

Foreword

This book could not have been written at a more timely moment. Precisely when the painful and prolonged experience of authoritarian socialism is coming to an end around the world, Donald C. Hodges asks the obvious and often-avoided question, Where do we go from here?

The dramatic reassertion of freedom in modern political consciousness is an event to be celebrated joyfully. But the demise of Marxism-Leninism has become more an occasion for smug self-congratulation than a golden opportunity for sober self-examination. The crumbling of Eastern European socialism does not constitute a confirmation of liberal capitalism or of the various forms of social-democratic economics. Today, the most powerful capitalist nation is itself in crisis, a crisis involving spiraling debt, economic dislocation, what appears to be a permanent underclass plagued by drug dealing and addiction, an apathetic body politic, and other signs of social disaffection. The United States of America is not Utopia, nor anything approaching it. We must be clear-eyed; social narcissism is the last attitude we need now.

In this sequel to *Intellectual Foundations of the Nicaraguan Revolution*, itself a sophisticated study of the connections between the “unique blend” of Sandino’s revolutionary thought and the Sandinista revolution, Hodges turns his attention from the politics and philosophy of Sandino to the lucid and confident exposition of a utopian vision: spiritual communism.

Spiritual communism? If ever a seeming oxymoron could grate on American ears it is this. No two concepts could seem more incongruous. But let us look again. Spiritual communism has been at the heart of the Christian longing for radical fellowship: its first communities, monasticism, and the religious orders of the church were, and are, attempts at maximizing the social bonds and human realization that ubiquitous social hierarchies—especially the economic one—clearly seem to prevent or hinder. These experiments in communistic Christian brotherhoods were not a panacea, but they can be taken as harbingers of what is possible for society as a whole.

Therefore, in spite of how jarring it sounds, the idea of a spiritual com-

munist is not a novel one. One reason why we have not heard much about it is because it has been hiding under the wings of another name: anarchism—an ideal with more militant and secularized connotations, but that nevertheless has continued to cherish the freedom and creative spontaneity that belong to the children of God. Just as Anabaptists, with their radical egalitarianism, were an irritant to the churches of the Reformation, so the anarchists were anathema to both capitalism and authoritarian socialism. The revolution of May 1968 in France shook not just the Left and the Right, but the whole French establishment. The inevitable elements of agitation and destruction, and sometimes even terrorism, that have been linked to such protest demonstrations have not done much to endear the anarchistic ideal to the general public. But the rejection of regimentation, of large organizations, of unnecessary complexity and luxury, and, in general, the eradication of hierarchical obstructions to human fulfillment have exercised their potent attraction among the best and the most sensitive. Those who have felt the appeal of anarchism include Thomas More, Thomas Jefferson, Gustave Courbet, Camille Pissarro, Georges Seurat, Stéphane Mallarmé, Max Stirner, Leo Tolstoy, Henry David Thoreau, Vinoba Bhave, Mahatma Gandhi, Lewis Mumford, Paul Goodman, Aldous Huxley, Herbert Read, and, in Nicaragua, Augusto C. Sandino. In any case, we should remind ourselves that agitation is not the essence of the movement; the search for human emancipation is.

Spiritual communism is not a theocracy, or the reign of the saints. Hodges points out that there is as yet no political theory for this new type of communism in the manner, say, of Marx's blueprint for socialism. Spiritual communism has not reached this stage. But the enduring relevance of the ideal of spiritualizing human organizations, an ideal Sandino held, should serve as a reminder and promise of things to come.

The aspiration toward freedom is the most profound in the human heart. Owing to the human condition, it is also subject to much misunderstanding and to practical abuses. The freedom for which generous and reckless youth fights is not the freedom of the experienced and seasoned. Modern mystics have probed other dimensions of freedom that give infinitely more depth to the libertarian yearnings of novices in the arena of political consciousness.

