

By David R. Dye

MANAGUA

DANIEL ORTEGA IS AT A CROSSROADS. TWO years after his defeat in the 1990 elections, Ortega faces important leadership challenges for the first time as head of Nicaragua's Sandinista Front (FSLN). Controversies in the party in recent weeks herald the probable emergence of distinct "right" and "left" factions, raising the specter of a division, the first since the Sandinistas' guerrilla days in the '70s.

The issue is strategy. Since the Sandinistas' exit from power, Ortega has steered the FSLN along a zigzag course that has left many of his followers confused or discontented. Throughout, the ex-president has been a vocal champion of Nicaragua's union and popular forces, seeming to sanction violent opposition to President Violeta Chamorro's government when he felt that major parts of the revolutionary legacy were in jeopardy. But Ortega has reined in these groups when their vigorous tactics appeared to threaten the country's stability or to mar the image the FSLN wants to project as a loyal, democratic opposition willing to play by peaceful rules.

The groups now emerging on Ortega's flanks want the ex-president to define himself—in radically different directions. How Ortega handles his party's ideological identity crisis will have a large bearing on the future of the FSLN and its revolutionary legacy as well as on Ortega's desire to lead the Latin American left in the '90s.

Social-democrats surface: On one side, a new "center group" has called on the FSLN to declare itself squarely in favor of "stability." That means foregoing land seizures, strikes involving factory occupations and other forms of violent popular resistance to the neoliberal economic policies of the Chamorro government. Rafael Solis, the group's most visible spokesperson, insists that "there must not be another November 9 in Nicaragua," referring to the burning of the offices of Managua's mayor by enraged Sandinistas last year. The group consists of middle-class Sandinistas, some with substantial business interests, for whom stability is a key to personal well-being.

Beyond criticizing Ortega's defense of disruptive tactics, Solis defines his group's views as moderate and "social-democratic," the first time such a position has been openly advocated in the party. Within the FSLN, social-democracy is a right-wing point of view and Ortega is known to disagree with it. But the new group reportedly enjoys behind-the-scenes support from high-ranking Sandinista legislators, including Sergio Ramirez, the former vice president.

Though small at present, a hidden factor makes the center group's challenge to Ortega potentially dramatic. As a lawyer for the Sandinista Popular Army, Solis is widely viewed as a stalking-horse for army leader Gen. Humberto Ortega, Daniel's brother. A major Sandinista goal since the elections—asserting the right of the revolutionary army to remain intact as the armed forces of a post-revolutionary and decidedly capitalist state—has by this point largely been met. But army and party interests have begun to diverge, with potentially dangerous consequences.

Home honor: On January 14, Humberto Ortega, the nemesis of the "Yanquis" during the '80s contra war, shocked many Sandinistas

Ortega feels pull from FSLN's right and left



Daniel Ortega with brother, Humberto.

by pinning the army's most prestigious medal on outgoing U.S. military attaché Col. Dennis Quinn. Other holders of the decoration responded vocally. While some politely termed the general's move a political mistake, many called him a "traitor" and a "sellout" for having had truck with the former enemy.

The general's explanation of his decision was somewhat oblique. "At times," he said, "to make people understand things that are difficult, one has to use electroshock—very strong measures designed to get them to react." The army chief went on to indicate that he wants the Sandinistas and others to understand that "confrontation and polarization"—the stock in trade of Nicaragua's post-election politics—must give way, and quickly, so that "all the country's political actors harmonize for the sake of totally consolidating peace."

Over the last few months, right-wing forces in Nicaragua have waned, with the demobilization of most of the "recontras" in February bringing a perhaps temporary but longed-for peace to many rural areas. But challenges to stability remain—in the countryside, where violent seizures of farmland are common, and in the city, where labor actions often involve the use of force.

Instability dominated talk when U.S. Secretary of State James Baker made a lightning visit to Managua January 17. Sharply criticizing the Sandinista police for failing to enforce the law as ordered by the Chamorro government, Baker warned Nicaraguans that if they expect either national or foreign investors to put their money behind 1992's expected economic takeoff, "stability and security" in the country will have to improve.

Sandinista army sources have made it clear they are taking the message very seriously and that the army will act when needed to control violent conflict and protect the property rights of all Nicaragua's citizens. To that end, the army has deployed the "recompas"—Sandinista paramilitary forces organized late last year to counter the recontras, but whom the army now appears to fear

as potential champions of poor peasants in danger of losing their lands to larger landowners. Sandinista union leaders also see a warning directed at them.

The flip side of the general's message is even more startling to Sandinistas. Bereft of new sources of equipment and training since the collapse of the Soviet camp, the army is bidding to develop a "normal institutional relationship" with the U.S. military with an

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eye toward an eventual request for assistance. Before the Pentagon responds favorably to this petition, it will extract a price from the general that may include a willingness to repress his political brethren.

