"One Day The Fields Will Stay Green"*

A Journey Into Nicaragua’s Northern War Zone

In February and March this year, Will Silk was in Nicaragua, studying, acting as a representative of Resource and Action Committee for Latin America (RACLA), and as a correspondent for Tribune. He covered the election debates, and the festivities commemorating the fiftieth anniversary of Sandino’s death. His article in Tribune on 14 March was the first in Australia to break the news of CIA involvement in the mining of Nicaraguan ports and foreshadowed the subsequent military escalation.

While in Nicaragua, Will travelled extensively, making two trips into the northern border combat zones, and talked with Nicaraguans from every walk of life.

He would like to dedicate this article to those Nicaraguans, but especially to Ligia Vigil, and to Mario, who “took him inside the Revolution and showed him its heart”.

Will Silk

Managua, Nicaragua. Late February 1984. The morning heat is intense. I am sitting in the outer office of FACs (The Augusto Cesar Sandino Foundation). The foundation operates out of a large modern suburban bungalow just off the Plaza D’Espagna in what was, during Somoza’s time, a middle class quarter of the city. The owners of the bungalow had fled with Somoza. The clerical and administrative staff seem all to be women.

I have an appointment to see Ligia Vigil, the FACs co-ordinator responsible for the American, Canadian and Pacific areas. She is a small, energetic woman with cropped dark hair. Lines of exhaustion and overwork run through her smile of welcome. In the course of our conversations she speaks little of her personal story but I piece together the following: She is in her early forties, and she has already had three lives. From a middle class background, she trained as a primary teacher and received part of her education in the US (she speaks excellent English). For a short time she taught in schools servicing her class, marking time in the marriage market. Following marriage came the confines of middle class motherhood: two sons and a closed domestic world. That world was cracked open by separation and a return to teaching as a single parent. Already opposed to Somoza — as were many liberal bourgeois and intellectuals — she was further radicalised by her new situation, by the contradictions exposed by her concern for full and equal educational opportunities, by the poverty and exploitation of the urban working class among whom she now lived and worked, and by the political activism of her sons as they reached their early teens. She joined the Sandinista National Liberation Front (FSLN) in the making of the revolution.

My original aim had been to find out as much as possible about the rural child-care and pre-school centre in one of the northern provinces to which funds from Australian solidarity groups like RACLA were being directed, and to get permission to visit, if possible. The news Ligia gave me was bad: the centre had been destroyed by Contras (counter-revolutionaries) barely a month after it had been built; the local area was at the moment, yet again, under attack and too dangerous to visit. However, FACs was trying to organise a new SIR (Rural Infant Service) project involving reconstruction of the destroyed centre and of others in the same area. The cost was estimated at SUS20,000 and it was into this project that Australian money might go. If there was a lull in the fighting Ligia promised to get me into the area to see conditions for myself.

Over strong, black Nicaraguan coffee, I ask Ligia to tell me more about FACs and its activities.

"FACs is a private, non-government institution for humanitarian work. It’s not linked with the FSLN. Rumours in the US press have done us much damage internationally. We are Sandinistas, but we welcome all private support groups involved in our grass-roots organisations. It’s February 1984 and, already, we have approved ten projects (costed at SUS300,000) mostly from Canadian groups. But we desperately need things we can’t get in Nicaragua: clothing, shoes, medicine and medical equipment for our beloved health program — at least $1 million worth, this year.”

I suggest that the supply of some of

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* From the poem “Song of Hope by Daisy Zamora, Nicaraguan Vice-Minister for Culture
this equipment might be a project for Australian unions, and ask why "beloved"?

"The health programs, especially those where masses of people are involved, are our success of successes. By us, I mean women, who helped plan them and carry them through. Women in AMLAE3 and CDS4 throughout the country, who took the initiative in setting up services we need so much."

"How much is the blockade affecting Nicaragua?" I ask.

"It affects all our work, Peace is a determining element. We need peace in order to reconstruct our country. The blockade affects all of Nicaraguan life but, at the same time, we're determined to live, even if it means living under threat. The threat won't stop our willingness to work or our will to defend all that we've been able to achieve — all our gains.