In Nicaragua, the Sandinista Front was perceptive and shrewd enough to assess correctly the enormous influence that religiously inspired revolutionaries could have in helping to bring down the Somoza regime and in symbolically legitimizing the Front's socialist policies once it was in power. In promoting what they called a "strategic" alliance between Christians and Marxists, the Sandinistas were reinterpreting, with great political adroitness, the old Marxian prejudice against religion as the opium of the people. The alliance served the Sandinistas, at least in the short run. In the long run, however, theologians of liberation may have to reevaluate such alliances be-

cause the Popular Church neglected its prophetic critical function, because it was used mainly as a conveyor belt of Sandinista policies and as good public relations with foreign Christian communities and institutions, and because the presence of priests in key ministerial posts did not add anything substantially Christian to the Sandinistas' conduct of politics. These developments raise serious questions about liberation theology's societal analyses and prognoses and its tactical and strategic alliances. These questions must be resolved if liberation theology wants to create itself anew from the present political ashes.

The great novelty of liberation theology is its unwavering insistence on interpreting reality from the perspective of the poor. Salvation, then, acquires a this-worldly aspect that was lacking in traditional theologies. Since liberation theologians had no satisfactory analytical apparatus to analyze concrete situations of poverty and underdevelopment, they naturally resorted to the most trenchant critique of capitalism available, that is, Marxism. Although they adopted analytical Marxism as a "tool" only, they eventually found themselves committed to an authoritarian ordering of society as the only way out of underdevelopment and socioeconomic injustice. Because liberation theologians have not given proper attention to pre-Marxian communism, they have lacked the flexibility to consider alternative and more spiritually satisfying ideals of social organization. And in the case of Nicaragua, instead of fully utilizing the richness of the Judeo-Christian prophetic tradition in criticizing the seductions of power so inevitable in any human administration and examining values behind concrete governmental policies, they were widely perceived as loyal but uncritical apologists for the Sandinista regime.

This does not mean that the Sandinistas came to power with the explicit intent of causing mischief. Far from it. The Sandinista program was neither worse nor better than other standard authoritarian socialist blueprints. Its literacy program released an enthusiastic national altruism, and today, even though they are out of power, it is noticeable that rude conduct based on old class distinctions is behavior not very often seen in the Nicaraguan social setting. If self-respect becomes a permanent attitude of the Nicaraguan popular classes, that is a development to be highly prized, although it has come by way of a painful and spendthrift revolution.

Yet, going as far back as 1982, those of us who had the opportunity of talking with diplomats from socialist countries such as Hungary and the Soviet Union were surprised at how they looked at the Sandinistas as irresponsibly willful and narcissistic newcomers who lost their heads and their sense of direction at the first sniff of power. What these diplomats saw was that romantic image-making and revolutionary dilettantism had taken precedence over prudent and solid management of the economy. That the Nicaraguan bourgeoisie has ample reason to feel resentful should not surprise anyone, though Violeta Chamorro's government has begun its administration in a con-

ciliatory stance. What is surprising and ironic is that the popular classes, in the cities and in the countryside, have manifested an unexpected bitterness against outgoing Sandinistas.

The Sandinistas were shocked not to get the vote of those whom they thought to be their most solid supporters—the young, the urban poor, and appreciable numbers among the military. Something went wrong. We have sufficient evidence today that an autocratic certainty as to what the people want is a dangerous path to follow. Julia Preston, writing in the *New York Review of Books*, summarizes what seems a historical judgment on the Sandinistas: “Right up to election day the Sandinistas continued to work on the arrogant assumption that their original revolutionary victory automatically endowed them with superior political judgment. They communicated with Nicaraguans by using aggressive catchphrases. . . . Like the deafening sound system they deployed at their final rally, they could make noise, but they couldn’t listen” (12 April 1990).

With obvious justification, liberation theologians could refer to Nicaragua as their geographical and political capital, even more so than Cuba, where Christian thought and presence are institutionally weak. Nicaragua functioned as a sounding board and as a center for spreading liberation theology. With one exception, Nicaraguans have not made any first-rate, intellectually cogent contributions to the fund of liberationist ideas, but that exception is a massive one. Ernesto Cardenal has presented poetically his version of the Kingdom of God on earth, where barriers between Marxism and Christianity have been broken down. Cardenal is not a theologian, and his poetic approach eschews complex scholarly justifications of his millenarian hopes. His Marxism is naïve and his pegging of class consciousness to Jesus’s message somewhat crudely insistent. But there is an engaging Franciscan quality in his monk’s vision of what constitutes a pre-Marxist utopia, since ultimately the hair shirt of his Marxism does not quite fit the Christian body of his hope.