The ex-president's reaction to the "center group" reflected the danger he sensed on his right. Ortega took to the radio to accuse the group of departing from the ideals of Sandino in a desire to accommodate the government. Though he avoided criticizing the army, Ortega stated bluntly that if this so-called center "preferred to be the rat's head of the government rather than the lion's tail of the Frente," its members "should seek another party—there are 21 in Nicaragua to choose from." Other party leaders immediately sought to soften Ortega's remarks to avoid the appearance of a serious rift.

The army's influence: If the army really is behind the center group, Ortega has reason to want to shore up support elsewhere in the party. But though his blast at the centrists was forceful, it failed to mollify another set of critics in the Front with different grievances. If the center group may be seen as an emerging party right, a "left" is also forming for whom Ortega's defense of lower-class Nicaraguans, far from being excessive, as the centrists claim, is not strong enough.

"I declare myself confused," said party veteran Silvio Prado. "The National Directorate [of the FSLN] appears to promote strikes at some moments, at others it terminates them." Prado is among many who criticize Ortega

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for not allowing the popular forces to fight their own battles and for subordinating their struggles to other interests of the party.

Together with other dissatisfied party members, Prado organized a forum in Managua to discuss "What Kind of Sandinista Front Do We Want?" Stretched over three evenings in February, the event marked the first time Sandinistas gathered outside established party channels to talk about basic issues, in particular, what their party is supposed to stand for.

For most of those attending, the identity crisis in the Sandinista ranks can be traced to the lack of a clear constituency. Union leader Jorge López: "We have irreconcilable class sectors in our midst, in a way different from when we were in power." People like López want the FSLN to regroup squarely around the country's popular forces—the workers, peasants, women's and youth groups that are bearing the brunt of the mass unemployment and impoverishment caused by current economic policies. For many, that means shedding middle-class elements like the "center group" whose interests lead them to seek accommodation with the Chamorro government.

Other grievances against the party leadership—and, implicitly, against Ortega—found a voice in the forum. Many blasted their leaders for a lack of ethical standards and a willingness to cover up corruption by officials of the former Sandinista government. And almost all were critical of the leadership's failure to follow through on Congress' mandates to give real decision-making power to lower-level party organs. "Nothing has changed since the Congress," said many, in effect blaming top leaders for the apathy affecting party ranks.

This popular and democratizing current in the FSLN is likely to be the more powerful challenge to the discredited "vanguardism" of the '80s. Rather than watering down the FSLN into a kind of tropical social-democracy as desired by the right, these Sandinistas are demanding the renewal of their party's revolutionary and utopian impulses. They insist that the FSLN go on being "socialist"—without having thought through clearly what terms like "socialism" and "revolution" might mean in the neoliberal '90s.


Look both ways: With the "right" and the "left" trying to extend their influence in the party ranks, Daniel Ortega is caught uncomfortably in the middle. At heart, the ex-president's sympathies probably lie with the left, which he has criticized only obliquely. Rather than embrace social-democracy, Ortega spends much time promoting alliances with more progressive Latin American groups such as Brazil's Workers Party. But he has also attempted to keep the right within the party and has moved slowly in democratizing the FSLN so as not to allow the more radical rank and file to crimp his freedom for political maneuver.

This balancing act now appears to be reaching its limit. Nicaragua's economic adjustment has begun to make the interests of the "haves" within the multi-class Sandinista Front diverge sharply from those of the "have nots." How much longer Ortega can keep the two together is an open question. If he doesn't soon jump in some direction, others may jump—out. ■

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AS THE WORLD BURNS

By W.K. Burke

 IN FEBRUARY 3, A TEAM OF NATIONAL Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) scientists held a press conference in Washington to warn that an ozone hole stretching from northern New England to northern Europe could form during the next two months. Three days later, the Senate voted 96-0 in favor of a resolution proposed by Sen. Albert Gore (D-TN) urging President Bush to accelerate the phaseout of chlorofluorocarbons (CFCs), the chemicals largely responsible for ozone depletion.

Within days, the White House announced a plan to speed the phaseout from the year 2000 to the end of 1995. It seemed that, finally, when faced with a bitter re-election campaign and a possible ozone hole over his vacation home in Kennebunkport, Maine, President Bush had acted quickly and decisively on an environmental issue.

But Bush's latest response to the ozone crisis falls far short of being the most our nation can do to stem ozone depletion. Environmentalists claim the administration's phaseout proposals contain loopholes that could allow production of some ozone-depleting chemicals well past the 1995 deadline.