"It specifically affects us because our government is forced to spend money on defence money we could use in social programs. There is a general feeling: defend the revolution to the last consciousness. That's how I feel; that's how my children feel about it."

As I stand to leave, Ligia winks and says, "Remember. 'As long as Nicaragua has children who love her, she will be free.'"

I wonder about the wink until, outside, I look down at the FACS letterhead on a piece of paper on which she had written her telephone number. The farewell sentence was the foundation motto and was a quote from Sandino. Significantly, Ligia had substituted the word "children" for "sons" in the original.

"It is 4.30 am. I'm walking across town in Managua from my barrio to the FACS office. There has been a lull in the fighting in Jinotega province and Ligia has been able to organise a jeep. She wants to pay a visit to three villages where FACS SIR projects are under way. It will be risky, her message warned — gringos and project workers are prime targets for contra assassins — but if I wanted to take the chance, she'd be leaving at 6 am.

On the long drive north, there was time for me to get to know Ligia better and, through her, the revolution and the people who were making it.

One of the many qualities in Ligia which I found striking, a quality I had seen bubbling in so many Nicaraguans during my stay, was that of hope: hope for the best even while preparing for the worst; hope that pushed her through impossible hours of work, over so many setbacks; hope in the potential of the revolutionary alternative for Nicaragua, that gave her and others I spoke to the freedom to admit, discuss and even, ruefully, laugh over past mistakes as they developed that alternative in practice. It was a quality I'd often missed in Australian radical politics. I asked Ligia about it, in what was it anchored, how did she manage to sustain it?

"Yes, of course I have hope," she said, and paused "... and it is sustained by surprises. Time and again, the rapidly developing consciousness of
the masses takes me by surprise. It is one of my fears that we in the bureaucracy will lag behind that consciousness and let it down."

I explained to her that very probably readers in Australia would baulk at the expression "rapidly developing consciousness of the masses". They might be puzzled, or even put off, by the linking of strong personal feelings to the phrase usually encountered as a vague theoretical term or an empty cliche of sectarian rhetoric. Could she give me an example? There was a pause and, in the moment it gave for self-reflection, I realised an old, cautionary paradox: I had imported the problem. It was not necessarily one which resided in the term itself: if the Australian context had emptied it of meaning, the Nicaraguan context had filled it.

"Well, I'll give you an example," she said. "The issue of the vote for sixteen-year-olds. You were up front at the Plaza de Revolucion during the Sandino Anniversary Rally when Ortega announced the junta's support lor their right to vote. So was I. I was interpreting for a delegation of foreign guests. We could see the response — such enthusiasm. The delegation's surprise was important to me — they got the message: these thousands of youngsters knew now what they wanted, they showed their joy in getting it. And that delegation will have to tell their people back home that the revolution in Nicaragua is a truly popular one, one that lives in its youth. Their surprise reminded me of my own surprise, of how the commitment of the muchachos had changed me, as I was telling you earlier."

Nearly four hours and 140 kilometres later, we're having breakfast in Jinotega, waiting for two community nurses who are going to make their rounds with us. We've left Lake Managua and the hot cotton plains well below us to the south. Jinotega, at 1,000 metres, is a small, high country town in provincial Spanish style beside an artificial lake delivering to a hydro-electric scheme. We are well into the southern mountains, in country where Sandino had his strongholds in the '30s — and Jinotega is a stronghold now. A truckload of militia — muchachos from Managua barrios — rumbles past. Farmworkers saunter by, their market delivery finished, with rifles slung over their shoulders.

The community nurses, two eighteen-year-old village women, arrive and we're off.

W ith Ligia as interpreter, I ask the two community nurses about their training.

They had learned to read and write through the literacy campaign. Later, with others, they had done a six-week crash course in community medicine, and still go to Jinotega one day a month for refreshers. This year, the course will run for twelve weeks.

