

THE PEASANTRY AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF SANDINISTA AGRARIAN POLICY, 1979–1984*

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Immediately after the Sandinista victory of July 1979, the Nicaraguan agrarian reform began with the expropriation of Somoza's agricultural estates and their conversion into state farms. Four years later, the land expropriated under the 1981 Agrarian Reform Law was being distributed to peasant production cooperatives and increasingly to individual peasant farmers. This article will analyze this shift in Sandinista agrarian policy and attempt to explain the factors shaping the course of the Nicaraguan agrarian reform. The focus is on the central policy debate of the first four years: the extent to which the agrarian reform should favor state farms, production cooperatives, or individual holdings.¹ That debate encompassed a series of related issues that will be examined here, including the rhythm of technological modernization, capital-intensive versus labor-intensive investment schemes, the pace and depth of socialist transformation, and the entire question of tactical and strategic alliances within the revolution.

We will argue that while the Sandinistas have not waived from their commitment to the central goal of the revolution—to build a society that functions in the economic and political interests of the majority—a central feature of Sandinista agrarian policy has been its pragmatism and flexibility.² Beyond the growing awareness on the part of the leadership of the concrete conditions of the agricultural sector, Sandinista agrarian policy has been shaped, in our view, by the interplay of three main elements: the commitment to the policy of national unity, external political and economic pressures, and tensions between state policy and developing worker and peasant organizations.

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The policy of national unity adopted by the new *Gobierno de Reconstrucción Nacional* resulted from the multiclass alliance that had been forged to defeat the Somoza dictatorship. The participation of the bourgeoisie in the struggle required not only bourgeois participation in government but a firm commitment on the part of the Sandinistas to a mixed economy and to political pluralism. This course also was dictated by the state of the economy and the need to secure external support.³ In addition to facing the economic disruption of the war, the revolution confronted the legacy of underdevelopment: a generally low level of development of the forces of production marked with sectoral and regional unevenness, a highly concentrated pattern of landownership, and economic dependence, particularly on U.S. trade, capital, and technology.⁴ The economic and political support of the advanced capitalist nations was crucial to the reconstruction effort. Moreover, the task of reconstruction required the full participation of scarce administrative and technical personnel as well as the talents of the bourgeoisie. The Sandinistas hoped that the commitment to the policy of national unity would assure that such support be forthcoming.

Since the victory, economic and political conditions have changed rapidly. On the one hand have been international economic and political developments, specifically, the world recession and the attempt by the Reagan administration in the United States to destabilize the Sandinista government through economic, political, and military means. On the other hand has been the internal development of the class struggle, itself influenced by U.S. support of the counterrevolution as well as by the growing strength of class-conscious mass organizations. The development of two rural mass organizations, the rural worker's association (the *Asociación de los Trabajadores del Campo*, or ATC) and the peasant's union (the *Unión Nacional de Agricultores y Ganaderos*, or UNAG), as organizations representing the interests of workers and peasants has often challenged the policy of national unity, requiring the leadership of the *Frente Sandinista de Liberación Nacional* (FSLN) to respond to these changing conditions with pragmatism and flexibility.

In general terms, there have been two broad phases of Sandinista agrarian policy differentiated by the enactment of the 1981 Agrarian Reform Law. In the first phase, from the victory until mid-1981, attention was focused on forming and consolidating the state sector and on organizing the rural population as workers. As a result of the tensions that arose during this period, the focus of agrarian policy gradually shifted. In the second phase, beginning in mid-1981 and gaining importance in mid-1982, attention was increasingly focused on cooperatives and on organizing the peasantry as producers. In order to analyze these evolutions in the Sandinista agrarian reform, we have identified

five subphases corresponding to the building up or resolution of tensions emerging from the dynamic interplay of the internal and external factors noted above.

STATE FARMS VERSUS PRODUCTION COOPERATIVES:
JUNE 1979–FEBRUARY 1980

The Sandinistas inherited an agricultural sector marked by the inequalities of underdevelopment: inequalities among the rural population in the degree of access to land as well as inequalities between the producers of agro-exports and the producers of domestic foodstuffs in the level of development of the productive forces. Three major rural groups existed—the bourgeoisie, peasant producers, and landless workers—as is indicated by the data in tables 1 and 2 on the agricultural economically active population (EAP) and the distribution of land-ownership.

In 1978 the rural bourgeoisie accounted for only 4.9 percent of the agricultural EAP but owned 84.8 percent of the nation's farmland. Of this group, Somoza, his relatives, and associates owned almost 20 percent of the land in farms. This land tended to be prime agricultural land in large commercial holdings concentrating on the production of agricultural exports. Large landowners not directly allied with Somoza held another 21 percent of the land in farms. A petty and medium bourgeoisie (with farms in the 36 to 355 hectare range) controlled 43.5 percent, slightly more land than the large bourgeoisie. Their farms were also largely dedicated to agro-export production. This agro-export economy had been consolidated over the course of the twentieth century on a fairly diversified base of coffee and cattle (from 1870 to the 1920s), cotton (in the 1950s), and tobacco, sugarcane, and beef exports (in the 1960s and 1970s) through a continual process of dispossessing the peasantry (Biderman 1982).

Peasant producers, occupying the remaining 15.2 percent of the agricultural land in farms of less than 36 hectares, constituted the second rural group. This group accounted for 58 percent of the rural EAP and was extremely heterogeneous. Included in its ranks were rich peasants who hired workers, "middle" peasants who could make an adequate living from farming, and smallholders whose farms were inadequate for family subsistence. Smallholders accounted for 36.4 percent of the rural EAP, or almost two-thirds of the peasant producers. The majority were semiproletarians who constituted the seasonal labor force for export agriculture. Nonetheless, these semiproletarians shared many of the characteristics and problems of other peasant producers. While many peasants concentrated on basic grain production, smallholders also accounted for 28 percent of the nation's cotton pro-

TABLE 1 *Agricultural Economically Active Population in Nicaragua, 1978*

<i>Sector</i>	<i>Number</i>	<i>Percent</i>
Large bourgeoisie (farms exceeding 355 hectares)	1,729	0.4
Petty and medium bourgeoisie (farms 36–355 hectares)	19,454	4.5
Rich and middle peasantry (farms 7–35 hectares)	93,377	21.6
Poor peasantry (farms 0.1–6 hectares)	157,357	36.4
Permanent wage workers	85,595	19.8
Landless seasonal workers	74,788	17.3
	432,300	100.0

Source: Unpublished 1983 data from the Dirección General de Reforma Agraria.

duction, 30 percent of coffee production, and 26 percent of cattle production (Barraclough 1982, 52).

The third rural group consisted of the landless agricultural laborers, who comprised 37.1 percent of the agricultural EAP. This group was subdivided into permanent agricultural workers (19.8 percent of the EAP) and those who could find only seasonal employment (17.3 percent of the EAP). Due to the rapid growth of Nicaragua's agrarian frontier from 1950 to 1970, most rural workers were dispersed among small enterprises, where two or three hired hands worked shoulder to shoulder with the owner, a situation that scarcely permitted the crystallization of defined class relations.

The transformation of this diffuse rural structure began during the war itself. During the last stages of the conflict, much of the land belonging to the Somoza group was taken over by rural workers and peasants. The principal impetus for these takeovers came from the rural workers association, the ATC. The formal consolidation of the ATC in March of 1978 brought to fruition many years of rural organizational work by the FSLN (Deere and Marchetti 1981, 48–51). Composed primarily of agricultural workers and semiproletarians, the ATC became the channel through which the economic and political struggles of the rural workers and peasants could be expressed as support for and direct participation in the armed struggle against the Somoza dictatorship. This activity culminated in takeovers of Somoza land as a means of maintaining production in the liberated zones. In the period from

TABLE 2 *Percent Distribution of Land by Size and Tenancy*

Sector	1978	1981	1982	1983	1984
Private property					
Farms					
356+ hectares	41.3	21.2	16.6	14.0	11.5
36–355 hectares	43.5	41.6	41.6	42.3	42.2
0.1–35 hectares	15.2	15.5	15.9	8.5	8.5
Subtotal	100.0	78.3	74.1	64.8	62.2
Credit and service cooperatives ^a				10.0	10.0
Production cooperatives		1.6	1.9	4.7	8.6
State farms		20.1	24.0	20.5	19.2
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Sources: For 1978–82, unpublished data obtained from the Dirección General de Reforma Agraria. For 1983 and 1984 (through July), calculated from Baumeister and Neira (1984). These data are comparable to the figures reported in MIDINRA (1984). Some discrepancies are found in the figures cited in other sources, however. See, for example, the data reported by García (1984, 79) in the same volume as the MIDINRA report.

^aThis category includes hectareage previously held as private property and land redistributed as individual peasant holdings as a result of the agrarian reform.

June to August 1979, these properties were farmed collectively as incipient production cooperatives rather than as individual holdings.