The Bush phaseout "doesn't require industry to do anything more than they are already doing," says a congressional source. U.S. CFC production has dropped 40 percent in the last five years. Equipment for recycling the compounds is selling briskly, and many electronics companies have completely stopped using CFCs as solvents. "Nobody wants to be the last one off the sauce," says Dave Doniger, an attorney with the Natural Resources Defense Council (NRDC).

But the Bush phaseout requires only a 10 percent reduction in CFC production in the next year. In effect, Bush is encouraging industry to take one last round of profits from CFCs. Unfortunately, recent findings suggest that even the most ambitious CFC phaseout plans may not be enough to avert ecological disaster.

Going, going... Last month, the NASA team warned that the ozone layer over the Arctic and northern portions of Europe and North America could be depleted this spring by 1 percent each day. Their warning was prompted by the detection of large amounts of ozone-destroying chemicals in the upper reaches of the Arctic atmosphere.

Ozone is oxygen with an extra atom attached to each molecule. What is called the ozone layer is simply a small amount of ozone in the stratosphere, the region of the atmosphere from 10 to 30 miles above the Earth's surface. At the high, cold altitudes of the stratosphere, ozone is destroyed quickly, but it forms quickly as well.

So normally, the amount of ozone present stays relatively stable. This layer absorbs much of the sun's ultraviolet radiation.

An ozone hole over the Northern Hemisphere would expose unprecedented numbers of people to excessive amounts of ultraviolet radiation, which causes cataracts and skin cancer in humans. Large doses of ultraviolet radiation also hinder plant growth.

But the possibility of a short-term ozone hole over the Arctic was not the worst news of the month. "We already knew there was an ozone depletion of 4 or 5 percent over the Northern Hemisphere and that [this depletion] would probably double over the next decade," says Michael Oppenheimer, a scientist for the Environmental Defense Fund. "That's terrible news right there. But in addition, some scientists believe there is a potential for even higher depletion."

So far, the worst ozone depletion observed has taken place over Antarctica. At the pole, stratospheric clouds form during the frigid winters that encourage the formation of chlorine monoxide, a by-product of the breakdown of CFCs. A swirling winter wind system, known as the polar vortex, prevents the stratospheric clouds from dissipating. Chlorine monoxide accumulates within the clouds and attacks the stratospheric ozone during the brief periods of winter sunlight. This creates the ozone hole, a decline of up to 40 percent in the ozone layer, which ends as warmer weather returns and breaks up the southern polar vortex.

This winter, when the NASA-led team discovered record levels of chlorine monoxide over the Arctic, they called the press conference warning that a similar ozone hole could form over the Northern Hemisphere this year.

But that isn't the only bad news. While it is by no means certain that an ozone hole will form from Kennebunkport to Copenhagen this spring, other evidence of ozone depletion and its effects is accumulating at a frightening rate. Shortly after Bush presented his plan to the Senate, an article in *Scientific American* highlighted the research of Susan Solomon of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA). In 1989, Solomon published a paper arguing that volcanic eruptions could increase ozone depletion by propelling sulfur compounds into the stratosphere that would increase current ozone depletion rates. Recent NASA data suggests Solomon could be right.

Since September, NASA's Upper Atmosphere Research Satellite observed that ozone levels in tropical skies affected by the eruption of the Philippines' Mt. Pinatubo were 10 percent lower than any previous tropical measurements. The satellite also

found regions of thinned ozone stretching north and south from the tropics. Solomon believes the clouds from Pinatubo could cause an ozone loss of more than 30 percent in tropical regions this spring.

"That is not a [conclusive] finding," says Dave Fahey, a NOAA scientist. Fahey cautioned that it is too soon to conclude that Pinatubo or any future volcanoes will accelerate ozone depletion at mid-latitudes. Still, these findings trouble other researchers, who note that humans loft large amounts of sulfur compounds into the atmosphere from coal-fired power plants. And Fahey warns that none of the recent findings are reassuring. "Nothing we saw reduces our concern," says Fahey. "It all increases our concern."

Dead stop: Even if all production of ozone-depleting chemicals were ended today, it still might not be enough to avert catastrophe. Since CFCs can linger in the strato-

sphere from 50 to 100 years before releasing all their chlorine atoms to take part in the ozone-depletion cycle, significant ozone depletion is likely to continue for at least a century no matter what actions are taken.

"The potential exists in the atmosphere over our heads to see much, much larger amounts of ozone depletion than we have yet predicted," says Joel Levy, a scientist who tracks research on the ozone layer, the Global Change Division of the Environmental Protection Agency's Atmospheric and Indoor Air Program. "The implication is that the chemistry that occurs [in the stratosphere] could have a much more dramatic effect than what has been predicted. That we'll have to wait and see."

How much harm can ozone loss cause? Without a stratospheric ozone layer, life on Earth would virtually disappear. EPA has estimated that current rates of ozone depletion will cause 200,000 deaths