The conversation is interrupted when the nurses visibly tense and point to a burnt-out utility beside the track. We are a few kilometres outside La Colonia, the new village on our schedule. They explain that, six weeks before, the "collectivo", packed with campesinos returning from outlying coffee fields, was ambushed by infiltrating contras as part of their rural terrorism strategy. Everyone on board had been machine-gunned and a message left saying "This is what happens if you support the Sandinistas". I asked one of the nurses if the strategy worked. "No, the opposite," she said.

"Then why do they persist?" "You're talking about people who, for 60 years, held power through terror, torture and exploitation. That's their tradition. They can't think outside of it."

As we come into La Colonia, every field, every stream crossing, every crossroads is guarded.

The village sits on one side of a stream, hemmed closely by densely planted hills. In April last year, it had a brand-new SIR built by local voluntary labour and funded by Canadian solidarity organisations. It had stood proudly in the centre of the village beside the coffee mill.

But, in late April, an elderly campesino, head of the village defence committee, tells me, a band of contras surrounding La Colonia and lobbed rockets into it from the hills.

"They attacked us as though we were a military base," he says, leaning on his rifle. "But we held them off for an hour till the militia arrived, me and my little friends." He points to some thirteen and fourteen-year-olds sitting in the group listening to us in the village square.

"Us — and those kids down there guarding the Lord now. But the SIR was next to the coffee mill, and that was their main objective. The lot went up." He makes an explosive gesture with lips and hands, then spits and walks me through the wreckage.

After, Ligia takes me into the makeshift SIR, housed in a gloomy old converted coffee storage shed, and we talk to the SIR workers. There are 46 kids in the centre. Their parents are out coffee picking and they're all inside because there's an alert that contras are in the area. The shed has been divided into nursery, pre-school and infant play areas, and a primitive kitchen. Bottles are being heated and there is a smell of nappies being dried over a wood-fired oven.

The staff numbers nine, with one person in charge of each section. The workers tell me their most urgent needs and priorities at the moment: the kitchen has to be renewed, a nursery and infants' section built. During winter it's very cold and wet: a new roof is needed. The whole place has to be expanded to give more light and space.

"What's the medical situation?" I ask. The community nurses coordinate with a mobile health unit. There is a health centre for the villages in the area, an average of 35-50 kilometres away (about half a day's travel). The mobile unit calls once a month, contras permitting, and it is always unsafe to travel after dark. There is a hospital at Jinotega.

Education? There's an adult education program operating in each village after work. Those that know, teach; those that don't, learn. The village has a one-teacher primary school for children to the age of ten.

Ligia looks at her watch and the sun. She's concerned about the alert. La Sorpresa, the next village we are to visit, is over an hour away, further up into the hills, and the workers say things are happening up there.

As I'm climbing into the landcruiser, the old campesino comes over and grabs my hand.

"Hey, look at this," he says, grinning and shaking my hand with both of his.

"Years ago I'd never been further than the next village. I was afraid to talk to a man from Jinotega. What would I say? Now, I'm holding the hand of a man from the other side of the world. I'm talking, you're listening. You tell them where you come from that that's
a Sorpreso, ("the surprise"), sits like a fan on the skirt of an olive-coloured hillside. We look down on it as we emerge from a cutting and edge down a shoulder in four-wheel drive. We pass through forward defence perimeter positions — rifle pits covered by cut tree branches for shade. Each has a crew of two sub-teenagers. Their smiles of recognition are nervous. White puffs of smoke mist up from slopes a kilometre or so away on the other side of the village, and the occasional distant round of small arms fire drifts over to us.

This is the village that Ligia would like Australian solidarity groups to support. It has a population of 50 families — approximately 370 people — with 80 kids to be serviced by the SIR. The village is now the hub of a state farm which grows coffee and caraway. Previous to the Triumph, the same workers provided the workforce for an estate owned by one of Somoza's henchmen. When he fled they went on working the estate successfully and requested through their union, the ATC (the Farmworkers' Association), that the land be given to them by the state under provisions of the Agrarian Reform Laws.