Following the Sandinista victory, the landholdings of Somoza and his allies were immediately confiscated under decrees numbers 3 and 38. As table 2 shows, the transfer of this land to the state sector in 1979 significantly reduced the share of land held in private units larger than 355 hectares. The former Somocista properties were usually modern, large-scale operations, and reasons of efficiency suggested that they should not be broken up. Economic considerations were reinforced by political considerations. The fact that the land takeovers had largely been carried out by landless rural workers, rather than by peasant producers, meant that little popular pressure existed to break up the confiscated lands. But the question of ownership and productive organization still had to be resolved: should the state turn the title to these lands over to production cooperatives, or should it retain title and administer the farms itself?

The decision was made in favor of state farms. First and foremost, agro-exports were crucial to the operation of the economy, and the Sandinistas needed to ensure the continued generation of foreign exchange.⁵ Second, these farms were among the most highly developed in the country and had been operated with a small permanent labor force and a large seasonal work force. Some among the FSLN leader-

ship feared that worker ownership would lead to the development of a rural elite. It was preferable for the state to have direct control of the surplus generated on these farms in order to distribute the benefits more widely. Similarly, it was argued that employment would be greater under state management, whereas worker-owners might limit broader participation. Others worried that because of Nicaragua's diffuse rural structure, a strong cooperative policy might result in these capitalist farms disintegrating into individual private plots. Such an outcome would endanger existing economies of scale and the possibility of intensifying technological development in the future. Third, a political consideration was the fear that distributing these lands to rural workers and peasants as cooperatives would touch off more land takeovers and thus endanger the policy of national unity.

The fact that the Sandinistas were able to convince peasants and rural workers to turn their incipient production cooperatives over to state management attests to the degree of faith that these groups had in the commitment of the Sandinista leadership to the goals of the revolution. The confiscated lands, along with other properties of the Somoza group, became a part of the people's sector, the Area de Propiedad del Pueblo (APP). Administration of the two thousand farms was delegated to the Instituto Nicaragüense de Reforma Agraria (INRA), which had been created seven days after the victory.

The organization of the state farms was undertaken in the middle of the 1979–80 agricultural cycle, one that had begun during the last stages of the war and was therefore extremely disrupted. The pressing immediate task was to reactivate production. The legacy of Somocismo posed many obstacles to this undertaking. One major difficulty was the lack of sufficient technical and administrative personnel. The task of administering 20 percent of the farmland in the country thus strained the capacity of the new government to the utmost. In many cases, it was necessary to retain the formerly Somocista lower management on the farms. Many of these managers (whose education averaged four years of schooling) maintained their prerevolutionary attitudes toward the work process, and conflicts quickly ensued between workers and management. The workers also were in many cases influenced by prerevolutionary modes of consciousness, and throughout the country, they took their "historic vacation." Absenteeism, tardiness, three-hour workdays, and low productivity became endemic as the old structures of oppression were stripped away by the revolution.

In response to this situation, the workers' organizations (the ATC in the rural sector and the Central Sandinista de Trabajadores in the urban sector) were envisioned as playing a dual role. On the one hand, they could defend the interests of the workers against managers and owners in both the state and private sectors. This role would in-

clude pressing for just wage increases, improvements in working conditions, and improvements in benefits; calling managers to account for improper treatment of workers; and maintaining vigilance against de-capitalization and other forms of counterrevolutionary activity on the part of private owners. On the other hand, the workers' organizations were given the important task of educating the workers as to their new roles in the new society. This undertaking included technical training as well as general political education. In this manner, the workers' organizations could represent the interests of the workers as they found them but could also become the principal avenue for the development of the workers' capacity to supersede their old roles and levels of consciousness and to begin to participate more fully in the work of revolutionary reconstruction. Through these organizations, the workers were expected ultimately to participate fully in the management and direction of the APP.

Whether the ATC could successfully play this dual role, and in so doing assure the participation of rural workers and peasants in the agrarian transformation, initially depended on its success in mobilizing and training the rural population. The mobilization efforts of the ATC were substantial. By November of 1979, they approached fifty-nine thousand members, and membership continued to expand rapidly throughout the rest of this early period (Deere and Marchetti 1981, 51). With this kind of growth, the quality of member participation was clearly uneven. Moreover, training and political education were all the more difficult because the ATC represented a wide-ranging worker-peasant alliance that included permanent workers on the state farms, permanent workers on the private farms, seasonal workers on both state and private farms who lacked access to land, and semiproletarians who were both seasonal workers and peasant producers, as well as many small rural entrepreneurs.

In this first period of the revolution, then, the organizational basis for the operation of the state farms was created. Property was vested in the state, with the expectation that management would be gradually shared by state-appointed administrators and by the workers through the ATC. The ATC was to take on an additional role as the political representative of rural workers and peasants and the organization through which the political, social, and technical training of the rural population was to take place.

Organization of the state farms brought a significant portion of the agro-export economy under the direct control of the state and set up new social relations for a segment of the rural labor force. But the remainder of the landless work force and the peasant smallholders were unaffected by these policies. Pressure began to mount from these groups for jobs, access to land, and state services. Although the perma-

ment labor force on the state farms was rapidly expanded, there were limits to this process, which by itself was not a solution to the problem of rural unemployment and underemployment. Scattered land takeovers attested to the continuing economic difficulties of the peasantry.⁶ The consolidation of the state sector also failed to address the problem of domestic foodstuff production because the state farms were primarily export-oriented enterprises.

THE PROBLEM OF THE LANDLESS AND SEMIPROLETARIANS AND THE ORGANIZATION OF PEASANTS AS WORKERS: FEBRUARY–DECEMBER 1980

By February of 1980, when the immediate task of organizing and reactivating production on the APP had been accomplished, these problems had become the new focus of debate. That month the ATC led a massive demonstration in Managua demanding the legalization of several land takeovers of non-Somoza farms by its membership, the reduction of land rental prices, and the requirement that landlords rent their unused lands at these lower rates. In addition, the ATC demanded a more liberal credit policy for peasant producers (Marchetti 1982, 5).

It was clear to the Sandinista leadership that the agrarian reform process had to be broadened in order to attack the problems of rural poverty, unemployment, and foodstuff production as well as to meet popular demands. But the Sandinista government's options were constrained by the policy of national unity. Its alliance with the private sector, which was considered necessary in order to reactivate production and preserve foreign political and economic relations, depended upon its commitment to the mixed economy, and specifically to private property. The bulk of export production still remained in the hands of the private sector. In 1980 large and medium-sized producers accounted for 72 percent of cotton production and over half the total production of coffee, sugarcane, tobacco, and cattle (Barraclough 1982, 52). Reactivating this production was crucial to the economic success of the revolutionary project.

The Sandinistas attempted to steer a middle course, expropriating the properties under ATC membership control while strongly discouraging future land takeovers. To diffuse pressure, it began to cede unused and underutilized APP land to groups of workers willing to work the land collectively. In addition, it attempted to convince the bourgeoisie that the conditions of land rental had to be changed because a large segment of the peasantry was sharecropping or renting land at rates that would ensure their continued poverty and hunger for land. Thus in the spring of 1980, the government embarked on a two-pronged approach to the problems of rural poverty and unemployment

that bypassed for the time being the more fundamental issues of land-ownership and distribution.

The first focus of the new policy was to improve the conditions of land rental. In April and May of 1980, the government passed decrees lowering rents by 85 percent and prohibiting the eviction of tenants. Moreover, by this point, the state had ceded more than thirteen thousand *manzanas* of APP land rent-free for a single growing season to four thousand rural workers organized into collectives (this kind of group was known as a *colectivo de trabajo*, or CT) (MIDINRA 1981).

The second focus of the new policy was to provide massive amounts of credit to peasant producers, both renters and owners. The credit policy as implemented was designed to serve the triple purpose of improving the economic situation of the producers, encouraging cooperative organization, and increasing basic grain production. Tenants and owners were encouraged with interest rate subsidies to form cooperatives for the purpose of receiving credit and technical assistance: credit was made available at 7 percent to production cooperatives, at 8 percent to members of credit and service cooperatives, and at 11 percent to unorganized peasant producers (Deere and Marchetti 1981, 57). PROCAMPO, a branch of the agricultural ministry, was charged with implementing policy regarding the peasant producers. A national committee, with representatives from the Banco Nacional de Desarrollo (BND), PROCAMPO, the ATC, the Ministerio de Planificación, and ENABAS (the Empresa Nicaragüense de Alimentos Básicos, the government marketing agency for basic grains) was set up to coordinate the credit program (see table 3).

Reflecting the government's new priority on foodstuff production, the acreage financed in basic grains in 1980–81 increased by 313 percent over 1977–78 (CIERA 1982, 48). Peasant producers (with holdings under 36 *manzanas* or in production cooperatives) accounted for 92 percent of the acreage financed. The increase in credit to this sector for both basic grain and export crop production was spectacular, 330 percent over the last year of Somoza's reign (MIDINRA 1982c, 31).

Although the state provided the credit, the ATC was responsible for organizing rural workers and peasants into cooperatives. The success of this drive was immediate: by June 1980, 73,854 members belonged to 2,512 cooperatives encompassing approximately 60 percent of peasant households.⁷ Most of the cooperative members were individual peasant producers, members of the 1,185 credit and service cooperatives. Some 1,327 production cooperatives in various stages of consolidation had been formed on either APP or private land. Membership in the ATC mushroomed to one hundred and twenty thousand members by June, transforming it from a heterogeneous organization of rural

TABLE 3 Area Receiving Credit, in Manzanas

Sector	1977-78	1980-81	1981-82
Basic grains ^a	111,400	460,453	258,643
Export crops ^b	229,800	302,600	280,879
Total	341,200	763,053	539,522

Source: CIERA (1982, 48).

