

June 2017

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Recommended Citation

Bracegirdle, Peter (2017) "The Social Relations of Education in UNO's Nicaragua (1990-1991)," *Comparative and International Education / Éducation Comparée et Internationale*: Vol. 21 : Iss. 2 , Article 3.
Available at: <http://ir.lib.uwo.ca/cie-eci/vol21/iss2/3>

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The Social Relations of Education in UNO's Nicaragua (1990-1991)

Peter Bracegirdle

Violeta Chamorro's coalition government came to power in April 1990 with a clear but lofty mandate: Put an end to the political and economic aggression waged against Nicaragua by the United States and heal the national wounds of decades of dictatorship, civil war, and invasion. In order to attract foreign aid and investment, the government set Nicaragua on a development course more to the liking of international capital and the lending institutions. Its economic plan emphasized liberalization, privatization, and sharp cuts in government services. The architects of the new economy also demanded changes in the formal and nonformal educational system. The Ministry of Education announced guidelines for a new education, emphasizing development, democracy, professionalism, and traditional Christian values. But as with Nicaragua as a whole, rather than stabilizing the system, the changes gave rise to a new set of conflicts between economic classes and political interests.

Le gouvernement de coalition de Violeta Chamorro a pris le pouvoir en avril 1990 avec un mandat clair et très important: mettre fin à l'agression politique et économique américaine contre le Nicaragua et soigner les plaies de décades de dictature, de guerres civiles et d'invasion. Afin d'attirer l'aide étrangère et l'investissement, le gouvernement a établi un programme de développement en relation avec le capitalisme international et les institutions prêteuses. Son plan économique mettait de l'importance sur la libéralisation des prix, la privatisation et les coupures drastiques dans les services gouvernementaux. Les architectes de cette nouvelle économie ont aussi demandé des changements dans les systèmes d'éducation formelle et non-formelle. Dans le contexte d'une "nouvelle éducation," le ministère de l'éducation a défini des orientations portant sur le développement, la démocratie, le professionnalisme et les valeurs traditionnelles chrétiennes. Si on considère l'ensemble du pays, ces changements, au lieu de stabiliser la situation, ont donné naissance à de nouveaux conflits entre les classes économiques et les intérêts politiques.

The Social Relations of Education in UNO's Nicaragua (1990-1991)

There is a correspondence between a society and its educational system. Simply put, the role of education is to help reproduce the social relations of production (Bowles, 1972, p. 278). This refers to the socialization process in which young people are prepared for their future roles in the economic system. Educational institutions do this in at least two manners: by training workers in skills and knowledge necessary for efficient production and by instilling in citizens the values and attitudes required to perform society's roles. The correspondence is evident in the content of the curricula, both overt and hidden, as well as in the organizational form the education system takes, whether, for example, the decision-making authority is national or local, authoritarian or democratic in nature. It is most apparent during periods of rapid social reform, when elites from opposing ends of the socio-political spectrum form successive governments (Bowles, 1972, p. 279). As the new leaders consolidate their control of the political structure, the form and content of the educational system comes to reflect the transformed social relations of production. A clear example of this followed the transfer of power in

Nicaragua from the Sandinista National Liberation Front (FSLN) to the National Opposition Union (UNO) in the spring of 1990.

Considering educational policy under Violeta Chamorro's UNO coalition government in Nicaragua from April 1990 to December 1991, the present study begins with an overview of the ideological orientation of the educational system the new government inherited from the Sandinistas. It then looks at the UNO Ministry of Education personnel and at three of the most influential policy-making bodies in the new Nicaragua, at how they have affected the educational system and at how their guidelines have been put into practice. There is also a discussion of the manner in which the Sandinistas have resisted the UNO project. The central hypothesis is that the changes made to the educational system under Chamorro reflect the new attitudes and policies regarding economic production in UNO's Nicaragua; specifically, these changes reinforce the neoliberal economic system the UNO people are putting in place.

As the period under review is recent, I have relied on reports written by individuals directly involved in education in Nicaragua, in particular the work published by Managua's Central American University in their journal, *envío*, and the research carried out by the Nicaraguan Institute for Popular Education and Research have been important in informing North American readers. Their reports have been corroborated by Lisa Haugaard, director of the Central American Historical Institute at Georgetown University in Washington, Tom Barry, senior analyst at the Inter-Hemispheric Education Resource Center in Albuquerque, New Mexico, and by numerous writers whose articles have appeared in a variety of magazines, including the FSLN's *Barricada Internacional* (BI). Pertinent United States government documents detailing American development assistance programs for Chamorro's coalition government have also been reviewed. Haugaard and Barry provide authoritative critiques of the United States foreign aid packages. Besides *Barricada Internacional*, Central America Report, Latinamerica Press, PeaceNet, *Pensamiento Propio*, and the reports of various church groups, such as the CEPAD Report, have been used in staying abreast of changes in Nicaragua during the period under review. From a research point of view, this paper aims to present the collected data within a broader conceptual framework, while offering readers a context in which future developments in Nicaragua's educational system may be interpreted.