Ligia points out that the dwellings rented to them by the estate owner had been shanties or barracks, but that now a new housing project is under way. The government provides pre-fabricated materials and the workers the labour power, when they have time to spare from harvest and defence work.

We visit the SIR. It is in a small barracks once used by harvest workers. There is little light, huge gaps between the unsanded rough plank floors. It is getting colder, draughtier and damper as the afternoon progresses. Plastic gives a makeshift roof cover. Through Ligia, the workers tell me the building won't make it through the wet season. They will have to make a new building true to Ministry of Welfare standards, but they need everything — except labour and enthusiasm.

As I talk with them about the centre's needs, the sound of intermittent small arms and light machine-gun fire intensifies. Everyone seems less concerned that I am. A major problem, Ligia explains is Nicaragua's shortage of US dollars previously earned from the sale of exports now curtailed by the economic blockade. Another is Nicaragua's lack of secondary industries.

"Even nails and corrugated iron have to be imported, and with the blockade we can't get enough export dollars. That's why, at this stage of the revolution, contributions of dollars and materials from international solidarity organisations are crucial to us."

As we walk up through the village towards the coffee drying plant and the old estate offices, now a community centre and regional militia command post, I think what a
The land cruiser lurches along a muddy track bordering a small lake and into the large village of Escambray. An orderly collection of new pre-fabricated houses stands on a rise in a sheltered valley. This is a village with a difference: it is comprised entirely of a resettled Miskito Indian community.

There are 1,200 people here, evacuated by the Sandinistas from Rio Coco, a large river running onto and along the Honduran border. I had asked many questions about the Miskito Problem' and the Nicaraguan government's resettlement plans. The international press had been carrying reports of Nicaraguan oppression of Indian minorities on the Atlantic coast, of genocide, concentration camps and massacres. That is why Ligia had brought me here: this project is part of the larger resettlement plans and FACS is involved.

"The original development plan was to have taken place in the area where this community lived," Ligia tells me.

"In order to introduce the plan the government first had to gain the trust of the people. The FSLN moved 80 women and men to live with the community for a year on the Rio Coco. The children were in bad shape and in some parts of the area 100 percent of the population had TB. Nutrition and community health programs were begun and our people began to earn the Indians' confidence and to teach them about the revolution. But, owing to an escalation in counter-revolutionary activity along the river, they were forced to come here to a safer place."

"They moved here a year ago. They were all living under pieces of plastic in July '83 — and now it's a town. It's not yet a self-supporting community. They've been given land and are cultivating rice. They are already self-supporting with beans and corn. Here, at present, there are no fish, but the lagoon and river are being prepared for a fish hatchery."

We say hello to some women who take us over the communal kitchen, dining hall and food storage area. There is not much in the latter's larder. Over a meal of frijoles, I ask about the organisation of food production.
The FSLN carries out its first guerrilla actions.

The FSLN sets up a rural base at Pancasan. Luis Somoza's brother, Anastasio, becomes president.

An earthquake destroys the capital, Managua, killing 15,000 people and leaving 170,000 homeless. The Somoza family ruthlessly exploits the situation and appropriates most of the international aid.

We start off rather stiltedly, Ligia translating.

"What was it like in Rio Coco?"
"OK."
"Do you miss that life, or is it better here?"
"We're getting used to it here. They miss the animals, chickens, pigs. They miss their river so much. We've lived a very long time beside the river. They are fish from here down." (She sweeps both hands down from her navel.)

I am curious about the way she is using "they", "we" and "I". Perhaps, as Ligia suggests, she is just referring to other, older people in the community, but I get the impression that she is also talking very much about herself — or at least, one part of herself. She seems to be using the third person to distance that part from another part of herself and from us. The part appears to speak out of a discourse whose parameters are inscribed by community legislations on what women are supposed to think and feel.

"Why did you leave the river?"
"The war was getting closer. The FSLN told us we would have to move to be safe. By the way," to Ligia, "we got the clothes; thanks."

