

ABSTRACT
NATIONALISM IN CENTRAL AMERICAN REVOLUTIONS

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The Nicaraguan Revolution signaled growing crisis in Central America in the late 1970s and indicated the potential of armed struggle linked to popular support. Within a year of the overthrow of the Somoza dictatorship, opposition groups in El Salvador established a similar military-political strategy, and the Guatemalan guerrilla movement expanded its base among groups demanding substantive social change. In each country, revolutionaries stressed the national character of their programs and intentions.

As Cold War ideology would have it, the nationalism of Central American revolutionaries disguises a communist-Soviet-totalitarian matrix in which the Sandinistas in Nicaragua, the FMLN in El Salvador, and the Guatemalan insurgents are agents of a hostile foreign power. Political scientist, Seymour Martin Lipset, has pointed out that the United States was the first "new" nation. And, the American Revolution, occurring during a period of bourgeois development influenced by Lockean liberalism, has been the benchmark by which all revolutions are to be judged.

Central American revolutions, however, have been carried out in the interest of dispossessed and exploited social classes. Central American revolutionaries seek popular participation beyond the right to vote, want to limit an individual's right to profit from others, and to redistribute economic wealth to the poorer classes. They are making a clear break with liberal conceptions of democracy and freedom. Independence is associated with rejecting values, relations, and institutions believed to be responsible for maldevelopment. It is ahistorical to measure these revolutions by the experience of the United States.

In Central America, nationalist struggles must combat both entrenched ruling classes and subordination to imperial power. Arising out of dramatically different historical conditions, independent national development will have to emerge from social forces different from those which accomplished this task in the United States.