The Educational System Inherited from the FSLN

The ideological orientation of the Sandinistas is best summed up in the term "popular education." This began with the literacy crusade of 1980 and continued with the subsequent expansion of nonformal adult education programs. This expansion meant an increase in the number of teachers and schools, as well as a democratization of access to education for those who had least access before the revolution (Carnoy & Samoff, 1990). The majority of

those who entered the system during this period (1979-1989) came from the popular classes. This nonformal adult education promoted a new kind of pedagogy and new ways of learning (Popular Education Collectives). Because it was considered a tool in the process of class struggle, the system demanded the participation of mass organizations like the National Association of Nicaraguan Educators (ANDEN), the Nicaraguan Women's Association (AMNLAE), the Sandinista Workers Confederation (CST), and groups in the health and agrarian sectors. The popular education concept permeated the different organizations; its methodology was used "in health brigades, the agrarian reform, drafting the new Constitution (1987), preparations for the electoral process, the growth of the communal movement and grassroots and community preschools" (Arrién, 1991, p.18).

In addition to the expansion in nonformal education programs, the Sandinista government increased basic, secondary, and special education services. By the end of their term, 81% of rural schools offered four grades or more—a significant improvement from the 10% figure at the beginning (Arrién, 1991, p.17). Secondary education was expanded in urban areas to accommodate young workers, while Peasant Agricultural Schools were created to provide special education in the countryside. Bilingual and bicultural programs began on the Atlantic coast where Rural Work-Study Schools were initiated. The Preparatory College was created to facilitate university access for those of the popular sectors and a grant program was created to finance university studies in Nicaragua and abroad (Arrién, 1991, p.18). By the end of 1986, almost 27% of all Nicaraguans were receiving some form of organized schooling (Wagner, 1989, p. 26).

In order to offer "the people's education," the Sandinista government collaborated with teachers and community leaders to design teaching programs to fit "the needs of the country." Free education was offered at virtually all levels and new materials to complement the new methodologies were created. The leadership also initiated a program to nationalize "the centers of private [higher] education that [had] been immorally turned into industries by merchants who hypocritically invoke religious principles" (Borge, Fonseca, Ortega, Ortega, & Wheelock, 1969, p. 16). They trained more and better teachers in modern sciences to take on greater responsibility; they increased the state budget for higher education; and they eliminated "the neocolonial penetration of the university, especially the penetration by the North American monopolies through the charity donations of the pseudo-philanthropic foundations" (Borge et al., 1969, p. 16).

The Sandinistas also sought to develop a new culture through education, by encouraging an increased awareness of co-operation among individuals. The culture was served by the concept of the new Nicaraguan, the Sandinista, and by a strengthened unity of "students, faculty, and investigators with the whole people" (Borge et al., 1969, p. 17). An ethical element in education was echoed throughout much of what the Sandinista leadership wrote about correct

behavior in citizens, where awareness, honesty, selflessness, and commitment replace ignorance, "envy, vanity, and other base desires . . . [in] the creation of the new man" (Hodges, 1986, p. 259). The "fundamental human problem" facing the new Nicaraguan, according to Tomás Borge in *What is a Sandinista?* (1980), was "to overcome alienation from others and self-alienation, a dehumanizing condition accentuated by contagion with the 'American way of life!'" (Hodges, 1986, p. 259).

In June 1989, the Ministry of Education (MED) published a booklet revealing the Sandinista's plans for a second literacy campaign in 1990. They estimated that the illiteracy rate had climbed by as much as 10% since the end of the 1980 Crusade. This meant that about 20% of Nicaraguans over 10 years of age were illiterate, reflecting in part the limitations in the success of the popular education program. With the February 1990 election results, the priorities within the MED changed.

Agents Influencing Education under UNO Leadership

There are four important bodies influencing the UNO government's policy toward education in Nicaragua. These are: (1) the government of the United States, which acts through two foreign assistance agencies—the Agency for International Development (US AID) and the National Endowment for Democracy (NED); (2) the Superior Council of Private Enterprise (COSEP), a bloc of Nicaraguan industrialists, financiers, and large-scale agricultural and commercial groups who adhere to the free-market economic philosophy associated with the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF); (3) the Catholic Bishops Conference and the Catholic Church hierarchy, led by the archbishop of Managua, Cardinal Miguel Obando y Bravo; and (4) the Sandinistas, who remain an influential force in Nicaragua and whose supporters take direct aim at educational policy through ANDEN and through such newly formed groups as the Nicaraguan Institute for Popular Education and Research (INIEP). The UNO government has placed responsibility for educational policy in the hands of three individuals—Sofonías Cisneros, Humberto Belli, and Hortensia Rivas—who constitute the leadership of the Ministry of Education.

