

**Irish Association for American Studies**

---

Review

Reviewed Work(s): *New International*, Number 9 1994, "The Rise and Fall of the Nicaraguan Revolution" by

Review by: Henry Patterson

Source: *Irish Journal of American Studies*, Vol. 3 (1993), pp. 158-159

Published by: Irish Association for American Studies

---

hysteria that led to the abuse of power by various administrations in the United States. It was this anti-authoritarianism which led him to support the SDS during the occupation of Columbia University (to the horror of his friends).

This is an excellent analysis of Macdonald's long political journey involving extensive research in the archives as well as numerous interviews with Macdonald's associates. The volume is well presented and is an excellent addition to our understanding of one man's journey from the Old Left to the New.

WTM Riches

University of Ulster at Jordanstown

*New International*, Number 9 1994. "The Rise and Fall of the Nicaraguan Revolution" Pathfinder Press: New York. ISBN 0-87348-750-8. £8.95

*New International* is a journal of Marxist politics and theory produced by the Socialist Workers Party of the United States. This party greeted the Nicaraguan revolution in July 1979 as the triumph of a workers' and farmers' government which if the FSLN provided the 'correct' political leadership would go forward to the establishment of a workers' state. As a consequence the party established a reporting bureau in Managua for its weekly paper *Militant* and its Spanish-language magazine *Perspective Mundial*.

This issue of the journal provides a partisan but fascinating perspective on the Nicaraguan revolution. It takes the form of resolutions and reports to SWP conferences from 1979 to 1989 with a fifty page introduction which attempts to provide an overview of the SWP's analysis of the Nicaraguan situation down to early 1994.

It charts the 'degeneration' of the FSLN from what is originally portrayed as a potential 'communist' leadership to a situation at the end of the decade where 'The Sandinista leadership transformed the FSLN into a bourgeois electoral machine in 1989 and early 1990.' (p.34). It is as much

*Book Reviews*

concerned to criticise other left analyses of Nicaragua as to explain developments. It criticises the writings of Noam Chomsky, with some justice, for a one-dimensional approach which over-emphasises the overwhelming power of the United States to determine developments in Central America.

For the SWP things could have turned out differently: by 1987 the Sandinistas had defeated the contras and then was the time to begin deepening the process of economic and social transformation in the country. Instead the leadership turned to policies of 'concertacion' - of seeking a social pact with the bourgeoisie in the interests of 'national unity' and economic development. The result was a demoralisation of their working class and poor peasant base which would bear the cost of the new policies. The alternative was to turn to the more idealist and voluntarist economic policies promoted by Che Guevara in the early stages of the Cuban Revolution - the SWP seems rather uncritical of the Castro regime.

The constraints under which the Sandinistas were operating in the second half of the 1980s are noted: the massive damage done by the war, the clear indication from the USSR that it was both reducing assistance and wanted the FSLN to come to a settlement with the US and the pressure of its main European supporters and the Socialist International for moderation. But such constraints could have been transcended by a radicalisation of policy and a mobilisation of the energies and commitment of the masses. If this voluntarism is unconvincing it is still the case that anyone interested in the US and Central America and in viewing the Nicaraguan revolution through a prism which reveals as well as distorts, will find this a valuable source of information and opinion. It will also be of interest to the student of the significance of solidarity work for the US left and intra-left disputes on the nature of revolutionary movements in Latin America.

Henry Patterson.  
University of Ulster at Jordanstown