4   The CDS as Integrator

The transformation of political culture in Nicaragua is occuring through a vast number of channels. Education, the media, official propaganda, and the mass organizations all play an important role in changing the hitherto dispossessed and politically disenfranchised Nicaraguan into a well-informed participant in his political system--in a word, into a citizen. By far the most important of these institutions in terms of participation and in terms of breadth of activity are the CDSs. Within the CDSs, Nicaraguans are striving to make their interpretations of the promises of *Sandinismo* a reality.

The CDSs are transforming Nicaraguan political culture in many ways. At a variety of levels, they provide Nicaraguans with something they have historically been denied: a sense of national and local community. The ways in which the CDSs promote national and local community and the extent to which this is important in the transformation of Nicaraguan political culture will be the subject of this chapter.

Within local and national communities, the CDSs provide

something else that has been traditionally absent in Nicaraguan society: a forum for the public debate of national and local issues. This has led to a dynamic tension within the CDSs between popular expectations and everyday reality, and between the ambiguous expectations of the FSLN that the CDSs will support the revolution and the reality of their role as envisioned by Nicaraguans. This tension and its effect on the transformation of Nicaraguan political culture is the subject of the following chapter.

Origin and Structure

One of the most significant characteristics of the CDSs is their spontaneous and autonomous formation. Many local CDSs trace their origin to the destruction of the earthquake that levelled most of Managua in 1972. When it became apparent that Somoza was pocketing the vast sums of international aid that began arriving, many *barrios* spontaneously organized grass-roots Civil Defense Committees (CDCs) to coordinate rescue and relief operations. As one resident of Ciudad Sandino recalls,

> after the earthquake, someone well respected in the
> barrio would call a meeting and organize volunteers to
> remove rubble, bury the dead, and make sure that food
> was available. Soon they would call themselves a CDC
> and begin communicating with other CDCs.[1]

By mid-1973, a loose network of approximately 3,000 CDCs existed in Nicaragua, coordinating small reconstruction projects, supplying medical aid, and protecting neighborhoods.[2]

From their experience in relief operations in 1972 and 1973,

CDCs began to realize the political potential of mass organization. For the first time ever, Nicaraguan workers and peasants were mobilized for political purposes. They organized protests against the Somoza regime, protected their neighborhoods from the marauding National Guard, and gradually grew closer to the hitherto insignificant FSLN. Inevitably, Somoza took a dim view of such developments. Throughout the mid-1970's, CDC leaders were harassed, arrested, even tortured publicly by the National Guard.[3]

The gradually developing relationship between the CDCs and the FSLN was an important one. Before 1972, the FSLN had had very little success in organizing and recruiting within the urban population. This was due primarily to harsh National Guard repression, worker attempts at reform rather than structural change, and the difficulty of communication between rural and urban areas. The CDCs, however, provided communication, medical support, and recruits to the FSLN. Lino Real, coordinator of CDSs in Ciudad Sandino recalls that

> during the fighting in 1978 and 1979, FSLN fighters would arrive at CDC member's homes already knowing their names and what sort of aid they could expect. The neighborhood was able to provide them with food, shelter, and intelligence on the whereabouts of Guard patrols.[4]

After the revolution, most of the *somocista* regional and local officials mimicked their *jefe* and fled their communities and the nation, often taking with them whatever funds remained in their charge, destroying documents, and sabotaging offices. The CDCs were often the only organized group in a community able to fill the

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resulting administrative vacuum. The CDCs were renamed Sandinista Defense Committees (CDSs) and established on every block and in every village throughout Nicaragua. Because of their existence throughout the country and their grass-roots nature, the FSLN employed them to conduct a census and registration of all Nicaraguan citizens. Similarly, it relied on the CDSs to oversee minor reconstruction projects and distribute scarce food items, and encouraged them to organize around-the-clock neighborhood security patrols.

Today, there are approximately 15,000 CDS block organizations with between 35 to 45 members each.[5] These block committees report to *barrio* committees which are subordinate to zonal, and finally, district level committees. Each block committee elects a coordinator, a secretary of health, of commerce, of propaganda, of provisions, and of security. Corresponding offices exist at the higher levels of CDS organization, but only those of the zonal and district levels are salaried positions.

The CDSs are unique among the mass organizations in Nicaragua in that membership is based solely on residency in the jurisdiction of a particular CDS. While the other mass organizations are organized by profession, sex, or age, the CDSs admit any resident of a block over the age of 15. This makes the CDSs by far the largest of the mass organizations with over 600,000 members--40% of the adult population.[6] Furthermore, the influence of the CDS extends beyond its membership. Since CDSs regulate commercial licenses, zoning laws, ration cards, and serve a variety of other administrative

functions, no Nicaraguan citizen is completely removed from his CDS.

The CDSs are also unique in terms of the size of their sphere of activity. As non-sectoral mass organizations, the CDSs concern themselves with any issue that is of relevance to their community. Apart from their official duties regulating commercial licenses, dispensing ration cards, organizing security patrols, and participating in health and educational campaigns, the CDSs consider problems ranging from the reception of dignitaries to the solution of domestic quarrels.

The breadth of their role in Nicarguan society also makes the CDSs the most controversial of the mass organizations. Critics of the CDSs argue that they are para-statal watch groups which give the FSLN "eyes and ears" in every block in Nicaragua. They focus on the "revolutionary vigilance" carried out by the CDSs and list examples where CDS coordinators have withheld ration cards for political reasons. Opposition parties in the National Assembly have even called for their dissolution.[7]

While the FSLN does indeed maintain close ties with the CDSs, the charge that they are co-opted agents of the FSLN is without foundation and belies the considerable autonomy maintained by the CDSs. Abuses of CDS power have been problematic in the past and continue to be so today, but these abuses are attributable more to the greed and overzealousness of individuals than to FSLN manipulation. Indeed, in 1982, the FSLN acknowledged that abuses occurred within the CDSs and councilled CDS leaders to avoid them in the future.

The CDS as Integrator

Perhaps the most important role played by the CDSs in the transformation of Nicaraguan political culture is their role as integrator. In this capacity, the CDSs perform a function unprecedented in Nicaraguan history; the integration of the Nicaraguan into meaningful and active communities at the national and local levels. Integration into community is a crucial aspect of the development of a participatory political culture. Huntington writes that "No aspect of political culture is more significant than the scope and intensity of the identification of the people with the political system."[8] Without a sense of participation in a variety of communities, their is no sense of context in which political action should occur.

Another crucial aspect of the integration of Nicaraguans into communities is the identity these communitites provide the individual. According to Verba, "Perhaps the most crucial political belief involves that of political identity. Of what political unit or units does the individual consider himself a member, and how deep and unambiguous is the sense of identification?"[9] It is precisely this identification with political units that the CDSs seek to foster. Specifically, their efforts to identify the individual with the nation and national heritage of Nicaragua provide the members of the popular classes with a sense of participation in a national struggle of development.

Integration into National Community

Integrating Nicaraguans into a national community is a more difficult task than it might seem to be. Vestiges of regionalism continue to shake the nation's unity, most notably the perennial conflict between the Pacific regions and the Atlantic coast, but also parochialism based on the uneven socioeconomic development of the Pacific plains region. At a more abstract level, the Nicaraguan peasant and working classes are hesitant to accept the mantle of Nicaraguan nationality because of the anti-popular and anti-nationalist heritage of what they have always known as Nicaragua. Most Nicaraguans will explain that until 1979, Nicaragua was a family run business in which it was the people's duty to produce uncomplainingly or to die. Nicaraguan history was a history of oppression, dispossession, and disenfranchisement. National flags were most in evidence mounted atop National Guard troop carriers or on the sides of the Air Force jets that bombed the nation throughout 1979.

The CDSs strive to integrate Nicaraguans into the national community in a variety of ways. The CDSs' national hierarchy and their working relationship with the FSLN serve to identify the peasant or urban worker with the Nicaraguan nation by diminishing the historical rift between the roles of the ruling elite and the popular classes, and by establishing certain grounds of commonality shared by Nicaraguans everywhere. Similarly, the many projects undertaken by the CDSs--projects ranging from street cleaning to participation in national vaccination campaigns--give individual

Nicaraguans a sense of active participation in the development of their own country. The CDSs also employ all the trappings of patriotism--symbols, flags, slogans, and mythology--to identify the modern Nicaragua with which the popular classes are familiar with the Nicaraguan tradition of resistance to oppression, mainly in the heritage of Sandinismo.