In June, 1990, the then-Minister of Education, Sofonías Cisneros, was quoted in a Managua newspaper as saying, "Everything [in the Sandinistas' educational objectives] is applicable except the revolutionary part. We believe the revolution has no validity, either in Nicaragua or elsewhere" (*envío*, Oct 1990, p.12). This statement signaled the government's intention to remodel the education system in the image of their own authority: "an education that promoted new, fundamentally Christian values harmonious with historical requirements for peace, democracy, coexistence and reconciliation" (Arrien, 1991, p.18). Cisneros, who is a close ally of Cardinal Obando y Bravo, came to the post after spending a period as the key lay figure on the Catholic Bishops Conference's Education Committee. He stayed as Education Minister until

January 10, 1991, when President Chamorro shuffled her cabinet and announced the creation of the National Technology Institute (INATEC) "to train Nicaraguan youth in diverse technological fields" (*CAR*, 18 Jan.1991, p. 12). INATEC was intended to integrate technical education previously offered by the MED with vocational training offered by the Ministry of Labour. Cisneros was named its director and was replaced by former Vice-Minister of Education Humberto Belli as head of the MED.

Belli has been recognized as the principal planner in the UNO educational program. According to *envío*, he "is a well-known rightwing ideologue who founded the Puebla Institute and has close ties to the United States-based Institute on Religion and Democracy [IRD]" (Oct 1990, p. 12). The Puebla Institute is an anti-Sandinista, Catholic human rights organization, based in Washington, with strong connections to the authoritarian City of God sect. Belli is a leading figure in the sect which "upholds the values of the religious right: hierarchy, traditionalist education, and a corporatism in which every social group knows its place and stays in it" (Quandt, 1991, p. 49). The IRD receives funding from the National Endowment for Democracy as a part of the Reagan administration's "Democracy Project" which began in 1983. Belli himself received CIA funding and logistical support for his anti-Sandinista tract, *Nicaragua: Christians Under Fire*, published in the early 1980s. He has recruited Dino John Pantoni, "a close U.S. advisor . . . who is also a CIA informant" (*envío*, Aug 1991, p. 12), to the Ministry to give seminars and run conferences in professional development. Belli and Pantoni organized several events through the summer of 1991, including a three-day conference on democratic education which critics have denounced as attempts to "impose a U.S. education model [on the Nicaraguan system], all the while keeping tabs on teachers and other MED personnel opposed to such an end" (*envío*, Aug 1991, p.12). Belli has said that his plan is to "depoliticize education and teach a scientific perspective and Christian values" (*envío*, Oct 1990, p. 12).

A third member of the MED leadership is Vice Minister Hortensia Rivas, a teacher who helped found the anti-Sandinista Nicaragua Teachers' Union Federation (FSMN) in 1988. She has special responsibilities in personnel, recruitment, and training. During the general strikes of May and July, 1990, Rivas helped establish a vigilante-type force made up of members of the pro-UNO *Vía Cívica* organization financed by the United States, which began to monitor the dissenting ANDEN teaching personnel. Rivas is also in charge of contracts and has been accused by ANDEN leader Mario Quintana of basing educational policy decisions on political criteria detrimental to the quality of education. In her defense, Cisneros stated that "We don't want wise teachers; we want loyal ones" (*envío*, Oct 1990, p. 13).

Chamorro's leadership in the coalition government has been criticized (by Vice President Virgilio Godoy and spokespersons for COSEP) for its decision to "rollback the revolution" gradually instead of attacking the Sandinista program head on (Barry, 1991, pp. 359-360). Belli himself has made it a point

to label Chamorro as "ineffective" in his speeches on government policy. The President allows the MED under Belli to operate freely however, as both individuals agree that spending cutbacks and re-allocation of funds within the education budget are necessary. As suggested by the events surrounding Nicaragua's September 12, 1991 decision to withdraw its claim against the United States in the World Court of Justice, Chamorro's role in UNO has included raising international funds and convincing money lenders to forgive portions of Nicaragua's foreign debt (Jeffrey, 1991, p.1). When the U.S. government announced on September 25, 1991, that it had cancelled \$259 million in debt left over from the Somoza years (1937-1979), "Nicaragua's foreign debt [was reduced] to about \$9 billion, down from \$10.8 billion" a year before (Jeffrey, 1991, p. 1). Two days later, on September 27, the World Bank announced its first loan (of \$110 million) to the UNO government.