^aRice, maize, beans, and sorghum.

^bCotton, coffee, and sugar.

workers into one representing both workers and peasant producers (Deere and Marchetti 1981, 56).

During the same period in which credit, ATC organizing, cooperative associations, and PROCAMPO assistance were being initiated as the indirect approach to the land question, the Sandinistas began formulating an agrarian reform law to deal directly with this issue. Considerable debate ensued over this proposal, particularly over the questions of to what extent and under what conditions private land would be expropriated, and to what extent and in what form such expropriated land should be turned over to peasant producers. Although an agrarian reform law was announced in July 1980, it was subsequently tabled. This decision was prompted by the growing political tensions within the country after the resignation of Alfonso Robelo from the ruling junta. At this point, the Sandinistas decided the law was not worth the risk of alienating the private sector. Another factor influencing the decision to table the law was the complaint by the ATC of inadequate participation in its formulation.⁸

Thus the indirect policy package constituted the Sandinista government's response to the problems of domestic foodstuff production and rural poverty in 1980.⁹ But the manner in which this policy was implemented, and some of the basic elements of the policy itself, reduced its effectiveness and gave rise to a new series of tensions. Difficulties emerged from three interrelated quarters: from weaknesses in the credit and organizational strategy, from the continuing tenuous nature of peasant access to land, and from the response of the rural bourgeoisie.

The abundant disbursal of credit was accompanied by a series of administrative and structural difficulties. The credit was received too late by some producers, in amounts exceeding the actual productive capacity of the peasant holdings, and with shortages of inputs, insufficient price guarantees, and inadequate marketing facilities. The net result was that peasant indebtedness exploded, with only mixed results in terms of basic grain production.¹⁰ The percent of the 1980 debt re-

paid in that year fell to 33.6 percent, from the already low figure of 58.7 percent for 1979 (MIDINRA 1982c, 253). Peasant repayment rates for basic grains by the end of the 1980–81 agricultural cycle were still below 50 percent, although repayment rates for the export products of coffee, cotton, and cattle were better. In terms of crop production, table 4 substantiates that beans, rice, bananas, and tobacco showed no improvement over the 1979–80 harvests, while coffee production increased only slightly. Significant increases in output occurred only for maize, sorghum, sesame, sugar, and cotton. With respect to animal production, pork and chicken became more available after being encouraged as substitutes for beef, but the production of cattle, milk, and eggs declined during the 1978–79 cycle. Particularly problematic was the fact that the traditional motors of the agro-export economy, cotton and cattle, still had not regained prewar production levels and the fact that the main wage good, maize, equaled 1977–78 output but was far below current demand.

These problems can be attributed in part to the lack of government technical expertise, to difficulties in coordinating the activities of the various government agencies involved with the peasant sector, and to a general lack of knowledge of the conditions of the peasant producers. The problems also resulted from the generally ad hoc nature of Sandinista policy toward the peasant sector at that time. The state was still concerned with consolidating and administering the *Area de Propiedad del Pueblo*, an enormous undertaking. The *Asociación de los Trabajadores del Campo*, with its increasingly large cooperative membership, had taken up the pressing issues of indebtedness and the need for improved marketing services. But it nevertheless remained a rural workers' association and found it difficult to coordinate policy effectively regarding its peasant members. Credit had been a useful tool in expanding ATC membership, but it was not clear whether expansion had benefited the ATC as an organization or its increasingly diverse membership. Expectations were rising quickly among rich, middle, and poor peasants as well as among the long disadvantaged lower strata of rural entrepreneurs, the petty and medium bourgeoisie. It was becoming evident that more fundamental changes in the approach to the peasant sector were necessary.

Although the Sandinistas had hoped to sidestep the question of property ownership, it remained a persistent problem. The rental provisions were insufficient to resolve the peasants' desire for access to land. On the one hand, many private landowners were resisting the rental decrees by refusing to rent out land at the official rates. On the other hand, even where land was made available to the peasants, tenure was not sufficiently secure to plan production for more than one growing season at a time. Over the course of the year, the ATC increasingly took

TABLE 4 Indices of Agricultural Output^a

Product	1977-78	1979-80	1980-81	1981-82	1982-83	1983-84
<i>Domestic Crops^b</i>						
Rice	100	132	133	193	204	202
Beans	100	71	70	101	115	155
Maize	100	80	101	107	102	129
Sorghum	100	143	209	225	124	226
<i>Export Crops^c</i>						
Cotton	100	15	53	45	55	62
Coffee	100	98	103	106	125	86
Sugar	100	86	98	114	112	102
Sesame	100	91	161	124	93	210
Bananas	100	107	107	104	74	113
Tobacco (Havana)	100	100	112	96	85	115
<i>Livestock</i>						
Cattle	1977	1979	1980	1981	1982	1983
Milk	100	111	83	64	79	81
Pigs	100	57	47	63	65	45
Chickens	100	111	145	168	197	186
Eggs	100	51	113	125	174	184
	100	99	291	384	450	465

Source: García (1984, 81).

^aBase 1977-78 = 100.

^bCrops destined primarily for domestic consumption.

^cCrops destined primarily for export.

up the call of its membership for security of land tenure and for a stronger response to the actions of the bourgeoisie.

Meanwhile, middle and wealthier peasants were experiencing mixed results from Sandinista policy. Although many peasants had benefited from the liberal credit policy, other needs of theirs, such as technical assistance and the timely provision of inputs and machinery, were not being addressed. The attention of the agencies of the Ministerio de Desarrollo Agropecuario y Reforma Agraria (MIDINRA), with their limited personnel, was being directed at the APP and the fledgling cooperative sector. Moreover, middle and rich peasants were a net user of hired labor, and often their interests were at odds with the ATC.

The rural bourgeoisie was quick to exploit this gap in Sandinista policy. Despite the efforts of the Sandinistas to work with the private sector and protect its economic interests, segments of the rural bourgeoisie were actively working against the revolution. After an initial period of disorganization, they had begun to regroup their economic and political forces around the producer associations (for example, the

coffee growers association and the cotton growers association) and the overall association of large and medium agricultural producers, the Unión de Productores Agrícolas de Nicaragua (UPANIC) (Sholk n.d.). These associations began a drive to incorporate peasant producers into their ranks, using credit, the direct provision of cheap inputs, and propaganda as their main organizing tools.¹¹ From the point of view of the ATC, the bourgeoisie was attempting to organize the peasantry by crop into their producer organizations both to prevent them from recognizing their common interests with the rural proletariat and to sow the seeds of the counterrevolution.

In response to this organizing drive of the rural bourgeoisie, the ATC began to recruit actively the middle and rich peasantry. The previous August, however, the ATC had lost its principal organizing tool when the government, fearful of a possible labor shortage for the upcoming export harvests, sharply curtailed credit for the second planting of basic grains. It also became clear that the middle and rich peasantry did not see the ATC as the organization that could best represent their interests. The situation came to a head in November of 1980, when the ATC pressured the government for increased acreage within the APP for basic grain production to be carried out by ATC work collectives, thus threatening the harvest labor supply of both peasant producers and the bourgeoisie.

SHIFTING ALLIANCES AND THE ORGANIZATION OF PEASANTS AS PRODUCERS: DECEMBER 1980—JULY 1981

For some time, activists of peasant origin within the ATC had been arguing that the peasantry needed their own organization. Events over the last few months had demonstrated that the middle and rich peasantry constituted an emerging social force within the revolution whose interests had to be addressed. With the election of Ronald Reagan, Nicaragua's bourgeoisie quickly recognized their new ally and began to defect from the revolution.¹² The whole scheme of class alliances began to shift rapidly. Instead of gearing the national unity program to the large bourgeoisie, the FSLN now focused on the numerically most important group of entrepreneurs, the small and medium-sized landowners. Given this shift in the national strategy, the peasant vanguard within the ATC was able to convince its leadership and the FSLN that an independent peasant organization was absolutely necessary.¹³

A large regional assembly was held in Matagalpa on 14 December to lay the basis for the new peasant organization. The assembly called for a nationwide union of all small and medium producers with regional representative councils. The response was tremendous, and

thousands of peasants began to organize. Village, *municipio*, and regional assemblies were held throughout early 1981. The mobilization culminated on 25–26 April 1981 with a national constituent assembly in which the national council of the new peasant organization, the Unión Nacional de Agricultores y Ganaderos (UNAG), was created. This organization became the sole representative of the small and medium producers vis-à-vis the state. It was given representation in the Consejo de Estado, in the national and departmental committees of small and medium producers, and in the national and regional councils of the MIDINRA.

