” is a list of 13 “critical national concerns” and the reader is asked to select those the Democratic Party should emphasize. Not one refers to Central America.

As the U.S. prepares for war in that region, most of Congress and the public are oblivious to the danger. In this vacuum the administration adeptly controls the terms of debate, presenting its latest military escalation as the reasonable, centrist thing to do. By speaking of billions and not just of millions in aid to Central America, the Kissinger Report set the context for the administration's current request for a fourfold increase in military assistance for El Salvador. The purpose of that report was to quiet those who said the administration had no policy and to provide a “bipartisan consensus” for current aims.

During March 18-25—the fourth anniversary of the assassination of Archbishop Romero by the man who may win the Salvadoran presidency that week—various religious and political organizations will again try to puncture the indifference that blankets Congress and this country. “Central America Week” couldn't be more timely, for it coincides with votes in Congress that will determine whether the military escalation accelerates.

Congress will not resist the Reagan-Kissinger “bipartisan consensus” unless it hears from its constituents. Subcommittees on Central America may balk at administration proposals to add another \$179 million in military aid to El Salvador this year and \$133 million the next—the current level being \$65 million—along with comparable increases for Honduras. But the Senate as a whole and perhaps the House could find it expedient to let the president have his way.

This is a critical moment, then, to communicate what is happening in Central America where and when one can. What follows is an assessment of where the U.S. is headed, the first part examining the ongoing military escalation. Next week I will review the prospects for a diplomatic solution to Central America's conflicts.

Forget the explanations. What actually has Washington been doing these past six months in Central America?

- The first U.S. military invasion in 18 years (Grenada);
- The deployment of a quarter of U.S. surface seapower to Central American and Caribbean waters;
- Thousands of U.S. troops introduced into Honduras on a semi-permanent basis to construct military facilities and to provide military training, not only for that country's army but for Nicaraguan exiles, Salvadoran troops and U.S. forces; recent U.S. government reports project 20 years of such military involvement;
- The attempt to revive Central America's NATO, CONDECA, as a regional force to be used against Nicaragua;
- The rising role of Gen. Paul Gorman, head of the U.S. military's Southern Command, to the point where U.S. ambassadors complain of his usurping their role; Gorman recently dubbed Mexico our “No. 1 security problem” due to its “policy of accommodation with its own left and international leftist interests”;
- An expanding army of Nicaraguan exiles (*contras*) equipped by Washington to attack that country from bases principally in Honduras, given more sophisticated weapons to compensate for their inability to attract popular backing inside Nicaragua;
- And finally the massive escalation in military aid proposed for El Salvador along with the hidden growth in U.S. military advisers. If successful in its current requests, this administration will have



## PERSPECTIVES

# Reagan's plan for Central America

spent \$20,000 per Salvadoran soldier by year's end.

How will these amassed military resources be used? At the highest levels the Reagan administration discusses military actions that will “turn the tide” in El Salvador and humble Nicaragua's Sandinista leaders into accepting a coalition with “democratic forces” amenable to Washington. The preferred scenario has the U.S. providing logistics for a war fought by Central Americans under a regional banner, most likely CONDECA's since the OAS shows no signs of playing along.

Until the U.S. election is behind it, however, the administration won't launch a war without a provocation credible to the U.S. public, such as a Nicaraguan attack on Honduras. *Contra* attacks and U.S. military maneuvers have sought to draw the Sandinistas into attacking Honduran or U.S. assets, thereby providing a Central American Gulf of Tonkin. So far the Nicaraguans have not taken the bait. If reelected, Reagan will be more adventurous. In the meantime, the stage for the post-election play is being set by transforming Honduras into Fort Benning South.

While U.S. strategy remains the politically-palatable one of “letting” Central American boys do the fighting, North Americans are being killed. Seven died in the Big Pine 2 maneuvers held in Honduras and 18 died in Grenada. The administration's policy places thousands of U.S. troops close to regional hotspots, while the infusion of military aid feeds those flames.

The truth is that the more military hardware Washington pours into the region, the more the conflicts expand, and the stronger the forces opposed by Washington become. Thus the current pattern can only be a holding action to carry the administration past the elections; it offers no solution in itself.