According to Lisa Haugaard, director of the Central American Historical Institute (CAHI) at Georgetown University, the U.S. Congress passed the Dire Emergency Supplemental Appropriations Act in May 1990, which allocated \$300 million in aid for Nicaragua for the fiscal years 1990 and 1991 (Haugaard, 1991, p.1). Economic and political conditions were placed both on the balance of payments support and on the food aid. These conditions included "privatization of farms and industry; privatization of the banking system; liberalization of laws governing export trade and foreign investment; government fiscal austerity, including layoffs of public employees; and other measures promoting economic adjustment and a free market philosophy" (Haugaard, 1991, p. 2). According to a United States General Accounting Office (US GAO) report from May 1, 1991, entitled "Aid to Nicaragua/Status of U.S. Assistance to the Democratically Elected Government," US AID decided that a \$5 million allocation "would be released upon receipt of evidence that a total of 5,000 civilian employees had left the public sector and that total public sector civilian employment had declined by a corresponding number" (US GAO, 1991, p.17). Further conditions were included in the "Food for Progress Agreement" signed by Chamorro's government and the United States to send \$17 million in food aid to Nicaragua. These conditions granted United States corporations access to productive resources which were the property of the Nicaraguan State.

The political conditions attached to financial support are more difficult to verify and US AID maintains there are no political conditions on assistance (Haugaard, 1991, p. 2). However, more than "\$21.2 million can be identified to be of primarily political or educational, rather than economic development, purposes" (Haugaard, 1991, p. 5). Included in this total is money channelled toward a study of Nicaragua's 1987 Constitution and the taking of an "inventory and analysis of Nicaraguan laws" (US AID, 1992, p. 3), which the US GAO reports should identify "governmental and political weaknesses that impede social and economic progress and prevent full economic development" (US GAO, 1991, p. 22). As well, the various organizations to

have received financial support from the U.S. government through US AID and NED from 1984 to the present have all opposed the FSLN politically. In fact, according to the Council on Hemispheric Affairs and the Inter-Hemispheric Education Resource Center (1990), this is the sole common characteristic in a collection of groups which includes print and radio media, trade unions, human rights commissions, women's groups, and business associations, as well as the much publicized Nicaraguan Democratic Front, the dominant *contra* force during the 1980s (pp. 43-46).

On a broader level, the [\$300 million] aid package raises questions about the role the donor country is playing in the national politics of the recipient. [US] AID selection of interest groups and NGOs representing one end of the democratic spectrum, whether in its "democratization" or other initiatives, represents a serious intrusion into the politics of another country. Aid to study reforms to the Constitution, in particular, seems highly inappropriate. (Haugaard, 1991, p. 7)

The free market philosophy is supported within Nicaragua by the business council COSEP. According to Janice Acton in a report entitled "The Nicaraguan People: At the Crossroads" (1991) "COSEP principles enshrine law and order, private property and individual rights, and opposes [*sic*] state intervention" (p. 16). They have taken an interest in education through supporting the technological institute project (INATEC) directed by Sofonías Cisneros. They are also receiving financial assistance from US AID to operate a center for investment and export promotion in conjunction with the Ministry of Economics and Development (US AID, 1992, p. 2). Historian Roberto Cajina, writing in *Barricada* in April 1991, said that COSEP is involved in a campaign with the UNO government to "strangle the existing institutions of higher education in order to strengthen these new initiatives, which are more to their ideological liking" (*envío*, May 1991, p. 27). COSEP members have recommended moving toward the privatization of education in Nicaragua, a trend consistent with the neo-liberal economic philosophy of US AID and the World Bank. In December 1991, Education Minister Belli announced that "beginning next school year [ie, February 1992] primary and secondary school students will pay monthly fees of . . . [\$1 and \$2] respectively" (*BI*, Jan 1992, p. 35; Jeffrey, 1992, p. 2). Francisco Arellano, a MED advisor to Belli, saw this measure in its larger context: "There is a generalized trend towards privatization . . . and the privatization of education is not anything different from what's happening in the country" (*BI*, Jan 1992, p. 35).

The influence of the Catholic Church hierarchy on educational policy is evident in certain "new initiatives" in higher education, in the changes in curricula at the primary and high school levels, in the textbooks US AID has provided, in the appointments of community MED delegates and school directors (Seiser, 1990, pp. 10-11; *envío*, Oct 1990, pp. 14-15), and in the close relationships Cardinal Obando y Bravo has with Violetta Chamorro, Sofonías Cisneros, and Humberto Belli. Besides the INATEC project, Obando is working with the "charismatic City of God sect of the Catholic Church" to create a new Catholic University in Managua with funds from the Vatican (*envío*, May 1991,

p. 27). Cajina has argued that this institute will eclipse the existing Jesuit-run Central American University. In addition, Obando has overseen a significant change in the curricula at the primary and secondary levels and the introduction of courses on morality and ethics. Evangelical leaders have expressed concern that schools now impart Catholic ideology. Cajina denounced the changes as a "return to the Stone Age, the imposition of an orthodox Catholic government which is essentially conservative and classist" (Jeffrey, 1990, p. 3).