Shifting alliances with respect to the entrepreneurial class, mentioned above, required corresponding adjustments at the level of the rural work force. Instead of having a more radical working-class leadership, poor peasants and semiproletarians were now incorporated into the broad gamut of medium and small entrepreneurs and rich and middle peasants represented in UNAG. This development marked a definitive shift from the original assumption that the semiproletarians could best be organized as a social force with wage workers. The new strategy was accompanied by a change in terminology: *semiproletarian* was dropped and the phrase *small and medium producers* began to appear in all official discussions of the peasantry. The worker-peasant alliance was overshadowed by the new petty bourgeois-peasant alliance.

The ATC was weakened considerably as an organization by the splitting off of part of its membership. Much of the former leadership of the ATC, particularly the leaders of peasant origin, moved to UNAG. But the objectives of the ATC became more clearly defined because it now had a more homogeneous membership made up of the rural wage workers on state and private farms. Its primary focus now became union-building.¹⁴

The new political and organizational forms of the peasantry both reflected and subsequently shaped the direction of Sandinista agrarian policy. Now an organization existed that uniquely represented the interests of the small and medium producers as producers. Even before the formal constitution of UNAG, the incipient peasant groups had been pressing for access to land. Throughout the early months of 1981, they held demonstrations for land redistribution, presenting evidence of decapitalization on the part of private landowners and showing the existence of substantial amounts of idle and deficiently worked land.¹⁵ To the mounting pressure from the peasantry was added the continuing concern of the government to assure domestic food production. As government programs were successfully raising the disposable income of the poor, output of basic grains needed not only to recover to prerevolutionary levels but to increase significantly to meet the growing demand.

In response to these pressures, the government in March 1981 passed the "law of forced rental," under which the private sector was obliged to make available for rental at the officially established rates any idle or deficiently worked land. It was hoped that this law would increase the amount of land available to the peasantry for basic grain production. Unfortunately, the effect of this law was minimal (CIERA 1982, 21). It was passed too late to have much effect on the spring sowing, and many large landowners refused to comply. These difficulties also reflected the continued preoccupation of the state with the APP sector and the lack of a forceful policy backing the peasantry. UNAG was not yet well organized enough to enforce compliance with the law in the face of landlord opposition. In addition, the rental law still failed to address the basic peasant demand for secure tenure, so that UNAG pressure on this issue continued. Indeed, as more land (both private and APP) was rented out, the number of peasants with an interest in this issue increased.

Recognizing the shortcomings of the indirect approach that had been followed for the preceding year, the Sandinistas in the spring of 1981 reinitiated discussion of an agrarian reform law. This time both the ATC and UNAG actively participated in the debate. All were in agreement that the land issue had to be resolved. Not only was considerable pressure building from below for a fundamental redistribution of landed property, but the fears of all sectors of the agrarian bourgeoisie over the future of the mixed economy had been aroused by the lack of clear protection for productive private property (Winson 1983; Sholk 1984).¹⁶

While a fairly broad consensus existed on the commitment to maintain the mixed economy in agriculture, opinions diverged over the property and organizational forms that would constitute the reform sector.¹⁷ One group within the MIDINRA still considered the path of socialist transition to lie primarily in collectivization via state farms.¹⁸ The majority conceptualized the transition path more broadly as including both state farms and production cooperatives (based on collective, although private, property).¹⁹

Behind this disagreement lay another debate over the rhythm of technological modernization and the question of capital-intensive versus labor-intensive investment schemes.²⁰ Those favoring state farms argued that the agro-export sector had to be the motor force of accumulation in the transition period, which required heavy investment in modern infrastructure and machinery that would be better managed if under direct state control. Others agreed that nothing less than an agricultural revolution was needed in rural Nicaragua to meet the social goals of the revolution, but they dissented as to the need for centralized management of the process. This group had somewhat more faith in

the peasants' ability to respond to technological change, envisioning a capital-intensive cooperative sector as well. A third group favoring production cooperatives argued that modernization need not be equivalent to capital-intensive or large-scale production schemes. They argued that labor-intensive investment in decentralized production units was much more realistic as a transitional path. Moreover, just bringing together isolated rural producers and giving them access to technical assistance should result in considerable increases in output in the short run. A fourth group, made up of agricultural technicians and bank employees, tended to resist all three socialization projects. They favored concentrating resources on those entrepreneurs who had demonstrated their capacity to pay back loans.

These positions reflected not only differing views on agricultural modernization and the nature of the peasantry but also different evaluations of the performance of the state sector in the first two years.²¹ While production had largely been reactivated on the state farms, many difficulties remained due to the size of the sector relative to trained personnel, the diverse nature of the activities within some of the state farms, and the isolated location of others.²² While idle land within the APP was being made available to *colectivos de trabajo*, some, but by no means all, believed that the efficiency of land use within the state sector could be further increased by spinning off some of the APP holdings to production cooperatives. On this issue, the ATC and UNAG were often divided, with the ATC supporting those backing the consolidation of the APP and UNAG supporting the conversion of some state farms to production cooperatives.

A third, but related, debate concerned the means of achieving the ultimate goal of production cooperatives. UNAG argued forcefully that any form of cooperative association should be voluntary. Moreover, if the agrarian reform was to be responsive to the demands of peasants and rural workers, they had to be given the opportunity to choose the form of access to land and the form of productive organization, even if it meant distributing land as individual private property. This group argued that such a step was necessary to consolidate the support of the rural population for the revolution as well as to increase basic grain production. According to this view, distributing land as individual property to peasants, who would be urged to join credit and service cooperatives, would be the first step in fostering cooperation among these rural producers, cooperation that might ultimately lead to more collective production arrangements. The leaders of UNAG thus favored the possibility of the now "classic" path of socialist agricultural development—land redistribution followed by successive phases of gradual collectivization.

The majority of MIDINRA officials thought that distributing land

in individual holdings would be counterproductive to the long-term goals of the revolution. They rejected the notion that a gradual socialization process could be fostered on the basis of individual private property. Rather, such a process, termed *recampesinización* ("repeasantization"), would emphasize individual, rather than collective, interests and perhaps spur the development of capitalist class relations in the countryside. Furthermore, some in this group viewed the national unity policy as tactical and short-term in nature. Fostering a new sector of independent producers implied a long-term commitment to the mixed economy and the alliance that empowered rural entrepreneurs and peasants.

Between these two positions was what subsequently became the consensus position. It was based on the recognition that in order to transform Nicaragua's agricultural sector, a multiplicity of tenure patterns might be appropriate, including production cooperatives, state farms, credit and service cooperatives in the model of "classic" socialist transformation, independent peasant and entrepreneurial production, and mixed arrangements such as collective ownership with individual family management of units within the collective area. This latter form, known in Nicaragua as *cooperativas de surco muerto*, was perceived as falling between production cooperatives and credit and service cooperatives in the degree of socialization.

In fact, the practice of the first two years of the revolution had led to decidedly heterogeneous forms of both cooperatives and state farms. Lack of state paternalism vis-à-vis the peasantry and the decentralized nature of cooperative formation fostered every conceivable combination of land tenure, productive organization, and collective activity.²³ There were even state farms that resembled production cooperatives.²⁴

No consensus was reached on these issues during this period, reflecting the differences among the ATC, UNAG, and MIDINRA officials. As a result, the agrarian reform law that ushered in the second major phase of Sandinista agrarian policy left the door open to various forms of productive organization and to pragmatism as the ruling force.

THE AGRARIAN REFORM LAW AND THE CONSOLIDATION OF AGRICULTURAL INITIATIVES: JULY 1981–JUNE 1982

The Ley de Reforma Agraria, announced in July 1981, was designed to meet three basic objectives: to bring idle land in the private sector into production and thereby increase basic grain output; to meet peasant demand for secure access to land and thereby increase their commitment to the revolution; and at the same time to quiet the fears of the bourgeoisie by resolving once for all the land issue. As summarized

by Minister of Agriculture Jaime Wheelock, the objectives of the agrarian reform were to cement the alliance of the peasantry to the revolution and to ensure the provision of cheap food.²⁵

Under the agrarian reform law, all idle, underutilized, or rented land on estates exceeding 350 hectares in the Pacific region and 700 hectares in the rest of the country was subject to expropriation. All land farmed under precapitalist relations of production (sharecropping and labor service arrangements) on holdings exceeding 35 hectares in the Pacific region and 70 hectares in the rest of the country was also subject to expropriation. Abandoned land was subject to confiscation regardless of size. Owners of expropriated land were to be compensated with agrarian reform bonds, based on the average declared value of their holdings over the previous three years (CIERA 1982, 22). The beneficiaries included peasants who had been farming land under any type of rental arrangements, smallholders with insufficient land, landless workers, state farms, and finally, urban residents who wanted to produce basic grains. Preference was to be given to those peasants and rural workers willing to form cooperatives—either CCS (cooperativas de crédito y servicio) or CAS (cooperativas agrícolas sandinistas)—and to the families of heroes and martyrs of the revolution (Mayorga 1982; MIDINRA 1982c). It was initially estimated that some 715,000 hectares would be available for redistribution under the reform. That figure was subsequently raised to 1,430,000 hectares.²⁶

The law contains several notable features. First, no maximum limit was set on size of landholdings. As long as the land is efficiently utilized, farms of any size are allowed. This arrangement guarantees that capitalist farms will henceforth be protected from any form of land takeover. At the same time that capitalist farming is encouraged, all precapitalist relations of production are to be eliminated. Second, the reform allows for both individual and collective ownership of the redistributed land. Third, the intent of the law was to distribute parcels of adequate size and quality to provide each family with an income at least equivalent to the minimum wage. This approach implied that tenants might not—in fact probably would not—receive title to the plots of land that they had been farming. To prevent a process of either concentration or fragmentation of holdings, the agrarian reform titles cannot be sold nor can the land be subdivided among heirs. Fourth, the land and titles are to be distributed free of charge. Finally, the agrarian reform law was the first in Latin America to establish the legal preconditions for incorporating a significant number of rural women (Deere 1983; CIERA 1984a).