With the exceptions of the army and the FSLN itself, there are few institutions in Nicaragua that are as self-consciously patriotic as the CDSs. In older nations with longer national histories, the various trappings of patriotism tend to have a limited appeal and are most revered in times of national holiday or crisis. Among the Nicaraguan popular classes, however, I noted an almost religious reverence for things patriotic--a reverence born of the tremendous sacrifices endured by the Nicaraguan people for their nation. As one resident of Ciudad Sandino said,

> most Nicaraguans have family members who died for their country before it was even a country. To a foreigner, we seem obsessed with our flags and slogans, but remember that only now have we succeeded in winning them for ourselves.[10]

A visitor to any CDS office in Nicaragua is immediately struck by the clutter of national symbols that fills the office. Most offices have a meeting room dominated by the blue and white Nicaraguan flag and the black and red flag of the FSLN. Even in the most insignificant block offices, national maps showing political borders, population density, and economic data cover the walls. Often, one wall is devoted entirely to pictures of Sandino or of the FSLN national directorate.

A sense of national coommonality is promoted by a variety of rituals which are standard in CDSs throughout Nicaragua. All CDS meetings open with the singing of the national anthem and spirited repetitions of whatever slogan the CDS leadership or the FSLN has promoted. In the summer of 1987, *"Aqui no se rinde nadie!"* ("Here nobody yields!) was ubiquitous, printed atop CDS letterhead, spray painted by the CDSs on walls and buildings, and used as a greeting within the CDSs.

On July 19, the day of *"el triumfo"*, the CDSs are at their most patriotic. The CDSs of every *barrio* organize huge neighborhood *fiestas* replete with all the pomp and circumstance of Nicaraguan patriotism. Revelers sing revolutionary songs, break piñatas, and drink barrels of the national Victoria beer. At the center of the these festivals are the veterans from the revolution and the war in the north. Often wounded or missing an arm or a leg, these men are given the positions of honor and called upon to make speeches.

Attendance at these festivals, or even at a weekly CDS meeting, impresses the visitor with the extent to which patriotism is a novel force in Nicarguan social life, and the extent to which it foments social solidarity. The consensus on nationalism that bound the coalition of opposition to Somoza continues to bind Nicaraguans in a sense of mutual pursuit. In this regard, a distinction must be made between nationalist feeling and support for the FSLN. The ubiquity of FSLN flags, slogans, and propaganda in the CDSs hides the rifts that exist in the CDSs over the course of the revolution. It is not uncommon for a CDS to be split evenly between FSLN supporters and

critics. Indeed, most CDS members are not FSLN party members.[11] Nonetheless, underlying these differences of opinion is a strong consensus that Nicaragua is now a true nation with a proud, if somewhat limited, national heritage. As Ricardo Telez, a CDS member from Masachapa put it, "we may still argue, but we argue on our own terms, in our own country."[12]

The use of patriotism to integrate Nicaraguans into a national community is, albeit important, largely symbolic. The CDSs play a far more concrete role in this integration in the various ways in which they diminish what has historically been one of the major obstacles to the identification of the popular classes with the nation: the dramatic rift between the national elite and the popular classes. This process, which corresponds to *Sandinismo's* tenet of popular democracy, occurrs in a number of ways. In a literal sense, the CDSs diminish the rift by providing a means of communication between the people and the government and vice-versa. In a more figurative sense, the CDSs diminish the rift by blurring what have been the traditional roles of the national elite and the popular classes. In other words, the CDSs provide Nicaraguans with experience in finding their own solutions to local issues without turning to the central political apparatus.

The connection between the CDSs and the central government in Managua occurrs at three levels. Formally, the connection was established by the participation of delegates from the mass organizations in the Council of State, Nicaragua's legislative body prior to the 1984 formation of the National Assembly. The CDS district

committees elected nine members to represent them in the 47 member Council.[13] Less formal connection occurs within the FSLN. Most district and zonal level CDS coordinators tend to be active members of the FSLN and well-connected to the FSLN National Directorate. Finally, direct connection between the national leadership and the people is maintained by occasional *"cara al pueblo"* (face the people) meetings organized by *barrio* CDSs. In these meetings, citizens are invited to ask questions of a visiting member of the national leadership.

It is naturally somewhat difficult to determine exactly how well the lines of communication provided by the CDS between the national elite and the popular classes actually works. In terms of political culture, however, the important thing is that Nicaraguans believe that there exist channels of communication between themselves and those who make national policy. Even non-CDS members I interviewed in Nicaragua agreed that both regional and national government is considerably more accessible to the population than they were under Somoza.

This is a belief unprecedented in Nicaraguan history, and held in the same sort of reverence that Nicaraguans hold their national symbols and patriotic displays. The impression Nicaraguans have that lines of communication exist between them and their leaders makes them willing to participate in the political process. Local and national problems are discussed at CDS meetings with the expectation that solutions will reach higher levels in the CDS hierarchy. At one meeting in Pueblo Nuevo, I observed an old man

who did not belong to his local CDS wait through the whole business of the meeting to propose a way in which the Northern highway (which is adjacent to Pueblo Nuevo) might be made more secure from counterrevolutionary attack.

Finally, the CDSs strive to integrate Nicaraguans into the national community through their participation in national development campaigns. Local CDSs have been instrumental in the success of a variety of national educational, health, and housing campaigns. In mid-February of 1980, for example, Nicaragua's CDSs, in concert with the ministry of health, organized a polio vaccination campaign that vaccinated 80 percent of the nation's children under the age of five.[14]

Apart from their obvious development value, the grass-roots participation in these campaigns provided by the CDSs makes the individual Nicaraguan feel like he is personally responsible for the improvement and development of his own nation. No longer are national level pursuits the sole realm of the national elite. As one CDS leader put it, "projects like the Literacy Crusade and the health campaigns make the people understand that they are the force that will shape the development of Nicaragua."[15]

Integration into Local Community

In integrating the Nicaraguan individual into a national community, the CDSs perform a historically unprecedented task. The same may be said for their efforts to integrate Nicaraguans into local community, but in a more limited sense. Prior to the 1970's

Nicaraguans were integrated into their local communities only to the extent that they maintained relationships with a few local acquaintances and family members. Because of Somoza's repression, this integration never manifested itself in any organized fashion until the devastation of the 1972 earthquake prompted the formation of the CDCs. The CDSs, drawing on this heritage as grass-roots self-help groups, seek to make membership in a local community meaningful. This is accomplished primarily in two ways: first, through community development projects designed to encourage the participation of the entire community, and second, through their attempts to institutionalize heretofore informal social activities and customs.

Because of their broad mandate to serve the community, most *barrio* level CDSs maintain ongoing development projects that seek to improve the *barrio* with little cost and wide participation. Of all the CDS activities I observed in Nicaragua, these were most successful in giving Nicaraguans the sense that they belonged to a community and that their ideas and participation helped the national and local well-being. Such projects are typified by two projects I was able to study closely: an effort to improve sewage and drainage facilities in Masaya and the formation of a transportation cooperative in Masachapa.

Masaya

Masaya, a small city approximately thirty kilometers south of Managua,[16] has always had difficulties with sewage disposal. When

the town was smaller, the individual sewage cisterns beneath each house presented no real threat to the environment or health of the city. In the last six years, however, the town has nearly doubled in size due to the flow of refugees coming out of the war-torn mountains to the north.[17] Because of the rise in population, the antiquated sewage disposal system was unable to process Masaya's sewage. By 1985, local streams had become polluted and were no longer available for use in washing or as a source of potable water. The adjacent Lake Santiago had lost its fish population and swimming there was not permitted. Similarly, the roads became pocked with holes filled with untreated sewage water. The local CDS estimates that these conditions were responsible for a fourfold increase in the number of gastrointestinal illnesses in Masaya.[18]

By 1986, "*agua negro*" (sewage water) had become the main concern of the local CDSs. When Raul Mendoza, the coordinator of the CDSs in Masaya met in Managua with representatives of the Ministry of the Interior in March of 1986, he was told that the government could spare no resources for the improvement of sewage facilities in Masaya. He was given the name of an American ecumenical church group that had expressed interest in assisting in a development project in Nicaragua and a manual on sewage disposal. Mendoza told the various barrio CDS leaders that the sewage problem was in their hands and that they could expect no help from the government.