What is implied in Cardenal’s religious yearning was clearly and consciously held by Sandino in his eclectic Gnostic-theosophical-millenarian vision: political restructurings are not sufficient for fundamental changes in human relations. Sandino was unashamedly spiritualist in his very earthly political struggle, so spiritualist as to make the Sandinistas wince in discomfort and hide as much as possible how un-Marxist Sandino was in his rejection of secular rationalism and materialism. What will come as a surprise to other Nicaraguans is that Sandino is an exemplar of the new political style in which the wisdom of the East meets the knowledge of the West. This new style includes the ideals that propel movements such as ecological activism, women’s and peace movements, animal liberation, and movements in which Christ, Buddha, and Lao-Tzu are harmonized. These new social and political dynamics are pushing toward a voluntary social arrangement in which freedom and human relations will be paramount, and in which a holistic perspective that

sees humanity's intimate relation with nature, along with a spiritual world-view, will prevail. This hoped-for outcome Hodges winsomely describes as non-Marxist communism.

By detecting the unity behind various liberation movements—from overtly political to broadly cultural—Hodges has opened widely the scope of our political reflection. He has clearly seen how these diverse movements converge in their search for the spiritualization of society and the attainment of universal kinship. It is for us to pursue his insight to its desired realization.

NAPOLEÓN CHOW

Advisor to the Ministry of Culture and vice-director
of the Technical Office of the Presidency of Nicaragua

THIS PAGE INTENTIONALLY LEFT BLANK

If socialists show themselves capable, if they learn how to annul egoisms . . . they will be able to proclaim not just socialism, but rather communism without frontiers and private plots . . . [so] that *everything belongs to everybody in common* . . . [and] nothing is left to the individual except the wisdom for moral and spiritual elevation, while its material benefits belong to the commune.—JOAQUÍN TRINCADO, *FILOSOFÍA AUSTERA RACIONAL* (1920)

We have now explained the five loves and infallibly laid the foundations of the Communist Ethic . . . the complete man is the *Spiritist Communist*.
—JOAQUÍN TRINCADO, *LOS CINCO AMORES: ÉTICA Y SOCIOLOGÍA* (1922)

Here I am forcing myself to receive “intuitively” the spiritual inspirations relative to the organization of our first government of the Universal Commune, for which I have had to reread in these moments our book *Los cinco amores* [The Five Loves].—SANDINO TO JOAQUÍN TRINCADO, 22 JUNE 1931

I made myself the firm promise that as soon as the war for independence came to an end, . . . I would . . . free Nicaragua from the barbarism into which exploitation has submerged it, first feudal-colonial and now capitalist.—SANDINO IN A CONVERSATION WITH JOSÉ ROMÁN, BOCAY, MARCH 1933

I had become unionized in Mexico. . . . With workers and peasants I want to forge a new Nicaragua. We are going to organize them. In Managua we will buy a building to use for the House of the Laborer, as in Mexico. . . . No more exploiters . . . everything will be in cooperatives.—SANDINO IN A CONVERSATION WITH NICOLÁS ARRIETA, NIQUINOHOMO, NOVEMBER 1933

On one occasion, speaking to me about his belief in . . . the future of communization . . . , Sandino added with a jovial air: “But look, if I were to say this openly, people would take me for a screwball.”—RAMÓN BELAUSTEGUIGOITIA, *CON SANDINO* (1934)

I saw Augusto Sandino for the first time in Prinzapolca. He addressed me, saying that he wanted to fight in the interior. . . . At the same time he gave me a written statement concerning his ideas, the concluding sentence of which proclaimed that “PROPERTY IS THEFT.”—GEN. JOSÉ MARÍA MONCADA, AS CITED BY ANASTASIO SOMOZA GARCÍA, *EL VERDADERO SANDINO, O EL CALVARIO DE LAS SEGOVIAS* (1936)

THIS PAGE INTENTIONALLY LEFT BLANK

SANDINO'S COMMUNISM

THIS PAGE INTENTIONALLY LEFT BLANK