The agrarian reform law embodied considerable ambiguity over the forms of distribution of expropriated land, reflecting the ongoing debate over the best means of achieving socialist agriculture. By the fall

of 1981, at least one issue was resolved. Although the APP would continue to receive priority attention from the MIDINRA, it was decided that this sector would not be expanded. Ministry planning documents envisioned that by late 1981, the agrarian reform would largely distribute land to production cooperatives (MIDINRA 1981). By the end of the reform, the APP was expected to hold 20 percent of the nation's farmland, with production cooperatives holding 20 percent, credit and service cooperatives, another 20 percent, unorganized peasants, 5 percent, and the private entrepreneurial sector, the remaining 35 percent. This distribution was to be achieved by organizing the poor peasantry into production cooperatives and middle and rich peasants into CCS. The next major debate became the relative merits of favoring production cooperatives, credit and service cooperatives, and cooperatives that combined aspects of both.

Throughout the following spring, debate continued between UNAG and the ministry over the feasibility of organizing such a large segment of the poor peasantry into production cooperatives. UNAG again stressed the importance of allowing peasants to choose whether they wanted to organize individually or collectively.²⁷ Experience had shown that primarily landless workers favored joining production cooperatives.²⁸ Smallholders with insufficient land more often favored receiving additional land as a private holding. Moreover, the analysis of the social base of the credit and service cooperatives revealed the shared interests of the poor, middle, and rich peasantry as agricultural producers. Although differentiation existed within the CCS, it was not necessarily a problem. The middle and rich peasantry often provided positive leadership for cooperative development and possessed greater technical skills. The advisability of organizing the poor peasantry separately into production cooperatives through access to agrarian reform land was thus reappraised. This reappraisal was also affected by considerations of the shifting alliance analyzed in the previous section.

From these discussions emerged a ministry cooperative development strategy in the fall of 1982. The strategy called for policies geared to win the support of both rich and poor peasants, policies that would consolidate production cooperatives as well as credit and service cooperatives. While peasants would be allowed to choose the form of property and organization they desired, state resources made available to the peasantry would favor the gradual socialization of the productive process. Land would be distributed to production cooperatives, to "mixed" cooperatives (with land held collectively but production carried out individually—the "cooperativas de surco muerto"), and to individual peasants willing to join CCS. Although distribution to non-organized individuals was not ruled out, a clear official consensus favored cooperative farms; policy statements indicated that 1982 land

policy would constitute a “strong support and stimulus to the cooperative movement” (CIERA 1982, 24). In addition, the allocation of state credit would favor collective investments on all kinds of cooperatives, thus allowing peasants organized in CCS to experience gradually the perceived benefits of collective activity.

The ongoing debate over the forms of property and productive relations and continued ministry emphasis on the APP were among the factors resulting in slow implementation of the agrarian reform in its first year. Another factor was the consensus that the cooperatives should be on a sound organizational footing before receiving land titles. The organizational drive of the previous year had been problematic for cooperative development. Many cooperatives, especially the CAS, had been formed too quickly and with insufficient technical assistance; and as a result of the credit difficulties experienced during the 1980–81 agricultural cycle, many of them dissolved. Almost 30 percent of the members left the cooperatives during this period (Marchetti 1982, 6). While old cooperatives were disbanding, the rate of formation of new ones dropped markedly. In 1981 only 372 new cooperatives were formed comprising 6,236 new members, as compared to 1,663 new cooperatives comprising 26,814 new members in 1980 (MIDINRA 1982c, 247).

Those cooperatives that survived the 1980–81 agricultural cycle, whose membership formed the nucleus of UNAG, were the strongest. Rather than repeat the overambitious organizing drive of the previous year, policy during 1981–82 encouraged slow, but solid, expansion of the sector. As a result, only 40 percent of the land affected under the agrarian reform law in its first year was actually distributed. As Salvador Mayorga, vice-minister of agrarian reform, explained, “it takes more time to identify good beneficiaries, especially if the emphasis is on cooperatives, than to identify bad hacienda owners. . . . We don’t want a single beneficiary to fail” (Collins 1982, 96). The emphasis was on consolidation.

Related to the consolidation of cooperative organizing was the consolidation of credit policy. The Banco Nacional de Desarrollo was hesitant to continue making loans to the peasant sector after the disastrous repayment record of the previous year. The need to expand food-stuff production was pressing, however, and the decision was made to renew credit, but on a reduced scale. The desire for retrenchment also came from the peasants themselves, many of whom were reluctant to increase their indebtedness (MIDINRA 1982c, 31). The financing of basic grain acreage dropped 44 percent overall between 1980–81 and 1981–82, with the peasant sector experiencing a 46 percent contraction (MIDINRA 1982c, 31; CIERA 1982, 48). But total financing of basic grain production still represented a considerable increase over the pre-revolutionary period, as can be seen in table 3. The financing of export

crops was only slightly reduced in 1981–82, reflecting both the better repayment rates for export crops and the much lower amount of export acreage that had received credit the previous year.

The new policy for 1981–82, in addition to improving the provision of credit, also focused on improving producer prices and the delivery of services and technical assistance. ENABAS, the government agency for the purchase and distribution of basic grains, was strengthened in March 1981 with the formation of the PAN program (Programa Alimentario Nacional). This program is an ambitious attempt to improve the production, acquisition, and distribution of foodstuffs in the country by coordinating and expanding the various elements of the policy. ENABAS sets the official purchase prices for basic grains. As can be seen from table 5, producer prices were raised considerably in 1981. The price of maize was increased by 25 percent over the previous cycle, beans by 45 percent, rice by 58 percent, and sorghum by 55 percent. ENABAS storage facilities were expanded, and an attempt was made to improve government collection services to more remote areas of the country. The main depositories (Depósitos Agrícolas Populares, or DAPs) were supplemented with intermediate collection points (Centros de Acopio Intermedio, or CAIs) run by concessionaires in their homes. Mobile collectors, both trucks and launches, were used to purchase grain.²⁹ The ability of ENABAS to purchase a significant portion of the grain harvest is crucial to the government's ability to make its price policy work by cutting through the inherited system of rural merchants and speculators that for so many decades has squeezed both peasant producers and urban consumers.

The streamlining of marketing also included making available increased supplies of agricultural inputs and machinery to the peasantry.³⁰ PROAGRO is the state agency charged with distributing seeds, pesticides, and fertilizers. In recent years, 40 percent of the agency's sales has been to the peasant sector. Somewhat more contentious has been the provision of agricultural machinery, transport, and fumigation services to the peasant producers by the state agency AGROMECA. It controlled only seven thousand tractors (including three hundred new ones), and two hundred harvesters. Preference for using this machinery was given to the APP sector, due to the larger scale of export crop production. Strides were also made in providing increased technical assistance to the peasantry. But the government had only 723 agricultural technicians (including those with PROCAMPO and the Banco Nacional de Desarrollo) in the entire country to serve the needs of seventy-five thousand clients.³¹

The 1981–82 policy of consolidating and encouraging peasant cooperative production was a considerable success. Output of basic grains increased substantially over the 1980–81 cycle, as can be seen from table

TABLE 5 Official Producer Prices for Basic Grains^a

Crop	1978	1979–80	1980	1981–82	1982–83	1983
Maize	49.6	60	80	100	130	180
Beans	143.4	180	220	320	350	390
Rice	110.4	140	205	323	323	366
Sorghum	45.6	55		85	85	128

Sources: For 1978 to 1982–83, *Barricada*, Lunes Socio-Económico, 4 July 1983. For 1983, CAHI (1984b).

^aIn cordobas per quintal, 10 cordobas = \$1.00 U.S.

4. Production of all products except cotton, cattle, and milk was significantly above prerevolutionary levels, a major achievement for the country. Nicaragua was by this point self-sufficient in beans, rice, chicken, pork, and eggs and had an exportable surplus in 1982 in sugar, sorghum, and cooking oil (MIDINRA 1982c, 261). Maize shortages continued to be a problem, however. The debt situation improved markedly as a result of the more cautious credit policies and the increased delivery of services and assistance. In 1981, 73 percent of that year's debt was repaid, as opposed to the previous year's figure of 34 percent (MIDINRA 1982c, 253).