Spurred by the increasing pollution of the lake adjacent to their *barrio*, the CDS of *barrio* number nine decided to contact the

American ecumenical church group. The church group expressed willingness to collect funds for the necessary piping if the CDS could plan and install a sewage system. Two months later, the *barrio* committee met to draft a plan which would pipe *barrio* number nine's sewage five kilometers to the northern highway where it could be hooked into the sewage treatment system of a local industrial complex. The overseer of the complex, Carlos Estre, had earlier agreed to accept 2000 gallons of effluence per day.[19]

It became clear that the success of *barrio* number nine's *agua negro* project depended on the mobilization of the local community. On July 7, 1986, a special *barrio* level CDS meeting was held which drew approximately 500 residents of the barrio.[20] The meeting lasted five hours, during which each block committee selected a week in which its members would dig the trenches necessary to construct the pipeline. In all, 17 block committees promised a total of 6000 man-hours.[21]

Digging began in early August of 1986. As the CDS leaders had expected, participation was slow to materialize. In the first three months of digging, less than 500 meters of trenches were dug with participation rates of less than 35 percent of what had been promised.[22] As the community realized that the project would actually occur, participation rates nearly tripled. In the second three months of the project 1600 meters of trenches were dug.[23]

Pedro Fornos, who owns a small artisan shop directly adjacent the trench site, accounts for the change in participation by pointing out that the community had never really believed that it could happen

and underestimated its collective ability:

> For years, politicians and various groups would come
> through here with ideas on how to improve things, but
> nothing ever happened. This made people skeptical of
> the *agua negro* dig. Once everyone saw that it actually
> was going to happen, they realized that they themselves
> would make it happen, and everyone joined in.[24]

By the spring of 1987, an unmistakeable sense of community pride in the *agua negro* project fueled participation. Fornos recalls that

> the CDS meetings became very lively as members tried
> to convince each other to spend more time on the
> project. At one point, when a man said he had to stay
> home to care for his sick wife, three women volunteered
> to look after her while he dug.[25]

Informal competition arose between the various block committees to see which block could dig the longest trenches in a one week period. By August of 1987, digging was complete and technical advisers had been secured to assist with the various hook-ups. Problems with the delivery of piping has held up the installation of the system.

It was clear to me during my time in Masaya that the CDS of *barrio* number nine had been responsible for the development of an altogether new sense of community and social solidarity in the neighborhood. This sense of community had various characteristics: pride in the ability of the community to get things done, a willingness to sacrifice personal time to the greater good, and an ability to organize and work together to achieve a solution to a common problem. Many of the participants in the project say that they worked together with and established relationships with people in the

community they had never known. Felipe Monge, the owner of a small farm outside of Masaya, said that "even in a town as small as Masaya, you know your family and some friends. Because of the organization of the project many new friends were made."[26]

Masachapa

The village of Masachapa lies on the Pacific Ocean 30 kilometers east of Managua. Prior to 1979, this village of some 700 people was economically supported by its small scale fishing industry, the services it provided a nearby military base and oil terminal, and the weekly influx of beach-seeking vacationers from Managua.[27] The district-level CDS estimates that prior to the revolution, approximately 43 percent of Masachapa's working population was involved in fishing, while 30 percent of the working population worked in some kind of transportation--the transport of fish and oil to Managua, various transportation services for the military base, and transportation of vactioners to and from Managua.[28]

The prevalence and nature of these two industries set the stage for a serious political rift after the revolution. Transportation workers, who had been organized in a Somoza-approved cooperative and whose livelihood depended on the military base, the oil terminal, and the demand for transportation to and from Managua, were severely affected by the sharp decline in demand for transportation accompanying the destruction of the oil terminal, the closing of the military base, and the sharp decline in demand for fish that occured in late 1979.[29] Fishermen, on the other hand, although they suffered

a decline in income after the revolution, owned the means of their own sustenance and were not threatened with starvation.

The political consequences of this change in economic conditions were severe. Transportation workers as a whole became bitterly opposed to the FSLN. Throughout the early 1980's, many left Masachapa hoping for work elsewhere, and according to local residents, many younger transport workers left Masachapa in 1983 to join the counterrevolutionary resistance in Costa Rica.[30] One resident recalls that "many of our truckers were so set against the Front that we feared the army would move into Masachapa."[31]

Fishermen, in contrast, were consistent, if somewhat lukewarm, in their support for the revolution. Apart from the absence of any threat to their economic survival, many hoped to participate in FSLN-proposed fishing coooperatives, and saw the closing of the nearby National Guard base as a boon to their town which had so often been plagued by the harrassment of off-duty Guardsmen. Consequently, many fishermen played an active role in the reorganization of the political institutions in Masachapa after July of 1979. When the CDSs were reorganized in 1983, six of nine barrio coordinators were fishermen.

In November of 1985, a block-level CDS coordinator proposed that a transportation cooperative be formed in Masachapa that would transport Masachapa's fish to Managua at favorable rates and provide transportation for a cement factory ten kilometers east of Masachapa. As the block coordinator recalls,

I realized there was a market for fish in Managua, but

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that our fishermen could not afford the trucking rates charged by the independent truckers. At the same time, there were unemployed truckers in Masachapa. If we could use them to move our fish to Managa we could all make a little more, and if the truckers were organized, they could work out a deal to move cement for the factory.[32]

By the summer of 1985, the transportation cooperative had been set up under the aegis of the local CDS. Economically, the project had an inauspicious beginning when the cement factory preferred to employ truckers from Managua than the truckers from the Masachapa cooperative. Nonetheless, the income of fisherman increased an estimated 17 percent while demand for transportation increased 27 percent.[33]

In terms of the integration of the various sectors of the Masachapa population, the project was an unmitigated success. The process of negotiating the terms of the cooperative and of the relationship between the cooperative and local fishermen brought fishermen and transportation workers together to work for a common goal. As one trucker active in the cooperative recalls:

> During our meetings at the CDSs, it became clear to us that we could put aside our political differences to try to work together on some things. It was surprising for many of us to learn that the community cared about its collective well-being more than about the speeches of the Sandinistas, and I think that many of them [fishermen] were surprised to learn that we were not anti-revolutionary *somocistas*.[34]

Similarly, just as surprise in the efficacy of collective action in Masaya had led to an increase in community-consciousness, so it did in Masachapa. Since the CDSs had provided the forum in which the

cooperative was formed, many local residents began to see them as the most effective political groups available to them. After 1985, the CDSs of Masachapa saw a two-fold increase in the level of their membership. As one block-level coordinator recalls,

> before the transportation project, we could never get more than ten people in a [CDS] meeting. Now, since people think these meetings can help them, everyone comes, bringing every sort of problem to my attention, gossiping with neighbors, catching up on news . . . .[35]

The Institutionalization of Informal Social Customs

A slightly less visible way in which the CDSs integrate Nicaraguans into local community is through their institutionalization of previously informal social customs. In this way, the CDSs actually create community by de-emphasizing the relative importance of Nicaragua's traditional and highly complex kinship structure in relation to the community. Prior to the revolution, there existed no organized social support systems such as day care for children, aid to widows, or help to families experiencing illnesses. Consequently, grandparents, cousins, and even more distant relations were called on to assist family members in need.

Such kinship structures were necessarily a part of a person's social standing in the same sense as their wealth. Individuals or families with large and well-maintained kinship structures naturally had more resources to draw on and more alternatives than smaller or more isolated families. As one Nicaraguan explained:

> a family name will tell you something about its owner.

In every village and city there are some families who
are known to be particularly large, tightly knit, or
wealthy--families who look out for each other. These
people are more secure than others with small,
unknown families.[36]

Kinship structures, by differentiating between families and
their ability to support each other, were inimical to a broader sense of
community solidarity. Apart from rendering the broader community
nearly functionless, it created social distinctions that vitiated the
equality necessary for people to view themselves as equal members of
a community. By institutionalizing the social customs that have
previously been the realm of kinfolk, the CDSs move the focus of social
relations out of the family and onto the community. Furthermore, by
providing a common level of social services to all, everyone in the
community considers himself an equal member of the community.

The institutionalization of social customs ranges from raising
money to support the widow of a fallen soldier to providing care to
parents who must leave their children for short periods of time. Lino
Real, coordinator of the CDSs for Ciudad Sandino explained that
"when a combatant falls the CDS organizes collections of food and
money to give to the family. People support each other through the
CDSs that way, and everyone, including the CDS, benefits."[37]

An unforeseen benefit of the institutionalization of informal
social customs has been the resultant increase in the community
integration of women. This is due to the fact that the kind of social
customs undertaken by the CDSs were traditionally female functions.
Real explains that:

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> The revolution was intended for all the people of Nicaragua, and in many ways, the struggle is harder for women, who are constrained by the roles their families think they should play. By taking some of the family burdens off women, the CDSs and AMNLAE [the women's mass organization] have contributed to their new involvement in the revolutionary process.[38]

The CDSs themselves recognize the power such community services have in providing community solidarity and in popularizing the CDSs. Consequently, when a CDS finds a successful way of supporting members of its community, it passes its methods up the CDS hierarchy for dissemination to all local CDSs. Passing the hat in a community to provide support to the family of a war casualty was a practice that originated in the *barrio* CDS of Ciudad Sandino. When the CDS observed the extent to which this action brought the community together and ultimately resulted in an increase in importance of the CDS, it was made standard practice for CDSs all over Nicaragua.

Conclusion

The development of local and national community in Nicaragua are typical of the types of social transformations that accompany revolutions. Huntington writes that revolutions destroy

> old social classes, the old bases, usually ascriptive, of social differentiation, and the old social cleavages. [They] produce a new sense of community and a common identity for the new groups which acquire political consciousness . . . It means the creation of a national or political community of equals. It means a fundamental shift from a political culture in which subjects view the government as "they" to one in which citizens view the government as "we".[39]

This shift is something unprecedented in Nicaraguan history. Never before have the Nicaraguan people so identified with their nation and with their communities. By promoting this identification, the CDSs set the context in which Nicaraguans can actively and critically participate in the determination of their own political destiny. The context itself, because of its novelty and deep meaning, compels Nicaraguans to play a participatory role in the political system.