There are more Salvadoran guerrillas controlling greater portions of that country now than a year ago, despite the accumulation of U.S. military aid and a doubling of the army. Why? Partly because an army that recruits by kidnapping and that terrorizes villagers generates guerrillas. After Vietnam one would have thought our policymakers understood this. But also consider this arithmetic. The Salvadoran military outnum-

ber the guerrillas three to one. It is estimated that 30 percent of the weapons Washington gives Salvador's soldiers passes to the insurgents through black market sales or battle losses. (This is the figure cited by Sen. Patrick Moynihan, a hard-liner who, as ranking Democrat on the Senate Intelligence Committee, has access to classified CIA reports.) Thus the administration may be doing a better job of arming each guerrilla than of arming each soldier.

Turning to the other countries, we find the same counterproductive pattern. By betting on the most *Somocista* of the *contra* bands and equipping them to mount barbaric attacks on their homeland, Washington has strengthened the Sandinistas inside Nicaragua. This is the only government in the region, with the possible exception of Costa Rica, that dares to disperse arms among its people. Having given the exiles the kiss of death through association, the CIA now admits that none of the *contras* can gain enough Nicaraguan territory to establish a rival government. Stuffing these counterrevolutionary genies back into the bottle in the event of a political settlement may now be beyond Washington's power.

In Honduras, the massive infusion of U.S. military aid has doomed whatever chances that newly hatched civilian government had of bringing its military under control, as well as swamping a fragile economy.

Washington tries to achieve its purposes by equipping others to do its dirty work, but not surprisingly those others fight for their agenda, not ours, making it hard for Reagan to sell Congress on the arrangement. Recent revelations make clearer than before the link between Salvadoran death squads and leaders—present no less than former—of the military there. The land reform is unraveling, savaged by a Constituent Assembly elected through Washington's urging.

The U.S. simply is unable to create, out of money and advice, a centrist, reformist yet friendly regime when the historic moment for that possibility has passed, as it had in El Salvador by January 1981 and possibly as early as 1972. Administration efforts to legitimate by election what *does* exist in El Salvador today may issue in the crowning of Roberto d'Aubuisson, denizen of the death squad

underworld in the pay of Salvadoran exiles in Miami, making even clearer that it isn't elections that create democracies but democracies that hold meaningful elections.

Taking more decisive control over its client states might seem the solution for Washington. When tried, however, in periodic crackdowns on Guatemala and El Salvador, this strategy elicits a nationalist backlash that feeds the right wing and thus alienates Congress. The administration is caught between its two roles: leader of a democracy at home and leader of an empire to the south. Really taking charge in Central America also carries the risk of Americans being killed in numbers greater than the public will accept, for that degree of control means more Yankees in the field, not just barking orders from behind embassy walls.

The most impoverished countries may still be bought, Honduras a case in point. As long as Washington pours the money in, Honduran elites apparently will let their nation be turned into the 51st state, a proposal actually voiced in Tegucigalpa. This obviously is a solution difficult to generalize in the closing decades of the 20th century, nor one that recommends the U.S. to the rest of Latin America.

Eight billion dollars. That's what the Kissinger Report says must be spent if Washington is to prevail in Central America, a region where national products rarely top the annual sales of Woolworths. Why did the Reagan White House embrace the Report's lavish recommendations? It probably anticipated that the military component of those recommendations could be funded while most of the economic aid was “postponed” in a bipartisan effort to bring the deficit down. Still, it is amazing to witness this administration recapitulating its Democratic predecessors' tactic of throwing money at a problem that eludes conventional wisdom and White House control.

What is happening in Central America today is an escalation of U.S. military force, some of it directly controlled by Washington, much of it in the unpredictable hands of proxies. This being the case, what do our leaders say they are doing? The Reagan administration claims to be pursuing a “two track” policy: the one military, the other diplomatic. The objective, we are told, is to encourage a peaceful resolution of Central America's conflicts by using military pressure to bring the “other side” around.

This argument cannot be dismissed out of hand, for indeed the Cubans and Sandinistas have “come around” in recent months, adding further concessions to their longstanding offers to negotiate. Because the Cubans and Sandinistas have come around, we are now in a position to assess how serious Washington is about reaching a political settlement. Is the diplomatic track real or merely a cover? Tune in next week to find out.

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