The new policy also resulted in a consolidation and strengthening of the cooperative sector. After the sharp drop in membership during the 1980–81 agricultural cycle, participation was slowly but steadily increased. By 1982 some 45 percent of the peasantry belonged to cooperatives (CIERA 1984a, 24).³² The October 1982 cooperative census revealed that there were 2,849 cooperatives in the Pacific and central interior regions of the country, with some 68,434 members (see table 6). Production cooperatives, based on collective property and labor, made up some 20 percent of the total number with 11.5 percent of all cooperative members. The bulk of the eighty-four thousand hectares farmed by these CAS constitutes land distributed through the agrarian reform.³³ By far the largest number of cooperative members, 45 percent, belonged to credit and service cooperatives accounting for 63 percent of all cooperatives. The bulk of the land farmed by CCS members is pre-reform private property and is farmed individually. The remaining cooperatives, 35 percent, are either "mixed" cooperatives (cooperativas de surco muerto), precooperatives (not yet considered consolidated), or collective work arrangements of various types.

Of the land distributed to cooperatives through the agrarian reform law by October 1982, some 68 percent had been assigned to production cooperatives. Individual producers organized in credit and service cooperatives had received 22 percent, and other forms of coopera-

TABLE 6 *The Nicaraguan Cooperative Sector*^a

Type	Units	(%)	Members	(%)	Manzanas	(%)
Sandinista agricultural cooperatives (CAS)	578	(20.0)	7,895	(11.5)	118,390	(9.7)
Credit and service cooperatives (CCS)	1,275	(45.0)	43,265	(63.2)	804,375	(65.7)
Mixed cooperatives (surco muerto)	375	(13.0)	11,324	(16.5)	171,183	(14.0)
Other forms ^b	621	(22.0)	5,950	(8.8)	129,635	(10.6)
Total	2,849	(100.0)	68,434	(100.0)	1,223,583	(100.0)

Source: 1982 National Cooperative Census, in CIERA (1984, table 6).

^aAs of October 1982; includes only Pacific and Central Interior regions of the country.

^bIncludes precooperatives and collective work groups.

tive groups had received 10 percent of the distributed land (Deere 1983). While official documents concerning cooperative development strategy favored the multiplicity of tenure patterns and forms of rural productive organization, it is clear that production cooperatives had received priority attention during this period.

The new agrarian policy of consolidated support for peasant producers was thus marked by considerable success over this period. In terms of economic performance of the peasant sector, production of all their crops and livestock for domestic consumption (except for cattle) increased over the previous year, and credit repayment improved markedly. In terms of organization of the peasant sector, CCS and production cooperatives were strengthened and began once again to increase in numbers; UNAG grew in membership and initiative; and the organizing of services, technical assistance, and marketing systems began to be addressed in a more systematic, although still rudimentary, fashion.

Despite these successes, new problems such as seasonal labor shortages emerged, and old tensions remained between the rural bourgeoisie and the increasingly more organized and vocal peasantry—tensions that challenged the Sandinista attempt to move cautiously with its new policies. Giving poor peasants and rural workers access to land always carried the risk of drying up the harvest labor pool for agro-export production. The need to mobilize massive brigades of urban students and other volunteers for the 1981–82 coffee harvests partly attests to the success of the land redistribution. It should nonetheless be kept in mind that seasonal labor shortages in the rural areas have been a continuous structural problem in Nicaragua for the last fifty years.

What has mainly accounted for the labor shortages has been the model of capitalist development in Nicaragua and the excessive urbanization of the society (CIERA 1985).

Implementation of the agrarian reform moved slowly in its first year not only because of the desire to build a successful cooperative sector but also because of the continuing desire to maintain the policy of national unity. Each case of expropriation was determined through a national agrarian reform council and adjudicated through a special agrarian reform tribunal. In this early period, an attempt was made to identify and expropriate only the worst cases in order to avoid alienating the bourgeoisie. But evidence of resistance and decapitalization was mounting. Both the ATC and UNAG pressed for a more rapid implementation of the agrarian reform process.³⁴

THE COUNTERREVOLUTION AND THE INCREASED PACE OF LAND DISTRIBUTION: JUNE 1982–JULY 1983

The balance between those factors favoring slow implementation and those favoring a more rapid implementation of the agrarian reform was finally tipped toward the latter by the military situation. Throughout 1982 the country had faced increasing counterrevolutionary attacks from U.S.-backed Somocista forces (the "Contras") based across the northern border in Honduras. In late 1982 and early 1983, the intensity of these attacks increased, as the Contras tried to disrupt the export harvest. To the pressure for redistribution from the rural organizations was added the pressure from the military to increase the defense capabilities of the war zone by settling more peasants on the land (CAHI 1983).

In the face of increasing defections among the agrarian bourgeoisie and the increasingly militant and class-conscious stance of the rural organizations, the decision was made to turn greater control of the agrarian reform process over to those organizations and thus decentralize the process. Final decision on land adjudications was passed to regional commissions that included ATC and UNAG members. Local organizations were mobilized throughout the country in the fall of 1982 to investigate the patterns of land tenure and utilization and to lay out detailed proposals for the expropriation and redistribution of land in their communities. The regional agrarian reform strategies that resulted from this process planned not only future land redistribution but investment (CIERA/DGRA 1982). This decentralization of the agrarian reform and agricultural development in general paralleled a decentralization of FSLN activities as a whole, and it reflected the growing ability of the popular organizations to direct the revolutionary process. This

stage represented a major achievement in terms of the political goals of the revolution.

The redistribution process was increased sharply in 1983. In the first eighteen months of the agrarian reform, ninety-three thousand hectares of land had been distributed to some sixty-five hundred beneficiaries. Over two and a half times that amount was transferred in 1983, so that by December, twenty-two thousand families had received over three hundred thousand hectares of land. The amount of land being distributed to individual farmers as compared with production cooperatives increased in 1983, as well as the amount of land being transferred from the state sector to cooperatives (CAHI 1984a, 2–3). The data in table 2 illustrate these changes.

Although practical considerations dictated a speed-up in the agrarian reform process, the speed-up did not reflect any clear resolution of the debate over the organization of production in the transition to socialism. Despite the increased titling of individual owners, the commitment to cooperative organization and collectivization continued. As stated in the agrarian reform law and reiterated in government documents in 1982, individual titles were seen as a “transitory step toward associated forms of production” (for example, MIDINRA/PAN 1982; CIERA 1982, 24). Emphasis was placed on organizing individual owners into CCS and then gradually encouraging within those associations collective projects (whether social services or new productive activities) that could build a more collective consciousness. Nonetheless, there continued to be less support for the credit and service cooperatives than for other types of cooperative organization.

The coordinated approach to peasant production developed in 1981–82 was repeated for the next agricultural cycle. Policies included subsidies for the purchase of seed, increased financing per acre and an increase in credit availability, expansion of technical assistance and training programs for cooperative members, and new increases in producer prices.³⁵ Total credit to peasant producers increased in 1982 by 60.3 percent in real terms over 1981.³⁶

Despite these efforts, as can be seen in table 4, output of many crops (including the key foodstuff crops, beans and maize) fell in 1982–83 from their 1981–82 levels. This decline was largely due to events beyond the control of the Sandinistas: disastrous weather conditions and the continuing destabilization efforts of the U.S. government.³⁷ Floods in May 1982 wiped out a considerable portion of the recently planted food crops, and the replanted crops were then hit by a severe drought. Most affected by these natural disasters were corn, cattle, and milk. As a result of these difficulties, peasant debt problems intensified in the 1982–83 cycle. The actions of the United States in cutting off

flows of foreign capital exacerbated these difficulties, as crucial inputs and spare parts needed for the processing and packaging of foodstuffs became increasingly unavailable (Sholk 1983).

Although these events were not directly controllable by the Sandinistas, the vulnerability of the economy to such disturbances reflected continuing weaknesses within the agricultural sector. These basic weaknesses—unresolved problems arising from the legacy of underdevelopment—are the ones that the Sandinistas are now confronting, along with the “Contra” war.

The Sandinista response to the intensified war effort in 1984 was again to step up the pace of land distribution, particularly in the zones of conflict. Whereas in 1982, 647 households a month were receiving land titles, in 1983 this rate had increased to 1,147, and in the first six months of 1984, to 1,628 households per month (CAHI 1984d, 34). Almost 30 percent of the total amount of land titled during the agrarian reform process was titled during the first half of 1984; most of this land (62 percent) was titled in the war zones, the departments of Matagalpa and Jinotega and on the Atlantic Coast (CAHI 1984c).

By the time of the fifth anniversary of the revolution (July 1984), the rapid pace of titling had raised the total amount of redistributed land to nearly one million hectares, almost 20 percent of the cultivable land. By that point, the majority of land titled (54 percent) had been assigned to individual peasant producers as agrarian reform property. But most of the land that was individually titled represented confirmation of the ownership rights of squatters residing primarily in the war zones, who had never held title to the land they occupied. Land actually redistributed as a result of expropriation to individual peasant producers constituted only 4.5 percent of the total land titled under the agrarian reform (CAHI 1984c).