5   The CDSs as Forums
for Political Action

By integrating Nicaraguans into national and local
communities, the CDSs create a historically unprecedented context in
which informed political activity can occur. Nonetheless, a sense of
attachment to national or local community is not, in and of itself, a
guarantee of informed and critical participation in the political
process; it is necessary but not sufficient. Integration into national
and local community involves only the most nominal (albeit
necessary) choice on the part of a Nicaraguan individual, namely,
whether or not to consciously accept that integration. Obviously, the
Nicaraguan is not called upon to choose whether he will participate in
the Guatemalan, or the Costa Rican national community, and rarely
does he choose between local communitites. These communities are,
for all intents and purposes, given.

Informed political participation, however, involves critical
choice based on a critical appraisal of one's best interest and
presumably, of the community's best interests. As Gary Ruchwarger

writes in *People in Power*,

> Individuals who participate in public affairs learn to gain other people's cooperation through the careful consideration of matters beyond their own private interests. Moreover, this participatory form of democracy is self-sustaining because the more individuals participate, the better they are able to do so.[1]

Within the CDSs, Nicaraguans are beginning to "take sides" on issues of local and national importance and to collude informally to that end. This process, as critical as it is to the formation of informed political actors, is by no means "guaranteed" by popular participation in mass organizations such as the CDSs. Were the CDSs merely co-opted agents of the FSLN or institutions designed to manifest some political ideology, the debate and conflict within the CDSs would be sterile or non-existent.

This, however, is not the case. The CDSs serve an important role in the development of critical and well-informed citizens through the political activity that occurs within them--political activity that is an inevitable result of the ambiguity surrounding the agents and ideology of the Nicaraguan revolution. This political activity, and the education it affords Nicaraguans inexperienced in things political can be divided into two kinds: the procedural training occurring through the attempt to adopt democratic procedures within the CDSs, and jurisdictional and substantive debates that force individual Nicaraguans to critically examine, and to look beyond, their own political interests and to identify themselves with various positions on important issues.

Procedure within the CDSs

Although it is perhaps the most readily observable facet of the CDSs, the sometimes faltering attempt to introduce democratic procedure into their operation is one of the most important forces shaping the transformation of political culture in Nicaragua. Because their votes and participation count in the CDSs, Nicaraguans are coming to believe that they can and should control their own political destiny, and that it can be controlled without recourse to violence. Irrevocable decision-making from the top, which was the political norm prior to the revolution, is no longer seen as legitimate political method.

The attempt to introduce democratic procedure into the CDSs has been neither easy nor constant. Like all the other mass organizations, in 1979, the CDSs faced the prospect of introducing democratic participation to a populace completely unfamiliar with it. Furthermore, leaders had to be recruited from among the populace to guide the operation of the CDSs according to principles with which they had little or no experience. Luis Serra, an Argentine political scientist, described the situation as follows:

> There was a lack of understanding at the grass-roots level about the nature and importance of participation in the mass organizations due to general educational and political backwardness, the lack of information, rumor-mongering by counterrevolutionaries, and errors commited by some novice or opportunistic leaders.[2]

Shortly after the revolution, many mass organization leaders, including CDS coordinators, were simply appointed by local

authorities or by the FSLN based on their level of participation in the insurrection. Consequently, widespread abuses of power and authoritarian practices within the CDSs became a common complaint. CDS tasks that were supposed to be voluntary, such as revolutionary vigilance, became obligatory as many CDS leaders threatened to withhold ration cards if participation was not "offered". Similarly, reports of nepotism and of using CDS power to solve personal grievances became common. Corruption was also a problem as certain CDS leaders withheld rations for resale on the black market. As one resident of Managua recalls,

> when the CDSs were first organized, many coordinators thought they could rule their neighborhoods with personal power. Sometimes this was due to revolutionary fervor--it was natural for a commited revolutionary to treat his more complacent neighbors with some contempt. Other times, it was simply that the wrong people were in charge and felt they could use their new power to do whatever they wanted.[3]

By 1982, the situation within the nation's CDSs had become enough of a problem to warrant action by the National Directorate of the FSLN. In October, *Commandante* Bayardo Arce sent a strongly worded letter to the nation's CDS coordinators condemning "arbitrary attitudes and actions that have effects contrary to Sandinista principle"[4] As examples he cited:

> Authorization of arbitrary land or building seizures . . . withholding the sugar distribution card . . . harrassment by words or deeds of citizens who profess another ideology. . . arrogant and haughty attitudes . . . [and] falling into abuse of authority and using a responsible post in the organization as a way to enjoy

personal and family privileges.[5]

In November, the CDSs throughout Nicaragua were significantly restructured and much of the leadership at all levels was removed for abuses. Formal means for the democratic election of coordinators at all levels were introduced and systems of periodic evaluation were instituted. Similarly, the membership of the CDSs was given the right to recall its leaders at any time.

Several important principles emerged from Arce's letter to guide CDS procedure. Most important among these were the political equality of all members of the CDSs, their right to elect their leadership and to hold that leadership accountable for its actions, and the right of CDS members to play an active role in the decision making process and daily operations of the CDS. Shortly after Ciudad Sandino reorganized its CDSs, one woman referred to Arce's letter and remarked that "We should make copies of that letter and give it to everyone. Here our rights are underlined. And we ought to show it to our leaders often so that they fulfill them faithfully."[6]

Democracy within the CDSs means that each member of the CDS has an equal vote in determining both CDS leadership and policy. Each year, the members of a block-level CDS elect a coordinator and the various secretaries. The block-level coordinators elect *barrio*-level coordinators, and so on up to the national level. Furthermore, once elected, these coordinators are subject to recall by their own constituency. They *are not* subject to the approval of the FSLN or of the national government, a fact critical to the continuing autonomy of the CDSs. The fact that this is a meaningful process is demonstrated

by the election of individuals who have always been considered community leaders regardless of their association with, or opinion about, the FSLN. In Masachapa, for example, one *barrio*-level coordinator is a dentist, and the other is the owner of a small restaurant. Neither are members of the FSLN, and the latter had even run afoul of the Sandinistas because of his ardent advocacy of private enterprise.[7]

Each member of a CDS has the right to initiate debate on any issue which he feels is of importance to the community. Such debates range from local land disputes to arguments over national taxation policy. At the end of the debate, a vote is held to see if the CDS wishes to pass a resolution or suggestion up the CDS hierarchy, or if action can be taken at the local level. These suggestions and resolutions provided the bulk of the legislation introduced into the Council of State by the nine CDS representatives to that body. The Council of State was very responsive to legislation that had been proposed in this grass-roots fashion. Of the bills introduced prior to 1984 by mass organizations in general, 83 percent became law.[8] Finally, it is the ability to debate issues in the CDSs that gives rise to the identification of Nicaraguans with various positions on substantive issues.

To this day, democratic procedures in the CDSs are not a given. In many ways, the gradual acceptance of these procedures mirrors the transformation of Nicaraguan political culture from one used to violent despotism to one concerned with active participation; both naturally occur gradually. Reports of abuses of CDS power still surface around Nicaragua, but not nearly to the extent that they did in

1982. Authoritarian practices within the CDSs are in no one's political interest save the isolated coordinators who perpetrate them. Consequently, both the FSLN and the CDS Naational Coordinator have continued to make it clear that such abuses have no place in the revolution.

Conflict within the CDSs

The coalition of opposition that brought down Somoza had within it sufficient contradictions and ambiguity to assure that post-revolutionary politics would be characterized by struggle between a variety of competing attempts to shape the post-revolutionary social and political systems. The ambiguities that spark the debates within the CDSs can be classified into two kinds: jurisdictional and substantive. Jurisdictional disputes stem from the ambiguity surrounding the administrative roles of the CDSs, the municipal governments, and the FSLN itself. Substantive ambiguities, on the other hand, are conflicts that occur within the CDSs between competing views, ideologies, and expectations of how the revolution should proceed. Naturally, there are as many competitors in this struggle as there are competing ideologies in Nicaragua, but because of the FSLN's consolidation of power after 1979, this struggle is usually characterized by the criticism of FSLN policy.

Both kinds of conflicts share an important characteristic; they force individual Nicaraguans to evaluate their own political interests and to take sides with whichever side most closely represents those interests. This act negates the dispossession and non-participation

that have characterized Nicaraguan political culture for decades and encourages the kind of critical thinking that produces a well-informed political actor.