The Sandinistas have played an important role in opposing the new education project through the first 20 months of Chamorro's rule. Many of the organizations established between 1979 and 1990 have resisted changes which affect their status. ANDEN has organized mass demonstrations and strikes to protest budgetary cutbacks and new recruitment policies and in conjunction with the larger popular resistance to Chamorro's policy initiatives. In response to layoffs and the cancelling of state funding for some adult education programs, many of the personnel from the previous Ministry of Education, including the former minister Fernando Cardenal, established the Nicaraguan Institute for Popular Education and Research (INIEP) in late 1990. Besides implementing popular education projects abandoned by the UNO government, they are studying the mistakes and lessons of the previous term. Cardenal is one of a group of high profile Sandinista educators who have critiqued MED documents through the media. Another is Dr. Juan Bautista Arrien, currently an INIEP researcher and the MED's Permanent Secretary of the National Commission for Cooperation with UNESCO. A third is Dr. Carlos Tunnerman Bernheim, a former Minister of Education and Ambassador to the United States, whose detailed response to a MED pamphlet outlining new directions in the area of education has been used as a source and orientation of information by critics of UNO policy. These critics include parents and students who see themselves defending the gains of Nicaragua's revolution. In the words of Alba Palacios, the national coordinator of the Women's Secretariat of the Association of Rural Workers, "The revolution taught us to fight for our rights. We have not forgotten that lesson" (TFP, 1991).

Putting Guidelines into Practice

In November, 1990, the Ministry of Education released a pamphlet entitled "Guidelines of the Ministry of Education under the new Government of National Salvation." In it the UNO coalition listed and analysed the merits and the shortcomings in the education system inherited from the previous government. Then it laid out its plans for change for the 1991 school year, according to the general and specific aims of the new education in Nicaragua.

The pamphlet introduced the four general principles of the new education, which were conceived and structured within the framework of a humanistic vision (Arrien, 1991, p. 20). These principles are: (1) Rescue the true sense of full and integral educational formation; (2) Educate for democracy and peace;

(3) Educate for development; and (4) Educate for the family. According to Arrien, the first of these implied that the Sandinista government did not provide this formation, despite the evidence of their achievements to the contrary. This evidence must include the fact that the "Guidelines" is "almost an exact repetition of the [Goals, Objectives and General Principles of the New Education, as outlined in the 1987] Constitution" (Arrien, 1991, p. 20). Similarly, to educate for democracy and peace supposes that "the antecedent to this need is the existence of an authoritarian or totalitarian state" under the FSLN. Arrien suggested that a more appropriate measure is whether or not those popular sectors traditionally marginalized from the benefits of democracy, freedom, and peace, receive open and equal access to the new education. He also argued that the principle to educate for development is compromised when development is synonymous with economic growth, and doesn't include a "true human development [which] is also just and egalitarian" (Arrien, 1991, p. 20). Finally, Arrien maintained that the importance given to the family in the "Guidelines" is based on the belief that the FSLN is a Marxist organization which had to destroy the family to build a totalitarian state.

The MED pamphlet also stated that because of "certain [political] distortions [in education] arising out of a combination of external and internal factors" (PeaceNet, 1990, p. 2), the Ministry decided to implement curricular changes at the secondary school level. Four new courses were added (Morality & Civics, Philosophy, Economy & Society, and Statistics) and another was dropped (Sociology), while three others were allotted an increased amount of class time (Mathematics, Science, and Spanish). To allow for this increase, the timetable for secondary school students was expanded from 23 to 26 hours per week. Sociology and Spanish were singled out for ideological "distortions"; the former was criticized for its Marxist perspective and replaced in the curriculum by Economy & Society.

Humberto Belli, the principal author of the "Guidelines" document, also criticized the previous government for creating "an education highly subordinated to serve the interests of a party elite" (PeaceNet, 1990, p. 2). This bias, he argued, was reflected in the primary school textbooks, *Los Carlitos*, which the Sandinista government put together through consultations with Nicaraguan teachers in the mid-1980s. Different perspectives among parents, students, and educators either praised the *Carlitos* for being reflective of the Nicaraguan reality, or criticized them for being overly politicized. Belli pointed out that the readers contained FSLN party symbols and claimed that they used aggressive language to apologize for war. As a general aim of education in UNO's Nicaragua was democracy and peace, Belli decided to replace the *Carlitos* with a new series of textbooks.

According to the "Guidelines," the "distorted" textbooks would be replaced in the short term by adaptations of "the best textbooks in Latin America" (PeaceNet, 1990, p. 2). The new *Blue and White* texts began to arrive after the

1991 school year started. A US AID factsheet from February 28, 1991, indicated that the new readers were imported with American financial assistance.

Textbook Program: (\$12.2 million) At the request of the [Government of Nicaragua], A.I.D. is providing over 7 million updated, de-politicized textbooks for primary and secondary school students. As of February 22, 1991, a total of 5,570,092 primary and secondary school books have arrived in Managua and over 3 million have been distributed. These include translations into the Miskito language, the first professionally produced texts in that language. An additional 2 million textbooks will arrive by March [1991] for the beginning of the new school year.