Production cooperatives and the various forms of mixed and pre-cooperatives continued to be the primary beneficiaries of land expropriated through the agrarian reform process. Nonetheless, the magnitude of the titling of squatter land as individual peasant property represented a clear indication of Sandinista intent to pursue a propeasant policy, one that would be responsive to peasant demands, as long urged by the peasant organization UNAG. The massive titling of squatter land also significantly expanded the number of beneficiaries of Sandinista agrarian policies. By July 1984, forty-five thousand households, representing 32 percent of Nicaraguan rural households, had directly benefited from the agrarian reform process of land redistribution and titling (CAHI 1984c).

CURRENT ISSUES IN THE NICARAGUAN AGRARIAN REFORM

Although Sandinista agricultural policies have benefited a large proportion of the rural population and in great measure reactivated production, they clearly have not yet laid the basis for achieving the economic goals of the revolution. The increased pace of the agrarian reform, a response in part to external destabilization efforts, has brought into sharp relief a major weakness inherited from Somocismo: the lack of institutions that can respond to the needs of the peasant sector. The rapid rate of land redistribution implies a need to increase the availability of services to the peasant producers. The basic shift in government policy, from an emphasis on the state sector and on peasants as wage workers to an emphasis on peasants as producers, makes it imperative that the government also develop institutions that will give it greater control over generating and distributing surplus in that sector. Yet the government is severely hampered by a lack of technical personnel, infrastructural development (roads, irrigation, and similar systems), institutional development, and technological development in basic foodstuff production. Although progress has been made in all of these areas, the development of these institutions and the training of personnel is a long-term proposition, and the danger exists that the pace of the agrarian reform may outstrip the institutional capacity of the government.

Of particular concern is the low level of development of peasant technology. Almost half of peasant credit recipients use only traditional technology, and another 40 percent use only selected elements of the most minimal recommended technology package (MIDINRA 1982c, 234). This legacy of underdevelopment is reflected in extremely low yields for basic grains, even by Central American standards.

The need to develop peasant technology is especially pressing because of the price squeeze that the government has experienced. The Sandinistas inherited an unrealistic price structure because Somoza had maintained basic food prices at a level well below world market prices (Barraclough 1982, 38). The government has had to preserve these consumer subsidies to avoid placing an undue burden on the poor, while providing producers with more realistic prices to stimulate basic foodstuff production.³⁸ As a result, 10 percent of the national budget was being spent in 1983 to subsidize consumption of such goods as rice, beans, maize, and sugar.³⁹ Even with this disparity between producer and consumer prices, it was still not clear whether or not producer prices had been raised sufficiently to encourage greater commercial production by the peasantry. In mid-1983 major price increases were implemented for maize (39 percent) and sorghum (51 percent), as can be seen in table 5. The response of peasant producers was positive, as indicated

by the production figures in table 4. If it is necessary to increase prices further to stimulate peasant foodstuff production, however, the squeeze on the government will be even greater.⁴⁰

In addition to price subsidies, the unrealistic price structure placed another financial burden on the government. The liberal credit policy in the context of unrealistically low producer prices led to growing peasant indebtedness (on top of the substantial debt that the peasantry carried over from the prerevolutionary period). In July 1983, due to pressure from UNAG, the government assumed that burden by agreeing to cancel a significant portion of the outstanding debt contracted since 1979 by basic grain producers (CIERA 1984, 25).⁴¹ Although this action gave an important boost to the cooperatives, it represented another subsidy to peasant producers on the part of the government.

The underdeveloped state of peasant agriculture implies, then, the necessity for the Sandinistas to allocate considerable resources to the peasant sector. This allocation can come about in the form of unproductive transfers—price subsidies and the absorption of the peasant debt—or it can come about through productivity-increasing investments in the peasant sector. Until sufficient progress can be made in these investments, government subsidies of peasant producers will be necessary, given the Sandinistas' commitment to improving the material conditions of these families. To date the Sandinistas have been unwilling to finance the nation's economic development through the common method of squeezing the peasantry. This approach has resulted in a net transfer of surplus to this sector, however. So far, investment funds have largely come from sources outside the country, but the availability of such financing in the future is open to question.

The need to increase productivity in the peasant sector is clear (Marchetti 1983). Added to the question of the source of investment funds are two current debates with respect to the development of peasant technology. First, the need to provide technical assistance in the face of limited trained personnel has led to a continuing debate on the merits of prioritization of assistance to a select group of cooperatives versus attempts to reach all producers. This issue has yet to be resolved, although the government has embarked upon an ambitious cooperative development program in two regions of the country. The second debate concerns the nature of appropriate technology for basic grain production. A factor in this debate is the question of the ability to provide modern inputs, either from imports or through a process of import-substitution. The feasibility of import-substitution for agricultural inputs has taken on a new sense of urgency, given what appears to be a virtual economic blockade of Nicaragua by the Reagan administration.

CONCLUSION

We have argued that a major feature of Sandinista agrarian reform policy has been its pragmatism. Debates have raged over what constitutes socialist agriculture and the role of the peasantry in the transition to socialism. But as we have shown, the policy issues of land tenure and the organization of production under the agrarian reform have responded less to questions of theory or ideology than to the concrete economic and political conditions of Nicaragua. As a result, the Sandinista experience provides a rather notable departure from other Latin American and socialist agrarian reforms. Where the Sandinista agrarian reform perhaps differs most from the agrarian reforms of other countries embarking upon a transition to socialism has been in its commitment to the maintenance of a mixed economy that includes not just a private peasant sector (as in Cuba) but also a capitalist agricultural sector.⁴²

At the same time, in contrast to other socialist agrarian reforms and to the majority of those in Latin America, peasant and rural worker organizations have participated in shaping the course of the agrarian reform in Nicaragua.⁴³ Both the ATC and UNAG have had an important influence on agrarian policy, as has been shown, in such areas as credit policy and, most important, in assuring that peasants and landless workers are given the opportunity to choose whether they want to farm agrarian reform land collectively or as individual holdings. Moreover, UNAG itself, rather than the state, has been the primary force behind the organization of credit and service cooperatives and the production cooperatives.⁴⁴

As we have noted, the creation of strong rural mass organizations has often challenged the broader policy of national unity and has moved the agrarian reform perhaps quicker and further against the landowning class than would otherwise be the case. But it must also be noted that the Reagan administration itself contributed to the undermining of the mixed economy through its support of the counterrevolution. By providing the agrarian bourgeoisie with an alternative to that of abiding by "the rules of the game" of the mixed economy, the Reagan administration ironically contributed to deepening the agrarian reform and strengthening the rural mass organizations. As a result, Sandinista agrarian policy has moved during the 1979–84 period in a more decentralized and propeasant direction.

The process of revolutionary transformation in Nicaragua is far from over, and many difficulties remain. Nevertheless, it is to be expected that the Sandinistas will meet the current tensions with the same ingenuity and flexibility that they have demonstrated over the last five years.

NOTES

1. Although much has been written about the Sandinista agrarian reform, to date no attempt has been made to analyze it from the perspective of policy formulation. Much of the information on which this paper is based has not been generally available to scholars. In considerable part, the discussion here draws on the direct participation of one of the authors, Peter Marchetti, in the formation of Sandinista agrarian policy over the last five years and on the extensive fieldwork of Carmen Diana Deere in rural Nicaragua from 1980 to 1983. In addition, information was acquired from interviews, unpublished position papers of government and mass organizations, newspaper reports, and internal and published documents of MIDINRA and its research arm, CIERA.
2. Agricultural policy has been central to the achievement of the overall goals of the revolution. It is important to keep in mind the importance of the agricultural sector in the Nicaraguan economy. In the late 1970s, it accounted for 26 percent of the GNP and 67 percent of the country's foreign exchange earnings (Black 1981, 209). Moreover, in 1978 the agricultural sector employed 50.5 percent of the economically active population (EAP), while the industrial sector employed 17.7 percent and the service sector, 31.8 percent (Deere and Marchetti 1981, 41). It has been estimated that 70 percent of the population depended directly or indirectly on agriculture for their livelihood (Black 1981, 208). The agricultural sector was also of tremendous political import. See Arias (1980) and CIERA (1981) for accounts of peasant participation in the revolutionary struggle.
3. The struggle against the Somoza dictatorship was prolonged and destructive. The GNP in 1979 fell 32 percent, down to the 1963 level (Barraclough 1982, 49). Agricultural holdings had been decapitalized, agricultural production disrupted, and the country was utilizing scarce foreign exchange to import foodstuffs.
4. Dependence on foreign capital was exacerbated by the capital flight that accompanied the war, by Somoza's sacking of the treasury (which was left with only two days' worth of foreign exchange reserves), and by the decision to honor the US \$1.64 billion debt left by the dictatorship (Black 1981, 201).
5. Latin American history has shown that the transformation of plantations and haciendas into production cooperatives has often led to declines in production in the earlier stages, as in Chile, Bolivia, and Peru. These experiences were considered carefully by the Sandinistas and were the focus of a February 1980 conference organized by MIDINRA and the Land Tenure Center of the University of Wisconsin, which Deere and Marchetti attended. The pragmatic approach that the Sandinistas implemented was also designed to avoid repeating the errors of previous agrarian reforms.
6. Based on interviews with MIDINRA officials during February 1980.
7. Based on the CIERA estimate of approximately 118,200 peasant households.
8. Based on interviews with ATC, CIERA, and MIDINRA representatives during July and August 1980.
9. Another important aspect of Sandinista policy was the provision of the social wage—services such as education and improved health care. This feature of government policy will not be discussed here (see Collins 1982), nor do we treat the efforts of the Sandinistas to democratize consumption or food distribution. See CIERA (1983a and 1983b), Austin and Fox (1985), and Austin, Fox, and Krueger (n.d.).
10. See Collins (1982, 53–54) for a good discussion of these difficulties.
11. According to UNAG, these associations spread rumors that the government was Communist, antireligion, antifamily, that it was going to take away the peasants' property (even their pigs and chickens) and their children and eliminate the elderly (UNAG 1981).
12. The Consejo Superior de Empresa Privada (COSEP) resigned from the Consejo de Estado in November 1980, after its vice-president, Jorge Salazar (who was also president of UPANIC) was killed in a shoot-out with police. Salazar was linked to a counterrevolutionary plot that clearly established the links between Somocista ele-