Jurisdictional Conflict

The jurisdictional ambiguities that cause conflict within the CDSs stem from the lack of any coherent delineation of the functions and powers of the CDSs vis a vis the other local centers of political power, namely municipal governments and the local FSLN office. All three agencies evolved independently and filled roles dictated by necessity, not by some master plan. Because of their organization and mass-membership, the CDCs were called on to serve as governments in areas where the fall of Somoza had left a region without an administration. This role was unchallenged until the formation of the Municipal Juntas for Reconstruction (JMRs) in late 1979. In areas without significant CDC organization power was often taken by regional FSLN commanders since they were the sole authorities available.[9] Finally, some areas such as the entire east coast region lacked both CDCs and an FSLN military presence and came under no civil administration until the formation of the JMRs.

Within this jurisdictional conflict, each organization has a peculiar advantage. The CDSs have the advantage of wider local mass support than either the JMRs or the FSLN. The JMRs, which were heirs to the crumbled *Somocista* municipal government structure (and occasionally even its personnel) enjoy the resources consonant with their position. Finally, because of the concentration of

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centralized political and military power in the hands of the FSLN, it enjoys ultimate arbitration in jurisdictional disputes. Nonetheless, the FSLN's self-definition as a mass based party limits the extent to which it can operate counter to the wishes of mass organizations such as the CDSs.

Jurisdictional issues play a more important role in the political life of a CDS member than one might immediately suppose. This stems from the fact that many CDS members view their pariticipation in the CDSs as "their only way of participating in the revolution."[10] Membership in the FSLN is limited, as are opportunities to influence municipal government. Thus, a loss in jurisdiction for the CDS is a direct loss of control over one's political system. This jurisdiction is often jealously guarded. As one regional coordinator said:

> Because it is not clear where CDS jurisdiction stops and where the municipality's begin, there is often fighting between the two. In the past, when a particular CDS project has worked well, the municipality has tried to get control of it. But they know that to do so would be to anger many people in the CDS, and not just here, but in the national office as well.[11]

The awareness within the CDSs of the ambiguity existing between the various jurisdictions has led to the growth of a kind of political savvy among CDS members that involves the willingness to compromise and an awareness of the virtues of good bargaining. At many CDS meetings, when a project is proposed, the viability of the project is discussed in terms of its chances of being seen as a violation of jurisdiction by the municipality or by the FSLN. Often, a CDS will

determine which aspects of a project it holds most important and then negotiate with the municipality for more in order to secure what is considered most essential. As one regional coordinator said,

> The lack of real spheres of operation between the CDSs and the various other groups in a region require the CDS to try to learn to use this ambiguity for its own benefit; a knowledge that ultimately makes the CDS more powerful and better at filling the needs of the people of the region.[12]

Substantive Conflict

Jurisdictional disputes between the CDSs and other groups play an important role in the formation of politically informed citizens, but not as important as the role played by the multitude of substantive disputes that occur within the CDSs themselves. Since membership in the CDSs is independent of political, religious, or social affilitation, the CDSs bring together a completely heterogenous group of individuals. Ruchwarger writes that

> Every type of contradiction is found in this organization [CDS]: class distincions, differences in education, unequal levels of participation in the insurrection, generational conflicts, and different points of view on the problems faced by Nicaragua.[13]

Inevitably, the diverse and often mutually exclusive pre-revoluitonary expectations that coexisted within the anti-Somoza coalition are manifesting themselves in struggles both within the CDSs and between the CDSs and the FSLN.

These conflicts are heightened by two important characteristics of the FSLN: the diverse roles it played in the

insurrection against Somoza (sometimes it instigated action, sometimes it coordinated action, sometimes it was completely uninvolved), and its rather ambiguous self-perception as the "vanguard" of the Nicaraguan revolution. The ambiguous role of the FSLN in the insurrection means that in some areas such as Esteli and Leon, where it instigated or coordinated the insurrection, its authority over the popular classes is almost taken for granted. In other areas such as Monimbo, Granada, and Managua, where much of the uprising was spontaneous, FSLN authority is more likely to be questioned.

The notion of the FSLN as vanguard creates an ambiguous relationship between it and the CDSs as well. Sandinista rhetoric indicates that the FSLN sees itself subjugated to the will of the people. As one militant told George Black in 1979,

> We look to the masses constantly to enrich our vision, and when we talk of the CDSs as the "embryos" of popular power, it is because we have no preconceived idea of what that power will look like. The CDSs are the best current example we have, because they involve the whole people, and function in a highly democratic way which guarantess a continuous dynamic interplay between the vanguard and the masses . . . .[14]

Later in 1979 however, Carlos Nuñez, a member of the FSLN National Directorate, described the relationship in a different way, almost suggesting that the CDSs owed their very existence (and therefore allegiance) to the FSLN:

> The CDSs . . . what are they but the result of all the efforts ofthe FSLN and other revolutionary

organizations to give the popular classes a form of organizaton through which they can express their concerns, their worries, their criticisms, and say how far they want to take this revolutionary process?[15]

The notion of being a vanguard permits the FSLN, to some extent, to see itself as the leader of the popular classes rather than their advocate. The FSLN can justify non-responsiveness to popular demands by arguing that those demands are not in the real interest of the popular classes. In the following passage Nolan is correct in indicating that the FSLN has historically played more the "leader" of the masses and less their representative (with some notable exceptions):

> In spite of the Sandinista populist rhetoric, the FSLN is to its very core an elitist . . . organization. It has never conceived its role to be one of discovering and representing the self-defined hopes and aspirations of the individuals who actually make up the Nicaraguan people. Instead, it postulates unilaterally what the people ought to want.[16]

Quite apart from the ideological problems and tensions between vanguard elitism and real grass-roots popular opinion, the FSLN is usually the target of substantive conflict within the CDSs simply because it is in power and is associated with the *status quo*. Because of the FSLN's rapid consolidation of power after July of 1979, opposition parties can claim that they were forced out of post-revolutionary politics and thus bear no blame for post-revolutionary conditions. As an FSLN brigade leader said:

the FSLN inherited a national treasury with money for

1.5 days of imports, a destroyed economy, and a major
war with the North Americans. Naturally, we have not
been able to make everyone happy, and now the people
are beginning to blame us for it. But look at the PLI
[Independent Liberal Party], they did nothing after the
revolution and their membership goes up every year.[17]

Since the distinction between the FSLN and the state is
blurred, with the FSLN in particularly firm control of the army and
and the ministry of the interior, the CDSs might have easily been
co-opted into FSLN support groups had it not been for the spontaneous
way in which many of them developed and the independence with
which they continued to operate. Local CDS leaders in particular
understand the extent to which the CDCs assisted the FSLN in the
struggle against Somoza, and are loathe to acknowledge any vertical
power relationship between them and the FSLN. Lino Real says that:

It is not our purpose to serve the FSLN. Naturally, we
cooperate with them whenever we can, but if they have
a project for us, we discuss it in the *barrio* to see wheter
or not we can do it; if we can't, we tell them so. For the
most part, they respect our right to make autonomous
decisions. Other times, they question the
[revolutionary] consciousness of the people here.[18]

The conflict between popular expectations and FSLN positions
assists the development of a participatory political culture because it
prompts Nicaraguans to combine and collude in ways that give them
far more political power than they would have as individuals.
Nicaraguans understand that the FSLN must, if it is to maintain its
base of support, be swayed by the will of the people. The rather
abstract notion of "the people", however, is sufficiently ambiguous to

allow the FSLN great room for maneuver. Therefore, the more that individuals can combine and collude to present a united front as "the people", the greater their political leverage.

The informal groups and associations that Nicaraguans form around a particular issue within the CDSs are based not on geographical or national commonality, but on the similarity of member's viewpoints. Consequently, these groups are rarely ideological in nature; they are concerned with issues of local interest such as housing availability, food shortages, fuel rationing, and government subsidies to local development schemes. They range from a group of five peasants in the CDS of Pueblo Nuevo united to oppose the FSLN policy of returning land to owners from whom it was confiscated illegally to women in the CDS of Ciudad Sandino who organized to protest a rise in the price of milk.

The integration of Nicaraguans into such informal groups has two important effects. First, unlike their integration into national and local communitites, integration into informal interest groups implies conscious choice based on a critical evaluation of one's own best interests and one's vision of the community's best interests. Second, such integration implies trust and confidence in other members of the group. Verba emphasizes the importance of this trust to a unified and integrated political culture: "the extent to which members of a political system have trust and confidence in their fellow political actors is a crucial aspect of the . . . integration of a political culture."[19]

Throughout the CDSs of Nicaragua, one observes the constant

formation of informal interest groups. Often these groups are designed to oppose a particular policy of the FSLN, but sometimes they form to show support for a policy that is under attack by the opposition parties. One of the most dramatic examples of the former was a confrontation shortly after the revolution between the CDSs of northern Nicaragua (combined with the Rural Workers Association (ATC)) and the FSLN.

After the defeat of Somoza, many peasants, prompted by the propaganda of the revolution, spontaneously took over the farms of large landowners who had not been associated with Somoza. The FSLN, concerned with alienating landowners who had opposed Somoza, condemned the illegal land seizures. In late 1979, Sandinista courts ordered the lands returned.