In addition to the *Blue and White* readers, a textbook entitled *Civics, Morals, and Urbanity* was imported for use in grades three through six (*CEPAD Report*, May-June 1991, p. 8). The Ministry announced that in the long term a combination of imported/adapted texts and home-produced texts would be used in the public system.

Critics of the textbooks focused their complaints on both the content of the books and the process surrounding their distribution. In the case of the *Civics, Morals, and Urbanity* text, the General Assembly of CEPAD (the progressive Evangelical Church groups in Nicaragua) named a commission to meet with Belli about its concern that "religion is being taught in Nicaraguan public schools, a practice that is not consistent with the country's constitution" (*CEPAD Report*, May-June 1991, p. 8) in which it states that education is secular (and free). Although they focused on the unconstitutionality of the practice, CEPAD objected to "the use of the Roman Catholic catechismal version of the Ten Commandments, rather than the Old Testament text, in the textbooks" (May-June 1991, p. 8). All of the "depoliticized" books were infused with a highly moralistic, religious tone, as the "influence of the Church is present throughout" (*envío*, Oct 1990, p. 12). In addition, the fourth grade history reader "portrayed the previous government in an extremely negative light" (Haugaard, 1991, p. 5).

Besides the pro-Catholic, anti-Sandinista bias, the texts did not meet the approval of many ANDEN teachers because they do not reflect Nicaraguan daily life, particularly that of rural children.

Drawings of blue-eyed children, references to Santa Claus and sentences about 'riding a bicycle to market' are likely to bewilder them. Mothers who cook, wash and use sewing machines, fathers who work and bring home money and children who run errands are unfamiliar—and perhaps undesirable—models for children who may not have fathers and begin to work in the fields at the age of ten. (*envío*, Oct 1990, p. 12)

Tunnerman, in his three-part article in *Barricada*, also stated that the texts were "out of context to the cultural, economic and political situation that exists here" (PeaceNet, 1990, p. 3). He pointed to the adapted primary school reader called "My Puerto Rico" which contains a story "full of expressions unknown in Nicaragua" and asked "why all the U.S. money readily available for school materials (and not much else) could not have been used to revise the existing texts, deleting the offending party political allusions" (PeaceNet, 1990, p. 3).

The timing of the textbook substitutions and the handling of their distribution generated more negative attention for Chamorro's government. The *Carlitos* were newly reprinted, leading critics to believe that "the decision to eliminate all elements of Sandinista ideology [by importing the *Blue and White* readers] took priority over any other educational consideration" (Arrien, 1991, p. 25). And rural educational supervisors were not always informed by the MED of the changes. Teachers reported that the children and parents were not allowed to keep the *Carlitos*; instead the texts were confiscated and taken from storage, thrown in the dump or converted into pulp (*envío*, Oct 1990, p. 12). Others reported that the *Carlitos* were used as fuel in public book burning demonstrations, similar to the one held in the Leon public library in July, 1990, when various titles by Sandinista writers were "submitted to the purifying fire" (*LP*, 26 Jul 1990, p. 7). Arrien (1991) commented that "the new texts are the perfect tangible summary of the [UNO] government's political discourse" (p. 25).

The "Guidelines" also included among the inherited shortcomings, the "large number of teachers (over 60% in the primary sector) who lack full training and sufficient academic level" (PeaceNet, 1990, p. 1). This signaled a change in priorities as the MED began to emphasize quality and professionalism, while rejecting Nicaragua's popular or "empirical" teachers. Many of the empiricals were graduates of the 1980 Literacy Crusade, who "went on to become peasant teachers [and] taught basic subjects to their neighbors," often only a few steps ahead of those they were teaching (*envío*, Oct 1990, p. 13). By 1990, 60% of the 35,000 teachers in the country were empirical; most were lacking in formal training (Doerge, 1991, p. 8). Often they taught in the popular adult education programs which the MED diagnosed as weak areas suffering from "stagnation." They have since eliminated all state funding for these programs, as part of their general strategy to promote "depoliticized" formal schooling (Doerge, 1991, p. 7). To this end, the National Endowment for Democracy (NED) facilitated the curricular changes mentioned above by financing and delivering "a training course for 300 teachers in the teaching of Democracy and Human Rights" (PeaceNet, 1990, p. 1).