- ments outside the country and certain segments of the private sector. See Deere and Marchetti (1981, 67–68).
13. Interviews with UNAG and ATC national leadership, June–July 1981.
 14. See the discussion of ATC union-building activities in *Barricada*, 15 July 1983, “La ATC, sus avances organizativos.” But see also *Barricada*, 11 July 1983, *Lunes Socio-Económico*, “La participación obrera en el agro,” for a discussion of the need to move beyond union-building activities to the preparation of workers for broader participation in management as well as the successes and difficulties of such efforts as had been made to date.
 15. See CIERA (1982, 20); see also Collins (1982, 43–50) for an excellent account of the decapitalization controversy during this period.
 16. The dilemma of the agrarian bourgeoisie and its participation in the revolutionary transformation has been treated in depth elsewhere, so it will not be discussed in detail in this article. For an analysis of the private cotton farmers, see Winson (1983); for an analysis of the sugar sector, see Dubois (1983).
 17. The following analysis is based on Deere and Marchetti’s participation in the debates within CIERA and the general Nicaraguan milieu during 1981 and 1982.
 18. This group, known as the “APPistas,” were most impressed by what they viewed as the successful experience of the Cuban state farms.
 19. Although there was diversity among this group, what united them was a pragmatic response to what they saw to be the greater enthusiasm of landless peasants for production cooperatives as compared to state farms. Theoretically, some members also argued that production cooperatives would be more democratic units than state farms because they assured peasant and rural worker participation in all aspects of decision making.
 20. This debate, which had been simmering for some time, erupted with the decision by MIDINRA to accept the Cuban offer to build a capital-intensive integrated sugarcane production and milling complex at Tipitapa.
 21. As in many Third World countries, agricultural data in Nicaragua is inadequate for an analysis of the relative efficiency of the state farms in comparison to the production cooperatives, capitalist farms, or the peasant sector. This lack of reliable data has imposed a basic limitation on the formulation of adequate agrarian policy, and the Sandinistas have devoted considerable effort recently to generating reliable agricultural statistics and data series. They have been hampered in their efforts by the inadequacy of the necessary infrastructure and personnel and by the counterrevolution, which has made it more difficult to obtain data in the war provinces. Nevertheless, some data is now becoming available, and soon it should be possible to begin analyzing the performance of the agricultural sector in a more systematic and disaggregated manner.
 22. See Krueger and Austin (1983) and Dubois (1983) for analyses of the organization of the state farm sector and the problems it faces.
 23. This outcome was clearly seen in the analysis of the cooperative sector in Jinotega and Rivas carried out by Marchetti in the spring of 1982 as head of the Fondo Internacional de Desarrollo Agrícola mission, as well as in the thirteen cooperative case studies carried out in five departments in 1982 and early 1983 by Deere as part of CIERA’s rural women’s research program. Four of these case studies have been published as appendices in CIERA 1984a.
 24. As opposed to the Chilean and Peruvian agrarian reforms in which urban bureaucrats concentrated all their attention on turning the old haciendas into production cooperatives, the indirect or economic policy approach to land reform in Nicaragua allowed for high levels of peasant participation in the process of cooperative formation. While bureaucratic paternalism in Chile and Peru led to the failed experiment of attempting to pour new wine (cooperatives) into old wine skins (haciendas), in Nicaragua, the fact that the state initially concentrated land and other scarce resources on state farms meant that peasants had to struggle to create their own form of cooperative production.
 25. “What is the purpose of the Agrarian Reform?” Wheelock asked. “To guarantee the

- alliance of the principal class, which is the peasantry, because of its size. . . . Also we are opening up the material base, the condition of production, which is the land, so that the peasant can work it better and can thereby guarantee our people basic foodstuffs at relatively cheap prices" (Wheelock 1981).
26. *Barricada*, 16 July 1983, "Diez mil manzanas a campesinos de sur."
 27. This position was reflected in interviews taken during 1982 among both the national UNAG leadership and local UNAG activists throughout rural Nicaragua.
 28. The 1982 Censo de Cooperativas revealed that 53 percent of the members of production cooperatives had previously been landless wage workers, while 47 percent had farmed on their own account as either tenants or smallholders.
 29. *El Nuevo Diario*, 3 Feb. 1982, 10 Feb. 1982, and 17 Feb. 1982, "Así nació y trabaja ENABAS: los ER-CAI, formas de acopio, y la distribución." See also *Barricada*, 16 May 1983, *Lunes Socio-Económico*, "Producción alimentaria y distribución."
 30. The following information on agricultural inputs is from MIDINRA 1982d.
 31. By 1984 this figure had increased to 811 (CIERA 1984b).
 32. It should be noted that the ATC has been placed in a highly ambiguous position with respect to the implementation of agrarian reform. Although its membership often demands the expropriation of an estate due to decapitalization or failure to comply with the labor code, once the estate is expropriated and a production cooperative is constituted, the ATC members fall under the rubric of UNAG membership. Up to now, this arrangement has not resulted in open tensions between the ATC and UNAG leadership. Because UNAG includes among its membership peasants who hire seasonal wage workers, however, tensions could develop between the two organizations over wage levels and working conditions. But to date, these potential problems have not surfaced.
 33. A small number of CAS (cooperativas agrícolas sandinistas) have been constituted primarily by smallholders voluntarily pooling their private holdings. For a case study of one such CAS, "Carlos Roberto Huembes," see the appendix of CIERA 1984a.
 34. These confrontations were widely reported in the Managua press during the spring of 1982.
 35. *Barricada*, 12 May 1982, "Con nueva política de incentivos buscamos la autosuficiencia en granos básicos"; MIDINRA/PAN 1982; and *El Nuevo Diario*, 21 Mar. 1982, "Fabuloso plan de incentivos."
 36. Calculated from CIERA (1983b), using an inflation rate for 1981 of 23.5 percent.
 37. See the recent analysis of the performance of the Nicaraguan food system by Austin, Fox, and Krueger (n.d.) for a similar conclusion. See also *Barricada*, 27 June 1983, *Lunes Socio-Económico*, "Efectos económicos de la agresión imperialista," for a discussion of the effects of the war on the agricultural sector. See *Barricada*, 9 May 1983, *Lunes Socio-Económico*, "La crisis económica centroamericana y la respuesta nicaragüense," for a discussion of the effects of international economic conditions; and *Barricada*, 16 May 1983, *Lunes Socio-Económico*, "Producción alimentaria y distribución," for an overall analysis of the agricultural situation in 1982–83.
 38. In 1982 the price of a standard food basket for a family of six in Nicaragua was the lowest in Central America. See *Barricada*, 2 Sept. 1982, "En Centro América, Nicaragua tiene la canasta más barata."
 39. *Barricada*, 16 May 1983, "La lucha contra el monocultivo en Occidente." See also *Barricada*, 16 June 1983, *Lunes Socio-Económico*, "La distribución y consumo de leche pasteurizada," for a discussion of milk subsidies; and MIDINRA 1982d, 136–37, for a discussion of the subsidy problems that had already emerged by 1982.
 40. In 1983 food subsidies for basic grains increased by almost 50 percent over 1982. Total food subsidies reached almost one billion *córdobas* in 1983, forcing the government to lower subsidies to consumers in 1984 (CAHI 1984b, 2).
 41. By July 1983, UNAG-sponsored demonstrations were taking place throughout the country, urging the government to forgive the peasant debt. These demonstrations were being covered almost daily by *Barricada*. See, for example, *Barricada*, 12 July 1983, "Campesinos del todo el país por condonación de deuda," and other stories on p. 7 of this issue.

42. For an overview of the fate of the private sector in socialist agrarian reforms, see Winson (1983).
43. For comparative analysis with Chile, see Marchetti (1981); for El Salvador, see Deere (1982); for a review of the role of the peasantry in thirteen socialist agrarian reforms in the Third World, see Deere (1984).
44. This is not to say that the organization has been free of tension. The poor, middle, and rich peasantry have allied with various entrepreneurial sectors around such common interests as state credit policy. But the alliance is often an uneasy one, particularly for the poorer peasant strata who currently appear to have a weaker role in the UNAG leadership.

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