The conflict over the seized land produced a deep split in the CDSs of northern Nicaragua between those who felt that the land seizures were just and those who thought it best to accept the will of the FSLN. As a *barrio* secretary in Pueblo Nuevo said, "the land issue really caused serious conflict within the CDS. Some felt they had a right to the land and were prepared to fight for it. Others could not imagine turning against the FSLN so soon after the victory." (D40.5)Ultimately, the ATC succeeded in mobilizing the pro-seizure group of CDS members into a series of demonstrations. On February 17, 1980, 30,000 peasants and rural laborers demonstrated in Managua's Plaza of the Revolution.[20] Eventually, the FSLN reversed its position and decided to risk the alienation of the large landowners in favor of ceding to the will of this spontaneously formed, powerful

new interest group.

Not all conflicts within the CDSs are so dramatic. In the summer of 1987, a conflict swept the CDSs of a *barrio* in Leon over the possibility of instituting an oath of allegiance. One of the *barrio's* secretaries had proposed that the CDS require all members of the group to take the same oath taken by members of the FSLN:

> Before the image of Augusto Cesar Sandino . . . I place my hand on the black and red flag that signifies 'Free Homeland or Death', and I swear to defend the national honor with arms in hand and to fight for the redemption of the oppressed and exploited in Nicaragua and the world.

The coordinator of the CDS opposed the measure, arguing that sympathy for the ideas of Sandino was not required for membership in the CDS. Since Leon has a strong heritage of *sandinismo* and rebellion against oppression, a vociferous faction arose within the CDS demanding that the oath be mandatory. Ironically, the dispute was settled only when a local FSLN brigade leader visited a meeting of the CDS and pointed out that the gesture of loyalty, while noble in his eyes, would be counterproductive because non-Sandinistas would be discouraged from joining the CDS.

Roberto Telez, then a secretary of the CDS in question, made a telling remark about the episode:

> When a divisive issue like the oath question comes before the CDS, you can still see the fear people have of taking a stand on what might be a troublesome cause. Years of habit do not die easily. Discussion is slow at first, and people would rather hear their neighbor speak than to speak themselves. More and more,

however, people are getting used to expressing themselves, and as times get harder, that expression is often more and more contrary to the FSLN idea of what it should be.[21]

Counterpoint: The Sterile CDSs

The preceding argument that the CDSs of Nicaragua are transforming the political culture of the Nicaraguan people must be somewhat qualified. Naturally, in so large a nation, there are notable exceptions. These exceptions, moreover, are important because they illustrate characteristics that are important in the CDSs in assuring that they play a role in the creation of a well-informed, politically active populace.

The following describes a community I observed in which the CDSs seemed to be failing dramatically, in the transformation of the political culture of the local populace. These cases highlight the importance played by the autonomy of the CDSs in relation to the FSLN, particularly the question of whether it evolved from a spontaneously formed CDC or whether it was imposed after the insurrection.

Condega

The village of Condega straddles the pan-American highway 20 kilometers north of the city of Esteli. A primarily agricultural village of some 1,000 people, Condega, like neighboring Esteli, played an active role in the insurrection and has the reputation of being extremely revolutionary and loyal to the FSLN.[22] During the insurrection, the FSLN used certain homes in Condega for

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ammunition storage had some success in recruiting fighters, primarily from the village itself.

Despite its revolutionary reputation and its history of rebellion, Condega is split in terms of sentiment for the revolution and more specifically, for the FSLN. In the village itself, people express fervent pro-revolutionary feelings and describe the benefits that have come to the town as a result of several agricultural cooperatives and through a variety of development programs. As one resident said,

> Times are hard, of course, all over the country. But I think most people would agree that the revolution has made important differences for Condega. Before [the revolution] no one in the nation cared about the town. When crop prices were low, people did not have enough to eat. Now, everyone can get rice, beans, and milk. There is a health center ten kilometers away, and *brigadistas* come to assist with education, health programs, and farming.[23]

Outside the town, in the surrounding small farms and hamlets, one encounters very different opinions. Many peasants have experienced no real change because of the revolution; indeed, many feel that they have simply exchanged one *patron* for another, except that their *patrons* under Somoza did not try to organize them into state farms or cooperatives and did not require their sons to serve in the army. One peasant, who divided his time between a small plot of his own and wage work at a nearby state farm argued that "the Sandinistas want to make our farms into giant cooperatives, the better to control what we do and produce. In 1979, they promised us land, but despite all their confiscations, they have given away little."[24]

The CDSs in Condega mirror the split in sentiment for the

FSLN. In Condega itself, the CDSs are extremely pro- revolutionary and equate this with nearly unquestioning support for the FSLN. Outside Condega, in the rural zones, the CDSs are nearly irrelevant to the daily lives of the people in the area. Two CDSs I observed had only coordinators and no regular members. Both held meetings only twice a month compared to the weekly meetings of most CDSs. Of ten small farmers interviewed outside of Condega, only three knew that a CDS existed to provide them with "community services".[25]

Interestingly enough, despite the dramatic differences in their level of support for the revolution, the CDSs of Condega shared several important characteristics: debate of the kind previously described was nearly non-existent, they were not succesful in garnering community support for national and local development programs, and local residents were split between those who considered the CDS crucial to the revolution and those who ridiculed it. In other words, neither the CDSs of Condega itself or those of the outlying rural areas were succesful in creating an ethic of informed political participation in their communities; they had either failed to attract members or had devolved into FSLN support groups.

Despite the readily observed split in Condega between those who support the revolution and those who oppose it, there were factors endemic to the CDSs themselves that caused the failure of the CDSs to serve any politically meaningful role in Condega. Many communities elsewhere in Nicaragua (most notably Masachapa) are violently split over the revolution and still maintain active CDSs that politicize and involve members from every sector of the community. Most important

among these factors was a historical fact: the CDSs of Condega and outlying areas were not established until the 1982 regional restructuring of the nation.

Both members and non-members describe the difficulty experienced in the attempt to establish CDSs in 1982. The coordinator of one block CDS in Condega recalls that

> when we first started, nobody knew what to make of the CDS. We wanted the people's opinions on important questions, but no one had anything to say. We were embarassed in front of the people from Managua [national CDS leaders] because no one knew what to do.[26]

According to residents of Condega, the CDSs did not get started until the local FSLN office ordered its members to join and recruit members for the CDSs. One resident said,"some Sandinistas were upset because the CDSs were doing such important things in other villages, and here we did not have enough people for the [revolutionary] vigilance."[27] Once the local FSLN office decided to see that the CDSs became operable, they did, but with a significant pro-FSLN bias.

The pro-FSLN bias is reflected in the absence of real political debate in the CDSs of Condega. *Barrio* CDSs still work to solve local problems, but solutions are always sought from the local FSLN office or from the dictates of Sandinista leaders. As one non-member said, "I am not interested in the CDS here because it is just another arm of the Sandinistas, and I don't agree with what they have to say."[28] One *barrio* coordinator (a member of the FSLN) justified the pro-Sandinista bias of the CDSs in a statement that illustrates the

reason why non-FSLN members are skeptical about joining:

> Is it surprising that we should wish to do what the Front wants? They won the war, they are leading the masses. Of course some people are not as conscious as they should be, but they will change or be left behind.[29]

The CDSs in the rural areas surrounding Condega experienced the same difficulties as the ones in town, only the countryside could not provide sufficient FSLN members to establish the CDSs. Consequently, they are regarded as largely irrelevant but for the necessity of securing ration cards and occasionally contributing to revolutionary vigilance. As one farmer declared, "we have no need for them [CDSs] here. Many people say they are important, but why would we need something that we never needed before?"[30]

Conclusion

The CDSs of Condega demonstrate the extent to which CDS autonomy from the FSLN is critical in the cultivation of a politically participatory populace, particularly in areas that are predisposed against the innovations of the revolution. This autonomy depends on a variety of factors, but is most obviously related to whether or not the CDSs institutionalized a local spontaneous mass movement or whether they were imposed on an area where such a movement was lacking. Another important factor, however, is the perception of autonomy, whether or not a CDS originated autonomously. There are many active CDSs in areas that were not involved in the insurrection

(like Masachapa). In these areas, the success of the CDS in fomenting popular participation depends on the people's perception that the CDS is an impartial and active forum for the solution of local problems, and not a mere mouthpiece for FSLN policy.