Critics of this new emphasis on professionalism insisted that the dismissal of the empirical teachers would reduce access to education for students from the popular sector. ANDEN leader Mario Quintana estimated that once the officially announced 30% cut in social spending goes into effect, approximately 9,000 teachers will be out of work and at least 270,000 children will be unable to attend school (Doerge, 1991, p. 8; Mendoza, 1990, p. 7). ANDEN argued that UNO economic priorities have meant cutbacks in subsidies for school materials and public transportation costs and exacerbated the declining attendance rate which began slipping in the late 1980s as the economy worsened. Fernando Cardenal also said that removing the empirical teachers would result in school closings throughout the country, especially in the rural areas. He questioned the logic of "bringing someone in from outside

the community who [though licensed to teach] might be less attentive to the needs of the people. It might be harder for such a teacher to play the dual role of educator and community promoter that the empirical teacher has traditionally taken on" (Doerge, 1991, p. 8).

ANDEN also maintained that the Ministry of Education has practiced politically motivated harassment against pro-Sandinista Nicaraguan educators. UNO representatives in the National Assembly passed a law which declared that school directors held positions of "trust." This meant the MED personnel were granted increased authority to appoint new directors to all schools since the positions fell outside of union protection (Arrien, 1991, p. 22). ANDEN members claimed that the MED arbitrarily dismissed or transferred teaching and administrative staff for their political beliefs (Doerge, 1991, p. 8). Independent observers have concurred with these charges. According to the Network of Educators in Central America (NECA):

In recent months [i.e., May-October, 1990], the MED has taken a strong stand against the major teachers union, ANDEN. The MED has refused to meet with ANDEN representatives to discuss violations of contract negotiations and the MED appears to be giving hiring preference to members of the smaller pro-government teachers union, the FSMN. ANDEN no longer has the right to automatic payroll deductions of members dues, a serious handicap in hard economic times. (NECA, Winter 1990, p. 5)

ANDEN was also concerned with the positive attention given by the MED to the Nicaraguan Teachers' Union Federation (FSMN) which ANDEN maintained need not exist. The Vice-Minister in charge of personnel, Hortensia Rivas, set a policy stating that as of mid-August 1990 all new teachers hired were to be members of the FSMN. According to FSMN president, Mario Casco, "a majority of new regional and municipal-level ministry delegates, those immediately responsible for personnel decisions" were also FSMN members (*envío*, Oct 1991, p. 14). The differences in salaries between the new officials in management posts and those holding their positions from the Sandinista administration drew further criticism from INIEP personnel: The former earned from \$1,000 to \$1,250 per month, while the latter made do with \$150 to \$200 (Arrien, 1991, p. 22). Rivas and Cisneros refused to re-negotiate preelection contracts with ANDEN, but insisted they discuss the issue with the Ministry of Labor and all legally constituted educational labor organizations (*envío*, Oct 1990, p. 14). This forced ANDEN to recognize the FSMN formally. ANDEN responded to Rivas by demanding her resignation and calling for an end to politically motivated attacks. In addition to recommending that teachers be included in the overall development of educational policy, ANDEN asked that only objective factors such as professional qualification, seniority, and performance be criteria for evaluation of teachers.

The Ministers of Education denied their actions were politically motivated, but insisted that the ANDEN teachers were recalcitrant and unloyal to the new government. The ANDEN educators participated in the general strikes of May and July, 1990, occupying schools and community centres. A year later, under

Quintana's leadership, they maintained a 50-day strike "to bring dignity to the teaching profession," which ended May 27, 1991, only after "the government agreed to increase their salaries by 25 percent and promised that the 18,000 striking teachers would suffer no reprisals" (*LP*, 30 May 1991, p. 8). This strike broke promises not to engage in labor protests made in a "commitment letter" which individual teachers were forced to sign as a condition for returning to work after the general strikes in the summer of 1990. At that time MED employed members of *Vía Cívica* to report on all those who had participated.

The "Guidelines" authors gave special attention to "individual initiatives" in education, "a phenomenon that the new authorities see favorably and hope to foster" (Arrien, 1991, p. 23). These private initiatives came from the Catholic Bishops Conference, COSEP, and the U.S. aid-giving agencies—all supporters of the measures taken by UNO to "privatize" education by cutting public subsidies and by reducing the number of teachers. Over \$72 million in the United States aid package for 1990-91 was designated as "Development Assistance," of which \$21.2 was designed for political and educational purposes. Some \$2 million was allotted for training 800 leaders and business professionals in specialized skills "and an understanding of the workings of a free enterprise economy in a democratic society" (US GAO, 1991, p. 34). This new knowledge should help facilitate the country's economic development.