"We hear in the US press that the Sandinistas treat you badly."
"I don't know about others, but we are treated well. We're all right."
"What about the massacres?"
"I've never seen that. (She changes the subject.) "My husband works at the coffee plantation."

"What did he do before?"
"Worked the land, sugar cane, beans, corn. We had a piece of land, our own land."

"What's it like working the land here?"
"It was better, there, to work our own piece of land. At this moment we're coffee picking, but we are also cultivating food to eat. That's the first job."

The Sandinistas capture the National Palace and force the government to release fifty-nine political prisoners including Tomas Borge and Doris Tijerino.

Somoza is overthrown, ending a war that left 40,000 dead, 40,000 orphans, 200,000 families homeless. 750,000 persons dependent on food assistance, crops unplanted, 33% of all industrial property destroyed, US$1.5 billion worth of physical damage and an external debt of US$1.6 billion.
“How do you like the idea of the co-op?”

“If I think about it, it’s good. But there are some people: they don’t understand it.”

“What do ‘they’ feel?”

“They’re like me: they don’t understand. My companero does; he understands. It’s not a matter for women.” She looks down to smile and returns to an earlier time. “Me, I’m used to the river. Half my body was always in the river. That was good.”

“How do the children feel?”

“I’ve three kids, and I’m twenty-six. The kids like it here. They’re getting big and fat.” She beams proudly. “The oldest one—he’s three—is going to school here as soon as I’m strong enough to throw him in.”

The compafiero from the FSLN called a meeting. He asked what we wanted to do as the area was likely to be under attack for a long period. We could stay or leave. The community decided to go.

“Oppression by the FSLN?”

“We were never pressured. We saw what was happening. We were living in a combat area. It was getting worse. The main source of transportation is the river, especially for food. The contras kept taking the food.”

“Massacres?”

“No. I’ve never heard of any by the FSLN, but I heard on the radio that the Hondurans have killed 200 Miskito down river.”

“Have the Hondurans had any direct contact with your people, tried to influence you?”

“No; but the day we left, eleven of our community decided to go to the Hondurans instead of with us.”

“Could you tell me a bit about yourself?”

“I’m 37. I’ve got six kids. I was born here in Jinotega province. I went to the river when I was very young because there were no jobs here. The river population, you know, used to own this area. Yes, right here where the settlement is. But they were driven off by the latifundistas from late last century till the 1920s.” (I am surprised at this piece of information. Part of the strength of the woman’s nostalgia for the river had seemed to come from a notion that the river life was how it had always been before. Later, I think about the fickleness of oral traditions and of the dangers attendant in uncritically accepting them or romanticising them. The oral tradition, which holds some members of this community tightly in its grasp, had selected and silenced, rendering comparatively recent communal experiences timeless by dehistoricising and mythologising the sojourn by the river. Part of the woman’s separation trauma had seemed more than a personal loss and break, a loss of and break with an old, friendly people. With that you watch yourself.”

“So, in a way, you’re coming home?”

“Yes. I feel fine. I feel happy here with my family. I can even work. Some miss the river because the tradition is to be in the water all day. They get sad thinking about it. It’ll be with them a long time.”

“Do you think you all made the right decision?”

“Well, I’m happy. Fish is the main thing they miss. But once in awhile we buy fish and bring it here. We also used to hunt a lot with the blow-gun. There’s no hunting here. But there wasn’t any on the river any more, with contra activity.”

“How did you use lands by the river—everyone privately?”

“There was a lot of workable land without owners. All we had to do was move in, clear it and work it. We got on the river, chose land and settled, each on his own spot. When the land was impoverished, we’d move on. We’d only cultivate three-quarters of an acre each. Corn, beans—just enough to survive. That’s different from here. You’ve got one area of land to work permanently. And you work it collectively.”

“How do you feel about that?”

“I feel stronger to work collectively. There’s a lot of work to do. But it’s a new experience. We all feel we’ll get ahead.”

“How does your wife feel about all this?”

“She’s happy. The kids are healthy and play around—they have a happy life. The older people and some of the women are the main ones who feel sad. The youngsters are in the hills looking after the contras. When they come back they feel good.” He pauses. “I want to send a message to your people. We’ve planted 100 acres of corn already here. We’re still waiting for the new tractor’s parts, so we did it all with an iron stick—a hole, dropping the seed. With the tractor it’ll be different. We Nicaraguans,” he deliberately emphasises the word, “not just Miskitos, or this community”—need petrol, medicine and agricultural implements. We need the help of all friendly people. With that you watch us get ahead.”

We shake hands and I promise to pass his message on. It seems obvious from what he has said that within this Miskito community there is another awareness in play, a different perspective of reality which has broken through the effects of isolation and gone beyond the merely local.
"The contradictions and tensions are far more intense on the Atlantic coast itself, where the Miskitos are only the largest of many ethnic groups, each with its own special characteristics, but all with a history of oppression. British colonialism and US exploitation robbed them of their identity, broke down their cultural frameworks — left a space. There's the drama. The counter-revolution entered the picture, contesting that space, which the revolution had politicised. On the Atlantic Coast there has been no Nicaraguan identity. Our challenge has been to develop one. The contras, on the other hand, urge opposition to the Nicaraguan government and hold out the carrot of a return to a golden age of hunting and fishing through the establishment of an autonomous Miskito nation."

"What does she think of the proposal?"

"It's totally impractical. The zone lacks resources to maintain itself as a nation. It lacks the basic products, the means of production, the human resources. Dependence on the government in Nicaragua would be exchanged for dependence on the government in Washington."

"What can be done?"

"We have made many mistakes. At first, the revolutionary government neither knew nor understood the elements of the problem. It wanted to establish the same organisational structures on the Atlantic and Pacific coasts. We have changed as we have learned by our mistakes. Increased participation of the Miskitos and other groups in Nicaraguan national life is essential. Their viewpoints expand when they go to study on the Pacific coast and in other countries. An important goal is to train local officials, health and education workers in all the areas so that administrative dependence on the Pacific coast can be overcome. We have previously had the dilemma of having to import 'specialists' and then finding they don't share the mentality of the local people."

"It's vital to stress, however, that the behaviour of the government is not paternalistic. We seek to respond to the people's own participation, further it and strengthen it. This aspect of initiative, participation and ongoing, deepening awareness is the key."

I ask Ligia how she and the Sandinistas took the charge of "bourgeois accommodationism" which had been laid against them at times by the Communist Party of Nicaragua. Specifically, I expressed my doubts about neo-parliamentary representative democracy being better than the present participatory and consultative arrangements. One form
of government was going to be exchanged for another — and the form of the latter seemed, in may ways, dictated by the expectations imposed by the critical world outside. For the last five years there had been a provisional government with two co-ruling bodies: the Junta (nine persons) and executive made up from the Sandinistas, the leading revolutionary party; and the Council of State consisting of delegates of the major organisational groups and mass movements in Nicaragua (the clergy, the women's movement, trade unions, private producers and employers, youth groups, all other political parties, farmers' organisations, etc.). Was it force of external political circumstances which seemed to have pushed the revolution into the conclusion that a representative system utilising solely a plurality of parties was the best way to improve Nicaragua's image?

"The elections — in one sense we don't need them," Ligia answered. "They are very much an imposition from outside. We must maintain the goodwill and solidarity of international socialism. There has been much manipulation to alienate that solidarity. Possibly it will be defused by the election announcement. In another way, we Sandinistas feel confident that this is an exercise to show how popular our support is. That is why all parties are running individually and why the National Front won't go to the elections in coalition.

The support we have is so clear from the anniversary events in the Plaza. The night before, all those people along the Northern Highway when I was taking my delegates back to the hotel — anyone could see it. Old people out beside the bonfires, young people chanting, talking everything over so excitedly. And one could hear it in the Moment of Clamour — all over the city. How was it in your barrio?"

I tell her how it was in the Barrio Senor Lexcano where I was staying. It was a poor working class ghetto, the scene of much street-to-street fighting during 1977-79.

I'd come home around 10 pm on anniversary night to find my friends Mario, Walter, Carmen and the neighbours out in the street collecting cans, rattles, whistles, guitars, flutes — anything that could make a noise. The Junta had suggested to the CDSs, who planned the anniversary celebrations, that a moment of silence be observed for the murder of Sandino. The CDSs had replied, "Silence? No way; Sandino died in the struggle for us to be heard. We'll have a Moment of Clamour instead." And so it was.

On the moment, synchronised by everyone listening to their radios, the barrio had emptied: car horns, tracer shell bursts, people banging with tools on steel lamp posts, young militia and Sandinista groups firing off blank rounds of rifle and revolver ammunition as they raced from block to block, fireworks, shouting and singing.

At the end of a very long moment we had all looked at each other and listened to the receding rounds in adjoining barrios. Then, from the radios had burst forth a pop version of the last movement of Beethoven's Ninth Symphony, The Ode to Joy, in Spanish. Revolutionary kitsch? Maybe, but here in Nicaragua Libre, I had been deeply moved.

"Yes, so good. so good," said Ligia. "And so important that all the people who couldn't go to the Plaza could participate too. The revolutionary process is a genuinely popular one — it's a truly working class revolution.

"There are times when I feel so badly about having to compromise, to go slowly, not to say to people's demands: 'Yes, do it now!' I understand the communists' critical position. There are many of us who are sympathetic to that position — and the communists will do well enough to have a place in government after November 4. But that responsibility I was talking about: we must not fail the trust, not only of Nicaragua, but of Central America and of socialists all over the world.

"Yet, when I talk to my son (he's 22, he works so hard; he's in everything: cotton brigades, the militia, Sandinista organisations) and when I talk to his friends, I feel confident. I have great hope."

Footnotes
1. The Foundation is a private, non-profit, non-governmental organisation set up in 1980 to channel international non-governmental aid for reconstruction and humanitarian projects in Nicaragua. It has a board of directors (four of the seven are priests) with executive functions, and a co-directive body (The Council of Popular Participation) which meets monthly to coordinate, set guidelines for and work out priorities for the various projects. The council comprises representatives of all Nicaraguan associations, grassroots and labour union organisations on a national level.

2. The SIR projects — which provide a combination of infant and maternal health care, village child care, infant nutrition programs and pre-school education — have had a crucial significance in rural Nicaragua of a kind surpassed only by that of the literacy campaigns. Before the Triumph, parents had to take their infants into the cotton or coffee fields where they worked. Field conditions were abysmal: children had to be left unattended at the edge of fields; heat, insects, absence of shelter and basic facilities like water, and the strain placed on breast-feeding mothers forced to work non-stop for long hours of back-breaking labour resulted in very high infant mortality rates. The organisation of rural child care, along with the national literacy campaign, was a first priority of the incoming Revolutionary Provisional Government in 1979. Since then, SIRs have become prime targets for the contras, as part of their strategy to hinder agricultural production and to terrorise rural workers.

3. AMLA: The Luisa Amanda Espinosa Nicaraguan Women's Association, named after the first woman member of the FSLN to die fighting, has successfully mobilised women throughout the country around issues of particular concern to women, and is organising and providing leadership in the difficult task of breaking down the barriers to women's full and equal integration into Nicaraguan society. For a full account of its development, and of the role women have played in the revolution, see Randall M., Sandino's Daughters: Testimonies of Nicaraguan Women in Struggle, (New Star Books, 1981).

4. CDS: Sandinista Defence Committees, or neighbourhood committees, are the grassroots local self-government organisations of the people. Created as organs of urban struggle against Somoza, they are the basic administrative and representative units of a government of "popular power". They send delegates to regional councils of the decision-making network of "national consultation"; they also function as forums for the dissemination and critical discussion of all aspects of government planning, often playing an initiating or correcting role.

5. Barrio: working class suburban ghetto.

Will Silk is a member of the CPA Blue Mountains Branch. He is researching a PhD in political philosophy.