6   Conclusion

Like every other aspect of the Nicaraguan revolution, the CDSs are often represented abroad in ideologically biased terms. Critics of the revolution see the CDSs as examples of its authoritarian character. An AFL-CIO resolution, for example, labelled the CDSs "Cuban-style block committees requiring brother to spy on brother . . . established under the Sandinista police state."[1] On the other hand, supporters of the revolution, usually of the liberal variety, tout the CDSs as "schools for democracy".[2]

Unfortunately, these ideologically informed impressions of the CDSs are more indicative of their promulgator's political views than of any real characteristic of the CDSs. They obfuscate what is perhaps the most important long-term role the CDSs are playing in revolutionary Nicaragua. While the CDSs may not be bereft of authoritarian tendencies, and though they are not "schools for democracy" in the liberal democratic sense of the word, they *are* schools for informed political participation. Today , the CDSs provide the solution to the problem that Luis Serra posed shortly after the

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Nicaraguan revolution: "How could the enormous weight of behavior, attitudes, and the values nourished by the old social system be thrown off . . . ? How could corruption, alcoholism, apathy, egoism, individual lust for power and riches, *machismo*, violence, and authoritarianism be erradicated?"[3]

The CDSs are transforming the political culture of the Nicaraguan people from one of dispossession, apathy, and non-participation to one of thoughtful participation in local and national community and politics. This transformation is particularly important at a time when there is considerable ambiguity surrounding the FSLN's paradigm for institutionalizing popular participation in revolutionary politics. Sandinista rhetoric praises the people and *poder popular*, but Sandinista actions suggest that the FSLN takes more seriously its self-conceived role as didactic vanguard than its commitment to the will of the people. At the heart of the matter is the fact that the transformation of political culture in Nicaragua is not necessarily in the political interest of the FSLN. This raises the danger that the transformation of political culture may be blocked and the people of Nicaragua condemned to a future of non-participatory authoritarianism.

The FSLN is facing a problem that has been faced by all revolutionary parties--the difficulty of remodelling the political culture of the people to render revolutionary institutions relevant and meaningful. Once the transformation of political culture begins to supplant old ideological legacies, revolutionary parties face the difficulty of controlling the newly formed political culture.

The Nicaraguan case provides interesting counterpoint to the historical precedent established by revolutionary parties in their attempt to keep control of the process of political transformation. Historically, revolutionary parties have employed a variety of coercive techniques to ensure that the transformation of political culture is safely limited to mobilization behind the policies of the revolutionary party. Typically, as in the French, Cuban, and Cambodian revolutions, the revolutionary party initializes the politically "safe" transformation of political culture by violently purging opposition elements. This is followed by the establishment of institutions that are co-opted by the party. The Mexican PRI, for example, institutionalized, in Huntington's words, "the subordination of previously autonomous social forces to the governing political institution."[4] The historical alternative to this institutionalization has been the systematic repression of politically unorthodox social forces .

Perhaps the most graphic illustration of this co-optation are the Cuban Committees for the Defense of the Revolution (CDRs). In many ways, the Cuban CDRs and the Nicaraguan CDSs are analogous institutions. The CDRs are non-sectoral neighborhood groups charged with a wide spectrum of developmental and organizational duties. In contrast to the Nicaraguan CDSs, however, the CDRs lack functional and ideological independence from the Cuban Communist Party. As Jorge Dominguez explains in *Cuba: Order and Revolution,*

> In revolutionary Cuba, all levels of the mass
> organizations, the subordinate units of the party, and
> all elections lack important aspects of political

autonomy and are subject to externally imposed constraints on the selection of leaders, election procedures, and policy making.[5]

Because of this lack of autonomy from the revolutionary party, the Cuban CDRs lack the diversity of opinion and breadth of political debate that characterize the Nicaraguan CDSs. Fagen describes a common "attitude" towards the revolution in the CDRs not evident in the CDSs.[6] For example, he writes of a series of CDR meetings held throughout Cuba in 1962 in which conformity was explicitly established: 'At these meetings, open season was declared on those suspected of joining the committees for the "wrong reasons"'.[7] After these meetings, the CDR National Directorate declared that "These meetings have enabled us, the CDR and the masses together, to purge our ranks of unhealthy elements that have slipped in . . . ."[8]

For a variety of reasons, the lack of autonomy and the uniformity of belief and "attitude" in the Cuban CDRs raises questions about the extent to which the CDRs have transformed Cuban political culture, ie. assisted in the creation of the "new socialist man". First, because of their exclusivity against any unorthodox attitude or belief, the CDRs cannot contribute to the development of debate between Cubans of different political persuasions.

More importantly, however, by dictating the "proper" attitudes necessary for participation in the revolution, the CDRs stifle the formation of the critically informed political opinions that are the *sine qua non* of meaningful political participation. Consequently, the transformation of Cuban political culture has not been profound; it has not created autonomous and critical political actors. Instead, it

has merely mobilized the population in support of revolutionary institutions. Fagen writes that the

> observed and hypothesized changes [in Cuban political behavior] to date have not become so much a part of the general culture that they can be considered independent of the mobilization environments now sustaining and encouraging them. . . this simply says that were the revolutionary leadership to abandon its radical efforts to transform the political culture, much of the behavior now evoked from the citizenry would also cease."[9]

In contrast to the Cuban CDRs, the Nicaraguan CDSs maintain an ideological and functional distance from the FSLN. This autonomy makes possible the remodelling of Nicaraguans conditioned by generations of despotic rule and non-participation into critical and meaningfully participatory political actors. The CDSs integrate Nicaraguans into local and national communities and enable them to discover and practice the intricacies of politics within those communities. This integration and political practice is reminiscent of DeToqueville's description of the American participant in municipal politics:

> he has an interest in it because he shares in its management . . . he invests his ambition and his future in it; in the restricted sphere within his scope, he learns to rule society . . . develops a taste for order, understands the harmony of powers, and in the end accumulates clear, practical ideas about the nature of his duties and rights.[10]

This dramatic transformation of political culture through Nicaragua's CDSs is fundamentally based on their autonomy and the

consequent breadth of political action and debate. This autonomy exists for a number of reasons. Most importantly, in much of Nicaragua, the CDSs institutionalized previously existing, sponteously organized mass movements (the CDCs) that arose to provide grass-roots solutions to urgent socio-economic problems. After the insurrection, the CDSs maintained this autonomy for practical reasons; local problems required local solutions--in most cases, the revolutionary *junta* lacked the resources and organization to impose whatever solutions might have been in its political interest.

The preservation of autonomy was also assisted by the grass-roots (*poder popular*) orientation of *sandinismo*, the ideology that guided the revolution. Unlike Leninism, *sandinismo* considers the people, not the party, the final arbiter of truth. Consequently, despite its vanguard orientation, the FSLN cannot easily ignore the will of the people as expressed in their collectivities--*sandinismo* does not include a notion of "false consciousness". In another vein, *sandinismo* assisted in the preservation of CDS autonomy in post-revolutionary Nicaragua because it did not provide any blueprint for the relationships between the mass organizations, the state, and the FSLN. As a consequence, these relationships are continuously debated within the the CDSs.

The FSLN has had to come to terms with the fact that the autonomy with which the CDSs are bringing about the revolutionary transformation of Nicaraguan political culture prevents the equation of that transformation with poltical support for the FSLN or even with popular mobilization behind the revolution. Once the revolution

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opened the Pandora's box of political participation with the bourgeoning demands and diversity of opinion thus implied, the possibility of "mass mobilization" behind any single goal evaporated. Nonetheless, as Fagen suggests with reference to Cuba, the transformation of poltical culture is the endeavor of generations and has about it a tremendous fragility.

The nine-year experiment with popular participation in political affairs is tremendously overshadowed by the legacy of centuries of economic dispossession and political disenfranchisement. The reversal of the transformation of the Nicaraguan popular classes into the arbiters of their own political destiny is far from inconceivable. In the short term, the power to make this determination resides with the FSLN. The possiblity that the FSLN may not be the political "choice" of a critical and well-informed Nicaraguan people threatens its very existence.

Despite the fact that the FSLN predicates its own legitimacy (and therefore its power) on its mass base, it has other sources of power, most notably, the armed forces. If a critically informed, participatory populace presents too much of a threat to the political power of the FSLN, it may turn to those sources of power and away from its mass base. Such a step would mean the substitution of mobilization for participation, and a return to the authoritarianism that has alienated the Nicaraguan people from their country for centuries.

Notes

Chapter 1

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2 Peter Marchetti, "Nicaragua and the Disenchanted Liberals," Rosset and Vandermeer 35.

3 U.S. Department of State, "The Sandinista Military Buildup," Rosset and Vandermeer 44.

4 Sidney Verba, "Comparative Political Culture," *Political Culture and Plitical Development*, ed. Lucian W. Pye and Sidney Verba (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1965) 513.

5 Quoted in Gary Ruchwarger, *People in Power* (South Hadley, MA: Bergin and Garvey, 1987) 135.

6 Quoted in Richard R. Fagen, *The Transformation of Political Culture in Cuba* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1969) 1.

7 Verba 517.

8 Samuel P. Huntington, *Political Order in Changing Societies* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1968) 335.

9 Quoted in Tom Bottomore, ed., *A Dictionary of Marxist Thought* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1983) 361.

10 Gabriel Almond, "Communist Political Cultures", Comparative Politics, ed. Roy C. Macridis (Chicago: Dprsey Press, 1986) 232.

11 Almond 232.

12 Quoted in Fagen 2.

13 Carlos Fonseca Amador, "Nicaragua: Zero Hour" Rosset and Vandermeer 170.

14 Quoted in Ruchwarger 4.

15 Council on Interracial Books for Children, "Education for Change: A Report on the Nicaraguan Literacy Crusade", Rosset and Vandermeer 421.

[16] Ruchwarger 161.

Chapter 2

[1] Quoted in Henri Weber, "The Nicaraguan Background," Rosset and Vandermeer 139.

[2] George Black, *Triumph of the People* (London: Zed Press, 1981) 4.

[3] Weber 140.

[4] Shirley Christian, *Nicaragua: Revolution in the Family* (New York: Random House, 1986) 5.

[5] Black 5.

[6] Weber 142.

[7] Weber 142.

[8] Black 11.

[9] Black 11.

[10] Weber 142.

[11] Weber 142.

[12] Black 9.

[13] Black 9.

[14] Black 12.

[15] Richard Millet, Guardians of the Dynasty (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1977) 54.

[16] Black 13.

[17] Black 24.

[18] Edmundo Jarcquin C. and Pablo Emilio Barreto, "A Dictatorship 'Made in the U.S.A.'", Rosset and Vandermeer 161.

[19] Jarcquin C. and Barreto 163.

[20] Black 34-35.

[21] Black 36.

[22] Jarcquin C. and Barreto 162.

[23] Jarcquin C. and Barreto 162.

[24] Lino Real, personal interview, Ciudad Sandino, 23 July 1987.

[25] Ruchwarger 36.

[26] Ruchwarger 36.

[27] Ruchwarger 43.

[28] Ruchwarger 42.

[29] David C. Halperin and Richard Garfield "Development in Health Care in Nicaragua," *New England Journal of Medicine*, no. 307. 1982, 380 (Suggested by Coreen Govan).

[30] Halperin and Garfield 380.

[31] Council on Interracial Books for Children 421.

[32] Margaret Randall, *Sandino's Daughters: Testimonies of Nicaraguan Women in Struggle* (Vancouver: New Star Books, 1981) 5 (Suggested by Coreen Govan).

[33] James D. Rudolph, ed., *Nicaragua: A Country Study* (Washington: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1982) 115.

[34] Black 53.

[35] Black 54-55.

[36] Quoted in Black 8.

[37] Black 9.

[38] Millet 251.

[39] Jenny Pearce, "The Eagle Rises," Rosset and Vandermeer 154.

[40] Quoted in Christian 28.

[41] Millet 193.

[42] Black 29.

[43] Christian 28.

[44] Black 32.

[45] Ruchwarger 43.

[46] Javier Telez, personal interview, Managua, 11 August 1987.

[47] Stefano Lazardo, personal interview, Managua 15 August 1987.

[48] Fonseca Amador 170.

Chapter 3

[1] Luis Serra quoted in Ruchwarger 135.

[2] Jarcquin C. and Barreto 165.

[3] Jarcquin C. and Barreto 165.

[4] Christian 37.

[5] Roberto Aguilera, personal interview, Managua, 12 August 1987.

[6] Christian 57.

[7] Chrisitian 57.

[8] Christian 55.

[9] Christian 44.

[10] Quoted in Ruchwarger 2.

[11] Quoted in Christian 80.

[12] Christian 76.

[13] Stefano Lazardo, personal interview.

[14] Flora Lewis, "Violeta and Corazon," editorial, *New York Times*, 12 February 1988.

[15] Esteban Monge, personal interview, Managua, 20 July 1987.

[16] Quoted in Deirdre English, "We Are Sandinistas," Rosset and Vandermeer 133.

[17] Nolan 122.

[18] Quoted in Bruce Marcus, *Nicaragua: The Sandinista People's Revolution--Speeches by Sandinista Leaders* (New York: Pathfinder Press, 1985) 396.

[19] Quoted in Marcus 397.

[20] Lino Real, personal interview.

[21] Personal interviews conducted in Nicaragua, 16 July - 26 August 1987.

[22] Victor Aguerro, personal interview, Ciudad Sandino, 24 July 1987.

[23] Alonso Garcia, personal interview, Managua, 21 August 1987.

[24] Felipe Narvaes, personal interview, Managua, 25 August 1987.

[25] Quoted in Ruchwarger 3-4.

[26] Roberto Reyes, personal interview, Managua, 24 July 1987.

[27] Lino Real, personal interview.

Chapter 4

[1] David Escobar, personal interview, Ciudad Sandino 25 July 1987.

[2] Lino Real, personal interview.

[3] Lino Real, personal interview.

[4] Lino Real, personal interview.

[5] Central America Bulletin, "Building Democracy through Mass Organizations," Rosset and Vandermeer 351.

[6] Ruchwarger 161.

[7] Central America Bulletin 353.

[8] Huntington 310.

[9] Verba 529.

[10] David Escobar, personal interview.

[11] Central America Bulletin 352.

[12] Ricardo Telez, personal interview, Masachapa, 12 August 1987.

[13] Ruchwarger 106.

[14] Ruchwarger 93.

[15] Luciano Martinez, personal interview, Managua, 15 August 1987.

[16] Masaya was the site of the earliest spontaneous popular revolt against Somoza.

[17] David Lopez (CDS coordinator), personal interview Masaya, 17 JUly 1987.

[18] David Lopez, personal interview.

[19] David Lopez, personal interview.

[20] David Lopez, personal interview.

[21] David Lopez, personal interview.

[22] David Lopez, personal interview.

[23] David Lopez, personal interview.

[24] Pedro Fornos, personal interview, Masaya, 18 July 1987.

[25] Pedro Fornos, personal interview.

[26] Felipe Monge, personal interview, Masaya, 18 July 1987.

[27] Ricardo Telez, personal interview.

[28] Ricardo Telez, personal interview.

[29] Ricardo Telez, personal interview.

[30] Personal interviews conducted in Masachapa 11-13 August 1987.

[31] Arturo Caballero, personal interview, Masachapa, 13 August 1987.

[32] Carlos Villon (CDS coordinator), personal interview, Masachapa, 11 August 1987.

[33] Ricardo Telez, personal interview.

[34] Arturo Caballero, personal interview.

[35] Carlos Villon, personal interview.

[36] Felipe Narvaes, personal interview.

[37] Lino Real, personal interview.

[38] Lino Real, personal interview.

[39] Huntington 310.

Chapter 5

[1] Ruchwarger 136.

[2] Quoted in Ruchwarger 126.

[3] Benjamin Carrazco, personal interview, Managua, 14 August 1987.

[4] Quoted in Marcus 62.

[5] Quoted in Marcus 62.

[6] Quoted in Central America Bulletin 354.

[7] Ricardo Telez, personal interview.

[8] Thomas W. Walker, ed., *Nicaragua: The First Five Years* (New York: Praeger, 1985) 76.

[9] Walker 47.

[10] Luciano Martinez, personal interview, Managua, 15 August 1987.

[11] Pedro Caldon, personal interview, Managua 21 July 1987.

[12] Pedro Caldon, personal interview.

[13] Gary Ruchwarger "The Sandinista Mass Organizations and the Revolutionary Process," *Nicaragua: A Revolution Under Siege,* ed., Richard Harris and Carlos M. Vilas (London: Zed Books, 1985) 113.

[14] Quoted in Black 200.

[15] Quoted in Ruchwarger, *People in Power* 139.

[16] Nolan 120-121.

[17] Patricia Herrera, personal interview, Managua, 27 July 1987.

[18] Lino Real, personal interview.

[19] Verba 535.

[20] Ruchwarger, *People in Power* 143.

[21] Hernando Flores (CDS coordinator), personal interview, Leon, 16 August 1987.

[22] Jaime Santos, personal interview, Condega, 28 July 1987.

[23] Jaime Santos, personal interview.

[24] Emilio Jimenez, personal interview, Condega, 29 July 1987.

[25] Interviews conducted in Condega 28-29 July 1987.

[26] Jaime Santos, personal interview.

[27] Pedro Barca, personal interview, Condega, 29 July 1987.

[28] Esteban Lazaro, personal interview, Condega, 28 July 1987.

[29] Jaime Santos, personal interview.

[30] Emilio Jimenez, personal interview.

Chapter 6

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[2] Central America Bulletin 350.

[3] Quoted in Ruchwarger, *People in Power* 135.

[4] Huntington 319.

[5] Jorge I. Dominguez, *Cuba: Order and Revolution* (Cambridge: Belknap Press, 1978) 260.

[6] Fagen 82.

[7] Fagen 77.

[8] Fagen 77-78.

[9] Fagen 157-158.

[10] Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, ed. J.P. Mayer (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1969) 70.

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