[US] AID hopes that individuals who receive the training will be better able to help Nicaragua achieve goals such as decreasing the size and role of government, increasing government effectiveness to implement policies, fostering an appreciation of democratic pluralism, and stimulating broad-based economic growth. (US GAO, 1991, p. 34)

US AID allotted \$3.3 million to provide consultants and training on policy and administrative matters to the Nicaraguan government and private sector groups through the Central American Institute of Business Administration (INCAE). "These [27 consultants] have played a critical role in preparing draft legislation on economic policy issues including privatization and financial market reform" (US AID, 1992, p. 2). INCAE is also supported by the hard-line business bloc, COSEP, which has invested in private educational projects after having been excluded from the most important cabinet positions in Chamorro's government and refusing the two that its members were offered (Barry, 1991, p. 360). INCAE seminar topics have included "development of nontraditional exports, [and] foreign and domestic private investment" (Haugaard, 1991, p. 5). NED has sponsored similar projects from its inception in 1983. Through one of its Core Grantees, the National Republican Institute for International Affairs, NED has funded "educational institutes associated with factions of the Conservative Party [of Nicaragua]" as well as "an international cocktail circuit of conferences, exchange visits, seminars, and panel discussions for leaders from favored political parties, business groups, labor unions, and civic organizations" (*Resource Center Bulletin*, Spring 1990, p. 3). Among the "favored" groups were the various parties and associations

connected to UNO and its extremist predecessor, the Nicaraguan Democratic Coordinator (CDN), through interlocking directorates, funding, or coalition memberships, including the Confederation of Chambers of Commerce which shares a majority of its membership with COSEP.

Conclusions

Significant changes in the Nicaraguan educational system have taken place in the first 20 months of the UNO coalition government. The coherent nature of these changes demonstrates that the MED personnel have acted within a clear conceptual framework. Rather than simply reacting to a weakness in the system, or to a problem or crisis, the Ministry authorities have consciously created an education project, with guidelines, principles, policies, and applications in the schooling systems. This project has been built on two cornerstones: to cleanse the Nicaraguan educational system of the Sandinista ideology and replace it with Christian-inspired values and with North American notions of democracy, freedom, and peace; and to deliver the training and knowledge necessary to support the neo-liberal economic system the government is putting in place.

The same policy-inspiring bodies behind the changes in the educational system are upholding the neo-liberal economic project in Nicaragua. The trend toward technical and vocational training underscores the change in perception of the student-worker from one who needs to learn in order to function within his or her social and economic community to one who is first and foremost a resource for the country's economic growth. This trend is best exemplified by the creation of Nicaragua's National Technology Institute in 1991. By and large, Ministry efforts have centered on reinforcing formal education at the expense of the nonformal programs, which they say imparted the Sandinista ideology and offered unfair advantages to the popular classes. The "Guidelines" emphasized that in the new Nicaragua there were no special classes, only equal citizens. This has translated into a "national education" with the same goal for all students: "professionalization" (Arrien, 1991, p. 26).

If other MED guidelines and practices also fit with the prevalent international ideology, sufficient recognition must be given to the role the United States has played in educational change in Chamorro's Nicaragua. Through the conditions placed on development assistance, the U.S. has been able to ensure that the path followed is to their economic and ideological liking. The Structural Adjustment policies have meant sharp reductions in teaching personnel and schools and in the number of years of guaranteed basic education (reduced from nine grades under the FSLN to six under UNO). Despite the "Guidelines" general principle to "educate for democracy and peace," the textbooks issue is just one example of how U.S. aid has further politicized Nicaraguan society and curtailed academic freedom. Although the National Endowment for Democracy and the United States Agency for International Development remain active in Nicaragua in various sectors, the

emphasis these groups place on education is symbolized by the fact that US AID occupied offices within the Ministry of Education building in Managua. Their own inclination toward centralized control has been paralleled by the efforts of the MED to replace local educators with loyal ones. Too often the changes to the system have suited political rather than educational purposes.

The correspondence between Nicaraguan society and its education system is clear. Just as the Sandinistas began an enormous reform almost immediately upon seizing power in 1979, the UNO coalition members wasted little time in 1990 before they began to make changes suited to their socioeconomic paradigm. What has remained constant throughout is the role education plays in reproducing the current social relations of production.

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UNO National Opposition Union
 US AID United States Agency for International Development
 US GAO United States General Accounting Office

Abbreviations

AMNLAE Nicaraguan Women's Association
 ANDEN National Association of Nicaraguan Educators
 BI Barricada Internacional
 CAHI Central American Historical Institute
 CAR Central American Report
 CDN Nicaraguan Democratic Coordinator
 CEPAD Evangelical Committee for Aid to Development
 CIA Central Intelligence Agency
 COSEP Superior Council of Private Enterprise
 CST Sandinista Workers Confederation
 FDN Nicaraguan Democratic Front
 FSLN Sandinista National Liberation Front
 FSMN Nicaraguan Teachers' Union Federation
 IMF International Monetary Fund
 INATEC National Technology Institute
 INCAE Central American Institute of Business Administration
 INIEP Institute for Popular Education and Research
 IRD Institute on Religion and Democracy
 LP Latinamerica Press
 MED Ministry of Education
 NRC National Reconstruction Consortium
 NECA Network of Educators in Central America
 NED National Endowment for Democracy
 TFP Tools for Peace
 UCA Central American University
 UNESCO United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization