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COMMUNICATION, REVOLUTION, AND SOCIAL MOVEMENTS:
FREEDOM OF THE PRESS IN NICARAGUA 1979-1990

by

KRISTA BLAIR, B.J. (HONS.)

A thesis submitted to
the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research
in partial fulfilment of
the requirements for the degree of

Master of Journalism

School of Journalism and Communication

Carleton University

Ottawa, Ontario

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**COMMUNICATION, REVOLUTION, AND SOCIAL MOVEMENTS:
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September 22, 1998

ABSTRACT

This thesis examines how changing social relations shaped the development of concepts of press freedom in Nicaragua from 1979 to 1990. It measures the degree of press freedom by traditional liberal standards, but goes beyond that to examine how different social actors contributed to particular elements of the period's press freedom, including those falling outside the liberal tradition. The thesis hypothesizes that popular movements will champion forms of press freedom reflecting the barriers to free expression they experience, and that more egalitarian social relations will tend to produce a press freedom that includes the equal right to originate messages. Both primary and secondary sources are used to trace influences on press freedom ideas and practices. The thesis concludes that the combination of participatory and liberal elements in the press freedom of the period reflected the increased power of popular groups and the continuing influence of the middle and upper classes.

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LIST OF ACRONYMS

ALPROMISU	Alliance for the Progress of the Miskito and Sumu	Prerevolutionary indigenous organization, subverted by Somoza and largely moribund; replaced by MISURASATA in 1979
AMARC	Association mondiale des radiodiffuseurs communautaires/World Association of Community Radio Broadcasters	International association of community and participatory radio organizations, headquartered in Montreal
AMNLAE	Asociación de Mujeres Nicaragüenses Luisa Amanda Espinosa/Luisa Amanda Espinosa Nicaraguan Association of Women	FSLN-led women's mass organization
AMPRONAC	Asociación de Mujeres Ante la Problemática Nacional/Association of Women Confronting the National Problem	Predecessor of AMNLAE
ANDEN	Asociación Nacional de Educadores Nicaragüenses/National Association of Nicaraguan Teachers	FSLN-led teachers' union
APN	Asociación de Periodistas de Nicaragua, P.J. Chamorro/Nicaraguan Journalists' Association	Opposition journalists' union; members included La Prensa staff, Radio Corporacion staff, most Radio Catolica staff
ATC	Asociación de Trabajadores del Campo /Rural Workers' Association	FSLN-led mass organization of agricultural wage workers

CDN	Coordinadora Democrática/Democratic Coordinating Board/Nicaraguan Democratic Coordinator	U.S.-backed coalition of right-wing opposition parties formed in 1984; abstained from 1984 elections; supported contras
CDS	Comité de Defensa Sandinista/Sandinista Defence Committee	FSLN-led neighbourhood-based mass organization
CEBs	Comunidades eclesiales de base/Christian base communities	Grassroots Christian movement that lent support to the FSLN
CEPA	Agrarian Promotion and Educational Centre	Jesuit-founded independent Christian organization; generally supportive of FSLN
CEPAD	Comité Evangélico Pro-Ayuda al Desarrollo/Evangelical Committee for Assistance to Development	Independent umbrella Protestant organization; maintained position of critical support for FSLN
CIDCA	Centro de Investigaciones y Documentación de la Costa Atlántica/Centre for Information and Documentation of the Atlantic Coast	Research centre founded in 1982, originally under agrarian reform ministry; linked to MISATAN
CORADEP	Corporación de Radiodifusión del Pueblo/People's Radio Broadcasting Corporation	State-owned radio network
COSEP	Consejo Superior de la Empresa Privada/Superior Council of Private Enterprise	Umbrella business organization; key member of opposition movement

CST	Central Sandinista de Trabajadores/Sandinista Workers' Federation	FSLN-led labour confederation
EPS	Ejército Popular Sandinista/Sandinista People's Army	Armed forces of the revolutionary state; under the control of FSLN executive
FAO	Frente Amplio Opositor/Broad Opposition Front	Anti-Somoza coalition that succeeded UDEL; members included UDEL, MDN, Conservative party factions
FO	Frente Obrero/Workers' Front	Ultra-left workers' movement that opposed FSLN; allied with MAP-ML; publisher of <i>!:/Pueblo</i>
FPN	Frente Patriótico Nacional/National Patriotic Front	Anti-Somoza coalition led by FSLN; included MPU and moderate parties
FSLN	Frente Sandinista de Liberación Nacional/Sandinista National Liberation Front	Marxist guerrilla movement that led the armed opposition to Somoza
IMF	International Monetary Fund	Intergovernmental organization that oversees international monetary system, providing credit and concerning itself with economic structural reform
INCINE	Instituto Nicaragüense de Cine/Nicaraguan Institute of Cinema	Division of Ministry of Culture responsible for producing and distributing films and regulating cinema admission prices

JGRN	Junta de Gobierno de Reconstrucción Nacional/Governing Junta of National Reconstruction	Executive branch of revolutionary provisional government; appointed by FSLN
JS-19 J	Juventud Sandinista 19 de Julio/Sandinista Youth- 19th of July	Sandinista youth association
MAP-ML	Movimiento de Acción Popular/Marxist-Leninist Popular Action Movement	Far-left party opposing FSLN
MDN	Movimiento Democrático Nicaragüense/Nicaraguan Democratic Movement	Anti-Somoza business and professional association founded in 1978; led by businessman Alfonso Robelo
MIDINRA	Ministerio de Desarrollo Agropecuario y Reforma Agraria/Ministry of Agricultural Development and Agrarian Reform	In this thesis, refers to Comunicaciones Midinra, the video production division of the agrarian reform ministry
MISATAN	Organization of Nicaraguan Miskitos	Independent indigenous movement formed in 1984; non-Sandinista, but initially committed to working with the government
MISURASATA	Miskito, Sumu, Rama, Sandinista Aslatakanka/Miskitos, Sumu, Rama and Sandinistas Working Together	Indigenous mass organization formed in 1979; successor to ALPROMISU; by 1981 in conflict with the FSLN
MPU	Movimiento Pueblo Unido/United People's Movement	FSLN-led grouping of student, labour, women's and civic organizations and left-wing parties; founded 1978

NWICO	New World Information and Communication Order	A set of communication reforms proposed in international forums during the 1970s and 1980s
PLI	Partido Liberal Independiente/Independent Liberal Party	Formed in 1947 by dissident members of Somoza's Nationalist Liberal Party
PSN	Partido Socialista Nicaragüense/Nicaraguan Socialist Party	Moscow-aligned Communist party
SRPM	Sindicato de Radioperiodistas de Managua/Union of Radiojournalists of Managua	Anti-Somoza journalists' organization; predecessor of UPN
UCA	Universidad Centroamericana/Central American University	State-subsidized private university affiliated with the Jesuits
UDEL	Unión Democrática de Liberación/Democratic Liberation Union	Moderate umbrella anti-Somoza group founded by <i>La Prensa</i> editor Pedro Joaquín Chamorro in 1974
UNAG	Unión Nacional de Agricultores y Ganaderos/National Union of Farmers and Cattlemen	FSLN-led mass organization of small and medium-size farmers
UNAN	Universidad Nacional Autónoma de Nicaragua/National Autonomous University of Nicaragua	State-funded university

UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization	International organization mandated to promote collaboration among nations in education, science, culture, and communications
UNO	Unión Nacional Opositora/National Opposition Union	U.S.-brokered and financed anti-Sandinista coalition that won the 1990 national elections; dominated by parties on the right
UPN	Unión de Periodistas de Nicaragua/Union of Nicaraguan Journalists	Sandinista journalists' association founded March, 1978
USAID	United States Agency for International Development	U.S. government agency providing humanitarian and economic development assistance overseas
VER	Voz Educativa Regional	USAID-funded radio project
YATAMA	Yapti Masrika Nani/Descendants of Mother Earth	Armed Miskito organization founded in 1987; successor to MISURASATA

CHRONOLOGY OF THE NICARAGUAN REVOLUTION, 1979-1990

Social and political developments	Events affecting the press
1937-1956 Rule of Anastasio Somoza García, both directly and through puppet presidents.	
1957-1967 Luis Somoza Debayle and puppets.	
1967-1979 Anastasio Somoza Debayle.	
1978-1979 Revolutionary war.	January 10, 1978 Assassination of <i>La Prensa</i> editor Pedro Joaquín Chamorro.
July 19, 1979 FSLN guerrilla columns enter Managua. Governing Junta of National Reconstruction (JGRN) issues Basic Statute the next day.	July 1979 Abolition of Somoza-era “Black Code” and other press laws. Confiscation of Somoza-controlled media.
July 24, 1979 State of Emergency decreed.	July 24, 1979 Law on the Maintenance of Order and Security provides for prison terms for distributing information aimed at injuring “popular interests.”
August 21, 1979 Statute on the Rights and Guarantees of the Nicaraguan People.	August 10, 1979 Provisional media law and regulations decreed.

April 1980

Council of State sits, after being expanded from 33 to 47 members, giving pro-FSLN groups a majority. Vileta Chamorro and Alfonso Robelo resign their seats on the JGRN.

State of Emergency lifted.

January 1980

Closing of *El Pueblo*. Three of the paper's journalists imprisoned for "writing against the interest of the revolutionary process and the people."

March 24, 1980

Start of National Literacy Crusade.

April 20, 1980

Last edition of *La Prensa* before departure of pro-FSLN editor Xavier Chamorro and much of *La Prensa* staff.

May 1980

Appearance of *El Nuevo Diario*, the first major daily to be worker-owned. Second cooperative paper after *El Pueblo*.

August 1980

Remaining private television network confiscated.

Literacy campaigns in Atlantic Coast languages begin.

Participatory adult education groups started as the National Literacy Crusade winds down.

September 1980

Decrees 511 and 512 require information related to internal security, defence, and the economy to be cleared by government before publication.

1981

Indigenous organizations join *contras* in Honduras.

Government withdraws its recognition of MISURASATA, the indigenous mass organization.

Participatory public health education and vaccination campaigns launched.

January 20, 1981

U.S. suspends aid to Nicaragua.

July 19, 1981

Agrarian Reform Law.

August 1981

Main *contra* organization formed.

September 9, 1981

Junta decrees General State of Economic and Social Emergency.

October 1980

Abolition of requirement that journalists belong to UPN.

1981

Indigenous language programs broadcast on four radio stations.

January 1981

Media Directorate moved from Ministry of Culture to Interior Ministry.

February 1981

Atlantic Coast's Radio VER ransacked by local junta.

April 26, 1981

Formation of CORADEP, state-owned radio network.

September 9, 1981

State of Emergency provides for a three-year prison sentence for disseminating "false news that might lead to the alteration of prices."

Fall 1981

MDN and conservative political parties form the opposition coalition CDN, the Nicaraguan Democratic Coordinating Committee.

Contras begin carrying out operations inside Nicaragua.

1982

U.S. blocks credits from international lending agencies.

Alfonso Robelo, MDN leader, joins *contras*.

March 15, 1982

State of Emergency declared.

1983

Introduction of draft.

Domestic opposition begins calling for FSLN-*contra* talks.

Educational enrollment peaks, then enters a decline lasting until 1986.

1982

Debate on new media law beings

Radio Sandino's *Linea Directa* program started.

ATC begins training "popular correspondents."

March 15, 1982

Debate on media law suspended.

Beginning of prior censorship of the three major dailies; radio newscasts replaced by a central newscast from La Voz de Nicaragua, the government radio station.

June 15, 1982

Some radio newscasts allowed to reopen.

1984

Government introduces some austerity measures.

U.S. mines Nicaraguan harbours.

October 1984

Contras launch new series of offensives on civilian targets.

November 4, 1984

FSLN wins first post-Somoza elections. 75 percent of electorate votes for a President and National Assembly. Mass organizations lose representation when Council of State is replaced by a system of representative democracy.

March 1985

U.S. imposes trade embargo.

October 1985

State of Emergency measures tightened. In November, opposition from National Assembly and Supreme Court causes terms of emergency to be softened.

May-June 1986

Public meetings (*cabildos abiertos*) held to discuss draft constitution.

August-November 1984

Election campaign. Political parties guaranteed minimum amount of free air time during election campaign and access to newspaper pages. State of Emergency amended to temporarily relax censorship and other measures.

1985

Radio Sandino's *Linea Directa* taken off the air.

October 1985

Censorship increases. Government seizes first edition of Church publication *Iglesia* before distribution, seizes printing equipment.

1986

UPN forces withdrawal of bill in National Assembly that would have criminalized revealing certain state secrets.

January 1, 1986

Radio Católica closed.

July 27, 1986

La Prensa closed indefinitely.

1987

Government begins talks with domestic opposition.

AMNLAE begins to push more strongly for FSLN recognition of women's rights.

By 1987 educational enrollment has increased 96 per cent since 1978.

January 9, 1987

New Nicaraguan constitution becomes law.

August 7, 1987

Central American presidents sign Esquipulas peace accords.

September 7, 1987

Autonomy Law gives Atlantic Coast regional self-rule.

1988

Official U.S. military aid to *contras* ends. Strategic defeat of *contra* forces.

Government gives demands of private producers higher priority; shifts economic resources to private sector.

February 1988

Government introduces IMF-style austerity measures.

October 1987

Censorship no longer enforced under State of Emergency.

La Prensa reopens with the agreement that there will be no further press censorship Radio Católica reopens.

1988

Pro-FSLN weekly *La Semana Cómica* closed twice for breaking media regulations on the portrayal of women.

January 1988

State of Emergency lifted after six years: remaining independent newscasts reopen.

November 21, 1988

Law of constitutional safeguards (*amparo*) allows citizens to appeal constitutionality of laws.

1989

Upsurge in illegal land seizures and invasions by peasants and workers.
Wildcat strikes.

Mass organization membership at 0.5 million.

August 1989

FSLN signs accord with 17 opposition parties, securing their participation in the 1990 elections.

February 26, 1990

UNO coalition wins national election.

November 1988

Launch of *La Crónica*, a new opposition weekly.

April 21, 1989

New media law approved by National Assembly. APN appeals to Supreme Court, arguing law is unconstitutional.

March 8, 1990

Sandinista-dominated National Assembly repeals April 1989 media law, paving the way for private television channels.

INTRODUCTION

The Debate on Press Freedom in Nicaragua

On July 19th, 1979, hundreds of guerrilla fighters of the Frente Sandinista de Liberación Nacional (FSLN) poured into the streets of Managua, capital of the small Central American nation of Nicaragua. Having led a mass uprising against dictator Anastasio Somoza, the FSLN installed a revolutionary government that promised Nicaraguans a wide range of civil liberties, including freedom of the press.

Within two years, however, the revolutionary government was fighting U.S.-backed insurgents in a civil war, and the Nicaraguan revolution had become a subject of international debate.

For Nicaraguans and their allies on both sides of the conflict, the issue of press freedom became a weapon in a propaganda war waged at home and abroad. The U.S. administration pointed to censorship and state controls on the press as proof of the revolutionary government's illegitimacy; the supporters of the Frente, on the other hand, concentrated on providing justifications for press controls, and on demonstrating that there was comparatively free discussion in the Nicaraguan press.

Despite the enormous interest in press freedom in Nicaragua during the period of FSLN rule, most examinations of press freedom were limited in scope. In particular, the Reagan administration's role in the Nicaraguan conflict limited the debate on press

freedom, first, by focusing most inquiry on the extent of censorship in the country, and second, by framing debate within the U.S. administration's particular conception of press freedom, which defined such freedom solely as the absence of state interference.

Such a debate could contribute little to understanding either how press theory and practice were taking shape in a nation undergoing revolution, or what the Nicaraguan experience might contribute to our own understanding of press freedom development.

Research Question

This study asks what *kind* of press freedom developed in revolutionary Nicaragua, and *why*.

Such a question is premised on the view that press freedom is an idea whose constituent elements vary according to time and place. Accordingly, examinations of press freedom development in a nation should go beyond merely asking the degree to which a particular country's press system conforms to the present Anglo-American model; they should also ask how forces at work within a society have shaped its particular form of press freedom.

While this paper centres on a case study of Nicaragua's Sandinist revolution, the initial impetus for this thesis grew out of a general interest in the directions in which freedom of the press could evolve. In both the West and international forums, a recurring criticism of liberal press freedom has been the inability of ordinary citizens to personally exercise their freedom to originate communication in the media. This study

focusses on the factors affecting the survival or development of press freedom as a right equally available to all to both receive and originate communication.

In revolutionary Nicaragua, the Sandinista regime opposed the libertarian interpretation of press freedom championed by the domestic opposition and the United States government. At the same time, pro-revolutionary groups were experimenting with new ideas of communication rights similar to those proposed in the West and in international forums in immediately preceding decades.

In the following case study of Nicaragua, therefore, the questions are: Did press theory and practice in revolutionary Nicaragua include a press freedom for the ordinary citizen? If so, what encouraged such a development, and what worked against it?

Theoretical Framework

This study will argue that the development of press freedom in a nation is shaped by changes in the configuration of social forces.

The fate of press freedom in a country cannot be explained by equating freedom of the press with a particular government ideology or an economic category such as “underdeveloped.” There is little explanatory value in such an approach: what is needed is an examination of how a nation’s historical development shaped press freedom.

In order to undertake such an examination, this thesis argues, we must discard theoretical frameworks that focus on classifying press systems, seeking to identify them with a particular model or to locate them on a predetermined spectrum or evolutionary path.

Instead, press freedom in both our own and other societies should be seen as an ever-evolving body of elements which has taken on different meanings at different times. Our present liberal press freedom consists of various elements that have been modified, added to, and subtracted from in a succession of social struggles. It is neither a finished product, nor do its constituent elements have a necessary relation to one another.

In developing this approach to press freedom development, the study argues that grassroots movements struggling for more egalitarian societies will tend to interpret press freedom as a right equal to free speech. When this happens, and such struggles succeed, these movements will introduce strong egalitarian elements into their society's press freedom.

A country such as Sandinist Nicaragua, in which a revolutionary mass movement deliberately attempted to construct a more egalitarian state and society, provides the opportunity to explore the relationship between changes in the content of press freedom and changes in social relations within a manageable period of time, and thereby to test this hypothesis.

The study recognizes that revolutions are not simply instances of dramatic popular movement victories, and discusses the factors affecting the influence of popular movements in revolutionary change. Apart from other revolutionary competitors for power, international pressures can affect the influence of popular movements in revolutions both through international actors lending or withholding support for revolutionary projects, and through international conditions that limit the policy alternatives of popularly supported governments.

Purpose of the Study

This is essentially an historical/theoretical study: its aim is not to produce new material on the history of Nicaragua or the Nicaraguan press, but rather to use existing primary and secondary historical sources to explain the course of press freedom development in revolutionary Nicaragua.

By identifying patterns in how social and political change affected that development, we are better able to identify factors that will affect the nation's future press freedom, and to explain differences between that country's conception of press freedom and the conceptions of other nations.

The emphasis is on the contribution such an exploration can make to the theoretical literature on freedom of the press. An understanding of the factors that shaped press freedom in Nicaragua contributes not only to our understanding of that situation, but may also inform our understanding of the dynamics of press freedom development in general.

Sources, Limits and Delimitations

As much as possible, this study limits its examination to events and developments within the boundaries of Nicaragua between 1979 and 1990.

However, prerevolutionary conditions within the country are discussed in order to provide a baseline for evaluating change and because, even in a revolution, there is considerable institutional and ideological continuity.

While the study concentrates on a relatively short period of time, the first ten years of the Nicaraguan revolution saw great social and political change. The study does not go beyond 1990 as the 1990 election signalled an end to (though not a reversal of) this period of rapid government-led change. As well, the change in government brought changes in the international pressures on the Nicaraguan government, including the end of the civil war.

If a nation's press freedom is shaped by the struggles of social movements, which take place at the domestic level, then an examination of the development of press freedom should focus on domestic developments. However, the thesis will discuss international forces insofar as they, first, affected the relative power of groups within Nicaraguan society and, second, limited the actions of the Nicaraguan government. Particularly in a small country such as Nicaragua, with a history of marked dependence on international markets and foreign intervention, the degree of influence of various social forces does not depend solely on their domestic power base.

This study relies on both primary and secondary accounts of press freedom and communication in Nicaragua during the Sandinista era. A range of secondary material, both journalistic and academic, is supplemented by primary materials which include translations and transcripts from Nicaraguan media, texts of legislation, government and FSLN publications, and transcripts of speeches and interviews with Nicaraguan leaders.

Much of what has been written on Nicaragua reflects the highly charged debate surrounding press freedom and the FSLN during this time period. Several scholars of Nicaragua (e.g., Walker 1991b, ix; Valdivia 1991, 356) have noted that the Nicaraguan

conflict involved the deliberate dissemination of disinformation in the guise of journalistic or scholarly works. Furthermore, in the highly conflictive, emotionally charged atmosphere of a revolution and civil conflict, even the most dispassionate observer may have difficulty in reporting fairly and comprehensively on rapidly developing events. Educator Robert Arnove, for example, comments in his 1994 work that his earlier studies of education in Nicaragua did not adequately address the suppression of dissent (Arnove 1994, 11).

This being the case, interviews and statements by Nicaraguan public figures have been evaluated in the light of studies that seek to distinguish between their publicly and privately expressed views. The reports of reputable independent human rights organizations have been invaluable in providing an account of events from third parties not directly participating in the debate over Nicaragua.

Overview of Thesis

This study is divided into three parts. Part One, which consists of Chapters 1, 2 and 3, describes the theoretical framework of the study. Part Two, consisting of Chapters 4 to 9, is the case study of Nicaragua. The final part, Chapter 10, is the conclusion.

The purpose of Chapter 1 is to set out the conceptual problem studied, which informs the examination of press freedom in Nicaragua. What circumstances favour the individual exercise of press freedom in a nation's press model? In setting up this question, the chapter discusses the generally accepted variants of liberal freedom of the

press, and new concepts, particularly the “right to communicate,” that have arisen in response to perceived shortcomings of Western press systems.

Chapter 2 describes the theoretical framework that will be used to explore press freedom development in Nicaragua, including an hypothesis on the conditions likely to produce the individual right to free expression through the press. It argues that we can best explore press freedom if we understand it not as one or more models, but as a changing body of ideas and practices whose elements are formed by various social struggles. After describing popular or grassroots movements, the chapter argues that history suggests popular movements will be the source of more egalitarian elements of press freedom.

Chapter 3 applies this theoretical framework to the case of a revolutionary state. It first presents the concept of social revolution, and explores the role of popular movements in revolutionary change. It then turns to press freedom in revolutions, arguing that we can best understand the changes to the press observed in revolutions by viewing press freedom as shaped by social struggles. Finally, it identifies the various forces that shape press freedom in revolutionary periods.

In Part Two, the study turns to the case of revolutionary Nicaragua. Chapter 4 begins with an economic and historical background of Nicaragua, including the history of its revolution. It then discusses the choice of Nicaragua as a case study of press freedom development. After reviewing the approaches of past studies of press freedom in revolutionary Nicaragua, it contrasts the questions these studies asked with what this thesis asks.

To examine how social change shaped press freedom, we must first have a clear picture of that social change. Chapter 5 thus explores how social relations changed in the Nicaraguan revolution. It outlines the social groups that participated in the revolution, and how their relative positions changed with the overthrow of the Somoza dictatorship and rise to power of the FSLN.

Chapter 6 describes Nicaragua's prerevolutionary press system and the changes to this media environment following Somoza's overthrow. In describing Nicaragua's prerevolutionary media environment, the chapter focusses on press freedom in order to provide a baseline picture against which to measure changes in it.

Chapter 7 discusses the various ideas and experiences of press freedom held by revolutionary actors as they entered the revolutionary period.

Finally, Chapters 8 and 9 trace how different social actors affected the development of the ideas and practices described in Chapter 7. Chapter 8 discusses the fate of those press freedom elements falling within the liberal tradition. Chapter 9 discusses the development of ideas and practices that lie outside traditional liberalism. Both chapters attempt to identify connections between changes in social relations and changes in press freedom ideas and practice.

Chapter 10 reviews how social relations shaped press freedom in Nicaragua, and concludes that the increased power of popular movements led to the emergence of a press freedom with more egalitarian elements. It considers what Nicaragua's case suggests about the conditions likely to produce press freedom as an equal right to receive and originate communication.

The chapter then contrasts the view of press freedom development used in this thesis to that of other studies of press freedom in Nicaragua. It argues that abandoning the “models” approach of other press freedom writers allowed this thesis to explore the development of ideas and practices not now accepted as part of liberal press freedom, and to address the reasons particular press freedom ideas and practices emerged or disappeared. In turn, such understanding allows us to project future directions of press freedom development.

PART ONE

STUDYING PRESS FREEDOM DEVELOPMENT:
THEORIZING ON PRESS FREEDOM, SOCIAL MOVEMENTS
AND REVOLUTIONARY CHANGE

CHAPTER 1

FREEDOM OF THE PRESS: RETRIEVING FREE SPEECH

Introduction

What could the experiences of a small developing country such as Nicaragua teach us about freedom of the press? By all accounts, press freedom in prerevolutionary Nicaragua was a complete sham; the revolutionary era was characterized by considerable government censorship and an acrimonious debate over whether press freedom existed, and by whose standards its existence should be judged.

Yet such a history makes Nicaragua more the rule than the exception. In developing countries, whose populations comprise the bulk of humanity, the liberal model of press freedom has had more success on paper than in reality – when it has gained acceptance at all.

Moreover, the governments of many developing countries have, like revolutionary Nicaragua, launched attacks on the validity of Western press theory and press systems. In the 1970s and 1980s, while a revolution was transforming Nicaragua, discussions of a “New World Information and Communication Order” in UNESCO and other international forums developed into a wholesale attack on the acceptability of Western communication models. Western liberal press freedom was viewed by many as a set of foreign values and practices that Western news agencies and governments were

imposing on them. They argued that if the liberal model guaranteed freedom to anyone, it was only to the Western media.

Not all criticisms of liberal models can be attributed to the self-interest of authoritarian regimes, for they have not been limited to the developing world, where authoritarian press practices are common. Western criticism of how its own press system operates has existed since the nineteenth century, and intensified during the twentieth century (Peterson 1978, 78-9; Altschull 1990, 277-282). This led to a variety of press commissions in postwar Britain, Canada, and the United States, each attempting to deal with perceived failings in the operation of the liberal model.

In comparison to developing nations, liberal press freedom is well established in Anglo-American societies. However, those countries also face the problem of attaining a system that actually provides the freedoms envisaged in theory. It appears, therefore, that challenges to Western theories of communication and the press need not imply a wholesale rejection of the value of free speech or a free press. Developing nations, where liberal press freedom has notably failed or is rejected, could be the source of alternative communication models that address criticisms of the present Western press model.

An examination of the Nicaraguan experience may reveal ways in which new variants of press freedom could develop. In turn, this may suggest possible future directions for the development of press freedom in our own society.

Liberal Freedom of the Press

Liberal press freedom is a body of thought and practice developed over the past 400 years, beginning in Western Europe and North America, and spreading to other regions in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Most of the struggle to establish liberal press freedom was accomplished in the seventeenth century (Siebert 1978, 48-50) and, despite later modifications, the essential elements of the liberal theory have remained unchanged since that time.¹

Emerging from an era marked by the confrontation of the rising commercial middle classes with the old authoritarian states, liberalism's theory of the press stressed the ability of individuals to arrive at truth through their own reason; hence, government must not hinder the free exchange of ideas.

Various thinkers from the sixteenth through the twentieth centuries advanced justifications for a press as free as possible from government control. Milton's *Areopagitica*, published in 1644, argued that in a free encounter of ideas in the open market, "so truth be in the field.... Let her and falsehood grapple; who ever knew truth put to the worse, in a free and open encounter?" In the eighteenth century, John Locke's concept of "natural rights" was a further argument against government's impinging on free speech (Siebert 1978, 43). In the nineteenth century, John Stuart Mill argued that the evil in silencing opinions lay in the fact that free expression of opinion was not simply a personal matter, but contributed to the creation of the good society (Siebert

¹ The following account of liberal press freedom draws heavily on the work of Frederick S. Siebert (1978).

1978, 46). Thomas Jefferson argued that the press needed to be free from government control so it could act as an educator in a democratic society and as a watchdog on government (Siebert 1978, 46-7).

The institutional arrangements that were to provide the unhindered exchange of ideas stressed private ownership of the press in an open market and the absence of legal restraints on the press.

In the classical liberal view, the press should not be owned or financially supported by government. Government should not use economic methods of press control, such as taxation or monopolization of a particular means of communication. These institutional arrangements would ensure that the press remained free from government influence, and would permit the free entry of anyone with the means into the “marketplace of ideas.”

While liberal press freedom hinges on the freedom of media from state control, most of liberalism’s proponents recognize limits to this freedom (Siebert 1978, 53-4). Such limitations include laws on libel, privacy, and obscenity; restrictions on the press during war or national emergency; and regulation of radio frequencies.

The advent of broadcasting played a part in the modification of liberal theory, as a degree of state ownership and intervention accompanied the introduction of these newer media. Broadcasting required the use of a common resource, air waves, and was perceived as having powerful impact on its audience. As a result, the state generally regulated to some degree both the right to broadcast and the content of broadcasting.

Some liberal democratic countries have (or once had) partial or complete state ownership of television or radio, albeit generally at arms-length from government.

In contrast, newspapers have more consistently followed an open market, private-ownership system. In general, newspapers continued to be privately owned and financed largely through advertising.²

In the postwar era, the idea of “social responsibility” gained some acceptance among journalists, journalism scholars, and the general public. The social responsibility model of the press represents the outer boundaries of generally accepted modifications to liberal press theory.

The idea of social responsibility arose in the twentieth century as a response to changes in the press system. The press had developed into a commercial mass market medium, with a significant degree of concentration of ownership and large capital costs. It thus had become more difficult to enter this “marketplace of ideas”; moreover, those in the marketplace appeared to be involved more in the pursuit of profit than truth.

As a result, journalists and newspaper owners began to develop standards of conduct around such ideas as objectivity and professionalism, as well as a conception of their role as public defenders or watchdogs (Altschull 1990, 276) acting on behalf of the “public’s right to know.” The advent of radio, followed by television, contributed to this

² The twentieth-century European experience of newspapers tends to diverge from classical liberal theory more than the Anglo-American experience. In Europe, newspapers have been subject to a wide variety of state and political party subsidy, generally affecting which newspapers exist, rather than what they say on any particular day (Smith 1978).

ethic of acting on behalf of the public, as these media were organized as state-owned public services in many Western countries.

In the United States, the Commission on Freedom of the Press, known informally as the Hutchins Commission and convened during the Second World War, first laid out an explicit description of this modified idea of liberal press freedom. It was popularized in Siebert, Peterson, and Schramm's classic *Four Theories of the Press*, published in 1956. The social responsibility variant of liberal press theory advocates a private press as free as possible from government censorship or control, but argues that as the "marketplace of ideas" has become difficult for the average citizen to enter, the press must take it upon itself to act as a "trustee" of the public's freedom, by ensuring that "ideas deserving a public hearing shall get a public hearing and that the decision of what ideas deserve that hearing shall rest in part with the public" (Commission on Freedom of the Press 1963, 219-220).

Social responsibility theory involved a shift from a conception of press freedom as negative freedom to that of press freedom as a positive freedom. In other words, proponents of social responsibility recognized that freedom was not only the absence of external restraints, but also the possession by the press and the public of the means to exercise such freedom.

Citizens, who had no means of mass communication themselves, had claims on the press, which provided them with information. The freedoms of the press were therefore linked with duties or responsibilities: the press, argued the Hutchins Commission, "is free for the achievement of those goals of press service on which its

own ideals and the requirements of the community combine... ” (Commission on Freedom of the Press 1963, 228).

However, the concept of the press’s positive duty to citizens is somewhat weak in social responsibility theory, which provides neither justification for a citizen to compel the press to provide access to an audience, nor a clear means by which the public can play a role in determining the ideas that get a hearing in the press.

The “accountability” to the public that social responsibility theory demands does not, for the most part, mean external regulation or control of the press, and such a solution was not desired by either social responsibility proponents or the American press. The Hutchins Commission was hesitant to consider such external regulation, arguing:

the main positive energy for the improvement of press achievement must come from the issuers. Although the standards of press performance arise as much from the public situation and need as from the conscious goals of the press, these standards must be administered by the press itself. (Hocking 1972, 226)

Criticisms of Liberal Freedom of the Press

Criticism of the liberal press system ranges broadly. Some claim that the press exercises enormous unaccountable power. Others say it lacks independence from big business, government or the left. Still others argue that the market imperative has driven it to cater to the lowest common denominator in society. But in addition to complaints about press operations, liberal theory itself has come under attack.

Beginning in the nineteenth century, critics, particularly those influenced by Marxism, criticized the *obstacles to freedom* that liberal freedom of the press entailed.

Marxism argued from its beginning that the liberal conception effectively denies freedom to all but the dominant capitalist class. The precise nature of this control of the press became a matter of debate. In the twentieth century arguments ranged from ones depicting the liberal press as under the direct control of the capitalist class, to ones that said the structures of the liberal press limit the range of debate within society.³

By the twentieth century, this line of criticism was no longer confined to socialists, as the metamorphosis of the press into a mass-market commercial enterprise spawned widespread liberal dissatisfaction. In the United States, the Hutchins Commission recognized that the press had not provided the free and wide-ranging public debate foreseen by liberal theory. The commissioners observed that the growing size and concentration of ownership of the press tended to squeeze out smaller or divergent competitors (Hocking 1972, 145).

The Commission recognized that freedom of the press, as it had been originally conceived, was an extension of freedom of speech. Yet unlike free speech, the exercise of press freedom requires the command of certain means. For early liberals, the absence of restraint appeared to provide press freedom just as it did free speech. But by the time of the Hutchins Commission, it had become apparent that few had the means to enter the liberal marketplace of ideas.

³ The proposed mechanisms through which discussion is limited include the nature of the press as private enterprise, the particular processes of news gathering that commercial competition fosters, and the reliance of the press on advertising (Curran and Seaton 1988; Curran 1978; Hall 1978; Herman and Chomsky 1988).

While the Commission recognized that, as an extension of free speech, liberal press freedom was originally the freedom to originate communication, it nevertheless concluded that it was not the right of every citizen to have access to the means of mass communication (Hocking 1972, 219).

Instead, under the social responsibility system, the press, as trustees of the public's press freedom, should carry the widest possible range of ideas. In this way, the proponents of social responsibility seek to approximate the open forum for debate that libertarian theory assumes will result from a free market. Social responsibility envisions a right to originate communication that is much weaker than that of classical liberalism: an individual's right to communicate is dependent on the decisions of the press.

Some members of the Commission, however, remained troubled by the demise of press freedom as a form of free speech, rather than a consumer right. In a dissenting opinion from the reports of the Hutchins Commission, commissioner Archibald MacLeish

argued that the question of access was critical to the problem of freedom of the press... His concern about the vitality of each citizen's right "to say his say in print if he so desired" (COFOP, 1946g, p.6) thus rested in his conviction that the right no longer existed, if indeed it ever had. (McIntyre 1987, 144)

The main difference between Marxist and liberal commentators was the former's argument that freedom was constrained on a class basis, thus supporting the existing capitalist system. Both sets of critics, however, argued that people were excluded from exercising freedom of the press, if this meant the freedom to contribute to the "marketplace of ideas."

In addition to the criticisms of liberal press freedom that emerged from the European and North American experiences, criticisms from Third World nations arose in international bodies such as UNESCO and the Non-Aligned Movement during the 1960s and 1970s. In the international campaign for a New World Information and Communication Order (NWICO), developing nations were reacting against the dominance of the Western media in international news reporting.

The campaign for NWICO was a reaction to the liberal concept of “free flow of information,” which UNESCO, under American influence, had traditionally advocated. The free flow doctrine is the application of liberal press theory to the international sphere, described by one member of the Hutchins Commission as an attempt “to write the First Amendment into international law” (White and Leigh 1946, 2). It holds that internationally, the fewer government controls on the press, the more communication freedom there will be. Advocates of NWICO, on the other hand, held that the free flow doctrine actually meant a one-way flow from the West to developing countries, which possess fewer communication resources (MacBride 1980, 137-149). They argued instead for a “free and balanced flow.”

NWICO supporters went beyond criticizing the direction of international news flows, however. Many concerns echoed those of press commissions in the U.S. and Canada: that the private enterprise system had led to growing concentration and monopolization of the press, in a marketplace of ideas where only large-scale enterprises could compete. Some argued that free speech and free enterprise, twinned in liberal

theory, are not necessarily compatible. The MacBride Report, a UNESCO-sponsored study of communications, argued:

The freedom of a citizen or social groups to have access to communication, both as recipients and contributors, cannot be compared to the freedom of an investor to derive profit from the media. One protects a fundamental human right, the other permits the commercialization of a social need. (MacBride 1980, 18)

The NWICO discussions reflected developing nations' growing dissatisfaction with their domestic press experiences during the 1960s and 1970s. Latin America, in particular, produced much criticism of liberal press theory. In contrast to other developing regions, the media in Latin America were generally formally organized along liberal lines, being in private hands and commercially operated. During the 1960s, the emergence of new social groups and political actors, and the perceived failure of Western models of development, led to criticism of these media. In various Latin American countries, political parties, the military or intellectuals began to criticize the commercial media for their failure to represent the public and to support social and cultural goals (Fox 1988, 17-18).

The conclusion of those critics – scholars, politicians, media practitioners – was that the oligarchic elites subduing and exploiting the masses had also become dominant in the sphere of communication and culture, thus enhancing their power to favour the status quo. (Beltrán 1988, 2)

The experience of both industrialized and developing nations led critics to argue that liberal press systems produced a “vertical” flow of communication within and between nations:

Over fifty years' experience of the mass media... have conditioned us, both at the national and international levels, to a single kind of information flow, which we have come to accept as normal and indeed as the only possible kind: a vertical, one-way flow from the top downwards of non-diversified anonymous messages, produced by a few and addressed to all. (Jean d'Arcy, quoted in MacBride 1980, 149)

At both the national and international level, liberal press freedom stood accused of being the freedom for the few to speak on behalf of a silenced majority.

New Conceptions of Press Freedom

Well into the twentieth century, alternatives to the liberal model remained limited largely to theories that rejected the concept of individual rights. The Leninist theory of the press, which provided the justification for the Soviet-bloc system of a state-controlled press, had interpreted liberal freedoms such as free speech, freedom of association and freedom of the press as class instruments that had no place in a workers' state (Carnoy 1984, 58).

However, in the 1960s, groups in both the developed and developing world, particularly Latin America, began to develop "alternative media" and "alternative communications" (MacBride 1980, 170; Beltrán 1978, 14).

Various referred to as popular, participatory or democratic communications, alternative communications refers to a wide range of phenomena, including messages, technologies, and communication practices, that are opposed to the dominant Western model of the mass media. The terms have come to encompass ideas ranging from the traditional alternative to liberal press freedom, state ownership and control of the media,

to new practices and institutions that present an alternative to the “vertical” nature of both state and private press systems (Grinberg 1986).

It is the latter projects – those which seek ways to overcome the limits of the liberal press model without sacrificing its freedoms – that are referred to here. These are attempts to use alternative communication media, often small-scale or low-cost, and different communication practices, to allow groups or movements excluded from the mass media to produce messages (MacBride 1980, 170; Beltrán 1978, 14-15).

In Peru in the 1970s, for instance, mobile video-tape units allowed peasants to be both the issuers and receivers of messages in rural education projects. Slum dwellers in Peru used community newspapers and loudspeaker systems to communicate independently of the dominant media (Beltrán 1978, 14-15). In North America since the 1960s, pirate radio stations, also called free or green radio, have operated outside government regulations to avoid prohibitively high operating costs and content regulation (MacBride 1980, 170; The Chicago Tunnel Company). In the 1990s, street papers started in cities in North America, the United Kingdom, Russia, South Africa, Australia and Europe (Harris 1997; Jeeroburkhan 1997). These papers are written and sold by homeless and low-income people to their own communities and the general public.

Alongside the growth of these new practices, academics in both the developing world and the West began to discuss new concepts of press freedom that recognized the

right of the public to originate information, in contrast to the Hutchins Commission's focus on the rights of the public as consumers of information.⁴

In Latin America, the work of Brazilian educator Paulo Freire in the 1960s was a primary influence on communication scholars, leading to discussions of “horizontal” communication models that would take the place of the existing “vertical” mass media structures (Beltrán 1978, 15). In the 1970s in Latin America, researchers working on more democratic or “horizontal” communication models were joined by governments and the church in advocating a “right to participation in information and mass communication... without limitation because of their cultural, economic, or social level” (UNESCO 1986, 9), and rights of access to the means of mass communication. These concepts would spread to other regions of the world, and they persisted in international forums such as the United Nations and UNESCO long after most Latin American governments had discarded them (Fox 1988, 8-9).

The idea of a right of access to the media was also being discussed in North America. In the United States, access to the press – a question raised by the Hutchins Commission – would be championed as a proposed first amendment right by Jerome A. Barron (1969), who has argued since the 1960s for the public's right to be heard – including a right of reply and right of access to the press.

⁴ The Hutchins Commission retained only an echo of the right to originate in its call for the press to reflect the wide range of debate present in society. In contrast, these new concepts of press freedom were closer to the original libertarian ideal, envisioning such a right as truly belonging to citizens, rather than being held in trust.

But by far the most comprehensive of these new ideas is “the right to communicate,” which came to include the right of access, right to participation, and horizontal communication.

The right-to-communicate concept has its origins in both Western countries and the developing world. First articulated by French communications expert Jean d’Arcy in 1969 (Fisher 1983, 13), and in the Canadian Telecommission Studies (Fisher 1983, 15), UNESCO began to study the concept in 1974 in response to a resolution introduced by the Swedish delegation. Much work was also done on the right to communicate at the University of Hawaii by L.S. Harms and Jim Richstad, who produced two of the most important reference works on the right to communicate (Harms, Richstad and Kie 1977; Harms and Richstad 1977).

The right to communicate concept was generally presented as an umbrella right. One formulation by L.S. Harms includes a right to participate and other association rights; a right to inform, to be informed and related information rights; and a right to privacy, a right to language, and related cultural evolution rights (Harms 1978, 2). The right to communicate was variously described as residing in the individual, groups, or nations, or as both an individual and collective right (Fisher 1983, 39-40).

As a right, the right to communicate implied a positive obligation for others to promote it and provide the environment for its exercise (Fisher 1983, 39; Fisher 1982, 18). “At the national level, therefore, recognition of a right to communicate will impose on the state the obligation of creating the conditions under which the practical freedoms and entitlements which derive from the right itself can be implemented” (Fisher 1982,

28). This could include legal recognition of communication freedoms and social policy aimed at improving opportunities to communicate (Fisher 1982, 28-32). Some discussions of the right to communicate included the obligation to provide the material means for its exercise, including the sharing of communication technology and resources internationally, and national governments' investing in communication infrastructure and ensuring more equitable access to the means of communication (Fisher 1982).

Such a positive obligation is far stronger than that of social responsibility. The basic thrust of such a right for the press system, argued Richstad (1978, 5), would be to extend privileges enjoyed by the press to everyone, and bring a far wider range of people into the mass media. In some cases, such as the right of access to the news media, and the right to participate in the communication process, the right to communicate would challenge the existing arrangements of liberal press freedom.

In its final report, the MacBride Commission included a discussion of the right to communicate, and presented it as the next in a succession of communication rights – free speech, freedom of the press, and freedom of information – that were part of a continuing struggle towards liberty and democracy (MacBride 1980, 172). The right to communicate added to the freedoms attained in the past, the report argued, in its demands for access, participation, and a two-way communication flow. The report's recommendations included the argument that:

Communication needs in a democratic society should be met by the extension of specific rights such as the right to be informed, the right to inform, the right to privacy, the right to participate in public communication – all elements of a new concept, the right to communicate. In developing what might be called a new era of social

rights, we suggest that all the implications of the right to communicate be further explored (MacBride 1980, 265).

The Limits of Change

The alternatives to liberal freedom of the press outlined above have gained little ground in either the West or developing countries.

While alternative communications practices and media offered opportunities for some groups who had little or no access to the mainstream press, their impact was limited: alternative media did not take the place of the commercial mass media. In Latin America, where alternative media movements had arisen in response to authoritarian regimes, alternative communication had little effect on national press systems following the restoration of liberal democratic governments (Fox 1988, 182).

The right to communicate remained largely confined to discussions in academic circles and certain international organizations. In Latin America, the experience of Mexico was typical: efforts by the government in the 1970s to regulate commercial television and implement a constitutional right to communicate were stymied by private industry and the private media, and their allies in the ruling party (Fox 1988, 22-23). At the international level, the campaign for a New World Information and Communication Order, including the right to communicate, which had been largely driven forward by an increased Third World influence in UNESCO, foundered in the early 1980s due to United States opposition (Roach 1990; Preston, Herman, and Schiller 1989).

In Britain and North America, the post-war press commissions have led to some innovations such as Britain's Press Council, a body backed by press proprietors and

intended to encourage a higher standard of press performance (Curran and Seaton 1988, 255). But ideas involving more far-reaching change in the press system have not gained acceptance. Both the Hutchins Commission and Canada's Kent Commission (Canada 1981) considered the possibility of external controls on the press – the Kent Commission actually recommended measures such as a publicly-owned national newspaper – but no concrete changes resulted.

The only major modification to the liberal press system to gain general acceptance, social responsibility, does little to provide citizens with the means to exercise their right to speak through the press. Instead, it emphasizes citizens' rights as consumers of information, and leaves the institutions and structures of the liberal press system largely unchanged.

This study is thus primarily concerned with identifying the conditions under which more egalitarian forms of press freedom, such as those included in the right to communicate, will emerge. Liberal freedom of the press has at its heart the idea that press freedom, like freedom of speech, is a right belonging to all citizens. The question, then, is what determines the fate of this original free speech component of press freedom?

The following chapter will develop a theoretical framework for examining press freedom development in a society. Using this framework, it will advance a hypothesis on the conditions likely to produce freedom of the press for the average citizen.

CHAPTER 2

CONCEPTUALIZING FREEDOM OF THE PRESS: RETURN OF THE PEOPLE

For last year's words belong to last year's language

And next year's words await another voice.

– T.S. Eliot, *Little Gidding*

Introduction

Extensive criticism of the gulf between liberal press systems and the individual citizen has had little effect on press development.

In some cases, the reluctance of press critics to attack longstanding liberal positions on press ownership and government regulation limited possible reform proposals. At best, press commissions called for small changes. At the worst, press commissions simply rationalized the existing press system.

Even radical proposals have had little effect on existing press systems. Perhaps press commissions have been deliberately conservative in part because they recognized that press freedom is mainly a product of various political and social battles in a nation's history, rather than commission reports.

To understand when reforms will succeed, and when such change will be in an egalitarian direction, we must understand the forces that shape press freedom development.

Traditional theories of the press are ill-equipped to explore these questions, as they primarily seek to classify press systems according to several predefined press models. Therefore, this chapter presents a theoretical framework for exploring press freedom development that departs from traditional theory.

This study is interested in a particular element of liberal press theory, press freedom vested in the citizen. Therefore, it will use the model of press freedom development presented below to advance a hypothesis on the historical forces favouring the individual exercise of press freedom.

The Development of Press Freedom: A Framework for Inquiry

Models of the Press

The prevailing theory of press freedom has undergone remarkably little change since the postwar period, when Siebert, Peterson and Schramm published their classic *Four Theories of the Press*, which grouped press systems into four theories corresponding to four political systems. These theories were the libertarian, social responsibility, authoritarian, and Soviet-communist theories.

Four Theories not only outlined the characteristics of each press system, but also provided a model for press freedom development. The book's first three theories were presented as stages in the development of press freedom: the authoritarian model gave way to the libertarian, which in turn was giving way to social responsibility theory. As Denis McQuail has noted, *Four Theories* was

a codification of stages of history of the press (from the ‘authoritarian’ to the ‘libertarian’) and also a marking of difference between western freedom models (responsible or not) and the soviet communist model, in which the media were assigned clear functions in society, as propagator, educator, mobilizer. (McQuail 1991, 68)

The underlying assumption was that the constituent elements of each model had developed as a seamless whole. A view of man and society, an economic system, and institutional arrangements were interlocking parts of a single historical development.

According to Siebert:

The libertarian theory of the function of the mass media in a democratic society has had a long and arduous history. This history has paralleled the development of democratic principles in government and free enterprise in economics... It has been an integral part of the great march of democracy which has resulted in the stupendous advancement of the well-being of humanity. (Siebert, Peterson and Schramm 1978, 70)

A basic text in journalism schools, *Four Theories* was the starting point for a great deal of later scholarship. Over the years, the approach of identifying “models” of the press has had considerable staying power, the original four theories being adjusted as new systems were identified. Hachten (1981), for example, proposed two new models, developmental and revolutionary, to take account of the press in the Third World; Altschull (1984) argued that there were only three models, market, Marxist and developing. Other new models reflect recent reaction to the commercialization and monopolization of the media, such as McQuail’s democratic participant model (McQuail 1983, 84-100), in which individuals and minority groups have rights of access to the media.

But while various modifications to the original four theories have been suggested, the basic approach of understanding the world's press by carving it into two or more models has remained much the same.

This approach was shaped by the particular needs and preoccupations of the 1950s, an era defined by the confrontation between two dominant political systems. It is thus better suited to highlighting the differences between “us” and “them” than enlarging our understanding of “us.”

Under the *Four Theories* schema, the development of press freedom in a nation is seen as a shift from one theory or model to another, corresponding to a shift from one societal type to another. The paths a nation can travel towards greater press freedom are delimited by existing models. The desired destination is pre-given: a liberal press model, whose content is defined by Western historical experience.

Change that explodes the known, pre-set models is another matter. There is little in the Siebert-influenced approaches to suggest when press freedom may develop along a path other than that already traced by the West, or what the characteristics of possible new press systems could be.

Nor is there a basis for identifying forces that may move a nation from an authoritarian system to a more libertarian one – short of a society duplicating the West's political, social and economic development. Indeed, under the *Four Theories* approach, press freedom evolution is only explicable as a move away from one coherent philosophical, political and economic system towards another.

The orientation of press theory towards certain questions and not others is of more than academic interest. To begin with, the assumption that the constituent elements of a press system necessarily reinforce each other has deterred reformers from proposing major additions to or subtractions from our existing press system. What's more, by delimiting our understanding of how press freedom evolves in developing nations, theory affects the development policies of Western governments.

The "models" approach continues to influence North American research on press freedom development. Therefore, we should understand the limitations such a paradigm places on investigations. Below, I shall look briefly at examples of two types of study: the first, an empirical study that draws on the literature of development communications, a product of the same postwar discussions of the media as *Four Theories*;¹ the second, a theoretical attempt to explain the development of press freedom that takes the *Four Theories* approach as its starting point.

Weaver, Buddenbaum and Fair's 1985 study, "Press Freedom, Media, and Development, 1950-1979: A Study of 134 Nations," seeks to explore the causal relationships among press freedom and other "measures of development." The authors hope that identifying patterns across a large number of nations will contribute to an "understanding of what societal conditions are conducive to greater freedom of expression – and what conditions work against it" (Weaver, Buddenbaum and Fair 1985, 107).

¹ Wilbur Schramm, one of the authors of *Four Theories of the Press*, was also a pioneer in the field of development communications, authoring a seminal study, *Mass Media and National Development*, 1964.

The study relies on the literature of development communications, which posits that the mass media play a role in the modernization or development of the Third World. Development communications shares the underlying assumptions of an early theory of national development known as modernization theory², in which development is thought to be a linear process, following the same path for every society – a path first traced by the Anglo-American experience. Under modernization theory, once capital has accumulated to a certain point, the development process will take off, and the country in question will naturally proceed along the same path of development as Western nations.

Several decades' experience showed the relationship between mass media and development to be more complex than the cause and effect originally premised in development communications. Thus Weaver, Buddenbaum and Fair's study examines the causal relationships among government control of the press, accountability of governors, media development, and other societal characteristics. Their study finds that:

there are different predictors of the amount of government control of the press in Third World countries than in the more developed First and Second World countries. Moreover, there appear to be real problems with simple, linear models of development which predict that increased urbanism leads to increased literacy, which in turn leads to increased development of the communication media, to greater political participation, and then to less government control of the media (Weaver, Buddenbaum and Fair 1985, 115-6).

The study's finding that the factors influencing press freedom development are changeable from society to society, and not the result of an inevitable – and uniform – chain of developments, is a significant move towards an understanding of press freedom

² The following paragraph draws on the account of modernization theory in *Development Theory in Transition*, by Magnus Blömstrom and Björn Hettne, Zed Books, London, 1984, Chapter 1.

development as shaped by the particular conditions of a nation's history. Yet the study's underlying assumptions remain those of *Four Theories*, and this limits its investigation of the conditions encouraging free expression.

While the authors have found that influences on press freedom differ between nations and that the relationships between variables may change over time, the purview of their study remains limited to a set press system that will develop in all nations. Press freedom is equated with the absence of governmental control – roughly speaking, the *Four Theories* libertarian theory without its accompanying philosophical underpinnings. While the authors note that the absence of government control “does not measure the actual free flow or diversity of opinions and ideas within the mass media of a country”, “an inverse correlation is assumed.” The indicators chosen for measuring government control are much the same as the political and economic elements of the libertarian press system in Siebert's model: absence of government ownership of the mass media, political censorship, and economic pressures by government.

Moreover, it is clear from the terms used in the study that this press freedom is inseparable from a particular model of society. The indicators used for the variable “accountability of governors” are competitive elections and classical liberal freedoms – including freedom of the press from government control. The study is in fact investigating the relationship between the liberal political system and the liberal conception of press freedom – “measures of development” whose definitions establish a prior link.

In short, while the study reveals that the influences on press freedom may differ from society to society, press freedom development is still conceived of as development – or modernization – towards a set press model, whose relationship to a liberal political and economic system is to some degree definitional. Investigation of factors shaping press freedom evolution is limited to those that reproduce the liberal press system and society, and excludes innovations that fall outside this line of development.

John C. Merrill's 1974 book, *The Imperative of Freedom*, attempts to improve upon the early theory of press freedom development. Merrill writes from a libertarian perspective that opposes social responsibility theory and views press freedom as a universal value consisting of the absence of external controls on media units (Merrill 1974, 72-3).

Merrill finds the *Four Theories* approach – and modified versions of it – inadequate. These approaches, he feels, create “pigeon-holes,” in which each press classification is separate and largely mutually exclusive. Although an author may present press systems as belonging to a spectrum or progression, “with all such models, the extremes with their specific labels tend to become ‘pigeon-holes’ and it is very easy for classification to retrogress into a basic binary type” of authoritarian-libertarian (Merrill 1974, 40).

Instead of a “linear pigeon-hole or progression model,” Merrill (1974, 40) proposes to use a “circle of progression.” In this approach, authoritarianism and

libertarianism are at opposite poles of the circle, *and can be reached by moving in either direction*, through either capitalism or socialism.³

The advantage of Merrill's approach is that the development of press freedom – or of authoritarianism – is not necessarily identified with a move to specific political and economic arrangements.

Unfortunately, the picture of press system development that Merrill goes on to elaborate is not as open-ended as his press circle might allow. Although his model opens up the possibility that a nation can travel along more than one route towards press freedom, Merrill's model for media and national development returns us to a classificatory, linear approach.

Merrill advances the view that increased “social conflict” correlates with increased press freedom. He links press theory to developmental stages of society, positing three basic steps in national development, with particular levels of social conflict corresponding to each – and a corresponding political theory and press model:

Societies tend to develop or progress from autocracy, to democracy, to statism, with their media systems going from authoritarianism through libertarianism back to authoritarianism. This is the normal circular progression tendency of social and media development postulated in this chapter – and throughout the book...

Political theory and press ideology are closely related to economic level in a society's natural progression through the developmental cycle; these, of course, are accompanied by other significant factors such as social friction, population size, type of media and age of society. (Merrill 1974, 62)

³ Merrill does feel, however, that capitalism is more conducive to press freedom than socialism, as “Capitalism engenders individualists, persons who like to compete. Socialism engenders conformists, persons who like to adapt and move along together” (Merrill 1974, 74-5).

As with *Four Theories*-style approaches and modernization theory, Merrill's theory of press freedom development is essentially the author's interpretation of Anglo-American press freedom development. The difference is that Merrill views the advent of social responsibility as a negative development, and defines true press freedom as the libertarian model.

The result is a quasi-teleological account of press freedom – what Merrill (1974, 43) terms a sociohistorical determinism – in which nations develop towards a preordained press system.

Why do these revisions of earlier approaches retain the view of press freedom development as arriving at one or more models corresponding to a specific type of society?

The answer lies in their depiction of press freedom as a set definition, containing specific, complementary elements. If we believe press freedom must always include certain political and economic arrangements, this naturally leads to its identification with a corresponding type of society.

Furthermore, if press freedom is a model whose constituent elements are necessarily linked, change in a nation's press freedom mainly consists of changes in the degree of a model's presence or absence. Small shifts within the model are possible, but not fundamental change of its content or meaning.

Change going beyond that which leaves the fundamental elements of the press system intact signals a shift to another press model – and hence to another societal type.

In seeking the causes of press freedom change, such an approach leads us to search for factors affecting society as a whole, rather than specific elements of press freedom.

This approach tends to leave people, their actions and aspirations, out of the equation. Instead, our attention is directed to macro social indicators – such as economic growth or urbanization – associated with certain stages of development or politico-economic systems. Abstract measures of society, rather than the struggles of peoples making their history, occupy centre-stage. While such measures may tell us about a people as a whole and the context within which they act, this is not the same as understanding the beliefs and choices of different groups and individuals.

Yet, as scholars (McQuail 1991; Curran and Seaton 1988, 277-291) have pointed out, press models are merely theoretical constructions. In the real world, elements of many models coexist in the same society.

Is there an approach that doesn't depict press freedom development as a progression of models with pre-specified contents?

It is tempting to build models of press freedom development that predict the future for developing nations to be a rerun of someone else's past. The folly of such an approach becomes clear when we look at our own society: where are we going? What model of the past can be used to predict our future press system?

This thesis takes the position that there is no set progression or cycle of press system development for societies. Identifying press freedom with a particular stage in a nation's history or a particular sociopolitical system is of little predictive – or

explanatory – value. What is needed is a model of press freedom that is open-ended, allowing us to explore the ways press freedom could take shape in the future.

The end of Cold War politics may encourage thinking on the press that depends more on the actual complexities of press systems, and less on ideological confrontations.

In a 1991 essay, Denis McQuail argues that we should abandon theories of the press that work from the ideological orientation of a society down to its corresponding press model (McQuail 1991, 68-73). Instead, McQuail proposes a ground-up approach: his paper develops a framework of media performance norms by examining the content of recent media policy debate in Western nations.

In doing so, he introduces the concept of discourse, which he defines as “an identifiable and dedicated form of language usage,” whose “terms are interrelated and overlapping and their specific meanings are dependent on their place in a larger frame of reference” (McQuail 1991, 72).

McQuail’s approach allows him to better characterize a reality where media policies and ideological positions contradict one another, and can have shifting, variable meanings. In contrast to the traditional press models, the principles of the framework he produces “can be mutually contradictory” (1991, 80).

McQuail, of course, is examining the norms or public expectations for the media in a set time and place: he is interested in building up a picture of thinking on the press in the last few decades in the West.

But such an approach should also be useful in discussing the elements of our press system over time, not just at the present. As we shall discuss below, the history of

press freedom is better characterized as an evolving discourse, rather than a succession of models.

Rethinking Liberalism and Freedom of the Press

Liberal press freedom is often presented as an internally consistent body of political values, practices, and institutions. Indeed, not only liberal accounts, but also many Marxist treatments, view it as a coherent, unitary system whose elements emerged from a single historical trend. In this view, liberalism and its corresponding press system are products of the mutually reinforcing developments that dismantled traditional authority in Western society (Hachten 1981, 64-5; Siebert 1952, 7-9; 1978, 41-50; Altschull 1990): the growing influence of the middle class, the Reformation and the Enlightenment, the development of modern commercial society – and, implicit in these, the growth of a new individualism.

Many liberal critics recognize that certain later developments, such as the rise of a mass commercial press and the concentration of media ownership, have come into conflict with the goal of free expression in the liberal press system. But the fundamental principles and practices of liberal press freedom are not seen to be inherently conflictual.

Traditional Marxists view the institutions of liberal democracy, including liberal press freedom, as class instruments. Liberal press freedom, they argue, produces the illusion of freedom while ensuring that the dominant classes retain their privileges by constraining communication. In this view, constraints on free speech are not the result of

contradictions that have developed in the liberal system, but rather, are consistent with the class nature of liberalism.⁴

In both cases, press freedom and other liberal rights tend to be presented as originating solely in the bourgeoisie's struggles with the *ancien regime* – with the old rule of status and authority. The basic components of the liberal press system are seen as springing from a common source, and therefore as inherently compatible.

But there is an alternate interpretation of the origins of liberalism and liberal freedoms which suggests that press freedom can be understood in a different way.

Early in this century, Rosa Luxemburg, a contemporary and critic of Lenin, argued forcefully that while bourgeois democracy was a formalism that hid social inequality and subjugation, the solution was not to reject liberal freedoms, but to give them reality under a socialist system (Carnoy 1984, 61-2; Cunningham 1987, 45). This was an early socialist argument that elements of liberal democracy – individual rights such as free speech and freedom of the press – might exist under conditions other than those of liberal society, and might serve interests other than those of the bourgeoisie. In other words, Luxemburg was suggesting that certain elements of liberalism were not *necessarily* attached to the liberal system as a whole.

Later socialist writers explicitly rejected the supposed unity of liberalism, arguing that the liberal system contains contradictory elements. C.B. Macpherson (1965) argued

⁴ This stream of thought is exemplified by Lenin's argument that liberal democracy's institutions are not merely controlled by the rich, but structured so as to ensure capitalist control: "This argument is critical to Lenin's view that the State apparatus in a capitalistic society is a distinctly capitalistic apparatus, organized structurally – in form and content – to serve the capitalist class, and cannot possibly be taken over by the working class to serve its ends" (Carnoy 1984, 59). This general view of liberal democracy was more explicitly applied to the liberal press system in works such as Ralph Miliband's 1973 *The State in Capitalist Society*.

that liberal democracy contains two conflicting logics: the logic of capitalism, which encourages some men to seek fulfilment by taking over the abilities of others, and a democratic, egalitarian logic, which encourages a true “equality of opportunity to realize one’s human capacities” (Macpherson 1965, 47). Samuel Bowles and Herbert Gintis speak of a “clash of rights.” Liberalism, they argue, contains two distinct logics, personal rights and property rights, whose spheres of influence are not clearly delineated, and which increasingly come into conflict as people seek to extend them to new areas of life:

In February 1960, four black students refused to leave a Greensboro, North Carolina, lunch counter after being denied cups of coffee they wished to purchase. At the time, they were assaulted and vilified as “outside agitators.” In fact they were quite the reverse. The students’ undoubtedly radical protest was a simple affirmation of quintessentially *liberal* rights. The spreading wave of sit-ins, though unsettling to the racial status quo, was not antiliberal: rather it proclaimed the priority of one aspect of liberalism, personal rights, over another, rights of property. (Bowles and Gintis 1987, 27)

The source of such tensions in liberalism, both Macpherson and Bowles and Gintis argue, lies in the fact that liberal democracy did not emerge solely from the struggle of liberals, or “the people,” with an authoritarian state, but also from struggles between the ascendant bourgeoisie and other groups.

Liberalism did not spring into being as a whole piece. Indeed, as Macpherson points out, “Democracy came as a top dressing [to liberalism]... It was the liberal state that was democratized, and in the process, democracy was liberalized” (1965, 5).

Numerous authors argue that the present freedoms of the liberal democratic state are largely the legacy of the working class struggles of the nineteenth and early twentieth

centuries (see, for example, Carnoy 1984, 170-1 for the views of Marxist theorists of the state; also, Macpherson, 1965, 35). Socialist theorists Bowles and Gintis, quoting historian Theodor Scheider, argue:

“At the close of the [nineteenth] century Europe was still predominantly monarchial; and it was obvious... that the middle class, at any rate for the time being, preferred monarchial to republican forms of government... The industrial workers’ associations and their political organizations, moreover, almost all supported the principle of a democratic republic; and it was mainly they who brought about the fall of the great monarchies at the end of the first World War.”³¹

Indeed, the working classes in this period assumed the revolutionary role in the expansion of rights, and liberalism became the cautious defender of the status quo ante. (Bowles and Gintis 1987, 44-45)

Indeed, the greater number of working class movements of the nineteenth century, far from being animated by Marxist theories of a proletarian revolution or by economic demands alone, were struggles over liberal rights and liberal democracy (Bowles and Gintis 1987, 62, 169; Laclau and Mouffe 1985, 149, 155-6; Castoriadis 1976; Bendix 1964, 67, 71-78). Historian Eric Hobsbawm asserts:

There is absolutely no doubt that the poor, the working people and the potential or actual members of labour movements spoke the language of *rights* (and still do)... By far the most powerful mobilizations of labour on the continent, e.g. general strikes, were for electoral reform... Hence, insofar as they were politically active as movements, most nineteenth-century labour movements still operated in the framework of the American and French revolutions and their type of the Rights of Man. (Hobsbawm 1984, quoted in Bowles and Gintis 1987, 169)

Bowles and Gintis (1987) and Castoriadis (1976) both argue that in part the working class adopted liberal rights simply because the ideas of liberalism were there: that is, they were the dominant way of understanding reality.

But as well, the universalist aspect of liberal rights lent itself to the struggles of dominated groups in society. Postmarxist theorists Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe (1985) have argued, for instance, that in the French Revolution, the idea that equal rights belong to each citizen provided an inherent expansionary logic that encouraged successive groups to attempt to extend this egalitarian ideal into new areas.⁵ As Macpherson argues, liberal freedoms were essential to the functioning of the liberal system, and whatever the intents of early political elites, “These freedoms could not very well be limited to men of the directing classes... The risk that the others would use them to get a political voice was a risk that had to be taken” (Macpherson 1965, 5-8).

While liberals readily admit that liberal rights and democracy originally excluded the great majority of people, and only gradually came to include most members of society, they see this gradual extension of rights, say Bowles and Gintis, as natural and inevitable:

This traditional liberal response takes personal and property rights as fundamentally harmonious and ultimately compatible. In this view, the full extension of rights is that ideal and universally desirable point toward which liberal capitalist development moves. That highly diverse groups have found it in their common interest to contribute to this movement hardly occasions surprise within liberal theory. (1987, 36)

But the critical point of the socialist authors is that the extension of liberalism was by no means an inevitable development, nor was it consistently championed by liberal intellectuals. Rather, the expansion of liberal rights was driven forward by and

⁵ This expansionary logic was evident even as the revolution unfolded: in 1791, two years after the *Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen*, republican Olympe de Gouges drafted the *Declaration of the Rights of Woman and Citizen* (Bauer 1996, 21-6).

shaped by the dynamic of social conflict – by the struggles between social classes, including struggles against the ascendent bourgeoisie and their liberal philosophers.

Although liberal theory certainly supplied a logic for extending liberal freedoms, the important distinction of the socialist argument is that once liberal freedoms had been articulated as universal, equal rights, it was the excluded classes that applied pressure for these rights to be extended – *often against prevailing liberal sentiment*.

For if the working class pushed forward liberal freedoms and liberal democracy, in doing so they shaped liberal ideas in new ways. The role of social struggle in the advancement of liberalism would be of little consequence if each group to take up the argument of liberal rights had merely advanced a predefined ideology. Cornelius Castoriadis, referring to the working class movement of the nineteenth century, argues:

Right from the start, liberty and equality became the battle cries of the English workers' movement, but with a meaning radically opposed to their "bourgeois" meaning. The workers appropriated bourgeois culture, and in doing so, they reversed its signification. They read Paine, Voltaire and Volney – but was it in these authors that they found the idea that capital is only accumulated labour... The activity of the working class incorporated the instruments and contents of the existing culture while conferring a new signification upon them. Sometimes it would take up significations that even preceded the bourgeois epoch (Castoriadis 1976, 30-31. See also Bendix 1964, 66-7).

Moreover, while liberalism had an egalitarian aspect which lent itself to working class struggles, this was due to the fact that liberalism had always been an amalgam of ideas advanced by different parties, at different times, and for different purposes. Prior to the rise of the working class movement of the nineteenth century, the liberalism of seventeenth-century England had two identifiable and contending strands: the radical

democracy of Christian radicals such as the Levellers, who rejected property as a basis for the franchise, and the influence of John Locke and the urban middle classes, for whom the right to property was a fundamental principle (Bowles and Gintis 1987; Skocpol 1979).

If the working class introduced new interpretations of liberal rights, they were not the first group to so alter the Western concept of rights. The principle of rights was used by the aristocracy in their struggle against absolute monarchy, who conceived of rights not as universal but as linked to status, before it became a central matrix of liberalism (Bendix 1964; Bowles and Gintis 1987, 152-3).

What we have, then, is a picture of a liberal democracy whose constituent elements have held different meanings at different times in history for different people.

Bowles and Gintis – and, working on the other side of the Atlantic, Laclau and Mouffe – describe this historical process using the concept of discourse. Both pairs of authors draw on the work of philosophers such as Wittgenstein, who argues that words do not correspond to set ideas, but that their “meaning depends upon use, and that use is infinitely varied over time and space” (Bowles and Gintis 1987, 166).

Bowles and Gintis argue that the personal rights of liberalism cannot be limited to one specific meaning; nor do they have a single and necessary relationship to other elements of liberal democracy, such as private property. The present liberal freedoms are simply a stage in a general *discourse* of rights, begun in the 1600s and continuing to the present day.

Such a discourse, argue Bowles and Gintis,

reflects neither shared consciousness nor social ideology. A discourse is a set of tools. People use these tools to forge the unities that provide the basis for their collective social practices... The content of a discourse is simply the constellation of uses to which it is regularly put. The meaning of rights, in turn, is precisely their socially structured deployment in social action. Lacking an intrinsic connection to a set of ideas, words, like tools, may be borrowed. Indeed, like weapons in a revolutionary war, some of the most effective words are captured from the dominant class. (1987, 153)

Thus, the origins of an idea do not necessarily define its content, “inasmuch as the ideas are still living and are continually taken up in socio-historical activity that enriches, impoverishes, and transforms them – and even goes so far as to interpret them in diametrically opposed ways” (Castoriadis 1976, 29). Indeed, new ideas may take shape imperceptibly behind old terms, making it difficult to discern when they came into being and why.⁶

In this discussion, the term discourse refers to Bowles and Gintis’s concept. In addition, the term articulation is borrowed from Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe. Laclau and Mouffe define articulation as “any practice establishing a relation among elements such that their identity is modified” (1985, 105). In other words, articulation describes the emergence of a particular arrangement and interpretation of words and concepts out of people’s collective action. Articulation, then, is defined here as a particular arrangement or interpretation of elements belonging to a historical discourse.

Use of the term *discourse* is not meant to imply that change in political reality is the result of *talk* rather than *action*. As Bowles and Gintis argue, the meanings of liberal

⁶ C.B. Macpherson (1965) for example, has argued that by the time democracy became a part of liberalism, its meaning had changed drastically from its original class conception as rule by and in the interests of the poor or common people.

democracy have been shaped by the collective *actions* of people, by their *use* of liberal ideas and practices in social struggle. If we return to Bowles and Gintis's example of the lunch counter sit-ins of the civil rights movement, it is clear that the students did not challenge the prevailing interpretation of liberal rights merely by *arguing* that personal rights had priority over property rights. Rather, their collective actions themselves challenged, and eventually altered, prevailing beliefs, practices, and institutions to reflect a new interpretation of liberalism. The concept of discourse is intended to highlight the fact that systems such as liberal democracy, once thought of as models reflecting a singular ideology, are in fact a continually changing, conflictual body of elements that different groups shape to reflect their interests.

Here, a caveat. The concept of discourse places people at the centre of history: ideas are not predetermined and determining objects, but rather tools that are shaped by the goals and identities of their users. But this should not be taken to an extreme: ideas are malleable, appearing in different forms and constellations – but they are not infinitely so. Rather, we should think in terms of a range of possible articulations.

To summarize, the preceding picture of the history of liberal democracy is something quite different from that of a linear evolution of a system whose core elements are stable and complementary. Liberal democracy and liberal rights, these authors have argued, can be viewed as a discourse, a body of elements with indeterminate boundaries and shifting meanings, whose trajectory is changeable.

The meaning of liberal rights, that is, the way in which elements of the discourse of liberal rights are articulated, depends in large part on the relationships and interactions

between the various movements using this discourse. The contradictory tendencies in liberalism reflect the opposing forces in the social struggles that shaped Western history. The development of liberalism will continue to be shaped by such struggles.

What does this mean for the way freedom of the press can be viewed?

Liberal freedom of the press is intimately connected to the functioning of the liberal polity, and presupposes the values, practices, and institutions of liberal democracy. If the constituent elements of liberal democracy, and their relationship to each other, change as social relations change, then the elements of the present model of press freedom should also come to be articulated with other values or practices.

This thesis proposes that freedom of the press can be viewed as a discourse to which different groups have made different contributions over time. Press freedom is not a single liberty, but an amalgam of values and practices structured by an ongoing social contest. Thus, the particular content of a society's press freedom is shaped by its social relations.

As with liberal democracy, the concept of discourse is intended not only to characterize press freedom ideas or theory, but also the practices and institutions that embody them. The *meaning* a social group gives press freedom is found in their actions, practices, and institutions, as well as in their words.

In making this argument, I do not mean that the development of press freedom in a country can be predicted by imputing to a certain social class a particular interpretation of press freedom, and then calculating the changing power of that class. Quite the opposite. New interpretations of rights emerge out of people's struggles to build a better

life for themselves and their children. They are not linked beforehand to a group of people categorized by their economic position.

Viewing the development of press freedom using this framework places people firmly at the centre of the history of press freedom. Press freedom does not change simply because there are different social groups in society, but as a result of the struggles of these people to advance what they believe to be their interests. We thus can view press freedom as shaped not by categories or macro social indicators, but by the actions and aspirations of people.

Does the history of liberal press freedom bear out the view that, like the liberal democracy within which it is situated, press freedom can be viewed as a discourse shaped by social conflict and changing social relations? If it can, we should be able to identify shifts in its content linked to the rise of new social actors, including shifts towards press freedom as a direct and equal individual right.

The next section applies the discourse framework to a well-documented period in the Anglo-American history of press freedom, known as the “War of the Unstamped.” It explores the links between changes to press freedom and the emergence of new social actors, and compares the resulting picture of press freedom development in this period with that of authors who do not use the discourse model.

The War of the Unstamped: Social Conflict and the Discourse of Press Freedom

The history of freedom of the press is characterized by dramatic social upheavals: in the seventeenth century, the contribution of the religious dissidents and urban middle

classes to breaking down the controls on the press leading up to the English Revolution; in the eighteenth century, the campaign for the reporting of the proceedings of Parliament, which pitted John Wilkes and the people and officials of the City of London against a court-dominated Parliament.

Here, however, I will focus on the middle- and working-class radical movements of the nineteenth century, which pushed for expansions of liberal freedoms, including the abolition of the stamp taxes on newspapers. By the nineteenth century, patterns of social conflict more closely resembled our own than in previous eras, as social struggles tended to be class-based, employed modern methods of political action (such as demonstrations and the mobilization of public opinion), and took place within a recognizably modern political environment.

As well, by this stage in the history of press freedom, while authoritarian political thought was by no means dead, liberal ideas – from freedom of the press to attacks on hereditary privilege – had become a common language for groups seeking change.

As England entered the nineteenth century, many of the traditional controls on freedom of the press had been noticeably weakened. Fox's libel act of 1792 had made juries the judges of what constituted libel as well as of the act of libel. While prosecutions for libel continued into the nineteenth century, such measures came to be used increasingly sparingly. In addition, governments found that the state's ability to influence the respectable press was declining for a variety of reasons, including the need for papers to appear independent if they were to influence public opinion, and newspapers' increasing ability to collect foreign news on their own.

Stamp taxes had been introduced in the late 1700s to keep in check the radical papers that were urging reform of Parliament and other challenges to the existing order. But beginning in 1815, with William Cobbett's launch of a cheap paper that took advantage of a loophole in the stamp laws, there was an upsurge of radical papers aimed at the working classes.

The state responded by introducing the Six Acts of 1819. This increased the punitive measures available for dealing with libel. More importantly, however, this closed loopholes that had allowed radical opinion sheets to evade stamp taxes, and it introduced the requirement that publishers of papers post bonds or securities of a substantial sum. Stamp taxes became the primary means of suppression of the press during this period.

While the measures of 1819 were initially successful in quelling radical papers, 1830 brought a resurgence of radical publishing, ushering in a period known as the "War of the Unstamped," during which time the radical papers and their supporters openly defied government controls. The role of the working classes – and their newspapers – in this "war" is what interests us here.

Since the Second World War, historians studying both the press and the working classes have argued that the battle against government controls on the press in nineteenth-century England was won not solely through campaigns of the middle-class press and the liberal intelligentsia, but to a large degree by the working classes.⁷

⁷ See, for example, Patricia Hollis's *The Pauper Press*, 1970; S. Harrison's *Poor Men's Guardians: A Record of the Struggle for a Democratic Newspaper Press 1763-1973*, 1974; and the work of British press historian James Curran (1977; 1978; Curran and Seaton 1988).

In his landmark study of the history of the English working classes, E.P.

Thompson argues:

There is perhaps no country in the world in which the contest for the rights of the press was so sharp, so emphatically victorious, and so peculiarly identified with the cause of the artisans and labourers. If Peterloo established (by a paradox of feeling) the right of public demonstration, the rights of a 'free press' were won in a campaign extending over fifteen or more years which has no comparison for its pigheaded, bloody-minded, and indomitable audacity. (Thompson 1968, 791)

For it was not primarily against the middle classes and their newspapers that the stamp taxes were aimed, but against the so-called Pauper press (Cranfield 1978, 107). The government sought to restrict readership of the press to the middle classes by forcing up the price of papers through the stamp taxes; they sought to restrict ownership of the press to the middle and upper classes by forcing up the price of publishing both through taxes and through bonds for libel prosecutions (Curran 1977, 199).⁸ As Patricia Hollis comments:

The function of the fourpenny stamp was not simply to suppress violently radical papers, but to suppress cheap violently radical papers; not simply to suppress dangerous ideas, but to keep those ideas from the dangerous classes. It was not the opinions themselves but those who held them that created the problem of public order. (Hollis 1970, 16)

Historians such as Hollis thus portray the working classes as the real driving force in the struggle for press freedom during this period. In effect, press critic James Curran

⁸ Indeed, cheap serials aimed at the working class by middle class organizations were already available during the period of the stamp taxes. "Nonpolitical" publications – that is, nonradical – such as the *Penny Magazine* published by the Utilitarians' Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge were never prosecuted for publishing without the stamp taxes. The aims of these cheap magazines varied from the dissemination of science and "wholesome" literature to crude political and religious indoctrination, but all were aimed – unsuccessfully – at replacing the radical papers and other "unwholesome" reading material.

comments, studies of the early radical press “substitute for traditional Whig heroes new working-class ones” (1977, 196).

Hollis (1970, 10), writing about the struggle against the stamp tax on papers in the period 1830-1836, argues, “The middle-class radicals tried to change the law [on stamp duties], the working-class radicals to smash it.” While middle-class opponents to the stamp tax attempted to mobilize public opinion, and waged a campaign in Parliament, the real impetus for the abolition of the stamp taxes came from the defiance of the radical working-class papers, who made the law unenforceable.

Not only publishers, but hundreds of poor vendors of the unstamped papers, went to prison. Often fines were paid, and the families of those imprisoned supported, by public donation. The Radical papers, writes historian G.A. Cranfield, “bellowed for what they called ‘the freedom of the press’ – and were full of heart-rending accounts of the arrest of crippled and aged news-vendors, and soliciting subscriptions” (1978, 138).

It was clear, too, that the campaign waged by the Unstamped press was not the solitary struggle of a few individual editors, but a *movement* that engaged the efforts and sympathies of members of the poorer classes. While many of the vendors of the Unstamped certainly sold the papers to make a living, there is no doubt that many of them were conscious participants in the fight for freedom of the press. Take, for instance, the transcript of the trial of Joseph Swann, a hatmaker, which reads in part:

Defendant. – Well, Sir, I have been out of employment for some time; neither can I obtain work; my family are all starving... And for another reason, the weightiest of all; I sell them for the good of my fellow countrymen; to let them see how they are misrepresented in Parliament... I wish to let the people know how they are humbugged...

...and whenever I come out, I'll hawk them again. And *mind you* [looking at Captain Clarke] the first that I hawk shall be to your house... (Thompson 1968, 804).

Similarly, while the radical papers would not have attracted as great an audience as other working-class reading material, such as the cheap crime sheets, their reading was often a community affair: they were read aloud in pubs to those who could not read, and the arrival of the radical papers was enough of an event in some communities that people would line the road when it was expected (Hollis 1970; Curran 1977, 204).

Historians of the working-class radical papers contrast this role to that of the respectable middle-class papers of the day, which, surprisingly enough, were often ranged on the side of the state in this battle.

Both the established London papers and the Provincial Newspaper Society founded in 1836 were hostile to the abolition of the Stamp Duty, as such a move could increase their competition (Asquith 1978, 104). The respectable middle-class papers of the day generally refused to cover radical meetings on the repeal of the stamp tax (Hollis 1970, 80).

When, in 1835, the stamped press began to push in earnest for the lowering of the stamp tax, their motives were not freedom of the press but protection of their monopoly:

... The Times pertinently asked what would happen to the Chancellor's budget were the stamped papers to come out unstamped. Bell's Weekly Messenger begged Spring Rice [the Chancellor of the Exchequer] to protect the stamped papers and to inhibit the appearance of an unstamped daily by lowering the duty to a penny... (Hollis 1970, 79).

Indeed, among the middle-class opponents of the stamp tax, motives varied widely. Press critic James Curran has argued that middle-class liberal participation in the war against the stamp taxes was, paradoxically, often motivated by a desire to suppress the radical papers. Many of those who argued for the abolition of the stamp tax did so because they were interested in wresting control of the working-class press from the radicals, not in promoting the radical publishers' right to freedom of the press. Parliamentary campaigners argued that the tax had become unenforceable due to working class resistance, and that the best course would be to end or reduce press taxation, thus encouraging cheap papers owned and controlled, not by law breakers and desperate characters, but by respectable men of business (Curran 1978, 54-5).

In 1833, James Mill, writing to Lord Brougham in condemnation of "the illicit publications, in which the doctrines of the right of the labouring people, who say they are the only producers... is very generally preached," argued:

I am sure it is not good policy to give the power of teaching the people exclusively to persons violating the law, and of such desperate circumstances and character that neither the legal nor the moral sanction has sufficient hold on them. The only effectual remedy is to remove the tax which gives them this deplorable power. (Cranfield 1978, 141; Hollis 1970, 14)

In short, with some exceptions, "the parliamentary campaign for a free press was never inspired by a modern libertarian commitment to diversity of expression" (Curran and Seaton 1988, 28).

While middle-class reformers often had motives other than defending free speech, it would appear that both middle-class and working-class movements had the same

policy aim: the repeal of the stamp taxes. And in 1836, in an effort to restore an enforceable stamp duty, the government reduced the stamp tax to one penny, while tightening its enforcement.

It was a victory, but a partial one, and a solution on which some of the middle-class parliamentarians had wavered back and forth. It had, in fact, been argued by the stamped press of the day that such a solution would benefit them at the expense of the Unstamped: their costs would go down, while the Unstamped papers would be priced out of reach of most of their current readership (Hollis 1970, 88). Indeed, Hollis notes that the radical parliamentarian Place had feared that those middle-class campaigners who wanted cheap papers as a means to publicize their causes, rather than as an end in themselves, would settle for a penny stamp (62).

On the surface, the history of the War of the Unstamped is simply the story of middle-class and working-class individuals fighting to free the press from government control: the two groups do not appear to have made different contributions to press freedom, as both contributed to the same changes in the law.

But if press freedom is a discourse shaped by social struggles, then we should not assume that the dynamics of social forces in the War of the Unstamped were of no consequence. We would expect each movement to champion press freedom according to its own experiences.

Did the nineteenth century working-class press and their allies articulate a vision of press freedom different from that of the middle-class campaigners? In fact, accounts of the working-class role in the stamp war suggest that the answer is yes.

Both middle-class and working-class movements were fighting in the 1830s for a cheap press accessible to working-class readers. The difference lay in the *kind* of access they fought for. For middle-class reformers the issue of the stamp tax was part of their general campaign to educate the working classes to be responsible members of the polity: they wanted a cheap press so that the poor could read. The organizers-cum-editors of the working-class papers, on the other hand, wanted a cheap press so the poor could *speak*.

The move towards cheap newspapers had originated with the Unstamped and the working-class culture supporting them:

Such diverse witnesses as Charles Knight, the publisher of cheap books, Fox-Bourne, the historian of newspapers, and William Lovett, the founder of the National Association, agreed that the Unstamped, in Lovett's words,

originated the cheap literature of the present day – for few publications existed before they commenced... For many of the cheap literary and scientific publications that were published during that period were started with the avowed object of 'diverting the minds of the working classes away from politics'... (Hollis 1970, 297).

The middle-class movement for cheap papers came in response to changes initiated by the working-class movement, which had brought the poorer classes into the arena of public debate for the first time. While the middle-class movement was fighting for access to this new audience, the working class were fighting for their own access to the means of public communication.

Working men, argues Hollis,

did not want the repeal of the newspaper stamps merely to read the capitalist press at cut rates. Why should they pay even 3d. for a bundle of

lies? Working men needed a cheap free press of their own, concerned with *their* interests, catering to *their* tastes, guarding *their* rights, demanding *their* entrance to the political community. (1970, 22)

In short, two different struggles converged in the 1830s on the issue of stamp tax repeal: a struggle for the right of the working classes to *receive* information, and a struggle for their right to *originate* information.

Working class radical papers were characterized by the aspiration – if not always the reality – of a relationship to their readers very different from that of the top-down communication of middle-class controlled publications such as the *Penny Magazine*. The relationship between the radical papers and their readers tended towards what the MacBride Commission 140 years later would term “horizontal” communication.

It was the Unstamped press, according to R. Lowery, a one-time vendor of the Unstamped, that “freely reported the meetings and discussions of the working men’s association, and thus it might be said they were the means by which the people were admitted to the press...” (in Hollis 1970, 306).

According to Curran (1988, 16), the proprietors of the Unstamped press:

saw themselves as class representatives rather than as disinterested intermediaries and attempted to establish a relationship of real reciprocity with their readers. As the editor of the *Northern Star* wrote in its fifth anniversary issue,

I have ever sought to make it [the paper] rather a reflex of your minds than a medium through which to exhibit any supposed talent or intelligence of my own. This is precisely my conception of what a people’s organ should be.

The radical papers' reliance on reports by their readership, in the stead of professional journalists, contributed to this goal of two-way communication. And, despite the fact that some newspaper proprietors-cum-radical leaders were from the more privileged classes, a large number were also from relatively humble backgrounds: radical papers were owned by working men and working men's organizations (Curran and Seaton 1988, 16).

This different relationship between readers and editors did not entirely disappear with the decline of the radical working-class press. Virginia Berridge (1978, 250-3), writing of the Sunday papers of the second half of the nineteenth century, argues that the two-way relationship between readers and the Unstamped and Chartist papers carried over to the mass-circulation Sunday papers. Despite the change to middle-class control, and the accompanying change from purely "political" papers to commercial ones, readers continued to have a close, active relationship with the papers: "The popular Sundays initially carried over the tradition of the working-class paper, not just as a passive vehicle of information, but as a centre of organisation, agitation and involvement" (252).

Finally, the Unstamped papers often advanced justifications for press freedom different from the classical liberal arguments. The Unstamped papers were tied to the working-class movement. They saw themselves as the representatives of the working people, and the freedom of the press they fought for was freedom of the press for working-class people. The justification for liberty of the press was not couched in arguments of truth confounding falsehood in a free marketplace of ideas, but of the necessity of newspapers for the defence and advancement of the rights of the "productive

classes.” Freedom of the press became a central demand of the radical movement because of its importance in organizing the working-class movement – and because of its repression as part of an effort to repress working-class demands (Hollis 1970; Thompson 1968).

Few proprietors of the Unstamped demanded the classical liberties of the press, though Cleave did reprint the *Areopagitica*; but most of them said explicitly that the working classes must first have cheap news and cheap knowledge if they were to obtain the vote and the produce of their labour. (Hollis 1970, 298)

Viewed through the lens of traditional press theory, the War of the Unstamped appears to be a case of two allied movements fighting to establish a universally-agreed-upon press freedom.

Viewing press freedom as a discourse shaped by social struggles enables us to distinguish the different contributions of the two movements. The discourse model draws attention to the meaning movements give to the elements of a discourse, as well as to movements’ specific policy goals. The middle-class and working-class movements differed in the relationship of their newspapers with audiences, their idea of who would speak through a cheap press, and their justifications for press freedom – all as much a part of press freedom as institutional arrangements such as taxation.

In short, although middle-class and working-class radicals were allies in the fight to abolish the taxes on knowledge, these two allied movements articulated different conceptions of the press freedom they were fighting for, with the working-class movement emphasizing the right of the working classes to a voice; the middle-class movement emphasizing their right to receive information. The two movements were, in

effect, fighting for different freedoms; they were allied in believing the elimination of press taxes would provide those freedoms.

Without recognizing this, it would be difficult to explain why the working-class movement led the charge against stamp taxes rather than the middle-class movement, or why working-class opposition to the stamp taxes was more consistent and virulent than that of the middle-class reformers. The above reexamination of the War of the Unstamped reveals that press taxes were a free speech issue primarily for the working class. The fight for a cheap press became part of the ongoing struggle for press freedom when the working class began to push for its rights.

The discourse approach not only allows us to recognize that different groups have different potential contributions to press freedom, but to understand why. Each movement in the War of the Unstamped made a distinct contribution based on that movement's experiences. The working class emphasis on press freedom's providing it with a political voice was a natural outcome of the movement's experience of exclusion from the political community. That the original impetus for cheap papers and the fiercest opposition to the stamp taxes sprang from the working-class radical movement reflected the *economic* exclusion of the working class from the exercise of freedom of the press. The middle class, on the other hand, was not excluded from free speech through economic means.

Of course, these movements did not spawn new theories of the press in their entirety; rather, they organized around existing ideas and in the process shaped them according to their own experiences. As E.P. Thompson notes, despite the government's

stance, there was a strong libertarian tradition in England, such that at the top of one Unstamped publisher's subscription list were a Whig duke, a marquis and two earls (Thompson 1968, 795). The movements that fought the War of the Unstamped added new elements to a discourse of free speech and freedom of opinion that predated it:

In the contest between 1792 and 1836 the artisans and workers made this tradition [of libertarianism] peculiarly their own, adding to the claim for free speech and thought their own claim for the untrammelled propagation, in the cheapest possible form, of the products of this thought. (Thompson 1968, 805)

Social Movements and the Development of Press Freedom

The Working Class Movement and Press Freedom

The discourse model suggests that changes in social relations will produce new articulations of press freedom. Certainly, with the working-class struggle to engage in political life in the nineteenth century, a press freedom that had been restricted to an elite came under attack. But what do such past struggles tell us about the future sources of a more egalitarian press freedom? Should we automatically expect working-class people in other times and places to make similar contributions to press freedom?

The error in such an interpretation is in conceiving of the nineteenth-century English working class as a pre-given entity with a set ideology determined by its economic position. Classes do not exist: they become. As E.P. Thompson argues (1968, 9-11), class is an historical experience, not a thing:

And class happens when some men, as a result of common experiences (inherited or shared), feel and articulate the identity of their interests as between themselves, and as against other men whose interests are

different from (and usually opposed to) theirs... We can see a *logic* in the responses of similar occupational groups undergoing similar experiences, but we cannot predicate any *law*. (1968, 10)

While a working-class struggle in another historical situation would likely seek to expand press freedom, it would not *necessarily* do so – particularly in a society lacking the libertarian traditions, however weak, of nineteenth-century England.

Moreover, when we speak of a working-class or middle-class contribution to the struggle for press freedom, we are not referring to all the people in an economic category. We are speaking of relatively small groups of organized people, whose boundaries constantly shift, and whose struggles at times draw in the great mass of the population, at other times, less so. In the War of the Unstamped, for example, a core of newspaper publishers and distributors was supported in the 1830s by a growing number of working-class organizations and readers, and at times, by the wider public.

Thus it is more useful, when considering the effect of the working-class struggle on freedom of the press, to speak of a movement, rather than a social group or a social class. This implies less a social category than a coalescence of people around shared experiences and goals.

In short, an historical experience, not a social category, produced the egalitarian version of press freedom that interests us here.

Popular Movements

The radical movements that participated in the War of the Unstamped were simply one instance of a political phenomenon that arose in the nineteenth and twentieth

centuries and has come to characterize modern social change: the nineteenth-century working class upheavals were *the* social movement that would give their name to the modern phenomena known as *social movements* (Tilly 1984, 303; Wallerstein 1990, 13).

Various labelled popular movements, grassroots movements, or social movements, the concept encompasses diverse types of collective action that challenge existing power structures. Amin, Arrighi, Frank and Wallerstein (1990), for example, include working class movements, national liberation movements, peasant movements, and the so-called “new social movements” – movements such as the environmental, women’s and civil rights movements – in their discussion of social movements:

The key point is that we all believe that, for at least 150 years, if not longer, there have existed multiple movements throughout the world-system that have protested and organized against multiple injustices of the existing system and have offered alternatives which they believed would bring about a fundamental change in and/or improvement of the situation. (Amin *et al.* 1990, 9-10)

Social movements have been variously defined. My purpose here is not to enter into this debate, but simply to distinguish what is meant by social movements in the present discussion.

First, as with the nineteenth-century working-class movement, social movements are not groups, but collective actions: “it is a mistake to think of a social movement as a group of any kind. Instead, the term *social movement* applies most usefully to a sustained *interaction* between a specific set of authorities and various spokespersons for a given challenge to those authorities” (Tilly 1984, 305). Such movements are

constructed around certain identities and values: people do not act collectively simply because they occupy a certain position in the economic or social system.

Second, not every collective action can be considered a social movement. A social movement is a *sustained* collective action. As Frank and Fuentes (1990, 176) have pointed out, not everything that moves is a movement: isolated collective actions such as riots and other crowd behaviour, even when they express social demands, do not in themselves constitute a social movement.

As well, such collective actions should involve a challenge to existing social arrangements: Tilly offers a definition of social movements as interactions involving “publicly visible demands for changes in the distribution or exercise of power” (Tilly 1984, 306).

Social movements can be either local or national in scope, involving either a challenge to local authorities or to national governments (Tilly 1984, 304). They can even be trans- or multi-national (Frank and Fuentes 1990, 174).

Social movements or popular movements emerge as challenges to perceived subordination or exclusion in a society. These challenges to exclusions can take various forms, and are not limited to economic exclusion. Social movements, write Higgins and Coen,

are not always concerned with the control over production in the Marxist sense of the class conflict, but in terms of redefining how the system operates in terms of social and personal liberties. For many, this includes material freedoms, but only as one of many liberties that have to be attained (1992 121, n.1).

It is no accident that most social movements date from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries: the ideas of equality that make it possible to portray exclusion or subordination as illegitimate came to prominence in the last century (Laclau and Mouffe 1985; Laclau 1985; Wallerstein 1990, 13-15). Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe (1985, 160) argue that the so-called new social movements of the second half of our century are a continuation of a “democratic revolution” that began with the nineteenth-century working-class movements: the newer movements simply challenge different forms of subordination.

Lastly, the challenge social movements present to existing social arrangements is not only political, but cultural. Social movements transform society not only by pressuring authorities, but by forming new collective identities and practices (Evers 1985; Escobar 1992). A social movement “not only brings about institutional changes in society and state, but... also *is* a process of change which alters the participants’ and opponents’ experience of social power relations” (Bright and Harding 1984, 12).

Although I use the term social movements to denote collective struggles against perceived situations of subordination or exclusion, the direction of social movements is not necessarily only toward democracy and equality.

Many, if not most, social movements will contain both democratic and authoritarian elements, and some movements may in fact be overtly anti-libertarian. Popular resistance to perceived oppression may reduce the freedoms in a society (Laclau 1985, 33-4; Slater 1985, 7; Laclau and Mouffe 1985, 168-9). Laclau and Mouffe point to the right-wing movements mobilized by the neoconservative populist projects of Reagan

and Thatcher – movements that sought to dismantle prior democratic gains. The “liberation” sought by certain social movements may conflict with the freedoms sought by others. In Iran, for example, the Islamic movement, while successfully overturning a perceived domination of Iranians by foreigners, reduced the freedoms of women (Frank and Fuentes 1990, 172).

In our search for historical forces favouring more egalitarian conceptions of press freedom, the critical characteristic of social movements is their challenges to exclusion from rights. Authoritarian movements such as Nazism, which mobilize people without democratic participation or liberating aims, are therefore not discussed in the following section.

Popular Movements and the Future of Press Freedom

Universal suffrage and press freedom were central to the nineteenth century working-class movement because of workers’ exclusion from the political community. Members of the movement naturally interpreted press freedom according to their own experience of the conditions that denied them this freedom, and according to the role the press played in movement life. A more egalitarian press freedom was both part of the desired change in social relations and a means to this end.

Is it possible that similar popular movements could also articulate more egalitarian press freedoms? When would social movements challenge existing models of press freedom?

In general, a social movement is likely to do so when free speech and a free press are important to the movement's struggle: that is, when the press is important as a movement organizer, and when it is practical for the movement to pursue change by seeking a voice in the press.⁹ In addition, movements must have access to the discourse of press freedom: a movement arising in a society with some prior libertarian tradition, however limited or formalistic, is more likely to organize around concepts of free speech and free press than one in a society with no democratic traditions.

In Western nations, popular movements have often organized around liberal rights. The language of liberal rights was used in the English, French and American revolutions, from Chartism to the American civil rights movement.

In the past, demands for democracy in the developing world were often limited to small segments of the urban elite, with popular movements' demands focussing on specific ethnic or religious claims, or economic demands (Amin 1990, 128; Gurr and Goldstone 1991, 325). But popular movements are seldom solely about either a demand for rights or a demand for bread: rather, these are often combined, and material demands lead to demands for the freedoms necessary to secure them.

Moreover, today's movements increasingly use the language of rights (Amin 1990, 128; Bowles and Gintis 1987). Bowles and Gintis have argued that the "lingua franca of the students of Soweto, of the shipyard workers in Gdansk... or of the 1987

⁹ Today, movements for whom the press is unimportant are rare. They were more common in the previous century, and particularly in peasant societies where the media were not a dominant means of communication. However, some twentieth-century movements – certain Islamist movements, for example – have relied primarily on other communication avenues, such as religious institutions, to organize and agitate.

constitution of Nicaragua cannot be traced to the *Communist Manifesto*... but rather to the *French Declaration of the Rights of Man* and the *American Bill of Rights*” (1987, ix).

In recent decades, new popular movements have mushroomed around the world: women’s movements, ecological movements, youth movements, religious movements, minority movements. These movements challenge the exclusion of people from liberal rights and freedoms, including the barriers to freedom in existing press freedom.

The U.S. civil rights movement, for example, spawned literacy movements as a response to the use of illiteracy to exclude blacks from political participation. It challenged the prevailing discourse on press freedom, making the invisibility of blacks in the media visible. Jules Lobel, a U.S. professor of constitutional law, argues that the U.S. civil rights movement of the 1960s

redefined first amendment rights as a right to collectively organize to influence decisions affecting one’s rights.²⁹⁹ Margaret Burnham, a participant in the civil rights struggle and later a judge in Massachusetts, has written that “the [civil rights] movement resulted in a critical new consciousness that the right to organize was the linchpin of the right to free speech.”³⁰⁰ (Lobel 1991, 298)

Another, far looser series of movements, spanning greater distances of time and space – the women’s movements – have in a similar fashion highlighted the exclusion of women under the existing articulation of press freedom. As women’s participation in society grew, so did pressure for change in the press system, which was criticized both for its lack of female participation and for failing to reflect women’s views. For example, in the United States in 1973, the National Organization of Women successfully pressed the National Association of Broadcasters to change their radio and television

codes on the portrayal of women in the media (Carabillo, Meuli and Csida 1993). The 1995 Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing adopted a Declaration and Platform for Action calling on governments to support women's equal access to all areas and levels of the media and to promote women's "full and equal participation in the media" (Bauer 1996, 67).

Some of the new ideas of press freedom that emerged from Latin America were also linked to social movements. Church-based movements such as the Christian Base Communities, and educators such as Brazilian Paulo Freire, began in the 1960s to develop new communication practices as part of their efforts to empower poor communities (Fox 1988, 26; Beltrán 1978, 14). Elizabeth Fox writes that Latin American alternative media "were the product of people or groups who were economically, ethnically, politically, geographically and culturally excluded from power" (Fox 1988, 26).

In general, alternative media tend to be linked to popular movements seeking social change. Marc Raboy, drawing on the experience of Quebec in the 1960s and 1970s, argues that social movements will tend to develop their own communication strategies and practices or launch independent means of communication (Raboy 1984).

New articulations of communication freedom that do not emerge from the collective activity of people tend not to affect the discourse of press freedom. For example, in many of the newly independent states of the postwar period, liberal ideas were limited to a small segment of an embryonic middle class. Despite the efforts of the

intellectual elites, there was little chance for press freedom to emerge as mass actions of the population had never organized around the demand for it.

One of the reasons the NWICO discussions declined after losing the support of UNESCO was the fact that they existed largely within academic circles and international forums, not in domestic movements for communication reform (Roach 1990, 290). Those elements of NWICO that had an effect on national societies did so precisely because they emerged from domestic movements – notably ideas of popular culture and communication used by grassroots organizations in Latin America.

This study hypothesizes that in the development of a society's communication system, forms of press freedom that encourage its equal exercise will tend to emerge from popular or grassroots movements that challenge the exclusion of people from political participation and civil rights.

When such egalitarian elements emerge from popular movements, the extent to which they will affect the discourse of press freedom will depend on movement success in altering social relations.

In the Nicaraguan revolution, grassroots movements and organizations lent their support to the revolutionary Sandinista party, whose stated goal was to reorganize society to include the marginalized poor majority. A revolutionary state such as Nicaragua provides a good case study for examining the possibility that new, more egalitarian directions for press freedom can emerge from struggles to change the social relations of a society.

But before we can examine how social struggles affect press freedom in a revolution such as Nicaragua's, we must understand the dynamics of social change in revolutions. Therefore, the next chapter will discuss the role of popular movements in revolutionary change.

CHAPTER 3

POPULAR MOVEMENTS AND PRESS FREEDOM IN REVOLUTION

Everything now was drawing to a crisis.

The event was freedom or slavery.

– Thomas Paine, *The Rights of Man*

Introduction

Revolutions are atypical features of the political landscape. Students of revolution commonly identify only a limited number of actual cases of revolution; and it is conceivable that many societies will never experience such violent and sweeping change. So why examine press freedom in a revolutionary state?

Revolution plays a unique role in social and political change. Although rare, social revolutions mark a fundamental change in the ideals, political structures and social relations of societies. Neither social nor political change is confined to revolutionary periods, of course, but in revolutions, the struggles between social forces that shape the history of a nation – normally obscured in a stable state structure – are for a brief time laid bare.

If freedom of the press is indeed shaped by social struggles, then a revolution should present an ideal case study of the dynamics of press freedom development. The

pivotal role played by popular uprisings in revolutions provides an opportunity to observe how popular movements shape the ideas of their time, including press freedom.

In order to study the connection between social change and press freedom development in a revolutionary situation, however, we should understand how social relations change actually occurs in revolution, and how social movements contribute to it. This chapter therefore discusses what revolution is, and the role of social movements in revolution.

I then turn to press freedom in revolutions, arguing that we can best understand the changes observed in revolutions by viewing press freedom as a discourse. I conclude by discussing the factors we should consider when looking at press freedom development in revolutions.

Revolution, Rights and Social Movements

What is Revolution?

What is a revolution? What distinguishes revolution from other violent political upheavals such as civil wars, wars of succession, rebellions, and coups?

Among scholars of revolution, there is a common consensus that revolutions are not simply violent struggles for power, but occasions in which there is an attempt to remake society. It is this idea of fundamental transformation that sets revolutions apart from other phenomena involving a change in government. Coups d'état, for example, involve a transfer of power, but leave political and social structures unchanged;

rebellions may aim to overthrow specific rulers or redress specific grievances, but rarely to transform state and society (Aya 1984, 319; Selbin 1993, 12; Hobsbawn 1986, 10).

Some scholars distinguish between social revolutions and political revolutions, arguing that while social revolutions change both political structure and social relations, political revolutions limit change to the governmental structure. My use of the term revolution assumes that change extends beyond political structures.

Social revolutions, to quote a classic description, “are set apart from other sorts of conflicts and transformative processes above all by the combination of two coincidences: the coincidence of societal structural change with class upheaval, and the coincidence of political with social transformation” (Skocpol 1979, 4).

Popular Movements and Social Change in Revolution

While revolutions are distinguished from rebellions, riots and other forms of collective protest, the concepts are not mutually exclusive. Rather, in revolution, popular protests and uprisings form part of a larger effort to reconstitute the state.

Theda Skocpol and other theorists argue that in a revolution, a complex series of events leads to a weakening of the state and divisions among the governing classes. Once this has begun, popular uprisings can bubble to the surface (Skocpol 1979; Goldstone 1991, 39-40; Aya 1984, 322). In the ensuing struggle for control of the state, groups form coalitions, including coalitions between those with access to state resources (elites) and those without (Moshiri 1991, 24-5; Skocpol 1979, 11).

Popular uprisings in revolution do not occur, however, simply as a result of unbearable conditions. Rather than reacting out of generalized feelings of frustration or discontent, popular groups in revolution are often acting in defence of longstanding notions of rights that predate the outbreak of revolutionary violence (Aya 1984, 328).

Moreover, such uprisings take the form of an organized, collective action or movement, rather than spontaneous violence. “Individuals are not magically mobilized for action, no matter how aggrieved, hostile or angry they feel. Their anger must first be set to collective ends by the coordinating, directing offices of organization, formal or informal” (Aya 1984, 332-3).

In short, when, in response to weakness at the top, popular uprisings occur, they are not spontaneous, undirected reactions to misery, but rather organized collective action pressing established rights and claims.

Popular movements affect social relations both by pressing their specific claims and by supplying revolutionary elites with a power base. In her classic study of the great revolutions of China, Russia, and France, Skocpol found that

Revolts from below directly attacked the property and privileges of dominant classes, thus accomplishing changes in class relations that otherwise would not have occurred. Yet equally important were the effects of peasant and urban working class revolts on the course of national political struggles. Possibilities for counterrevolutionary restoration or liberal stabilization were undermined, and revolutionary leaderships found it possible to mobilize popular support in the process of building up new state organizations to defend against domestic competitors and foreign invaders. (1979, 285)

In fact, argues Jack Goldstone, revolutions must generally have popular groups’ participation if they are to succeed:

elites seeking radical change who are not already in influential positions in the state administration rarely can overcome the state and conservative elements in the armed forces without mobilizing support among the populace... Popular support for change... often makes the difference in the dismantling of the existing regime. (1991, 40)

Popular Movements and Revolutionary Ideology

When discussing the ideas that animate popular movements, we must keep in mind that the ideology of popular groups and that of the revolutionary elite to whom they lend support is not necessarily the same (Greene 1990, 65; Aya 1984, 329). Goldstone (1991, 42-4) argues that at the beginning of revolutions, all groups pursue particular grievances, but as the struggle for power unfolds, elites employ radical ideologies in an attempt to forge coalitions around themselves.

Aya (1984, 329) identifies three possible relationships between the “radical projects” of revolutionary elites leading the struggle and popular movements:

radical projects may be rejected as irrelevant, dangerous, or both by their intended audience; the masses may adopt the ideology and organization of their coalition partners, only to bend both (at times beyond recognition) to suit their immediate objectives; or, if radical elites do gain power, the utopias of revolution may become new ideologies of rule. (Aya 1984, 329)

However radical the projects of revolutionary elites, the revolutionary ideology of their popular allies may be less systematic and directed more towards specific, tangible grievances such as the demand for land or an end to repressive laws (Greene 1990, 79-83).

While the ideology of popular movements may owe much to the leadership of a revolutionary elite, this doesn't mean that an ideology can simply be “implanted” into

popular groups. The claims that popular movements organize around do not suddenly appear with revolution, but are present long before (Aya 1984, 328; Goldstone 1991, 42). Hence, the ideologies put forward by revolutionary elites must recognizably express values already held by popular groups:

Seventeenth-century English Puritans, eighteenth-century Jacobins, and twentieth-century Bolsheviks and Iranian mullahs all responded to perceived social problems by seeking to project greater identification with national aspirations and greater moral rigor than the reigning state. (Goldstone 1991, 43)

Revolutionary Actors and the Outcomes of Revolution

That revolutions have often invoked the language of rights does not, in and of itself, guarantee that the outcomes of revolution will be progressive, if by progressive we mean an increase in equal rights and freedoms.

To begin with, that a popular movement uses the language of rights does not mean it is inherently emancipatory. As Aya observes, the fact that protests of the common people were not irrational eruptions of rage, but relied on claims of right and justice, did not mean that “their protest was inherently ‘emancipatory,’ that their indignation never had a repressive or reactionary component, or even that their sense of self-interest over the long run was always reliable” (1984, 327).

Popular movements in revolution may have quite different aims from revolutionary elites, or from other partners in the revolutionary coalition – and may come into conflict with these groups (Aya 1984, 327). Popular groups may lend support to parties who deliberately misrepresent their aims. In many twentieth-century revolutions, vanguard revolutionary parties play a substantial role in revolutionary change after the

establishment of the new regime (Selbin 1993). Although such revolutionary parties usually claim to act in the interests of popular classes – and frequently depend on the support of popular groups to seize power – there is often very little actual popular input in the formation of their policies.

Not only the closeness of interests between popular movements and revolutionary elites varies; so does the autonomy of popular groups. Uprisings may be quite spontaneous without, at least initially, depending on the lead of elites in the capital; or, they may be more directly linked to the elite's revolutionary program (Skocpol 1979).

The revolutionary process sees the formation and breakup of alliances among social groups as it proceeds. Each stage of the revolution may involve different actors – some coming into being only after the collapse of the old regime, or the construction of the new (Hobsbawm 1986, 22; Aya 1984, 319-323). Often, after the assault on the old regime, one coalition member forces others out. Movements which lend support to the revolutionary struggle may end up its victims.

The point here is that the aims and ideology of various social groups in the revolution may be quite different – and not necessarily compatible. And the values of popular movements may not dominate in the revolutionary coalition, despite their vital role in the establishment of a new regime.

Finally, no matter the intent of any of the social groups taking part in the revolutionary struggle, the combined conscious intentions and choices of revolutionary actors do not solely determine the outcome of revolutions. Powerful political and economic forces – and military intervention – can derail the best-laid plans.

History is made by men's actions, and their choices are conscious and may be significant. Yet the greatest of all revolutionary strategists, Lenin, was lucidly aware that during revolutions planned action takes place in a context of uncontrollable forces. (Hobsbawn 1986, 12)

In short, while popular uprisings play an important part in revolutionary change, revolutions cannot be equated with the achievement of popular demands for bread or liberty. Other forces, both prior to the revolutionary contest for power, during, and in the post-victory period, affect the outcome of revolutions.

Studying Press Freedom Development in Revolutions

The "Model" Approach to Studying the Press in Revolution

Histories of revolutions reveal a common pattern of change and innovation in the press: the sudden multiplication of the number of media, the appearance of altogether new media, the access of new groups to the media, changes in the roles of journalists, and a period during which authorities' controls on the press loosen considerably (Popkin 1995; Rothschild Villanueva 1986). Moreover, the press often plays a central role in revolutionary conflict as a representative of various contenders for power, who in turn can attempt to reshape the press system.

Much of the existing literature approaches the problem of such changes using the *Four Theories* approach, seeking to characterize the innovations in the press as one or another model.

Some scholars believe the changes to the press during the actual revolutionary conflict constitute a new press model. William A. Hachten, for example, proposes a

“revolutionary” model of the press, to be set alongside other *Four Theories*-type models. The revolutionary model “is the concept of illegal and subversive mass communications utilizing the press and broadcasting to overthrow a government or wrest control from alien rulers” (Hachten 1981, 69-70). Among the examples Hachten gives are the underground press in Nazi-occupied France and the newspapers published by dissidents in colonial Africa, which helped organize nationalist movements and parties.

Hachten presents this revolutionary model as one of five press concepts, each reflecting a different political system and historical tradition. The others are authoritarian; Western (including the libertarian and social responsibility models of *Four Theories*); Communist; and developmental or Third World (a modification of the authoritarian model).

In contrast to these other models, however, the revolutionary model appears to describe not so much a press system or press theory as a fleeting strategy: “By its very nature, the Revolutionary concept usually is a short-term affair; the successful subversive use of mass communication to topple a despised regime is self-limiting” (1981, 72).

By focussing on an isolated “snapshot” of the press at one particular point in an ongoing revolutionary process, this approach obscures the causes of change. Hachten notes that once a regime topples, the Authoritarian or Communist concept usually takes over (1981, 72). Why should this be so? The “revolutionary model” approach does not address this question.

Similarly, as Mattelart (1986) has noted, studies that focus on the media after the consolidation of a revolutionary regime also tend towards a model approach. In the next

chapter, I review instances in which such an approach has been used to examine press freedom in revolutionary Nicaragua. The implicit assumption of searching for a new press model to accompany a new revolutionary regime is that the press system flows directly from a new revolutionary elite's programs – not from the ongoing conflicts in the press and society that surfaced with the revolution. And yet, as discussed in the previous section, the outcomes of revolutions are not reducible to a revolutionary elite's intentions.

The Discourse Approach and Revolutions

In Chapter 2, I argued that press freedom was shaped by the struggles of social forces, and that successful popular movements had often played a significant role in shaping press freedom in egalitarian directions. Therefore, rather than searching for a new model of press freedom to accompany a new ideological order, we should look at how the social struggles of a revolution shape press freedom.

The dramatic and rapid changes in the press system observed during revolutionary conflict are then explicable in light of the intensified social struggles. As revolutionary conflict gives way to a new regime, the evolution of the press system should reflect the fate of these social struggles.

Because popular movements play a role in cementing the new revolutionary order, revolutions offer perhaps one of the best historical opportunities for popular groups to contribute to press freedom. Therefore, in searching for forces shaping press freedom in revolutions, we should pay particular attention to popular movements.

However, in this chapter, I argued that while popular struggles contribute to revolutionary social change, we cannot assume revolution simply reorients society in the interests of popular groups.

Accordingly, the emergent press system will not be solely a reflection of either the intentions of popular movements or of a revolutionary elite, but rather, will be shaped by the relationship between the revolutionary leadership and its different bases of support. Therefore, we should look not only at popular movements, but at the entire array of social actors in the revolution and how their relationships change as the revolution unfolds.

Moreover, as the outcomes of revolutions are seldom solely determined by the combined actions of the various revolutionary actors, press freedom will be shaped by social struggles within the nation, but not solely determined by them. Factors such as international pressures on the revolutionary state will also play a role.

PART TWO

PRESS FREEDOM DEVELOPMENT IN NICARAGUA

CHAPTER 4

FREEDOM OF THE PRESS AND SOCIAL CHANGE: THE CASE OF NICARAGUA

I now turn from the general relationship between social struggle and changes in press freedom to the specific case of the Nicaraguan revolution. This chapter is divided into two main sections. The first discusses the geographic, economic and historical background of Nicaragua, and then outlines the history of the Nicaraguan revolution. The second section discusses why we should explore the role of social struggle in shaping Nicaragua's version of press freedom. It includes a brief review of past studies of press freedom in Nicaragua, and highlights the ways in which this thesis differs, both in the questions it asks about press freedom and in the scope of what it considers when measuring press freedom.

The Nicaraguan Revolution

Country Background¹

Stretching from the Pacific to the Atlantic coasts of the Central American isthmus, Nicaragua is the largest of the Central American states, occupying an area of 139,000 square kilometres. It is bounded by Honduras to the north and Costa Rica to the

¹Material for this section is drawn from the following sources: Grynspan 1991; Hodges 1986; Lpple-Wagenhals 1984; Ruchwarger 1987; Smith 1993; Spalding 1994; Walker 1982; 1985; 1991b; 1991c.

south. Compared to its neighbours, it is sparsely populated, with a density of 20 persons per square kilometre in 1980. As with many developing countries, it experienced rapid urbanization; in 1980, half the population lived in urban centres.

The population of Nicaragua is relatively homogenous: largely Spanish-speaking, of mestizo (a mixture of Spanish and Indian) descent, and predominantly Roman Catholic. A notable exception to this is the population of the Atlantic Coast, where approximately eight per cent of the population lives. This region does not share the Spanish heritage of the rest of the country. Costeños speak English or indigenous languages, are Protestant, and are descended from Indian groups of South American origin or from black slaves brought to the region by the British.

Nicaragua shares in a Latin American heritage of Spanish colonialism, which influenced its social, political and economic development. The Spanish had developed an elite-controlled, externally-oriented economy, based first on the export of slaves, later on agricultural products and natural resources. While independence from Spain briefly interrupted this pattern, it soon resumed with the growth of coffee plantations in the 1870s, followed by the introduction of other important export crops such as cotton. This not only made Nicaragua particularly dependent on foreign markets, but also contributed to the economic marginalization of most Nicaraguans: the growth of export agriculture displaced peasants from the land and made them dependent on seasonal employment.

Prerevolutionary Nicaragua had a tradition of pronounced class divisions, in which land ownership and income were concentrated in the hands of a minority elite. Income distribution figures for the late 1970s show that 80 per cent of the population

received only 40 per cent of national income, with the poorest 50 per cent receiving only 15 per cent of national income (Walker 1991c, 68). Economic power, coupled with the use of force, allowed the elite to monopolize political power, so that approximately 80 per cent of the population was excluded from political life.

A pattern of recurring foreign intervention in Nicaraguan political life also dates from the Spanish colonial era. First Spain, then Great Britain and the United States, intervened in Nicaragua for economic reasons. The reliance of Nicaraguan elites on foreign support and military force to maintain power impeded political institutionalization (Grynspan 1991, 91).

Nicaragua's political history consists mainly of successive *de facto* dictatorships and elite maneuvering for the spoils of state power. Political parties in prerevolutionary Nicaragua were generally not mass parties. The traditional Liberal and Conservative parties could scarcely be called parties at all: they represented factions of the economic elite linked by business and family ties, rather than opposing political programs.

The Somoza Regime

While Central American states (with the notable exception of Costa Rica) have a history of dictatorial rule based on oligarchies and the military, the 43-year Somoza family dictatorship (1936-1979) is unique in the region's history. To a remarkable degree, the Somoza regime's power was based not on elite support, but on control of the military and the support of the United States.

Early in this century, the United States laid the foundations for the Somoza dictatorship when it intervened in support of the overthrow of nationalist Nicaraguan president José Santos Zelaya. This led to repeated U.S. military occupations in an attempt to ensure pro-American regimes. In 1933, the United States withdrew its marines, leaving behind a U.S.-trained and officered National Guard to ensure the stability of the U.S.-brokered government of President Juan Bautista Sacasa. However, the National Guard soon became an uncontrollable political force in Nicaragua: its U.S.-approved commander, Anastasio Somoza Debayle, gained personal control over the National Guard through bribery and corruption.

In 1936, Somoza staged a military coup, forced Sacasa to resign, and engineered his own election to the presidency. Somoza, and later his two sons, Luis and Anastasio Somoza Debayle, used the National Guard to stay in power. The Somoza regime maintained a facade of democracy and constitutionalism by staging periodic elections, occasionally allowing the election of puppet presidents. The Liberal party, to which Somoza nominally belonged, became subservient to the Somoza family. The Liberals' traditional rivals, the Conservatives, were co-opted: in return for guaranteed minority participation in government and economic incentives, they played the role of a loyal opposition.

With the exclusion of the traditional Liberal and Conservative elites from real political power, the regime had a particularly narrow base. While at times the Somozas engaged in populist politics, they mainly relied on the National Guard, U.S. backing, and

a small clique of “Somocista” families to stay in power, rather than on any broad social group.

The Nicaraguan Revolution

During the 1970s, as economic conditions in Nicaragua deteriorated, the Somoza family’s use of state power to expand its economic empire increasingly impinged on elites’ economic interests. The private sector felt increasingly threatened. At the same time, the lower classes suffered from growing economic hardship. Popular disaffection was joined by elite opposition (Grynspan 1991, 95; Spalding 1994, 48-51; Weber 1981, 23- 29; 32-4).

The stage was set for the overthrow of the Somoza regime by a broadly based coalition of forces. Christian groups, urban and rural workers and peasants, and the middle and upper classes all organized against the dictatorship during this period.

Two groups organized mass opposition to the dictatorship. One was UDEL (Democratic Liberation Union), a coalition of political parties and labour unions organized by Pedro Joaquin Chamorro, editor of the opposition paper *La Prensa* and leader of a dissident faction of the Conservative party. The second was the Sandinista National Liberation Front (FSLN), which was carrying out guerrilla actions and organizing among students, urban workers, and the peasantry.

Of these two leading groups, UDEL, with its middle- and upper-class leadership who espoused a moderate, liberal democratic solution, was more important in the mid-1970s. With the January 10, 1978 assassination of Chamorro, UDEL and COSEP (the

Higher Council of Private Enterprise, an umbrella business organization) led a series of mass strikes and demonstrations.

Gradually, however, the FSLN took over leadership of the insurrection. Working- and middle-class support shifted from the Broad Opposition Front (FAO) – a coalition consisting of UDEL, the business-led Nicaraguan Democratic Movement (MDN), and opposition political parties – to the FSLN (Weber 1981, 47-48; Lpple-Wagenhals 1984, 16). Following a mass uprising in the central highlands city of Matagalpa August 1978, the Frente called for a national uprising. However, Somoza bombed the major Nicaraguan cities and crushed the uprising within weeks.

Attempts by FAO to negotiate a non-violent solution to the crisis faltered, due to Somoza's unwillingness to abdicate and the increasing radicalization of the population in the face of violent repression. FAO broke apart in late 1978, and the FSLN formed its own opposition coalition. In February 1979, the National Patriotic Front (FPN) grouped together Sandinista-organized popular organizations, trade unions, and middle-class organizations under FSLN leadership.

On May 31, 1979 the FSLN called for a final insurrection and general strike. On June 16, 1979, it declared a provisional government from Leon, a major Nicaraguan city under its control. On July 17, with the Frente closing in on Managua, Somoza fled into exile. Two days later, FSLN guerrilla columns entered Managua.

The Sandinista Era

When the five-member Governing Junta of National Reconstruction (JGRN) was installed in Managua on July 20, 1979, it faced the immediate task of economic reconstruction in a country devastated by a revolutionary war. It also faced the task of reconstructing the state, which had largely collapsed. While portions of the civil service remained, the army, the courts, the local government, the congress, and the Somoza-era constitution had been swept away (Reding 1991a, 15).

Initially, the provisional government appeared to be a national unity government, in which partisan political interests were set aside in order to deal with the national emergency. The provisional government consisted of the Governing Junta of National Reconstruction (JGRN), which had executive and legislative powers; the Council of State, a co-legislative body; and an independent judiciary. The Council of State, which was not immediately installed, was to be a corporatist body in which different organizations and parties would be represented.

The Junta members were drawn both from the middle-class and private sector opposition groups and from Sandinista organizations. The government espoused a moderate platform based on a mixed economy, a pluralistic state, and a non-aligned foreign policy, and initially enjoyed the support of COSEP and the Roman Catholic Church, which issued a supportive pastoral letter.

However, this broad-based consensus, possible because of the increasing polarization of the late 1970s, disintegrated within a few months of the JGRN's installation. As the FSLN moved to ensure its control of government by weighting

institutions with FSLN-organized groups, some of the private sector and traditional opposition parties broke with the government.

The first signs of a split came in a dispute over the organizations that would be represented on the Council of State. When the JGRN members had originally agreed on the composition of the Council of State in June 1979, the FSLN and middle-class parties had a balance of power (Reding 1991a, 17). After victory, the FSLN argued that the mass organizations, which had participated in the insurrection, should be given seats on the Council.

The two JGRN members aligned with the traditional Nicaraguan elites, Alfonso Robelo and Pedro Joaquin's widow Violeta Chamorro, resigned over the issue. When the expanded Council finally sat in April 1980, it included representatives from the mass organizations, political parties, labour unions, and churches. Pro-FSLN organizations had the majority of seats.

The official Church also drew away from the revolutionary government, causing a split between the Church hierarchy and the grassroots Christian movement that had collaborated with the FSLN. Within weeks of the JGRN resignations, the hierarchy called on all priests serving in the revolutionary government to resign their posts (Dodson 1991, 172).

It became apparent that the FSLN was to be the directing force in government. The JGRN members had been picked by the unelected nine-man executive of the FSLN, the National Directorate, and were officially subordinate to it (Gilbert 1988, 42). While

top officials in the reconstruction government were initially drawn from the traditional social and economic elites, many were replaced early on by FSLN cadres.

The Frente was able to keep control of the state through its leadership of the popular classes, which it had organized into party-led mass organizations. Moreover, the new armed forces, the Sandinista People's Army (EPS); the Sandinista Police (PS); and the state security forces were all under the direct control of the FSLN's National Directorate (Walker 1991a, 81; Gilbert 1988, 62).

To a remarkable extent, party and state were conflated (Smith 1993, 21; Gilbert 1988, 49), hardly surprising given that the FSLN was the most organized political force left once the Somoza state disintegrated. The influence of the FSLN

reached deep into the state through committees of the Sandinista militants in each government office and public enterprise. In the early years of the revolution, these party committees helped the FSLN gain control over a bureaucracy whose loyalty to the goals of the revolution... was uncertain. (Gilbert 1988, 62)

The first decade of the Nicaraguan revolution would be shaped by a struggle for power between two camps – the Sandinistas and the traditional political and economic elites – who espoused conflicting visions of the revolution.

The FSLN was a socialist party that saw itself as holding power on behalf of the workers and peasants. The party envisioned the creation of a “participatory” or “popular” democracy. It distinguished this from representative democracy, first, as rule in the interests of the popular classes and, second, as a “direct” form of democracy, in which the people's power is unmediated by delegates (Weber 1981, 111-113). For the

FSLN, the revolution would enable the poor majority to participate in their society's decision-making on both a local and national level.

While both the Sandinistas and the opposition had support from sections of the Christian community, rural peasantry, and urban lower and middle classes, it was the FSLN that had organized lower-class people around a declared "logic of the majority."

The opposition, on the other hand, had a relatively weak mass base and noticeable strength among upper-class Nicaraguans. Middle- and upper-class opponents of the Sandinistas feared that the FSLN would move Nicaragua increasingly towards socialism, eroding their economic and political power.

Over the next ten years, Nicaraguan society became more and more polarized, particularly after the outbreak of armed civil conflict in 1981, in which the United States organized and supported anti-government rebels known as *contras*.

In the face of the overwhelming political dominance of the Sandinistas, the opposition movement looked to the United States to shore up its influence, and became increasingly aligned with the *contras* and the U.S. While some opposition parties continued to participate in government, the most influential pro-U.S. bloc refused to recognize the legitimacy of the revolutionary government.

The *contra* war, combined with a U.S. economic embargo, contributed to a downward economic spiral beginning two years after the victory. Despite economic problems and civil conflict, the government continued efforts to institutionalize the revolutionary state. On November 4, 1984, the first post-victory elections were held. An elected president, vice-president, and National Constituent Assembly replaced the

provisional government. FSLN dominance was unaffected, as it won a majority in these elections. The U.S.-supported coalition of opposition parties, the Nicaraguan Democratic Coordinator (CDN), refused to run.

On January 9, 1987, the government promulgated a new constitution, which enshrined a system of representative democracy and a mixed economy, and gave constitutional status to the FSLN's commitment to "the logic of the majority" (Azicri 1991).

In August 1987, seeking an end to the contra war and international pressures, the government signed the Esquipulas II peace agreements, a Central American initiative intended to stop external support of insurgent forces in the region. As part of the peace process, the FSLN began talks with the opposition parties and secured their participation in the next elections.

The Sandinista era came to a close in 1990, when Violeta Chamorro, presidential candidate for the Unified Nicaraguan Opposition (UNO), a U.S.-backed opposition coalition, won the national elections.

The Struggle Over Press Freedom

Throughout the decade, the evolving conflict between the two camps was echoed by an ongoing struggle over press freedom. The mass media had played a pivotal role in the insurrection: the opposition paper *La Prensa* had acted as an organizer of the insurrection; press freedom had been a demand of the parties and professional associations opposing Somoza; and the pro-FSLN Union of Radiojournalists of

Nicaragua (SPRM) had organized the public to pay fines imposed on the media by the Somoza regime (Rothschuh Villanueva 1986, 29-32).

During the FSLN regime, the conflict between the government and the opposition was rooted in conflicting visions of the revolution, including conflicting concepts of press freedom. The opposition used the issue of censorship to mobilize support, including the support of international forces. The FSLN maintained that it supported press freedom, arguing that its own version of press freedom was defined by the interests and rights of the majority.

Studying Press Freedom in the Nicaraguan Revolution

The Choice of Nicaragua as a Case Study

Nicaragua is a good choice for a case study of press freedom evolution because its revolutionary regime, which came to power with the support of popular organizations, had the stated intent of remaking Nicaraguan society. This allows us to examine changes to press freedom during a period of rapid social change. Moreover, the participation of popular movements in the revolution – and the later conflict between two opposing camps of the revolution over press freedom – offers an opportunity to examine social movements' role in shaping press freedom.

Studying the relationship between social struggles and press freedom development within Nicaragua should allow us to predict future directions for that country's press freedom. However, the Nicaraguan experience should not be used to draw up "rules" of press freedom development that are transferable to other societies. As

discussed in Chapter 2, the relationship between social struggles and a particular articulation of press freedom are not automatic, but rather are produced by historical experiences.

However, similarities between Nicaragua and other societies may suggest avenues to be explored when examining the possible directions of press freedom development elsewhere. In many developing nations, Western models of press freedom have notoriously failed to “take root.” Nicaragua shares similar problems with these other developing countries, notably a large economically and politically marginalized population.

It should be noted, however, that the Nicaraguan experience is most likely to be relevant to those countries that, like it, share a heritage of “liberal” institutions and values. Regardless of the actual conditions for free speech and press in Nicaragua, the discourse of press freedom in its prerevolutionary era was similar in content to that of other nations of Western heritage. Some limitations to press freedom in Nicaragua resembled those in the West; thus, developments in Nicaragua that overcame such limitations suggest possible directions for the future of press freedom in the West.

The Literature on Freedom of the Press in Nicaragua

Accounts of the press in Nicaragua have focussed overwhelmingly on press freedom during the Sandinista era. In part, this is because press freedom became a key issue in the contest for legitimacy between the Sandinista regime and its opponents. As well, the press actively participated in the post-insurrection power struggle: the

opposition newspaper *La Prensa*, more than any political party, spoke for those opposed to the Sandinista project.

The Reagan administration's characterization of press freedom as the absence of state control and censorship, to the exclusion of other considerations, shaped much of the discussion. Hence, much of the literature is primarily concerned with marshalling evidence on the severity of state control of the press. Much material, particularly that found in the press itself, was anecdotal, focussing on particular, high-profile cases of government control of the press. Restrictive legislation, in particular the prolonged State of Emergency, and pressures on prominent opposition media – *La Prensa* and church-run media – received special attention.²

Those accounts of the press that took a pro-Sandinista position, including material on press freedom produced by pro-FSLN organizations and media within Nicaragua, generally concentrated on justifying FSLN press controls, and focussed on the same flashpoints of debate (such as *La Prensa*) as their opponents. Notable are the studies produced arguing that *La Prensa* was a U.S. instrument of destabilization, or, more generally, that the Sandinista government was responding to a deliberate disinformation campaign or to ideological warfare directed from abroad.³ Much

² For typical treatments of the Nicaragua media in the Anglo-American press, see for example coverage by Stephen Kinzer for *The New York Times*, including "Nicaragua's press feels the censor's scissors", *Globe and Mail*, October 26, 1985; "Darkening Nicaragua", by Ronald Radosh, *The New Republic*, October 24, 1983; "The shadow of dictatorship", *The Economist*, October 19, 1985; "Broken Promises in Nicaragua", October 26, 1981, *Time Magazine*; "Don't call her comrade", *Time Magazine*, June 12, 1989.

³ For examples of the ideological aggression thesis, see "How *La Prensa* invents news: Anatomy of a 'crime wave'," by Millie Thayer, *The Guardian*, October 19, 1988; "La Prensa" and freedom of expression in the Nicaraguan Revolution, Centro de Comunicacion Internacional, Managua, April 1983; "The media and psychological warfare," by Claudio Durán, *Canadian Forum*, August 1982; "The U.S. intervention in Nicaraguan and other Latin American media," by Angharad N. Valdivia 1991; "Nicaragua's *La Prensa*: Capitalist thorn in

attention was also paid to the part played by the *contra* war in the suspension of civil liberties (see, for example, the discussion of civil liberties in the human rights report *Nicaragua: The Right to Survive*, Catholic Institute for International Relations, 1987).

In short, although there is a large body of material on press freedom, much of it is purely descriptive and focuses on a narrow range of topics. This material makes little attempt to discuss press freedom beyond government policy and practices.

Not all the literature, however, limits itself to discussions of censorship and government control. Some authors have a broader view of press freedom:

“...they are certainly not as free as the New York papers in the sense that the owners can write whatever they please, since there is censorship in Managua. But journalists have more freedom in choosing the kind of paper they want to work for, and readers have far more freedom in choosing a newspaper close to their own political views” (Cook 1984, 36).

Although most studies of the transformation of mass communication during the revolutionary process focus on changes in the mass media (ownership, content, etc.), it is the supplanting of the mass media by the mass organizations as the principal means of mass communication that constitutes the revolutionary breakthrough in communication practice in Cuba and Nicaragua (Bresnahan 1985, 285).

What is rarely acknowledged in debates over press restrictions, however, is that freedom of the press, as we understand it, is not a universally shared convention. None of the international human rights treaties recognizes “freedom of the press” as such; instead they affirm a “right to information.” The Nicaraguan constitution borrows from this tradition (Reding 1991b, 102).

Even if the watchdog organizations’ goal of the elimination or substantial reduction of government controls on the media were a realistic possibility, that does not mean there would be a total absence of controls and that

socialist flesh,” by David Kunzle 1986; and “The return of La Prensa”, by Phil Ryan, October 17, 1987.

media actors could make their decisions autonomously. Other sectors of society, such as business, labour, church, political parties, terrorists, and so on, invariably fill the void. In short, controls are always present... The questions, therefore, are not whether controls exist or should exist. Rather, the questions should be: what combination of controls are exercised, by whom, and most important, what impact do they have on society? (Nichols 1982, 189)

These approaches recognize that the study of press freedom in Nicaragua needs to be situated in a broader context than the policies of the censor.

Given this, what attempts have there been to move from purely descriptive studies to historical examinations of the development of press freedom in Nicaragua?

Some studies of the Nicaraguan press use a “model” approach, asking if a new model of the press or communication emerged with the revolution.

Most comprehensive of these is the 1984 study of Doris Läßle-Wagenhals, *A New Development Model, A New Communication Policy? On Communications in Nicaragua before and after July 19, 1979*. Läßle-Wagenhals wanted to know if the new orientation of the revolution would change the communication model of Nicaragua; she was particularly interested in the model of development communications put forward by scholars such as Luis Beltrán,⁴ which stresses the free speech concepts of “horizontal communication” and the right to communicate.

Läßle-Wagenhals (1984, 2) asks “...if there were changes [in the communication systems], how were they interrelated to structural and ideological

⁴ See for example Luis Beltrán’s paper *Farewell to Aristotle: “Horizontal” Communication*, Documents of the International Commission for the Study of Communication Problems, Paris, Unesco, 1978.

changes in other subsystems of the Nicaraguan society, like politics, economy, education, and culture?”

But although she considers, in a thorough survey of communications in Nicaragua, the effect of prerevolutionary conditions, and the development of new journalism practices and institutions as a result of the revolutionary struggle, her focus remains the policies of the new revolutionary government. She largely portrays the conditions in Nicaragua as the result of intentional government “reshaping”:

Contradictory traits in other subsystems of Nicaragua reflect also in the field of communication and the new government's reconstruction of the communication system strongly resembled the approach to reshaping of the socio-economic, the political, and the cultural spheres: Confiscation of media, formerly owned by the Somozas and their allies, development of a kind of “mixed ownership” of the media, stipulation of new values, and the establishment of a powerful journalist union, which has its roots, like other unions and popular organizations affiliated to the FSLN, in the fights against the dictatorship. (Läpple-Wagenhals 1984, 153)

In her 1984 article “The Nicaraguan Press: Revolutionary, Developmental, or Socially Responsible?”, Bonnie J. Brownlee uses the tradition of Siebert's *Four Theories of the Press* and other press models to examine the role of the press under the Sandinista regime.

Brownlee posits that the restructuring of society and reduction of class inequality promised by the Nicaraguan regime

implies a significant change in – to use Siebert et al.'s terminology – the philosophy of the nature of the individual and the relationship of the individual to the society. If such change could in fact occur, one might expect some alterations in the role of the press within that system. (Brownlee 1984, 158)

But her approach to examining the press freedom emerging from social change relies on the basic tenet of the *Four Theories* “model” approach: that a press system takes on the colouration of the social and political structures within which it operates (Brownlee 1984, 157).

Brownlee’s characterization of the Sandinistas as a regime whose liberalism was tempered (163) by the demands of reconstruction and development thus leads inevitably to her conclusion: that many – but by no means all – aspects of the press in revolutionary Nicaragua fit the developmental concept (Brownlee 1984, 167). The Nicaraguan model, she says, was a Western model transplanted into an authoritarian culture (168), thus “chock full of vestiges of the authoritarian past and present but sprinkled with tokens of libertarianism” (Brownlee 1984, 169).

There is little in such an analysis to suggest that press freedom is the product of diverse historical forces. The approach Brownlee has employed focuses attention on the values of the new government personnel: the government is surmised to be chiefly preoccupied with development goals at the expense of liberal values, and thus, the press system has taken on this “colouration.”

What happened, the reader wonders, to a consideration of the changes in social relations? Where are the contributions of the movements that made the revolution? If it is true, as Brownlee argues, that “tokens of libertarianism... because of historic precedent, cannot be removed,” then why not?

A tantalizing detail in her account is the fact that Radio VER, a development communications project, was closed by the government, but reopened due to a mass

demonstration, extremely uncommon in that community (166). How much did such grassroots action contribute to the survival of libertarian elements? Would such a demonstration have occurred in previous times?

Brownlee herself addresses the inadequacy of the “model” approach in her final note:

The Nicaraguan revolution has telescoped what might otherwise have been a long evolution of press history into a span of less than five years. A close look at this press magnifies the importance of understanding more than just a label of “authoritarian,” “developmental,” or “socially responsible.” Rather, to understand the Nicaraguan press – or any press – we need to more closely analyse the many factors that have formed that society, and subsequently the press of that society: factors of history, economy, culture, language, geography, religion. An important next step in the study of press systems is to work toward developing models that allow for the systematic study of these related factors. (Brownlee 1984, 169)

It would seem that a new framework more oriented to the examination of change in press freedom – rather than its characterization – is what Brownlee is suggesting.

As was argued in Chapter 2, investigating the changes in press freedom over time is best undertaken if we abandon the “models” approach, and instead search for the historic influences on specific elements making up press freedom.

In his study of the post-revolutionary communication system, Armand Mattelart rejects the search for models to argue that there were conflicting “logics” at work in Sandinista Nicaragua’s communication theory and practices:

One finds the persistence of classical models related to the concept of “ideological work”, itself indebted to a doctrine of agitation and propaganda, as well as the emergence of radically new practices. Depending on which of these different lines one follows, one arrives at diametrically opposed conclusions: the inevitable reproduction of vertical

schemas of bureaucratic organization; or the beginnings of new social relations and therefore of a horizontal mode of social organization and communication. (Mattelart 1986, 8)

Mattelart argues that these two different logics cannot be identified with specific individuals or groups of people: often both strains of ideas are present in the thinking of a group.

In a significant advance on studies that attempt to identify a “model”, Mattelart not only identifies conflicting elements in the communications of Nicaragua, but points to influences bolstering each current of thought: the more vertical approaches to communication, he argues, are reinforced by orthodox party ideologies, the actions of solidarity networks from the East Bloc, and the approaches to communication encouraged by the war. The more democratic approaches to communication are bolstered by the construction of democracy and pluralism in Nicaragua. The holding of elections in 1984, he argues, “demanded a rethinking of the communication process, barely institutionalized but already on the way to sclerosis” (Mattelart 1986, 18).

But although Mattelart identifies the democratic current of communications with changes in social relations, there is little exploration of specific linkages between popular movements and changes in press freedom in his paper. (However, his is a relatively short consideration of communication in Nicaragua.)

Mattelart argues that the ideas of popular culture and popular communication present in Nicaragua were rooted in the diverse experiences of grassroots movements in Latin America:

these projects of popular communication are undertaken by the most diverse groups from grassroots Church communities in Brazil to miners' radio stations in Bolivia, and the new forms of political and cultural resistance to the military dictatorship in Chile supported by a multiplicity of social movements. (Mattelart 1986, 23)

However, in his study the link between such ideas and the history of popular movements in Nicaragua is not explored. Thus, while Mattelart's approach of identifying separate, even opposing strains in the communications of a nation is a step forward, the relationship between the press system that emerged in Nicaragua and changing social relations remains unclear.

Other authors have also made contributions outside of the "model" approach; rather than trying to classify the postrevolutionary press system, they describe the historical origins of specific observed roles or practices of the press.

Guillermo Rothschuh Villanueva (1986, 28-36) documents how press freedom became a demand of the revolutionary movement, and the press became actively involved in the struggle for power. New, though temporary, press practices – such as the journalism of the catacombs, in which radio journalists used church pulpits when their stations were silenced – emerged; so, too, did institutions that would survive into the post-revolutionary period, such as the Sandinista journalists' union, UPN.

John S. Nichols (1982, 1985) also discusses the revolutionary press, believing that the role of the media in the revolution foreshadowed the media system that would emerge afterward. He argues that both before and after the revolution, the press collaborated with contenders for political power.

But while Rothschuch Villanueva emphasizes the genesis of discontinuities with the prerevolutionary press, Nichols emphasizes the continuities. He makes the important point that revolutions are not complete breaks with the institutional and ideological structures of the past: many of the same groups and individuals governed the Nicaraguan media after the revolution.

To review, of the studies of the Nicaraguan press that attempt to analyse the broad character of the postrevolutionary press system, those that use the approach of seeking to identify a press “model” are unable to address the reasons press freedom development took a particular path.

Studies such as Armand Mattelart’s, which do not seek to identify a model, should be better able to explore the influence of historical forces on different trends in communication. However, while Mattelart links democratic elements in communications to Latin American grassroots movements, the specific social struggles in the Nicaraguan revolutionary process that supported those elements are not explored.

Studies such as Nichols’ and Rothschuch Villanueva’s seek the origins of specific elements of the press system in the prerevolutionary and insurrectionary periods. They document the new press practices that emerge during the revolutionary conflict, and also point to continuities with the past. But again, they lack an exploration of the forces determining the survival of these elements – both old and new – as the revolutionary transformation progresses.

Questions on the Development of Press Freedom in Nicaragua

The following study of press freedom in Nicaragua will not ask what “model” of the press was instituted by the Sandinista regime, but rather how social relations changed during the Nicaraguan revolution, and how that shaped the incorporation of ideas and practices into revolutionary press freedom.

Nicaragua was the site of a popular revolution: Somoza was defeated not by the regular military forces of the Frente, but by a mass uprising. Why then are people not visible in the studies of revolutionary Nicaragua’s press system? What was the role of popular movements in the evolution of press freedom? Western history suggests that popular groups would emphasize the right of the ordinary citizen to exercise press freedom.

This thesis argues that press freedom is best characterized as a changing discourse shaped by social struggles. Thus, the following examination of press freedom development in Nicaragua requires an examination of the ideas of press freedom emerging from social struggles, and the fortunes of those struggles. With this, we can understand the survival, emergence, or disappearance of elements of press freedom.

Given the dynamics of revolutionary social change outlined in Chapter 3, this requires tracing the changing relationships among the various revolutionary actors and the new revolutionary elite, as well as taking into account external forces. The next chapters therefore address these questions:

- To what degree did the popular movements form the base of support for the new revolutionary regime? What other social groups did the new regime have to rely on to maintain power?

- How autonomous were the popular movements from the FSLN?
- Did the power relations among the members of the revolutionary coalition change as the revolution unfolded?
- What external forces affected the power of the state and social groups in Nicaragua?
- What were the conceptions of press freedom used by the FSLN?
- What ideas of press freedom did popular movements in Nicaragua have access to? Were press freedom and free speech demands of popular movements in Nicaragua?
- What were the ideas of press freedom held by other members of the revolutionary coalition that overthrew Somoza?

Evaluating Press Freedom in Nicaragua

Any examination of a country's press freedom relies on a set of criteria for measuring or characterizing it. For many such discussions, the "yardstick" used is the legal and economic arrangements of liberal press models. Press freedom is measured according to how closely a society reproduces existing Western arrangements.⁵

However, if we view press freedom as a discourse instead of as a model with set, interlocking elements, evaluations of press freedom cannot be limited to this. We must build a picture of the degree to which various ideas of press freedom shape the press system.

This thesis is grounded in a normative preference for press freedom vested in the citizen, not the media unit. Accordingly, I shall pay considerable attention not only to pressures brought to bear on media units, but on conditions excluding ordinary citizens from the media.

⁵ For example, the well-known Freedom House has used a version of this approach to evaluate how "free" nations of the world are, including how free their press systems are (Gastil qtd. in Weaver, Buddenbaum and Fair 1985, 109).

Therefore, while I shall look at such traditional criteria as censorship and state controls on the press, I will also look for changes in institutions and practices that would allow “freedoms” that are not now part of the established liberal model. The study will attempt to evaluate the growth of ideas and practices that support the right to communicate and the right to access of the media, or that overcome restrictions that prerevolutionary institutional arrangements placed on the types or content of media.⁶

I must also emphasize that liberal conceptions of press freedom are not reducible to political criteria such as the extent of legal constraints, or to economic criteria such as private ownership and economic independence; liberal conceptions also include less tangible considerations, such as the general climate for individual liberties (Hocking 1972, 215-17). Accordingly, I will look at cultural factors as well as the legal and economic bases of the press system.

To understand how social change shaped the content of press freedom in Nicaragua, we must first discuss how social relations actually changed with the revolution. The next chapter examines the social groups that made the Nicaraguan revolution, and considers how their relative power changed with the insurrection and over the succeeding decade of FSLN rule.

Chapter Six then describes the media landscape before and after the revolution, and provides a baseline against which to judge how press freedom changed during this

⁶ For a brief discussion of alternate “freedoms of the press” that arose in response to prevailing liberal theories, please see Chapter 1.

period. Chapter Seven discusses the ideas of press freedom that each movement brought into the revolutionary era. Together these chapters lay the foundation for an inquiry into how the different movements' ideas of press freedom contributed to a new press freedom for the revolutionary era.

CHAPTER 5

REVOLUTIONARY ACTORS AND SOCIAL CHANGE

This thesis argues that social movements adopt and reshape elements of press freedom according to their collective experiences, and that such movements contribute to the prevailing articulation of press freedom according to their relative strength. Therefore, this chapter examines the movements that made the Nicaraguan revolution, and the fate of these social struggles in the new revolutionary state. Chapter 7 will then examine the ideas of press freedom that informed movements' struggles during the insurrection and in the Sandinista era.

The chapter is divided into two parts. The first section gives a brief description of the movements that participated in the overthrow of the Somoza dictatorship, and the ideas around which they organized. While the main focus of this section is on the members of the coalition that overthrew Somoza, it also discusses social groups for whom the revolutionary period offered a chance to organize and exert influence for the first time.

The next section explores how the social power of these movements changed with the revolution. While the revolution shifted power towards popular movements, other revolutionary actors and external forces acted to moderate this redistribution of power.

The Movements of the Revolution

In the years leading up to the fall of Somoza, two broad groups led the population against the Somoza dictatorship: middle- and upper-class business and political leaders, and the FSLN. Both groups sought the support of the so-called “popular classes”: these were small and medium farmers and ranchers, urban workers, semi-proletarianized *campesinos* (peasants) with small holdings, rural workers, workers in the urban informal economy,¹ and artisans. However, the FSLN was more successful than the traditional elites in swinging mass support behind them.

After victory, the partnership between the two revolutionary elites broke down as they vied for control of the state. Both elites sought popular support in this struggle, though the FSLN continued to have a far stronger mass base.

This section discusses the FSLN; the popular movements that supported or opposed the Frente; and the upper- and middle-class-led opposition movement.

The Sandinistas

The term Sandinista refers not only to the revolutionary party Frente Sandinista de Liberación Nacional (FSLN) but also to organizations linked to the party, including the FSLN-led mass organizations and the Sandinista People’s Army (EPS). Indeed, many Nicaraguans who did not belong to the FSLN considered themselves Sandinistas: “At the time of the triumph thousands of Nicaraguans considered themselves to be Sandinistas

¹ The informal economy refers to non-waged work such as Nicaragua’s numerous street vendors, who sold cooked food or sundry household items.

because they had taken up arms under FSLN leadership, but the party itself had perhaps 500 formal members” (Prevost 1991, 107).

However, the ideology of the FSLN, a vanguard party with a small membership, was never identical to the ideas motivating the popular movements that fought under the Frente’s banner. This section discusses the interpretations of *Sandinismo* found within the FSLN party; the next section will address the ideas around which the popular movements supporting them organized.

The Frente Sandinista de Liberación Nacional was founded in 1961 by young former members of Nicaragua’s Soviet-aligned communist party, the Nicaraguan Socialist Party (Partido Socialista Nicaragüense – PSN). FSLN ideology, *Sandinismo*, is a composite of several ideologies, allowing much flexibility in interpretation. Its main components include a Latin American form of Marxism-Leninism and the nationalist heritage of Augusto César Sandino, the man who led an armed campaign against the U.S. Marine occupation of Nicaragua in the 1930s. “In effect, Sandinismo is Sandino’s revolutionary legacy impregnated with the new Marxism” (Hodges 1986, 196).

Prior to the insurrection, and in the immediate post-victory period, the leadership of the Frente avoided identifying themselves as Marxists in order not to alienate domestic and foreign allies. Instead, they stressed their connection to the nationalist heritage of Sandino. According to Donald Hodges, who has authored one of the most comprehensive examinations of *Sandinismo*, there were two forms of *Sandinismo*, a popular one that relied on the myth of Sandino, and an advanced form that necessarily

entailed an acceptance of Marxism-Leninism (Hodges 1986, 186-187; also see Prevost 1991, 101).

Though the Frente was never an orthodox Marxist-Leninist party, certain core Marxist-Leninist concepts fundamentally shaped the party's organization, strategy, and ideology.

Dennis Gilbert (1988; 1989) has documented the strong influence of the Leninist concept of the vanguard role of the revolutionary party. The underlying assumption of vanguardism is that classes are endowed with objective interests that the masses do not realize until the vanguard party leads them to such an understanding. Among the numerous party documents advancing this idea, Gilbert cites this Sandinista definition of a vanguard: "An organization that brings together the most representative part of a class, that expresses its interests and objectives... that leads the struggle [of the exploited classes] for definitive liberation" (Gilbert 1989, 8).

The result is an unavoidably paternalistic view of people – a view that can serve to justify authoritarian government. The vanguard party, argues Gilbert, "acts on behalf of a future society rather than a current majority. Correct choices cannot be made by counting votes as long as the people remain politically immature and the vanguard monopolizes political vision" (Gilbert 1989, 25).

Similarly, the statements of some Frente leaders reflected the traditional Marxist stance on liberal democracy and liberal human rights. Marxism encompasses a wide variety of views of state and society, but Lenin's classic interpretation sees liberal

democracy and liberal rights as tools of the ruling class, and rejects their validity (Carnoy 1984, 58).

FSLN leaders and documents have displayed a Leninist dismissal of liberal freedoms. A party document published in the party daily *Barricada* attacks liberal bourgeois ideology for stressing abstract freedoms without regard to their real content in a class society, arguing:

“There is, therefore, no sacred abstract freedom for the masses; the only things that are indeed sacred are their own class interests and the principles of the Popular Revolution. Bourgeois freedom has nothing to do with popular freedom which reflects the objective interests of the people with respect to their right to organize and arm... as a class to promote their historic plan of a society in keeping with their nature as a majority class.” (Gilbert 1988, 34)

On the other hand, party ideology included other strands of thought running counter to this approach. Most notable among these was the influence of Christian liberation theology. Some Christians belonged to the FSLN, and even some members of the National Directorate came to the party out of the radical Christian movement (Hodges 1986, 275-6). Donald Hodges also identifies a commitment to human rights, with its origins in the liberal tradition and established church doctrine, and a “cult of the new man,” an idea of a new, self-sacrificing Nicaraguan, as part of *Sandinismo* (Hodges 1986, 266).

These other ideological influences enabled the Frente to accept both traditional liberal freedoms and social and economic rights in its program. In response to escalating repression, the Frente became a champion of human rights, which as Donald Hodges (1986, 266) points out, is not a Marxist concept. In 1975, the FSLN denounced the

Somoza regime's use of terrorism and censorship of the press. In January 1978, it issued a manifesto supporting both individual and social rights (Hodges 1986, 264-268).

The FSLN used the human rights language of documents such as the UN Declaration, which stresses the individual nature of rights. As early as 1969, the FSLN's program promised to establish a revolutionary government that "will guarantee that all citizens can fully exercise all individual freedoms and... will respect human rights" and "will guarantee the free exchange of ideas" (FSLN 1986, 14).

In its commitment to social and economic rights, FSLN ideology was in accord with the official doctrine of the Latin American Catholic Church, although it took these ideas somewhat further:

The FSLN's January 1978 manifesto paid serious homage to both sets of rights, to the right to live and to think freely as well as to the right to work and to organize a government that represents the people's real interests. But its recommendations for implementing those rights went considerably beyond the liberal tradition and Vatican II's proposals for reform. Besides establishing a common ground with liberals and mainstream Catholics in the face of the Somoza regime's human rights abuses, its ultimate purpose was a socialist revolution in Nicaragua (Hodges 1986, 268).

Popular Movements and the Mass Organizations

In the years leading up to the insurrection, there was a general upsurge of organizing among both popular groups and the middle class. Apart from some limited union activity, the bulk of popular organizing came out of Christian or FSLN activism.

The FSLN looked to the popular classes for its main base of support, and both the party and its Christian allies organized people to support the Frente's armed struggle.

Some of these Sandinista supporters came to be formally linked to the party; others remained outside it.

Near the end of 1977, the FSLN sought to channel its popular support into Sandinista mass organizations. The principal mass organizations were established at this time.

After the victory, additional mass organizations were established, and existing ones reorganized. As well, both workers and indigenous peoples had new opportunities to organize.

In the ensuing decade of FSLN rule, the Frente relied on mass organizations to mobilize popular support for its programs. As the major impulse for the organizations' development came from the FSLN (Serra 1991, 61), the mass organizations would appear more an extension of the vanguard party than grassroots movements.

However, the mass organizations were not simply FSLN tools, nor were they the only organized popular activity during this period. While the Christian movement continued to back the FSLN, it remained independent. As well, independent trade unions and indigenous rights movements – strengthened by the popular activism of the revolution – were increasingly a source of both support for and opposition to the Sandinista regime.

Popular Movements

The Christian movement

In the 1970s, an upsurge in Christian activism in Nicaragua produced both embryonic Sandinista mass organizations and independent pro-FSLN Christian movements.

The leadership and organizing ideas of these movements emerged from the changes in the Roman Catholic and Protestant churches in the 1960s and 1970s. In Latin America, the official Roman Catholic Church had come to stress human rights in response to authoritarian regimes. Moreover, beginning with Vatican II, the Church initiated a series of reforms in the 1960s that led to “liberation theology.” This radical Christian thinking stressed that the Church’s prophetic mission is “preference for, and solidarity with, the poor,” aimed at the poor’s liberation (Berryman 1987, 43-4). Clergy and laity began to go into poor communities and work with the inhabitants.

In Nicaragua, these changes coincided with deepening anti-Somoza sentiment, especially after the 1972 earthquake, when the regime embezzled donations intended for victims. As repression increased in the 1970s, the churches became a focal point of resistance (Dodson and Montgomery 1982, 163).

The Christian Base Communities (Comunidades eclesiales de base – CEBs) were an independent Christian movement that supported FSLN efforts to overthrow Somoza. In Latin America, CEBs are “small lay-led communities, motivated by Christian faith, that see themselves as part of the church and are committed to working together to

improve their communities and establish a more just society” (Berryman 1987, 64).

These small local associations were organized at the neighbourhood or village level – analogous to smaller church congregations. Though never involving more than a small minority of Nicaraguans, the Christian Base Communities were the first experience for many Nicaraguans in community organization, and served as training grounds for community leaders (Berryman 1987, 74; Dodson 1991, 168). CEBs produced a new type of religious leader, Delegates of the Word, typically *campesinos* or the urban poor, whose work often included education and community organization as well as Bible study.

CEBs appealed to the poorer communities: in Managua, for example, CEBs were not found in the middle- and upper-class parishes (Dodson and O’Shaughnessy 1985, 127). CEB members adapted the new church thinking in light of their experiences and the increasing anti-Somoza feeling: clergy sometimes found that “Delegates [of the Word] had taken the teachings of Medellin [a 1968 bishops’ meeting influenced by liberation theology]... and developed them in an explicitly political direction – without telling the priests” (Dodson and Montgomery 1982, 171).

Members of the CEBs in Esteli, a city in northern Nicaragua, linked up with the FSLN in 1975. CEB members took part in the legal, grassroots resistance against the dictatorship, and then later in the insurrection. Participants reported that in Esteli, Christian resistance to the dictatorship was made without much direct supervision from the Frente and that, moreover, a majority of the young fighters there were members of the CEBs (Dodson 1991, 169).

As well as organizing the urban poor and *campesinos*, progressive clergy initiated movements among Nicaraguan youth. Christian student movements carried out strikes and church occupations in the 1970s to protest human rights violations. Christian youth moved into poor barrios of the cities to organize the poor around community demands. Some Christian students moved from these communities to joining the Frente (Arellano 1988; D'Escoto 1983, 16; Dodson and Montgomery 1982; Dodson and O'Shaughnessy 1985, 124).

The Christian movement also bolstered FSLN organizations. The mass organization of rural workers in the Sandinista era, the ATC, had its roots in Christian organizing. The Jesuit-founded Agrarian Promotion and Educational Centre (CEPA) and Delegates of the Word helped plantation workers in Carazo and Masaya form Committees of Agricultural Workers to press demands for higher wages and better conditions. These Committees spread throughout the northern Pacific zone. In 1975, the FSLN joined these organizing efforts, and all the Committees were united into the ATC, staffed in part by former CEPA organizers (Ruchwarger 1987, 39-40). CEPA continued to support the Frente after the insurrection.

Similar changes were occurring within the Protestant communities in Nicaragua prior to the insurrection, particularly after the earthquake (Dodson and Montgomery 1982, 167). The Evangelical Committee for Assistance to Development (CEPAD) grouped together Evangelical churches to carry out community development. They later supported the insurrection with food, medical supplies, and support to combatants. By 1980, CEPAD grouped together 800 churches with 250,000 members – 10 per cent of the

population (Dodson and Montgomery 1982, 179n15). After the insurrection, CEPAD maintained a position of critical support for the Frente.

The Christian movement continued to provide the FSLN with a strong base of support after the revolution. “Pastors in poor barrios reported, for example, that almost all of the Catholic youth in their parishes joined the literacy crusade out of Christian commitment to the Revolution. Some of these consciously incorporated the Bible and Christian teachings into their courses” (Dodson and Montgomery 1982, 175). Christian leaders of the CEBs often moved into positions in Sandinista-led mass organizations such as the neighbourhood organizations (CDSs) or the ATC. In doing so, they brought their own interpretation of the revolutionary program.

The Christian movement shared with the Frente a similar view of economic and political barriers to the rights of the majority. However, the Frente was hampered by the authoritarian elements of their ideology, and their historic top-down methods. In contrast, the Frente’s Christian allies were more deeply tied to a tradition of human rights, and their organizing came out of community interests at the grassroots level. The pastoral initiatives that led to movements such as the CEBs had grown out of a democratizing impetus within the church, and emphasized dialogue and ground-up political work.

Women

In prerevolutionary Nicaragua, women were generally excluded from the political sphere and they tended to work at home or in the informal sector. With Somoza’s

cynical use of the 1972 earthquake relief funds to enrich himself, and mounting economic problems, women began to organize against the regime (Ruchwarger 1987, 47). Women's participation in the insurrection was probably larger than in any recent revolution excluding Vietnam (Molyneux 1985, 233).

Formal organization of women was primarily a result of Frente leadership: AMPRONAC (the Association of Women Confronting the National Problem) was founded in 1977 at the suggestion of the FSLN and soon became a Sandinista organization and part of the Frente's popular front. AMPRONAC worked to expose human rights violations under Somoza, and called for the repeal of laws that discriminated against women (Smith 1993, 200-1; Chuchryk 1991, 144). It saw the rights of women as economic and social, as well as political (Ruchwarger 1987, 48). AMPRONAC had from 8,000 to 10,000 members in 1979 (Molyneux 1985, 233; Chuchryk 1991, 144), but many other women participated in anti-regime activities outside of formal organizations.

After the insurrection, AMPRONAC became the mass organization AMNLAE. For much of the Sandinista era, AMNLAE organized women to support the revolution, but tended not to stress women's rights. In the late 1980s, however, this began to change after AMNLAE's leaders began rethinking the organization's role, and AMNLAE adopted a more explicitly feminist stance. As well, women in other organizations began to push women's rights independently of AMNLAE (Chuchryk 1991, 156-157).

The workers' movement

Pre-revolutionary Nicaragua had a weak workers' movement, in part due to repression. Independent trade union organizing began in the 1930s, but was forced underground in 1940 when labour leaders were imprisoned after they published a manifesto commemorating Sandino's death. After a brief period of accommodation between the unions and the dictatorship, workers took to the streets in the late 1950s, but were again repressed through imprisonments.

During the dictatorship union organizing was splintered, and generally focussed on wage demands rather than broad social or political goals. Unions were sometimes co-opted by the dictatorship, and only ten per cent of the urban workforce belonged to trade unions (Ruchwarger 1987, 43).

In the 1960s, FSLN cadres started organizing workers into trade unions in Matagalpa, Jinotega, and Esteli (Smith 1993, 117). In the final years of the dictatorship, radical workplace organizations began to appear, including Workers' Fighting Committees, which included workers with various political tendencies. These Committees later formed the core of the Sandinista labour federation (CST) (Ruchwarger 1987, 45, 101).

However, despite the Frente's efforts to place itself at the head of labour organizing and unite the workers' movement, it met with little success prior to victory. Weber (1981, 121) counted approximately fifty trade unions independent of the FSLN and committed to various political parties, including the Communist Party of Nicaragua,

the Socialist Party of Nicaragua, and the right-wing reformist Nicaraguan Democratic Movement (MDN).

While some unions – linked to ultra-left parties – fought in the insurrection, for the most part the labour movement affected the course of the revolution *after victory*, when both independent and FSLN-led unions benefitted from an upsurge in union organizing. In 1979, there were 133 trade unions with a combined membership of 27,020; by 1983, this had jumped to 1,130 unions with a combined membership of 207,391 (Smith 1993, 147).

While all unions experienced tremendous growth in the immediate post-victory period, it was most pronounced for FSLN-affiliated unions. Between 1979 and 1980, 75 per cent of new unions were affiliated with the FSLN-led CST. By the end of 1980, the FSLN dominated the labour movement (Ruchwarger 1987, 104).

However, the independent unions, affiliated with parties to the left of the Frente as well as to those in the conservative opposition movement, continued to be an obstacle to the Frente's project of uniting workers under its leadership (Weber 1981, 121-3). These unions sometimes regarded the Sandinista urban workers' union, the CST, as representing the interests of the state, not workers (Weber 1981, 123). The conflict among the various independent unions and the CST also reflected the fact that historically, many Nicaraguan unions had been organized, led and staffed by political party activists, and workers in the same sector were sometimes divided among several national labour confederations. The differences among the CST and independent unions

thus echoed the conflicts among the FSLN and other political parties (Weber 1981, 121-4).

The indigenous movement

The sparsely populated Atlantic Coast region was home to most of Nicaragua's ethnic minorities: the Miskito Indians, who were the largest indigenous group; the smaller Carib, Rama, and Sumu Indian groups; a largely English-speaking Black Creole population; and a small Chinese immigrant population in the towns. Coastal society was stratified along ethnic lines, "with the North Americans, the Chinese-American immigrants, the Spanish mestizos who held government posts, and the English-speaking Creoles at the top of the pyramid" (Smith 1993, 229).

While the Atlantic Coast's indigenous peoples had little participation in the anti-Somoza uprising, in the waning days of the dictatorship they began to organize around longstanding grievances. Demands centring on land claims and the right to maintain ethnic identity had been blocked under Somoza. With the regime's collapse, local political organizations could expand and make demands on the central government (Smith 1993 234-5).

The indigenous peoples' organization MISURASATA (Miskitos, Sumu and Rama with the Sandinistas) was launched in November, 1979 with the Frente's support, and was given a seat on the Council of State. MISURASATA began to organize in the Miskito villages. Its aims were to alert villages to their rights and organize them into a significant power bloc (Brownlee 1983, 135).

However, as most Atlantic Coast inhabitants had been inactive in the insurrection, they did not necessarily recognize the Frente's leadership in their struggles. Moreover, while the Pacific Coast struggle was framed in terms of class, the minority groups organized around peoples' rights and self-determination. The indigenous organizations had links to organizations such as Cultural Survival and the American Indian Movement (AIM), which espoused the rights of peoples. MISURASATA's demands soon after the insurrection for political autonomy and self-determination "were undoubtedly influenced by the historic decision on the right to self-determination taken in the 1977 United Nations conference on discrimination against indigenous peoples of the Americas" (Center for Atlantic Coast Research and Documentation (CIDCA) 1986, 128).

This concern for ethnic identity and cultural rights contrasted sharply with the Frente's initial view that the people of the Atlantic Coast suffered mainly from a lack of economic development (Smith 1993; CIDCA 1986, 126). The growth of the indigenous movement soon led to conflict with the revolutionary government, and several Miskito *contra* groups emerged, including one led by MISURASATA leader Steadman Fagoth.

The Frente attempted to mend fences with the indigenous movement as the decade wore on. But whether working with the Frente and or in opposition, indigenous peoples sought to alter government policy to address their group rights.

The Mass Organizations

After victory, many of the ad hoc groups that participated in the insurrection became part of the Sandinista mass organizations. However, the mass organizations

differed from the grassroots movements that preceded them because of their relationship to the FSLN.

The main mass organizations were the neighbourhood organization, the Sandinista Defence Committees (CDS); the Rural Workers Association (ATC); the National Union of Farmers and Cattlemen (UNAG); the labour confederation, the Sandinista Workers Central (CST); the Sandinista Youth (JS 19 J); and the women's organization, AMNLAE.

Some of these groups, such as the CDS and AMNLAE, began with the insurrection, when people organized themselves to resist the dictatorship. But UNAG was begun in 1981, when the party realized that the ATC couldn't adequately represent small farmers. And the Sandinista Youth was created immediately after the victory, to mobilize youth for the revolutionary government's projects.

Perhaps most important were the CDSs, which were descended from the Civil Defence Committees that organized urban neighbourhoods to fight during the two-year insurrectionary war (Walker 1981, 80). These committees had the most diverse membership, as it was defined by residence (Ruchwarger 1987, 161-2). CDSs carried out a wide range of activities in support of the revolution. They ran neighbourhood watches, participated in government programs such as health campaigns, tried to improve housing in the neighbourhoods, organized food distribution, and engaged in political education such as explaining to their members the cause of shortages.

The Frente envisioned the mass organizations, particularly the CDSs, as vehicles of participatory or direct democracy. The party often contrasted its project of "popular

democracy” with “bourgeois democracy,” arguing that for the Sandinista Front, democracy is not confined to elections, but exists when social inequalities diminish and when

the people exerts influence over its government, determines its government... workers’ participation in the management of factories, co-operatives, cultural centres and so on. In short, democracy is mass intervention in every aspect of social life. (Humberto Ortega qtd. in Weber 1981, 112)

Members of mass organizations were supposed to be able to participate in decisions affecting their day-to-day lives, both through participation in projects of the revolution and by shaping national policy. To this end, the mass organizations were represented in the Council of State.

In a sense, the mass organizations were conceived of as schools for democracy, where people would learn how to participate in the political life of the revolution. One of their functions was to be forums for discussion: CDSs often organized discussions of government policies, for example, and AMNLAE organized discussion forums on the draft 1987 constitution. Communication was supposed to flow upwards as well as down, and the organizations were supposed to foster participation and leadership from among the rank and file.

But such ideas were not the whole story. As with the Frente, these ideas were somewhat novel and competed with more authoritarian behaviour. Mass organizations were also sources of distinctly authoritarian, anti-liberal ideas.

The top-down style of the Frente was often reproduced in the mass organizations, as well as its unease with pluralism and dissent. Anthropologists Higgins and Coen paint a vivid picture of these tensions in their account of a CDS meeting in a Managua barrio:

According to Orlando [the CDS coordinator], “to attack the [CDS] committee was like attacking the revolution, and to attack the revolution was to attack the Sandinista party and its programs,” and they – the committee and community – should not allow this to happen. There was much discussion about this, and the mood was that Orlando’s attack was too strong... This example also illustrates a concern felt by many people about the operation of the CDS. The concern was that the CDSs were more than community-based action groups; they were, in fact, the local representative of the Sandinista party... It was also felt that one had to publicly express adherence to the party line in order to get the [CDS] committees to help in terms of getting food cards... (Higgins and Coen 1992, 107-8)

How independent mass organizations were from the party, and how much they were directed by the grassroots, has been a matter of considerable debate.

That the organizations were clearly identified as “Sandinista” and linked to the FSLN is clear. In theory, membership was open to everyone apart from *Somocistas* (supporters of the Somoza dictatorship). But membership does not necessarily mean participation and, as Serra notes, “There were some cases where dissent against the government or the political line of the FSLN was considered a counterrevolutionary attitude and caused the expulsion of individuals from organizations” (1991, 55).

Top and intermediate leaders of mass organizations were selected by the party and the directorate of the mass organization: even when there were elections, the candidates were generally handpicked (Serra 1991, 56-7; Gilbert 1988, 67). Moreover,

while each organization's goals and action plans were supposed to come from its membership, they were often handed down from above (Serra 1991, 57).

On the other hand, the mass organizations often pushed their constituents' interests in opposition to government or party positions. AMNLAE, for example, sponsored widespread public discussion of the legalization of abortion despite the opposition of President Daniel Ortega (Smith 1993, 221-2).

The degree of independence from the FSLN varied from organization to organization. The Sandinista Youth, for example, served as a training ground for party militants (Gilbert 1988, 66). But other organizations displayed considerably more autonomy. UNAG won numerous demands on behalf of its constituency (Ruchwarger 1987, 243). UNAG regional leaders were often not Sandinistas (Spalding 1994, 144) and the organization became increasingly independent as the revolution proceeded (Spalding 1994, 141).

The mass organizations' autonomy also varied over time. With the exception of UNAG, the mass organizations began to lose influence following an initial phase of relative autonomy between 1979 and 1981 (Serra 1991).

To summarize, while the mass organizations encouraged Nicaraguans to participate in public affairs, and ostensibly served as vehicles of free speech and association, they also reflected the authoritarian tendencies of the Frente, including the identification of dissent with counterrevolution.

The Traditional Opposition and the Private Sector

During the Sandinista era, opposition to FSLN rule came primarily from groups which had belonged to the social and economic elite during the Somoza era: the middle and upper classes, the Roman Catholic hierarchy, and the business community. These elites had organized around a revolutionary project which differed from that of the FSLN and its popular organizations.

Prior to the FSLN taking the lead through the FPN (National Patriotic Front) coalition, unarmed opposition to Somoza had been organized under the middle-class-led FAO (Broad Opposition Front). The political program of the FAO reflected a concern with the establishment of liberal freedoms, representative democracy, modernization and the elimination of corruption. Similarly, before Somoza's overthrow, a pastoral letter of the Nicaraguan bishops had interpreted the demands of the Nicaraguan people to be liberal rights and freedoms, including freedom of expression, an independent judiciary, and free elections (O'Shaughnessy 1986, 8).

After the insurrection, the FSLN included in government not only those who had belonged to their FPN coalition, but upper class representatives such as Alfonso Robelo of the MDN, and the prominent Conservative Violeta Chamorro of *La Prensa*.

Gradually, these groups fell away from the FSLN-controlled government. The umbrella business organization COSEP became a core member of the opposition movement. The opposition newspaper, *La Prensa*, and some of the Roman Catholic hierarchy became spokespersons for the opposition movement. As the decade continued,

this camp increasingly identified with the armed rebel or *contra* forces, which included former members of Somoza's forces as well as members of the anti-Somoza coalition.

The opposition movement was an elite movement rather than a mass movement. While the FSLN enjoyed a mass base, "[in] their political competition with the FSLN, none of the traditional opposition political parties, nor any of the new, modern middle-class political organizations, were able to build comparable alliances or organizations among the popular classes" (Weaver and Barnes 1991, 122).

As a result of this lack of organizing among the poor majority, the movement tended to reflect the experiences and world view of middle- and upper-class Nicaraguans. They, particularly urbanites, had an exposure to North American and European values that the poor did not (Spalding 1994, 136-7). In her study of Nicaragua's economic leadership, Spalding (1994, 137) found that forty per cent of study participants had completed their education outside Nicaragua; half of that group did so in the U.S.

The middle- and upper-class experience of Somoza-era repression consisted primarily of restrictions on civil liberties and a corrupt political system. Elites were not the targets of National Guard massacres, nor did they experience economic and social exclusion (Catholic Institute for International Relations (CIIR) 1987, 28; Weber 1981, 26-9, 32-4).

While many middle-class Nicaraguans saw the need for reforms, Spalding (1994) and Walker (1991c, 101-2) both report that well-off Nicaraguans were dismayed by social change:

Many employers now feared their workers. Several young producers I interviewed in 1990 described the outrage and indignation these changing social relations had sparked in their fathers' generation. Some who had come of age in the prerevolutionary period now hesitated to visit their own farms and firms because of concern about a possible confrontation... (Spalding 1994, 113)

Moreover, the movement came to depend on and, to a certain extent be defined by, the United States, rather than by a mass domestic constituency. The reliance of much of the opposition on U.S. support meant that the movement was shaped not only by Nicaraguans but also by the objectives of U.S. foreign policy. For example, the United States would provide funds for opposition factions to set themselves up as separate parties if they would reject any kind of relationship with the revolutionary government (Weaver and Barnes 1991, 134). Weaver and Barnes quote an unidentified PLI member: "It is a tradition for many centre-right political figures in Latin America to find out what the [U.S.] Embassy wants, and then position themselves in hopes that the Embassy will choose them as its instrument" (1991, 134).

Despite the identification of the movement with the middle and upper classes, it cannot be identified with either these classes or the Church hierarchy as a whole. Some middle-class Nicaraguans, business people and clergy continued to support the FSLN. As well, unions linked to opposition parties supported the opposition movement.

Moreover, not all Sandinista opponents subscribed to the hardline stance of organizations such as COSEP. The domestic opponents of the Frente included not only groups that sought a complete rollback of the FSLN's revolution, but also those which

generally supported revolutionary policies while seeking to end the Frente's monopoly on political power.

Nevertheless, the opposition movement came to dominate opposition politics in the Sandinista era, and the ideas around which it sought to mobilize Nicaraguans reflected the experiences of upper-class Nicaraguans and their U.S. allies.

Changing Social Relations in the Nicaraguan Revolution

Following the emergence of popular movements and the mass insurrection against Somoza, Nicaragua's popular classes entered the revolutionary era with new power.

However, this does not mean that the revolution resulted in a wholesale transfer of power to the popular classes. To begin with, the opposition movement emerged at this time. Moreover, while the new revolutionary elite, the FSLN, looked to popular groups for support, it was also subject to pressure from other classes and the United States.

Thus, in the post-victory period, popular movements found themselves locked in a struggle for ascendancy with Nicaragua's traditional elites – and to a certain extent, with the Frente itself.

The following section first details the contest among these revolutionary actors, and then assesses the new social relations that were taking shape in the revolutionary era.

The Struggle Among Popular Classes and Elites

Despite the FSLN's long-range goal of fundamental social change and a transition to socialism, the FSLN-controlled government espoused a mixed economy, a pluralistic

state, and a non-aligned foreign policy. This program was shaped by the Frente's recognition that the bourgeoisie was necessary to Nicaragua's reconstruction and development.

Having preserved a private sector, the Frente had to balance its commitment to "the logic of the majority" with the need to maintain support among the middle and upper classes. Thus, while the revolutionary government sought to increase the gains of the popular classes, this effort was moderated by its attempts to gain elite cooperation. As a result, as will be seen, popular movements encountered obstacles due to elite influence as well as FSLN authoritarianism.

For two years following victory, the FSLN-led government embarked on measures to effect rapid social change and consolidate its base among the popular classes. Health and literacy campaigns, agrarian reform legislation, the creation of cooperatives, and price controls and subsidies – all increased consumption levels and social benefits for the poor (Stahler-Sholk 1990, 60; Grynspar 1991).

This period was characterized by a high degree of popular mobilization. The mass organizations had seen an explosion of growth following the victory, and carried out many government functions, including implementing social programs and campaigns, policing neighbourhoods, collecting census information, and monitoring prices (Serra 1991; Grynspar 1991).

During the 1979-1982 period, the Frente encouraged mass organizations to be relatively autonomous, pressing the demands of their members (Serra 1991, 62). In fact, during this period the popular classes were a driving force behind social change, not

merely the recipients of the Frente's beneficence. In 1980, the FSLN unions joined with other unions in strikes and plant takeovers that continued until the government passed legislation against capital flight in 1981 (Serra 1991, 62). Similarly, organized *campesinos* and rural workers in UNAG and the ATC pressured the government to speed up agrarian reform (Serra 1991, 62; Ruchwarger 1987, 225).

However, this period of rapid change also saw the breakdown of the Sandinistas' coalition with middle-class and private sector organizations, whose positions were being weakened by anti-decapitalization legislation, confiscations, the nationalization of parts of the economy, and a Council of State stacked against them. The internal opposition from these groups was soon coupled with external military and economic pressures. In 1981 the United States began supporting the armed opposition (*contras*) and launched an economic embargo; soon after, they began blocking foreign credit. The U.S. economic embargo and its sponsorship of the *contras* undermined the Frente's abilities to carry out its programs and encouraged authoritarian behaviour.

Increasingly, popular movements found the Sandinista regime blocking their demands as it became concerned with survival. In the period following 1982, many lower-class gains came under attack. Economic deterioration led to a claw-back in social benefits and living standards, particularly in the late 1980s (Ricciardi 1991; Stahler-Sholk 1990). The Frente adopted a top-down approach to the mass organizations, subordinating members' needs to the overall demands of the war effort and economic recovery (Serra 1991; Stahler-Sholk 1990).

Part and parcel of these changes was the increasing leverage gained by the private sector and middle classes as the Frente sought their cooperation in ending the economic crisis and shoring up international support. The 1984 elections ushered in a new state structure designed along liberal democratic lines, and the mass organizations lost their representation in the legislature (Azicri 1991; Lobel 1991). By 1988, with the Frente seeking to mend fences with the private sector, government policy began to favour the interests of private producers (Spalding 1994, 105-118).

By the time the Sandinista regime entered the final years of the decade, it had undergone a dual process of deradicalization and liberalization. Participation in the mass organizations had dropped off, despite reform efforts in 1985 and 1988 (Serra 1991; Stahler-Sholk 1990). The government's 1988 introduction of IMF-style adjustment measures, endorsed by COSEP, did little to shore up popular support for the FSLN (Stahler-Sholk 1990, 64). In 1988, popular groups were mobilizing *against* the government, instead of with its support: Serra (1991) reports a series of land seizures and wildcat strikes outside the FSLN-led unions, for example.

Seeking an end to the *contra* war and external pressures, the government began talks with the domestic opposition in 1987 and began to lift restrictions on civil liberties and opposition party activity. In 1989, the Frente secured the participation of the opposition movement in the 1990 elections in exchange for further liberalization (Goodfellow and Morrell 1991).

Assessing Social Change

By the end of the decade, the Frente's commitment to the popular classes had yielded relatively little in the way of material benefits to these sectors. Initial increases in living standards and social benefits had been eroded by the *contra* war, the economic crisis, and government policies intended to gain private sector cooperation.

However, while popular demands were often stymied by the private sector and the FSLN, this does not mean social relations had failed to change. Compared to prerevolutionary times, the popular classes had clearly gained power – although the bourgeoisie and middle class retained some. Popular groups remained the main power base of the Frente throughout the period, and had more influence on state policy than in the Somoza era.

Ironically, one of the most telling signs of social change was the confrontations between the FSLN and their popular allies. As a result of the revolutionary upsurge in popular organization, excluded groups were increasingly able to challenge state authorities. Notably in the 1979-1981 period, but also throughout the decade, mass organizations and unions won concessions from the government and shaped policy (Serra 1991; Ruchwarger 1987).

Popular influence survived the FSLN loss to a U.S.-backed opposition coalition in the 1990 elections. The room for Violeta Chamorro's Unified Nicaraguan Opposition (UNO) government to manoeuvre was limited. Constraints came from the Frente, who had a strong party organization and retained significant influence in the armed forces,

and from popular groups, who acted independently of the FSLN leadership to defend revolutionary gains (Spalding 1994, 165; Burbach 1994):

By July 1990, Managua was paralysed by massive strikes and demonstrations in the streets... The Sandinista party leadership had not called for the general strike, and in fact many leaders believed that a period of social peace, even austerity, was necessary for the country to move forward. The Sandinistas were divided between the leadership which at times moved in tandem with the Chamorro government in quest of stability, and the popular sectors which were willing to take to the streets... (Burbach 1994).

Despite the erosion of the mass organizations during the final years of the Sandinista era, Sandinista unions resisted attempts to reverse gains in areas such as agrarian reform and social services following the 1990 election (Walker 1991c; Arnove 1994; Baumeister 1991, 243).

More so than redistributive economic policies, the Frente's project of participatory democracy helped improve the position of the popular classes.

The popular democracy envisioned by the Frente was not an unmitigated success and, to paraphrase Molyneux (1985), often meant the mobilization of popular classes without their emancipation. Most of the institutions of "popular democracy," such as the CDSs, the *cabildos abiertos* (local meetings between workers and state councillors), and mass organization representation in the Council of State, did not enable people to mandate or appoint their representatives (Weber 1981, 115-117).

Nevertheless, despite authoritarianism within organizations such as the CDSs,

by creating the mass organizations and by preaching the gospel of democratic participation in a society with traditionally low levels of political mobilization, the FSLN has evoked new expectations and trained a grassroots leadership where none existed before. (Gilbert 1988, 76)

Observers of CDSs describe both authoritarian and democratic effects on barrio (neighbourhood) life. Anthropologist Stener Ekern concluded that the CDSs functioned in a top-down manner, their actions amounting to “Street domination and the carrying out of orders of the patron” (Mijeski 1991a). On the other hand, Higgins and Coen’s anthropological study of a lower-class barrio in Managua concludes that the CDS had been the means of involving those residents in local political life for the first time:

The issues to which these residents directed their new power were not about changing the whole world, but about getting a polluting battery shop closed or attempting to get the prices of cheese lowered... For these residents, empowerment does mean a process for local control and development. It means that they are the designers of their community within the boundaries of the power to which they have access. (Higgins and Coen 1992, 159)

The revolution also opened the door to the organization of the Atlantic Coast’s indigenous peoples around longstanding demands, and ushered in the beginnings of a women’s movement.

With the revolution, Nicaragua’s indigenous peoples had new opportunities to pursue their rights, including group cultural rights. While the newly-organized indigenous people came into conflict with the government, some even joining the armed opposition, they nevertheless influenced government policy. By the middle of the decade, the FSLN was working on an autonomy plan for the Atlantic region. In 1987, the Atlantic Coast became two autonomous regions with their own elected assemblies, which were designed to control the exploitation of the area’s natural resources (Smith 1993, 239). The indigenous organization Yatama campaigned on the Atlantic Coast and won a seat in the National Assembly in 1990 (Reding 1991a, 43). Compared to the Somoza era,

then, the Atlantic Coast peoples had gained more participation in national life and more power to shape government policies affecting them.

Women also experienced an improvement, albeit limited, in their status. Discriminatory legislation was abolished, educational levels increased (Chuchryk 1991, 158), and participation in the work force rose to levels comparable with most industrialized countries (Chuchryk 1991, 148). In 1985, an unprecedented 40,000 women participated in discussions organized by mass organization AMNLAE to identify their concerns. In 1988, Atlantic Coast women founded the “Nidea White” women’s organization. The issue of abortion was widely discussed for the first time during the Sandinista era.

In short, the revolution produced a state with a far broader base than in any previous period of Nicaragua’s history. The emergence of social movements during the anti-Somoza struggle, coupled with Sandinista government policies, contributed to the general entry of the Nicaraguan people into political life.

A major structural change concerns the level of political institutionalization in a society with only two weak elite parties and no representation for the lower-income sectors. The Sandinista revolution incorporated the majority of the population into the political process and institutionalized popular participation through the FSLN and the mass organizations. (Grynspan 1991, 111)

While the popular classes experienced the most dramatic increase in power, the revolution also meant greater political participation for the bourgeoisie: “Economic elites who, for decades, had remained politically passive and had consigned the political

world to the Somoza family were drawn into the political wranglings of the times” (Spalding 1994, 187).

Regardless of changes in government, the revolution had changed the terms of political debate. Notably, in the 1990 elections, UNO’s campaign suggested they would not roll back the revolution, but rather were its legitimate heirs (Selbin 1993, 129; Weaver and Barnes 1991, 137). The 1987 constitution, which enshrined the revolution’s reforms, has survived the Chamorro administration and, so far, that of Chamorro’s right-wing successor, President Arnoldo Alemán. The unions remained a powerful force in the 1990s for defending revolutionary reforms and constitutional rights. For example, almost eight years after the Frente lost control of the government, President Alemán would find that he was unable to reverse land reform due to organized grassroots opposition (Nicaragua. Land reform reformed 1997).

This thesis confines its discussion of social relations change to the pre-1990 period as its purpose is to examine how social change shaped press freedom up to 1990. As has been discussed, power did noticeably shift towards previously marginalized peoples during this time.

While in the period after 1990 more conservative political forces were restored to power, this cannot be equated with a restoration of prerevolutionary conditions. As outlined above, Nicaraguans entering the 1990s had experienced a degree of political activism and popular organization unknown in the Somoza era.

Having examined the fate of the revolution’s social struggles, the next step is to understand the media environment and discourse of press freedom within which these

movements developed. The next two chapters discuss Nicaragua's media environment and the different ideas of press freedom that competing movements brought into the revolutionary period.

As we have seen, the opposing movements of the post-victory period had clashing visions of the revolution, rooted in the different collective experiences that led them to oppose Somoza in the first place. Upper-class opponents of Somoza had reacted to the suppression of liberal freedoms; popular movements had emphasized people's economic and social rights, or their rights as an ethnic group. Similarly, these movements would champion different, sometimes competing, ideas of press freedom in the post-victory period.

The contest between these movements and the success of each would determine the various elements of press freedom that emerged in Sandinista Nicaragua.

CHAPTER 6

THE MEDIA ENVIRONMENT BEFORE AND AFTER THE INSURRECTION

Introduction

The struggles over press freedom during the Sandinista years took place within a media environment that had many continuities with the Somoza era, including many of the same media organizations and material conditions. At the same time, however, the collapse of the Somoza state allowed the revolutionary government to break with the prerevolutionary legal framework and pattern of media ownership.

This chapter describes, first, Nicaragua's prerevolutionary press system and, second, the changes in this media environment following Somoza's overthrow.

The chapter is intended to provide the context for the discussions of Chapters 8 and 9, in which I will explore changes in the degree and nature of press freedom during the first decade of the revolution.

To evaluate these changes, we must have a baseline picture of press freedom at the beginning of the period. Therefore, in the following description of Nicaragua's media environment, I focus on the limits to press freedom that characterized the Somoza era.

The Prerevolutionary Press System

If we were to take its numerous constitutions at face value, prerevolutionary Nicaragua would appear to have possessed a libertarian press system. In reality, authoritarianism overshadowed weak, largely formalistic liberal freedoms. Constitutional guarantees notwithstanding, censorship and other forms of government pressure on the media had a long history.

The economic base of the press in prerevolutionary Nicaragua resembled that of many liberal systems. Privately owned media, financed in part through advertising and sales, competed in a relatively open market.¹ But while liberal theory would expect this to promote independence from government² (Siebert 1978, 52-53), in Nicaragua, the press had become largely a tool of government. Much of the press was owned by the dictator and his allies, so that de facto state ownership of the media extended far beyond official state media.

Non-governmental constraints on communication were perhaps even more pronounced than those stemming directly from the tactics of the dictatorship. In a nation of marked social and economic inequality, the majority of the population not only did not possess the means to express their views through the press, but also were often unable to receive broadcasts or read the papers.

The next three sections discuss each of these aspects of the prerevolutionary press system.

¹ While the market was relatively open, newspapers espousing communist ideologies were illegal.

² While *Four Theories*' definition of the authoritarian press model also includes private ownership, there it does not involve an open market, but rather, monopolies granted by the state.

Authoritarianism and Censorship

While the Somoza regime's constitutions paid lip service to civil liberties, including press freedom and free speech, the law was of little value in Nicaragua. The Somozas changed constitutions and laws to suit their purposes. The legal system

could be charitably described as a disgrace. Somoza's notorious National Guard had nearly unfettered discretion to serve as judge, jury and executioner in criminal matters and in dealing with political opponents... The country's lawyers devoted themselves almost exclusively to real estate and contract matters for the wealthier families. (Smith 1993, 146)

The judiciary itself was corrupt (Lawyers Committee, 1985, 29). In short, the presence of the National Guard and the weakness of the rule of law ensured that legal freedoms were unenforceable.

Moreover, while the Constitution of 1950 guaranteed "the free utterance and dissemination of thought, without prejudice to any liability that might arise for crimes and abuses committed in the exercise of such freedom" (Läpple-Wagenhals 1984, 96), this did not prevent legal censorship of the press. The president could declare a state of seige during an economic emergency or during times of unrest, or martial law in times of war; such declarations suspended this right. While most countries have provisions to limit freedoms in times of war or emergency, in Nicaragua the denial of civil liberties constituted the norm rather than the exception.

The entire Somoza era was marked by periods of official press censorship of newspapers, radio, and television as well as government closings of newspapers and radio stations. In particular, press censorship was renewed during elections (Läpple-

Wagenhals 1984, 110). The opposition paper *La Prensa*, which in the 1950s followed the practice of replacing censored stories with pictures of Ava Gardner, at times “would look more like an Ava Gardner fan magazine than a newspaper” (Nichols 1982, 185). In the years leading up to his overthrow, Anastasio Somoza Debayle declared both a state of seige and martial law.

In the early 1960s, a law that allowed the silencing of radio and television stations for “disturbing public order” (Läpple-Wagenhals 1984, 96) became known as the Black Code. Violations of the Code were not judged by the courts but rather, “the supposed violations were only known to the director of the Office of Radio and TV who was assigned to the National Guard” (Rothschuh Villanueva 1986, 30). In the last two years of the dictatorship, there were more than 100 shutdowns of news programs under the Radio and TV Code (Rothschuh Villanueva 1986, 29, 32). A similar law allowed the confiscation of press equipment.

The regime also employed a variety of extralegal methods to control the unfriendly press. It sought to counter the influence of opposition media by owning the major daily *Novedades*; radio stations; and one of the two television networks (Läpple-Wagenhals 1984). Government advertising was withheld from unfriendly media, newsprint was hoarded, heavy taxes were levied on machinery and repair parts needed by the opposition press, and unfriendly journalists were denied access to official sources (Nichols 1982, 185). Some journalists were also reportedly bribed (Läpple-Wagenhals 1984, 137).

When legal and economic measures were not sufficient, the regime resorted to physical force. Journalists were jailed, tortured, and sometimes murdered (Läpple-Wagenhals 1984, 109). The most notable instance of this was the assassination of the popular editor of *La Prensa*, Pedro Joaquin Chamorro, on January 10, 1978, which was widely attributed to the regime, and the later bombing of *La Prensa*'s offices by the National Guard during the insurrection.

Force was also used against international media. During the final days of the regime, foreign journalists needed prior authorization from the Presidential Press Office to file reports to their news organizations. Journalists were prohibited from receiving calls from abroad, and the National Guard was actually posted at the Intercontinental Hotel – the main Managua hotel equipped for international communications – to enforce these restrictions (*Foreign Broadcast Information Service Daily Reports*, July 19, 1979, p. 18).³ On June 20, 1979, ABC newsman Bill Stewart was killed by members of the National Guard (FBIS June 21, 1979, p.7).

During the final days of the Somoza regime, threats of force were also used by the FSLN to control the press. On June 26, 1979, Radio Sandino warned that radio stations operating without the permission of the Frente would be considered in the service of the dictatorship. Somoza's radio stations were declared military targets (FBIS June 26, 1979, p.11).

³The Foreign Broadcast Information Service produces translations of foreign media reports, which are published by the United States Department of Commerce. It will be referred to as FBIS in subsequent references.

Media Independence

In general, the Nicaraguan media were neither “watchdogs” on government nor open forums for public debate. While the media were privately owned, and a few, notably the newspaper *La Prensa*, sought to offer an independent version of the news, the government had no need to censor much of the media due to the high degree of media ownership by the Somoza family and their allies.

Media were owned primarily by the church hierarchy, the Somozist state, and political-economic elites. Ownership was highly concentrated. Radio ownership was concentrated in two groups. One was the Somozas, who owned the private stations Radio Managua, Union Radio, and Radio Station X (Serra 1986, 51) in addition to controlling state-owned radio; the other was run by businessman M. Arana Valle, who headed two networks constituting half of all radio stations in the 1950s (Läpple-Wagenhals 1984, 74). In the 1970s, except for one station, Televisora Continental, television was in the hands of two companies, one owned by the Somozas and the other by the Sacasa family (Läpple-Wagenhals 1984, 86). A survey of the world press by J.C. Merrill, C.R. Bryan, and M. Alisky reports that by 1970, the only daily of six not owned or controlled by the Somoza family was *La Prensa* (cited in Läpple-Wagenhals 1984, 57). The number of dailies had steadily declined under the dictatorship until after 1972 only Somoza’s *Novedades* and Chamorro’s *La Prensa* were published in Managua (Läpple-Wagenhals 1984, 57).

While the dictatorship’s domination of the media was pronounced, ownership was not a press control strategy solely of the Somoza era. The Nicaraguan media were

traditionally the tools of rulers and their political competitors (Nichols 1982; 1985). (As a result the press had not, as it had in North America, developed ideals of nonpartisanship and objectivity.) Over many years the Nicaraguan media were generally established by political factions:

The nation's first newspaper, *El Telegrafo Nicaraguense*, was founded in 1835 by the president of the country, Jose Zepeda, mostly as a political tool rather than a means of disseminating news. In the following century and a half, most newspapers were founded to espouse the cause of a local *caudillo*⁴, economic or other special interest groups, or, most often, one of Nicaragua's two major political parties – the Liberal or the Conservative. (Nichols 1982, 183)

Accordingly, opposing the Liberal Somoza family's *Novedades* was the Conservative Chamorro family's *La Prensa* – although *La Prensa* did become more than a mouthpiece for a Conservative faction.

Similarly, broadcasting began not as a news medium but as a weapon of the state. The first radio station, Radio Nacional, was begun by the U.S. Marines in 1931 to solve the problem of rebel disruption of military communications (Brownlee 1983, 50). The government-controlled Radio Nacional was publicly identifying itself as the voice of the National Guard in 1979 (FBIS July 18, 1979 p. 18). Lpple-Wagenhals (1984, 72) reports that there was virtually no distinction between military and government radio.

This dependent role was also evident in private broadcasting. The private Radio Corporacin, the most popular radio station in the 1970s, was connected to Conservative political forces; Radio Catlica was run by the Roman Catholic Church (Lpple-Wagenhals 1984, 75, 79-80).

⁴*Caudillo* is a Spanish term for a military or political leader.

The link between the media and the various competitors for political power continued into the Sandinista era. Media executives were often simultaneously leaders of the opposition movement or members of the FSLN. The most notable example of this after 1979 was Pedro Joaquin Chamorro Jr., who was at various times a shareholder, editor and co-director of *La Prensa*; an official of the opposition Social Democratic Party; a leader of the Costa Rica-based contra force; and a member of the board of directors of the Inter American Press Association, an organization with a strong laissez-faire interpretation of press freedom. The newspaper *La Prensa* was endorsed by the Democratic Coordinating Board (FBIS, February 5, 1982 p. 10) and the head of the Nicaraguan Catholic church, Archbishop (later Cardinal) Obando y Bravo.

The close association between the media and political forces in Nicaragua complicates examinations of press freedom. Arrests of journalists were not always simply attacks on press freedom. For example, before 1979, some of *La Prensa*'s staff were also members of FSLN cells (Kunzle 1986, 56). In the Sandinista era, editor Pedro Chamorro Jr. was on one occasion detained by the government for meeting with and signing an agreement with *contra* leaders (Breslin 1988).

Part of the solution to this problem is to evaluate the circumstances surrounding each particular arrest or imprisonment of a journalist, giving less weight to cases involving illegal, nonjournalistic activities, particularly armed activity. The arrest of a member of a guerrilla organization such as the FSLN should be given less weight, for example, than that of a journalist who has just published an anti-government news story and whom independent observers report is not engaged in other activities. However, in

most cases, state repression of the press involves not simply the isolated arrest of a correspondent, but a pattern of measures, including censorship and pressures on media units as a whole.

Exclusion of the Majority

The origins of the mass media in Nicaragua, coupled with a particularly unequal social structure, had contributed to a prerevolutionary press system that in many ways resembled that of an earlier era in Anglo-American history: John Spicer Nichols (1982) characterizes the prerevolutionary media as a class media, rather than mass media. Not only were the media controlled by elites, their audiences were also largely elite. Both the freedom to disseminate news and opinion through the press, and the freedom to receive it, were limited effectively to a privileged minority.

For the majority, the print media of the Somoza era were irrelevant. The literacy rate ranged from 38.4 per cent in 1950 to 53.1 per cent in 1975 (Grynspan 1991, 93). Newspapers reached rural areas only by subscription, with some areas having no newspaper circulation at all (Läpple-Wagenhals 1984, 56). Books in Nicaragua were “inordinately expensive” (Brownlee 1983, 55).

Few papers were aimed at the poorer classes: Läpple-Wagenhals (1984, 55) says *La Verdad*, appearing in 1935, was the first paper to sell for one centavo. Papers aimed at the poor tended to be left-wing party papers, illegal under the Somozas.

Prior to 1979, television reception was restricted to urban areas where consumers were concentrated. The sparsely populated Atlantic Coast was completely excluded

(Fung 1981, 67; Mattelart 1986, 11). Lack of electricity in some rural areas was a further barrier to television reception.

Radio was the most truly mass medium, accessible to rural people as well as urban (Smith 1993, 158; Läpple-Wagenhals 1984, 78). Even in the case of radio, however, broadcasting was concentrated in Managua (Läpple-Wagenhals 1984, 77). Nichols (1982) reports that the number of radio receivers was among the lowest in the Americas.

Given the elite ownership of the media, the poor majority had few means of communicating their opinions. Apart from a scarcity both of media aimed at their class and of media owned by non-elites, poor communications and transportation infrastructure impeded news reporting in rural areas. Telephone service, for instance, was concentrated in wealthier neighbourhoods of urban areas (Läpple-Wagenhals 1984, 46-48).

Moreover, in some media, foreign material took up a great deal of space. Somewhere in the area of 80 to 95 per cent of television programming was foreign, mostly from the United States: Nicaragua lacked TV studios and adequate production staff (Fung 1981, 67; Walker 1991c, 95; Mattelart 1986, 11). There was no documentary film tradition. The lives of the vast majority of Nicaraguans were thus invisible in this medium; television content, while largely foreign, most nearly reflected the tastes and interests of the Somoza family and other economic elites, who “fervently embraced the mass culture of the United States” (Dore 1985, 416).

A less tangible barrier to the communication rights of the ordinary citizen was the existence of what Paulo Freire has termed a “culture of silence.” The majority’s exclusion from press freedom was part of a larger pattern of political and cultural exclusion. Many lacked sufficient education to understand what they heard on the radio. Living in a society of rigid social divisions and repression, including mass killings by the National Guard (Lawyers Committee 1985, 13), had given many people no experience of or desire to take part in the kind of public discussion that characterizes a free society.

In Nicaragua, particularly in the rural areas, those in the field reported a “traditional sense of powerlessness and lack of self-esteem... passive acquiescence to anyone they perceived as exuding power” (Hirshon 1983, 91). Juan Molina, as president of the Union of Nicaraguan Journalists (UPN), commented that early attempts by journalists to interview the peasant were difficult as “in the beginning, he was not able to speak, because he feared the microphone” (Läpple-Wagenhals 1984, 146). In short, many citizens lacked not only the material means to exercise press freedom, but also the cultural and intellectual means.

The Media Landscape After the Insurrection

Following the insurrection, the legal framework and economic structure of Nicaragua’s media changed. Both the Nicaraguan constitution and specific media laws were replaced; prominent media disappeared or changed hands, and new media were founded.

As in the Somoza era, the new legal framework, first, recognized freedom of the press and, second, provided a legal basis for the state to restrict this freedom. However, it also introduced new ideas of communication freedom.

The new revolutionary state abolished the Somoza-era laws restricting press freedom, including the notorious “Black Code” on radio and television, and officially recognized communication freedoms. The last constitution of the Somoza era was replaced by a Basic Statute promulgated on July 20, 1979, which affirmed the rights contained in the Universal and American Declarations of Human Rights and other international human rights instruments (Fragaso and Arturo 1980, 32). On August 21, 1979, the JGRN issued the Statute on the Rights of Nicaraguans, Decree No. 52, which included a restatement of the rights of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. This statute established the “freedom to seek, receive, and distribute information and ideas” (Fragaso and Arturo 1980, 78). The following year the government signed the American Convention on Human Rights and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (Catholic Institute for International Relations (CIIR) 1987, 11).⁵ While Somoza-era constitutions had recognized a freedom to disseminate thought, this affirmation and incorporation of multiple international human rights instruments was a significant change.

⁵ The *American Convention on Human Rights* of the Organization of American States states that everyone has the right “to seek, receive, and impart information and ideas of all kinds, regardless of frontiers, either orally, in writing, in print, in the form of art, or through any other medium of one’s choice”; that this right cannot be subject to prior censorship but shall be subject to liability; and that freedom of expression may not be limited by indirect means such as the abuse of controls over newsprint (Article 13). It also establishes a right of reply or correction through the media (Article 14). The *International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights* of the United Nations, using almost identical wording, also guarantees that “everyone shall have the right to freedom of expression” (Article 19).

The new legal framework also placed restrictions on press freedom. As in the Somoza era, some restrictions were on the grounds of national security and public order; others supported the new aims of development and public service. The Statute on the Rights and Guarantees allowed legislation restricting freedom of information in the interest of national security, crime prevention, morality, or the reputations or rights of others (Läpple-Wagenhals 1984, 98-99). On August 16, 1979, the “General Provisional Law on the Mass Media” and its accompanying regulations were passed. It introduced the regulation of journalists, requiring them to belong to the pro-FSLN Union of Nicaraguan Journalists (UPN) or the Managua Radio Journalists Trade Union⁶, and took over the licensing and regulation of radio and television (Fragaso and Arturo 1980, 40). The provisional media law also directed the media to demonstrate concern for the defence of the revolution and reconstruction (Läpple-Wagenhals 1984, 98-99). For the first time the media were required to perform certain public service functions, such as the free broadcast of programs of an educational or cultural nature (Läpple-Wagenhals 1984, 116).

In addition, the provisions of the Statute on Rights and Guarantees, including freedom of information, could be suspended during a state of emergency. The first State of Emergency under the new government was decreed on July 24, 1979, and included the passing of the Law on the Maintenance of Public Order and Security, followed in September 1980 by the related Decrees 511 and 512. The Law on the Maintenance of Public Order provided prison terms for distributing information intended to “damage the

⁶ The requirement of belonging to UPN was soon reversed, however.

popular interests and abolish conquests achieved by the people”; this was altered in August 1980 to information intended to undermine “national security; the economy; public order; health; morals; the judicial power; ‘dignity of persons, the reputations and rights of others’; and ‘the legitimately constituted authorities’” (Amnesty International 1986, 15). Decrees 511 and 512 required that reporting of a wide range of information deemed to affect national security or the economy be submitted to the government before it could be published (Läpple-Wagenhals 1984, 100).

The new legal framework’s most notable break with prerevolutionary tradition was its introduction of new ideas of press freedom, including the idea that freedom of information could not be restricted by economic power. The media law stated that

freedom of information is one of the basic principles of any authentic democracy. The government should assure that there is no possibility that the means of communications are restricted through the direct or indirect domination of the economic power of any given group. This is the only way to assure the independence of the press (qtd. in Dirección de Divulgación y Prensa de la JGRN, 1982, 8).

The revolutionary state’s economy changed from the prerevolutionary free enterprise system to a mixed economy. Accordingly, mass media ownership changed from being almost completely private to a more even split between private and public ownership.

Television, which before the revolution was privately owned, was completely nationalized, a move justified partially on the grounds that TV had been in the hands of the Somoza family and a corporation of the pro-Somoza Sacasa family. The Somoza-owned station was confiscated in July 1979, and the other channel, Televiscentro, in

August 1980, when the two were fused to form the new Sistema Sandinista de Television (Mattelart 1986, 9).

Similarly, those radio stations owned by the Somoza family and by conservative media entrepreneur Mariano Valle were confiscated. The FSLN took over the Somoza-owned Radio Equis for its station, Radio Sandino, which had begun broadcasting during the insurrection using portable equipment. The government station Radio Nacional was taken over by the new government and renamed La Voz de Nicaragua. Other confiscated radio stations were organized into CORADEP (the People's Corporation of Radio Broadcasting) on April 26, 1981.

Those radio stations that were not nationalized largely continued with their prerevolutionary owners.⁷ Among the most prominent private stations were Radio Católica, which covered most of the Pacific Coast, and Radio Corporación, which could be heard nationwide. Radio Católica was owned by the Roman Catholic church and controlled by Archbishop (later Cardinal) Obando y Bravo and station director Father Bismarck Carballo, press secretary of the Archdiocese of Managua. The private Managua-based stations Radio Corporación, Radio Mil and the local Radio Minuto were interrelated by ownership and management, and linked to a faction of the Conservative party.⁸ All of Radio Corporación's journalists, and 87.5 per cent of Radio Católica's, belonged to the opposition Nicaraguan Journalists Association (APN) in 1982.

⁷The following information relies heavily on Lápplé-Wagenhals 1984.

⁸Radio Mil was confiscated in November 1983 and became part of the CORADEP network (FBIS November 18, 1983 p. 21).

In Nicaragua, radio station owners often chose to rent air time to journalists, who would produce radio news programs and in turn sell time to advertisers. Thus, a station could air news programs of several different editorial organizations. In practice, however, the news programming of the most popular private stations generally reflected the politics of the station's owners. Similarly, while CORADEP stations each produced news programs independently, these all followed a broad political line determined by CORADEP.

In 1985, the split between private and government-owned radio stations was approximately 50-50, with the same ratio for radio news programs (Smith 1993, 158).⁹

The newspaper press remained, as before, privately owned, and was dominated by two, later three, dailies. *Barricada*, the official paper of the FSLN, was set up with the help of international donations and the former *Novedades* presses; *La Prensa* remained in the hands of the Chamorro family; and *El Nuevo Diario* was founded in April 1980 by the former editor and shareholder of *La Prensa*, Xavier Chamorro, after a dispute with other family members over the editorial line of the paper. *La Prensa* quickly became the opposition newspaper after the split; *El Nuevo Diario*, pro-government.

Despite the shift to state ownership in broadcasting, advertising remained the primary source of financing for all mass media, although most of the international advertising agencies pulled out of the country, and the largest national advertising agency was now owned by the state, not the private sector (Läpple-Wagenhals 1984, 129-131).

⁹ State news programs were aired on CORADEP stations.

While international news services remained available, a national news agency, Agencia Nueva Nicaragua, was founded on October 19, 1979. It was financed by pro-FLSN papers, the UPN, and international donations (Läpple-Wagenhals 1984, 121-2). Foreign television and radio broadcasts also remained available, including contra radio stations.

Conclusion

The Nicaraguan revolution inherited a press system that from its very beginnings was characterized by government control and inequality, and in which constitutional nods to free speech and a free market system had failed to ensure press freedom.

Responding to the Somoza legacy of authoritarianism and exclusion, the revolutionary government established a new legal and economic framework for the Nicaraguan media immediately following the insurrection. State media ownership greatly increased, and a new constitution and media laws introduced ideas such as public service and equality of access.

Despite these changes, the media environment retained many continuities with the Somoza era. The balance of the private media remained, the main difference being that facilities previously controlled by the Somoza dictatorship were now in the hands of the revolutionary state. As before, there were both legal guarantees for, and legal restrictions on, press freedom.

Moreover, the deficiencies of Nicaragua's press system did not evaporate on July 19, 1979. For the next ten years of the Nicaraguan revolution, both the government and

the various movements of the revolution would battle against authoritarianism and inequality in the media system, albeit with more leverage than they had under the Somoza dictatorship.

The remaining chapters will examine how the Sandinista and opposition movements shaped press freedom in revolutionary society.

CHAPTER 7

DIFFERENT MOVEMENTS, DIVERSE FREEDOMS

The struggle for press freedom in prerevolutionary Nicaragua was in large part the confrontation between an authoritarian state and its middle- and upper-class opponents, who increasingly rallied around the cause of press freedom in the years leading up to the insurrection. This struggle focussed on freeing the press from government control.

The rise to power of the FSLN redefined the boundaries of that struggle. Defence of the mass media from the state was now joined by the championing of a new, more participatory press freedom by the Frente and the grassroots movements. In this articulation of press freedom, citizens and groups had rights of access to and participation in the means of mass communication.

In the Sandinista era, the power struggle between the revolutionary government and the opposition meant that these two projects tended to be separate, sometimes even opposed. Participatory forms of press freedom were championed by the Frente and popular movements. The opposition movement confined its fight to libertarian concepts of press freedom, rejecting both participatory press freedom and other elements of liberal press freedom, such as social responsibility.

However, while some groups were the sole or main proponents of certain ideas,

the movements also shared certain common elements in their articulations of press freedom. For example, during the insurrection the FSLN and its popular allies, as well as the middle-class opposition, organized against censorship. After victory, government authoritarianism was opposed by some of the Frente's own members and popular allies as well as opposition members.

This chapter outlines the ideas and experiences of press freedom of the various actors in the Nicaraguan revolution. It is arranged according to the three main axes of conflict during the Sandinista era: the struggles among the FSLN, the various popular movements, and the opposition.

The press freedoms described here together constitute the discourse of press freedom in Nicaragua. From the combined struggles of the various groups in Nicaragua's revolution, a new dominant articulation of press freedom for the revolutionary era began to emerge. The next two chapters trace the development of this new articulation out of the elements described below.

The Frente

The Frente's ideological pluralism and its broad range of alliances meant it was exposed to several shaping influences: the liberal tradition of its middle- and upper-class allies; Latin American work on participatory communication; the ideas of the new Christian movements; and Marxist-Leninist – particularly Cuban – communications methods.

The press freedom ideas the FSLN adopted were determined both by its own

experience of Somoza-era limits on communication – legal and extralegal, social and economic – and by the experiences of other Marxist and revolutionary movements. Thus, while FSLN support for liberal, economic and social rights suggests it would seek a press freedom reflecting all these rights, human rights were only one part of FSLN ideology. As a Marxist-Leninist vanguard, the FSLN had a strong bias against libertarian forms of press freedom.

Party statements reveal, first, a new conception of press freedom as access and participation – as the removal of social, economic, and institutional barriers to the majority's exercise of press freedom – and, second, a rejection of libertarian interpretations of liberal press freedom.

The Frente promoted a revolutionary journalism that included the new communications ideas of participation and access being developed in Latin America and international forums in the 1960s and 1970s. Guillermo Rothschuch Villanueva, a member of the FSLN's Agitation and Propaganda Department in the late 1980s, emphasized the participatory nature of this journalism, in contradistinction to the former vertical model:

“The state, with breaking this vertical structure, which existed, opens access and participation to the popular sectors. For the first time, the popular sectors have access to these media. They have created their own programs.” (Läpple-Wagenhals 1984, 40)

Similarly, Tomás Borge, Minister of the Interior, characterized the “new project of freedom of expression” as giving the people greater access to the news media (FBIS 14 August 1984, P7). In an interview with the Nicaraguan prorevolutionary magazine

Pensamiento Propio, Borge said there were two kinds of press freedom. The Frente had to coexist with press freedom as it was generally understood in Latin America, he said, and to some extent accepted this view of press freedom. But he added, for the first time in Nicaragua there was also press freedom for the masses (Interview with Tomás Borge 1985).

However, the FSLN's revolutionary press freedom was not clearly defined: freedom of the majority to participate in the media often gave way to a freedom restricted to the supposed "objective" interests of the majority.

Speaking to the Union of Nicaraguan Journalists (UPN), National Directorate member Luis Carrion argued that "revolutionary journalism means doing and saying all that and only that which will promote the people's victory" (FBIS 17 May 1983, P17).

An even more distinctly Leninist interpretation was that of Tomás Borge, speaking to the staff of the pro-FSLN daily *El Nuevo Diario*:

What is this freedom of expression for? To be abusive? To have yellow journalism? To practice pornography? To tell lies? To hide the truth of the revolution? To bury the people in anonymity? To magnify the image of the bourgeoisie?... This freedom of expression does not exist and will never exist in Nicaragua. [applause] We have freedom of expression for another purpose; to defend the rights of the workers, so that our people can freely express their feelings and their anti-imperialist and revolutionary stands. This is the freedom of expression we have in Nicaragua, the freedom of workers and peasants, the freedom of revolutionaries and not the freedom of bourgeois or those who have surrendered their body and soul to imperialism. Freedom of expression to tell the truth, not freedom of expression to tell lies and hide the truth. (FBIS 24 May 1982, P16)

To some degree, then, this "revolutionary journalism" resembled that of Cuba and other Marxist-Leninist parties. Before the revolution, some FSLN members resided in

Cuba and received training and support from the Cuban government. After victory, FSLN militants studied in Cuba. Cuba also supplied “vast amounts of material aid, as well as military assistance and advisers” (Smith 1993, 283). The latter included teachers and technical advisers for Nicaragua’s literacy crusade. Both technical advisers and donated texts reflected Cuba’s Marxist approach to communication (Mattelart 1986, 17-18).

While the Frente had come to accept the concept of individual rights, its interpretation of these was not that of classical liberalism. Despite the party’s commitment to maintaining some degree of press freedom as understood in the West, the Sandinistas never approached libertarianism. Instead, they advocated media responsibility and public service, although their interpretation at times approached an idea of press freedom that ruled out anything except the FSLN’s version of truth.

John Spicer Nichols describes a view that placed the development of society over individual liberty:

Various speeches, interviews, and writings of the FSLN leadership and other media policymakers emphasized: (a) the rights of society to receive important and useful information instead of the rights of the individual or a social class to send information, (b) the definition of news as a social good rather than an economic commodity, and (c) the use of the media for the mobilization of society toward common goals, such as national defense, literacy, or economic development. (Nichols 1985)

At a radio forum held at the Central American University’s School of Journalism, National Directorate member Bayardo Arce articulated an approach to broadcasting that was striking in its resemblance to the BBC’s original public service approach. Radio, he argued, should not only be accessible to people, but should “raise the cultural, political

and scientific level of the people. ... The great challenge is to find and use methods attractive to the listener and combine them with educational messages” (Nicaragua’s new media law 1989, 32).

Articulating a state-enforced version of social responsibility, censor Nelba Blandon of the Ministry of the Interior argued:

Our philosophy of social communication is based on the right of the people to receive correct, objective and verified information. We know the difference between freedom of the press and free enterprise. And we don’t confuse the two. (*La Prensa and freedom of expression* 1983)

Within the party, there was no one interpretation of how the ideas of press freedom described above should fit together. In particular, party members with media or Christian backgrounds tended to place greater priority on press freedom as a human right;¹ others emphasized social responsibility or press freedom as freedom in the “popular” interest.

To sum up, the party’s press freedom grouped together elements that had previously belonged to distinctly different traditions. Moreover, it appeared that the balance among these elements was still unclear. Despite accepting the idea of individual freedom, as a vanguard Marxist-Leninist party, with a history of clandestine military struggle emphasizing a top-down, authoritarian style, the Frente tended to put the group before the individual. And while their concern for social and economic rights, and their commitment to “the logic of the majority,” predisposed the Sandinistas to ideas of participatory communication current in Latin America, they tended to interpret these in

¹ The press freedom ideas that influenced those with media or Christian backgrounds are discussed in the upcoming section on popular movements.

an authoritarian light. When the party took control of the state, these conflicting tendencies in party thought presented openings for others to shape press freedom.

The Popular Sector

The popular movements that supported the Frente in the revolutionary war shared much of its ideology. However, despite the flow of ideas between these movements and the party, popular groups often found themselves working towards a different press freedom.

Each movement's press freedom ideas reflected its particular struggle against exclusion and repression. For example, in their defence of the rights of the poor, the Christian movements adopted a horizontal, participatory concept of free speech and press. As another example, after victory, the struggle of indigenous peoples brought the issue of minority group rights into the press freedom struggle.

Given the mass organizations' links to the Frente, their press freedom ideas were largely consistent with the party's. However, it was the mass organizations that actually carried out much of the Sandinista effort to change communications, and this effort was shaped by the organizations' membership as well as by the party.

Of the movements, those constituting the most powerful force for more participatory forms of press freedom were linked to the new Christianity. These groups shared the Frente's vision of an alternative to liberal ideas of press freedom – but they also counteracted the authoritarianism of its Marxism-Leninism.

As with the Frente, radical Christians defined press freedom through the prism of

their struggle on behalf of the poor. The FSLN spoke in terms of the “logic of the majority”; for Christians, it was a “preferential option for the poor.” Liberation theologians argued that the Church should speak of the rights of the poor or the rights of the majorities, as it was their rights which were being violated. This caused them to focus on the social and economic forces that barred these groups from exercising free speech and a free press. Theologian Juan Luis Segundo argued:

Doesn't affirming human rights lead us to maximize, as a violation of freedom of thought or expression, a newspaper being closed or a writer being jailed, and to minimize, as though they were the result of “natural” causes, the economic and social conditions that mean that the population as a whole not only cannot express itself, but that it is deprived of the ability to learn and hence to think? (Berryman 1987, 117)

Liberation theologians supported the idea of collective rights of peoples in addition to individual rights:

these theologians were arguing that rather than simply accept the Western notion of human rights, with its focus on individual rights vis-a-vis the state, which could easily become an ideology masking the daily suffering and death of the poor majority, Latin Americans should develop a new language about human rights. (Berryman 1987, 118)

The ideas of the Christian movement included the new thinking on popular education and communication taking place in the same decades in Latin America. Popular education is a broad term encompassing many concepts: an education that serves and is directed towards the majority; an education aimed at fostering participation in the community; a democratic education, which includes learners in decisions on what is taught and how (Bardnt 1985; 1991; Mattelart 1986, 23). Similarly, popular communication includes both communication projects aimed at previously excluded

people, and the participation of the intended audience in deciding what is produced (Mattelart 1986, 23-4; Gomez interview).

Church members participated in discussions of NWICO, horizontal communication, and critiques of the mass media, and used these approaches in their pastoral work (UNESCO 1986; Shea and Jarrett 1984, 15; Fox 1988, 27). In particular, the work of the Delegates of the Word and CEBs was influenced by the teachings of Brazilian educator Paulo Freire. Freire's approach to education and communication rejected vertical or one-way communication, and the authoritarianism and paternalism of revolutionary vanguard parties:

it is necessary to trust in the oppressed and in their ability to reason. Whoever lacks this trust will fail to initiate (or will abandon) dialogue, reflection, and communication, and will fall into using slogans, communiques, monologues, and instructions (Freire 1992, 53).

The Christian movement thus shared with the Frente a similar view of economic and political barriers to the rights of the majority. In both organizations, individuals were familiar with the ideas of popular communication. However, the Frente's Christian allies were not subject to a legacy of Marxist-Leninist communication practices and military organization. Their conceptions of press freedom were more directly a result of their struggle to defend the rights of the poor.

After victory, the struggle of indigenous peoples brought an additional conception of group rights into the press freedom debate. While the indigenous movement began to oppose the FSLN government, it was still a popular movement, whose struggle was distinct from that of the Pacific Coast elite-led opposition. As a result, its press freedom

concerns differed from the opposition movement's rejection of government controls.

Both the Frente and the popular movements supporting it viewed press freedom not only as an individual right, but as a group right – the rights of the poor majority. But the indigenous movement's struggle added to this class idea the idea that minority or ethnic groups had communication rights as a people.

Among the mass organizations, the women's organization AMNLAE and the journalists' union are notable for bringing their own experiences to bear on Sandinista ideas of press freedom.

While the former reflected general Frente thinking on press freedom, its defence of women's rights resulted in the addition of gender concerns to its conception of press freedom. While AMNLAE did not pursue explicitly feminist goals until the late 1980s, its predecessor AMPRONAC was demanding the elimination of the commercialization of women's bodies, including in the media, as early as 1977 (Chuchryk 1991, 144).

A smaller but influential organization was the Union of Nicaraguan Journalists (UPN). The vast majority of journalists working for pro-FSLN media were members of UPN, which had a seat on the Council of State and was described by its president as “a revolutionary journalists' grouping, completely identifying itself with the Sandinista Popular Revolution” (Läpple-Wagenhals 1984, 140-2).

These journalists tended to express views of press freedom in line with those of the Frente. This is hardly surprising, given the overlap between the personnel of pro-FSLN media and the membership of the FSLN or various organizations aligned with it. Carlos Chamorro, the editor of the FSLN organ *Barricada*, reportedly told a foreign

journalist that criticism in the press must be of a “constructive” nature, and that there is “no essential need to hear the other point of view” (Radosh 1983, 24). The UPN’s position in 1980 was that “[f]reedom of expression is not the right for anyone to disseminate whatever they feel like” (UPN 1980).

On the other hand, the Sandinista journalists had a long history of struggle against the state for the freedom to publish or broadcast. During the insurrection, Nicaraguan journalists had organized for the abolition of censorship in the Union of Radiojournalists of Managua (SRPM), whose leaders would found the Sandinista UPN in March, 1978 (Rothschuh Villanueva 1986). As a result, pro-FSLN journalists also supported more libertarian ideas. While, like Chamorro, they wished the press to support the revolution, they were also uncomfortable with some of the FSLN’s press policies. These conflicting allegiances – to the government and to press freedom – meant that on some issues, the UPN’s position was somewhat undefined. For example, on June 10, 1985, the UPN demanded that the FSLN government end press censorship, “claiming it misinforms the people” (FBIS 11 June 1985, P19; see also FBIS 18 June 1985, P16-17). While the UPN journalists were willing to support some wartime reporting restrictions, they rejected censorship of nonmilitary information. Yet, several months earlier at the UPN Journalists’ Congress, a declaration against censorship had been withdrawn when it failed to win unanimous support (Mattelart 1986, 15).

The Opposition Movement

The middle- and upper-class movement had organized against Somoza around demands for liberal freedoms, including press freedom, and subsequently made press freedom a focal point of their opposition to the revolutionary government.

Nine months after victory, in April 1980, COSEP set a series of conditions for its participation in the new Council of State, the first being that press freedom be respected, guarantees to private radio be renewed, the opposition be given access to television, and the settlement of a dispute between *La Prensa* staff and management be resolved in favour of management (Weber 1981, 80-81).²

The opposition and their media allies generally subscribed to a libertarian, free-market interpretation of press freedom. Opposition members tended to reject any restrictions on media organizations and journalists: “We oppose any measure that restricts freedom of the press. This freedom cannot be dispensed through a dropper; it cannot be rationed,” Pedro Joaquin Chamorro argued on *contra* radio (FBIS 6 March 1984, P19). Msgr. Bismarck Carballo (curia spokesman) and Cardinal Obando y Bravo were also outspoken defenders of various points of liberal press freedom: the right of the church to own media, the ideal of media depending solely on advertising (FBIS 19 June 1989, 20), and the reopening of media closed under the state of emergency (FBIS 8 September 1987, 12). In response to the Interior Ministry’s calls for journalists to “avoid yellow journalism” when reporting on the war and the economy, Cardinal Obando

² The dispute at *La Prensa* erupted in April 1980 when the paper’s owners dismissed pro-FSLN editor Xavier Chamorro, as they wished the paper to support the COSEP-led opposition. Many of the staff walked out in protest.

responded that “[j]ournalists must... work to achieve an unrestricted freedom of the press in this country” and complained that the government guidelines would lead to “a self-censorship for the journalist” (FBIS 18 May 1988, 14). Little in opposition statements supported the new, participatory concepts of press freedom being promoted in the revolutionary camp.

Opposition views on press freedom were shaped by the legal, rather than economic and social, barriers to press freedom that their members had experienced; by their experience of operating in a free market; and by the influence of American values.

For example, the opposition movements’ rejection of participatory communication ideas is not surprising, given that such ideas are partly a response to the experience of exclusion from the existing mass media. In prerevolutionary Nicaragua, the media had largely served elites in urban centres. Thus, while the poor were excluded from the press, the upper classes were not. The only barrier to free expression the wealthy experienced was the state’s press controls.

The opposition commitment to a free market media system reflected the fact that Nicaragua’s economic leaders had been accustomed to one of the most unregulated markets in Latin America (Grynspan 1991, 114 n.8). Devora Grynspan reports, “In a visit to COSEP headquarters in 1989, I was surprised by the emotional defence of a free market economy and the absolute attack against government regulation of any kind offered by one of the leaders of COSEP.”

The movement’s focus on press freedom was a result not only of the collective experiences of the middle and upper classes, but also of the fact that the United States

emphasized the repression of liberal freedoms in its campaign against the FSLN (Kornbluh 1991, 329). The U.S. administration pressured the Sandinistas to respect press freedom, which it defined as private media ownership and the absence of censorship. This concept of press freedom influenced the opposition movement, both because of the cultural links between the middle and upper classes and America, and because the movement depended on U.S. support in its fight with the Frente.

The opposition media were an integral part of the opposition movement: political and economic leaders were often the owners and leading figures of the private media. However, the Nicaraguan media had an additional reason to espouse a private enterprise, laissez-faire articulation of freedom of the press: the unique experience of the press in Latin America.

Latin American newspapers had a long history of battling for press freedom against the state, first against repressive colonial governments, and later against the region's endemic continuing press censorship (Fox 1988, 1). Both the Nicaraguan press's own experience of the fight for press freedom, and that of their Latin American colleagues, was essentially that of a battle between the state and media organizations.

The experience of Cuba, which soon after its revolution initiated an ideologically circumscribed, top-down media system, reinforced the free-market, anti-Marxist stance of private media and their allies in the bourgeois opposition. For example, Pablo Antonio Cuadra, a prominent Nicaraguan poet and managing editor of *La Prensa*, viewed the Sandinistas as totalitarians hiding their true intentions behind a "mask" (Cuadra 1986, 7-10).

Hand-in-hand with this experience was the lack of familiarity with public service functions for the media. Prior to the revolution, the Nicaraguan media had carried little in the way of educational or development-oriented programming. The Latin American press had a weak public service tradition, and governments had rarely intervened to carry out services such as education or health. As a result, experience of government intervention was overwhelmingly negative: “Other than the brief attempts at public-service broadcasting in various countries in the 1920s and 1930s, censorship provided the sole precedent of a public or state presence in the media” (Fox 1988, 15).

(On the other hand, on one occasion *La Prensa* editor Pedro Joaquin Chamorro Jr. appeared to support the imposition of some public service functions on the media, when he told Radio Sandino that centralized news broadcasts for all stations were justified “when there is some very important information that the government wants to give to all the Nicaraguan people” (FBIS 16 June 1982, P12).)

Similarly, concepts such as objectivity and social responsibility, which form part of the general discourse on press freedom in North America, did not appear to be prevalent among private media owners or private media personnel. For both pro- and anti-FSLN media, writes *Index on Censorship* researcher Nick Caistor, news “is seen as propaganda for a particular viewpoint” (1986, 9).

Pedro Chamorro Jr. publicly equated discussions such as those on the New World Information and Communication Order with government censorship and authoritarianism (Shea and Jarrett 1984), and also appeared to reject concepts of any government-imposed social responsibility of the press. Chamorro argued, for example, that lying would not be

a reason to suspend a newspaper (Kunzle 1986, 58). Similarly, *La Prensa* director Pablo Antonio Cuadra responded to a government communique authorizing the reopening of *La Prensa* “with no restriction other than those that a responsible exercise of journalism imposes” by arguing in *La Prensa*: “Our responsibility is to give that right [of freedom of expression] to the people so that a dictatorial policy comes to an end and Nicaragua becomes a republic where there really is a dialogue among free men” (FBIS 7 October 1987, 12).

Another researcher reports that when Radio Católica director Msgr. Bismarck Carballo stated his station had broadcast erroneous reports, “He seemed not to grasp our inquiry about whether he had considered broadcasting a correction” (Americas Watch 1988, 35).

In general, the attitude of opposition media was one of suspicion of any limits on their freedom, including both concepts from NWICO discussions and more mainstream Western concepts such as social responsibility. Luis Sanchez, of the opposition journalists’ union APN, argued:

Regulations on freedom of expression limit the constitutional principles that freedom is unrestricted. A government body is needed for technical and administrative aspects of law, but freedom itself should not be regulated. (Nicaragua’s new media law 1989, 28)

Summary

Entering the postvictory period, revolutionary actors brought with them both the legacy of a battle against state censorship and new press freedom ideas departing from the liberal tradition. While to some extent both these old and new elements had

particular champions, this period cannot be reduced to a contest between two sides with two different press freedoms. As discussed here, many groups – particularly popular movements – included both liberal and participatory elements in their articulation of press freedom.

The next two chapters look at these two trends in the evolution of this period's press freedom. As we will see, each movement contributed to press freedom development according to its articulation of press freedom and its relative power. Chapter 8 discusses the fate of press freedom elements associated with the liberal tradition – that is, aspects of press freedom dealing with the relationship between the state and the media. Chapter 9 outlines the growth of participatory elements.

CHAPTER 8

DEVELOPMENTS IN LIBERAL PRESS FREEDOM

Introduction

This chapter examines the changing status of those ideas about press freedom – and the practices and institutions embodying them – belonging to the liberal tradition. That is, it looks at those developments that liberal theorists would consider when evaluating press freedom change. This examination leads to the conclusion that the changing status of liberal press ideas and practices reflected changes in social relations, and in particular, changes in the relative power of the middle and upper classes.

The first section describes the general fate of liberal press freedom in the Sandinista era. This is followed by three case studies that focus on specific media developments. The chapter concludes by summarizing how different movements, in combination with external factors, affected the liberal elements of Nicaragua's press freedom, and shows how these changes were shaped by the shifting power of social classes.

The purpose of the case studies is to illustrate how social struggles affected the presence of liberal elements in the press system. While this study characterizes press freedom as an historical discourse, that is, an evolving set of meanings shaped by social conflict, this does not mean that Chapters 8 and 9 analyse *talk* about press freedom.

Rather, social movements, *through their collective actions*, give a particular content to press freedom. The case studies thus focus on what people did – at how they moved communications in a particular direction – rather than on what they said.

The developments described below – particularly those that enhanced authoritarian tendencies – occurred in the context of external pressures and political and economic instability. The *contra* war tended to exacerbate authoritarian tendencies, providing the revolutionary government with a rationale for limiting the news media. The increasing polarisation in society and siege mentality could be expected to contribute, above and beyond state controls, to discouragement of dissent. In addition, the U.S. and other states pressured the revolutionary government to respect liberal forms of press freedom.

Thus, these factors limited the actions that Nicaraguans could take in defining their communication rights. While this thesis is concerned with the way in which social forces in Nicaragua shaped press freedom, as we will see, their contributions to press freedom were affected by both external actors and difficult domestic conditions.

Changes to Liberal Press Freedom

During the ten-year period of Sandinista rule, fundamental elements of liberal press freedom – the right to privately own and manage media, and the freedom of the press from government control and censorship – came under attack. From the victory until the Esquipulas peace agreements in 1987, there was a growing authoritarian approach to the press. However, while libertarianism came under attack, other liberal

approaches to the relationship between the state and the media gained ground. The liberal idea of social responsibility was introduced. As well, there were some moves to establish media independent of either the government or its political rivals. I will describe each of these developments in turn.

Authoritarianism

This section first describes the legal, economic and extralegal controls on media organizations that developed soon after victory. It then outlines those liberal media freedoms that persisted, and the easing of authoritarianism in the final years of the decade.

Despite the initial repeal of the Somoza-era press laws and a new statute affirming freedom of information, legislation brought in over a three-year period after the victory gradually extended the degree of state control over the press. The government linked much of this legislation – most notably the States of Emergency – to the economic and political instability Nicaragua experienced immediately following the insurrection, and later, to the *contra* war.

The first State of Emergency, which allowed the suspension of certain rights, including freedom of information, was declared on July 24, 1979 – immediately after victory. While it was presented as a temporary measure, another emergency would be declared in 1981. On March 15, 1982, in response to the *contra* war and growing economic instability, a General State of Emergency was declared, which for the first time included prior censorship. States of Emergency would be repeatedly reimposed until

January 1988.

State of Emergency legislation was accompanied by regulations allowing not only censorship but also the suspension of publication of media that broke regulations. Another law allowed the imprisonment of journalists. As well, the regulatory body for the mass media, the Media Directorate, was moved in January 1981 from the Ministry of Culture to the Interior Ministry, responsible for police, state security and prisons. This meant that the personnel responsible for regulating the media were primarily concerned with national security, rather than cultural and educational objectives. Previously, in a break from common Central American practice, the revolutionary government had made the Ministry of Culture responsible for the media.¹

Restrictive press legislation was applied against both pro- and anti-FSLN media. However, the authorities frequently applied legislation in an arbitrary fashion (Weber 1981, 127), and in some cases attempted to muzzle the press without any backing from the law. For example, Americas Watch, a U.S.-based nongovernmental human rights monitor, reports a 1988 indefinite suspension of Radio Católica for which they could find “no express authority” in the Media Law (Americas Watch 1988, 32). The laws themselves, however, provided a wide latitude for interpretation. As Weber notes, “The disturbing thing about such press legislation is not the fact that it exists... so much as the looseness of its formulation, which leaves the door open to the arbitrary use of power”

¹ The head of the Ministry of the Interior, Tomás Borge, was one of the founding members of the FSLN and considered an orthodox Marxist-Leninist. In contrast, the less politically sensitive culture portfolio had gone to Ernesto Cardenal, a priest and poet who pioneered participatory education methods in the Christian community he founded on the island of Solentiname.

(1981, 105). For example, the prior censorship of information affecting national security or the economy was at times interpreted to include such unlikely items as an article on a Nicaraguan musician who was attempting to create a “national” music and a story on the spoilage of food imported from Bulgaria (Radosh 1983, 23).

At the height of the contra war, between 1984 and 1987, the government censored all newspapers and radio news. *La Prensa* and all news programming of Radio Católica were closed indefinitely from June 1986 to October 1987 (Nicaragua’s new media law 1989, 25).² Before its closure, *La Prensa* failed to publish on more than 40 occasions, sometimes because of suspension, sometimes to protest censorship. During the State of Emergency, new media needed government approval: the church magazine *Iglesia* was seized in 1985 before the first issue could be distributed because it had not registered as a periodical (Catholic Institute for International Relations (CIIR) 1987, 87).

Opposition journalists were detained, and some were imprisoned. While some of these arrests were directly connected to their work as journalists, such as the 1986 arrest of two *La Prensa* journalists for publishing an unauthorized newsletter, *PRISMA* (FBIS 11 February 1986, P8), others were more problematic. As noted before, journalists also tended to be political activists, sometimes engaged in clandestine activities.

Not only were the Somoza-era television stations taken over by the government, but requests for permission to start a private television station were denied. The intent here appeared to be to keep television out of the hands of the foreign and domestic

² As a radio station could air news programs produced by more than one group of journalists, each news program was responsible for clearing its information. Thus, news programs on the same station could be suspended and reopened independently.

bourgeoisie; on several occasions government officials stated they would be open to television stations operated by organizations such as the church, but not by the bourgeoisie (Borge 1980, 98; Serra 1986, 65; Americas Watch 1988, 40).

In addition to legal pressures on the press, extralegal practices similar to those of the Somoza era reappeared. These included economic controls on the press, such as restrictions on the supply of newsprint to *La Prensa* (Americas Watch 1988, 33), although the FSLN paper *Barricada* also suffered from newsprint shortages (FBIS 6 February 1986, P14). *La Prensa* was required to keep paying its staff while it was closed down, a move it argued was aimed at forcing it into bankruptcy (FBIS 1 May, 1987, P14). Foreign press correspondents were occasionally expelled, and their materials confiscated (FBIS 23 July 1986, P12). In 1986, foreign correspondents reported difficulties in covering news on the Atlantic Coast (Index on Censorship 9/86, 49; FBIS 29 August 1986, P7).

Attacks by unidentified men on opposition journalists and vandalization of media property were reported, a problem which continued into the UNO era when both pro- and anti-FSLN journalists and foreign correspondents suffered attacks (FBIS 9 May 1988, 17; FBIS 17 November 1988, 28; FBIS 12 July 1990, 31; FBIS 26 August 1993, 21).

And lastly, new forms of extralegal pressure on the press, such as demonstrations by mobs or *turbas* against media and government opponents, appeared (Americas Watch 1984; Kunzle 1986, 58).

However, it is important to note that despite the drift towards authoritarianism, important elements of liberal press freedom survived throughout the Sandinista regime.

Private media editorially independent of government continued to exist. These media included radio, two of the three daily newspapers, and nondaily newspapers and magazines. At the end of the decade the most notable media opponents of the regime, *La Prensa* and Radio Católica, were still in operation.

In fact, the revolutionary period saw a proliferation of political periodicals (both legal and illegal), many of them published by the numerous political parties in post-Somoza Nicaragua (Läpple-Wagenhals 1984, 61-2). In particular, the late 1980s saw the opening of new political journals as well as the reopening of those closed under the State of Emergency (FBIS 7 January 1988, 20; FBIS 4 November 1988, 15; FBIS 28 February 1989, 32; FBIS 15 November 1989, 52).

Even under State of Emergency censorship, *La Prensa* and other private media published harsh criticism of the government and the FSLN, including protests of human rights violations and pressures on the press (*Index on Censorship* 5/86, 5-9; FBIS 1 June 1984, P21). Censorship was temporarily eased during the 1984 election campaign, and in both the 1984 and 1990 election campaigns, all competing political parties were guaranteed minimum amounts of air time on government-owned radio and television. As well, books were never subject to censorship, and foreign publications and broadcasts were not blocked.

In the last few years of the Sandinista administration the general trend towards authoritarianism reversed somewhat, with the end of the State of Emergency, the reopening of media, and the lifting of prior censorship. It was also during this period that

the 1987 constitution and a new media law were promulgated. The principle of no prior censorship was enshrined in the 1987 constitution.

The 1989 media law, which replaced the provisional media law, was far more liberal, its most serious penalty a temporary suspension for up to three days. It included the elimination of decrees 511 and 512, which restricted reporting on military or economic information. No fines, permanent closures or imprisonment of journalists was allowed (Nicaragua's new media law 1989, 27). It also stipulated that journalists could not be forced to reveal their sources. (This law was short-lived, as the FSLN-led government repealed it shortly after the 1990 election.) The same year, the Law on the Maintenance of Order and Public Security, which had been used to imprison journalists, was abolished.

Media Responsibility and Public Service

The growth of authoritarianism during most of the decade was not the only development that challenged libertarian approaches to press freedom. Two other trends were the moves towards public service and social responsibility.

Both the provisional media law and the new media law drafted in 1989 incorporated developmental communication and public service concepts. The 1989 media law stated that the media were "at the service of education, culture, health and the development of the Nicaraguan people." During the literacy campaign, all radio stations joined a national network twice daily to deliver programs supporting the campaign. The Sandinista Television System carried extensive educational programming, as did

government-owned radio (Brownlee 1983; Lapple-Wagenhals 1984, 79, 89, 118).

The State of Emergency aside, the freedom of information provided for in the revolutionary constitutions was never that of libertarian press freedom. The idea of social responsibility or media responsibility was a consistent theme. For example, the 1989 media law stated that the media “should contribute, through objective, broad, balanced and responsible information, to strengthen peace, international harmony, promotion of human rights, struggle against war, racism and any type of discrimination” (Nicaragua’s new media law 1989). While the second half of this statement goes further than North American social responsibility, such ideas have in fact been championed not only by the non-aligned movement and NWICO, but also by some members of the Hutchins Commission (White and Leigh 1946).

In some cases, this media responsibility did not rely solely on the consciences of media personnel, but was backed by legislation allowing the government to penalize the media. (In this respect, the line between authoritarians and proponents of social responsibility is not always cut and dry.) The provisional media law, for example, forbade the advertising of tobacco and alcohol, and the portrayal of women as sex objects, and media could be temporarily suspended for violating these regulations (Lapple-Wagenhals 1984, 99).³ The 1989 media law established an avenue for individuals and organizations to launch complaints against the press, and obtain corrections, if the Interior Ministry’s Communications Directorate determined this was

³ However, in Western press systems, including Canada’s, there are similar legal restrictions on the advertising of tobacco and alcohol and sex-role stereotyping.

warranted (Nicaragua's new media law 1989, 27).

However, social responsibility did not gain complete acceptance during this period: both pro- and anti-government media generally used whatever methods they pleased in their ongoing propaganda battles. This was evident in the 1990 election campaign, at the end of the Sandinista era. UN observers criticized the "absence of objectivity" in the Nicaraguan press, which they said "goes to extremes that are difficult to imagine." Moreover, UN observers were concerned by the "aggressive" message content and language of the media (FBIS 8 January 1990, 27). Miguel D'Escoto, Nicaragua's foreign minister, publicly criticized the editor of *Barricada* for publishing anti-Semitic remarks (FBIS 24 January 1990, 11).

Editorial Independence

One other development deserves mention, although it had little effect on the Nicaraguan mass media as a whole. Journalists attempted to establish new media that were more than mouthpieces for the government or the political and business leaders of the opposition movement. In 1988, a group of journalists launched the weekly *La Crónica* with help from a Dutch foundation. *La Crónica* aimed at providing a more independent, balanced and pluralist reporting of political news (Kinzer 1988; FBIS 4 November 1988, 15). This paper continued into 1990. Other papers begun in the late 1980s, such as the political quarterly *Informe Politico*, also stated their intent of not favouring any party (FBIS 15 November 1989, 52). In the 1990s, both *La Prensa* and *Barricada* attempted to exercise more editorial independence from their political

patrons, with *Barricada* announcing in 1991 it would no longer be an official party paper (FBIS 17 January 1991, 10; FBIS 3 May 1993, 28).

To summarize, the libertarian project of the opposition movement lost ground not only to continuing authoritarianism, but also to the growth of social responsibility interpretations of press freedom. At the same time, however, other elements of liberal press freedom, such as private ownership and editorial independence, were a part of Sandinista-era press freedom.

What forces supported the presence of the various liberal press freedom elements? What drove the shift towards authoritarianism – and away from it? The case studies that follow look at how different social actors contributed to particular developments in Nicaraguan press freedom.

Case One: The Drafting of the 1987 Constitution

The Nicaraguan constitution of 1987 formalized press freedom developments since the insurrection. Its basic elements – social responsibility, right of access to the media, and the recognition of international human rights instruments – had been contained in prior legislation: the Fundamental Statute, the provisional media law, and the Statute on the Rights and Guarantees of Nicaraguans.

To a certain extent, these constitutional concepts reflected an emerging dominant articulation of press freedom: both the media and political opponents of the government referred to them when challenging specific media regulations. For example, the new

media law of 1989 was intended to conform to the framework contained in the new constitution – and once passed, the opposition journalists’ association, APN, appealed the new law to the Supreme Court, arguing it was generally unconstitutional, and specifically, that the constitution forbade the state to have an “economic monopoly” over television (Nicaragua’s new media law 1989, 28).⁴ Similarly, during the constitutional debates the opposition party members accused the Frente of restricting the supply of newsprint – a violation of the American Convention on Human Rights, given recognition in the constitution (Reding 1991b, 103).

The participants – and nonparticipants – in the drafting of the constitution, and their contributions to the articles affecting press freedom, reflect the forces that produced the emergence of social responsibility – rather than libertarian – press freedom concepts.

The following discussion first outlines the process that produced the new constitution, and each actor’s participation in that process. Then, it examines how various actors contributed to the constitution’s handling of government control of the press.

While the driving force behind the constitutional process was the Frente, the party sought cooperation from some of the middle-class opposition. On the eve of the 1984 elections for the National and Constituent Assembly, the Frente committed itself to political pluralism, civil liberties and continuing democratization in order to secure opposition participation (Weaver and Barnes 1991, 131). The constitutional process also

⁴ Following its loss to the opposition in the 1990 elections, the FSLN government repealed the 1989 media law.

reflected the government's policy of seeking international support from Western as well as Soviet-bloc countries: the initial draft of the constitution was drawn up after delegations travelled not only to Eastern Europe, but also to Latin American and Western European nations, to study their constitutions (Reding 1991b, 80).

Nevertheless, the COSEP-dominated opposition movement largely abstained from the 1984 elections for the National Assembly, and thus had no direct role in drafting either law, although it did publish criticisms of the constitution and hold demonstrations rejecting it. However, some middle-class opposition parties more supportive of the revolution, as well as the left-wing political parties, did take seats in the National Assembly. By participating in the Constituent Assembly, they were able to influence the final draft of the constitution on a number of issues, including, as discussed below, press freedom. At the end of the drafting, however, National Assembly members from the far-left MAP-ML and some members from middle-class parties refused to sign the constitution (Reding 1991b, 81).

In addition to the Frente and other political parties, popular movements also participated in the drafting process. A national consultation was held with the leaders of parties, unions and mass organizations before a draft constitution was drawn up, in language designed to be accessible to everyone. The draft was extensively discussed in the mass media. Then, in 73 televised forums across the country, approximately 100,000 citizens offered their views on the draft constitution.⁵ There were also 1,800 written

⁵ In many cases, the mass organizations organized their constituencies to prepare for and participate in these forums. In contrast, leaders of the opposition movement discouraged cooperation.

proposals. Notes from the forums were made available to the National Assembly, and were used by the Constitutional Commission to draw up a second draft (Asamblea Nacional 1986).

In the final draft of the constitution, the FSLN's influence was paramount. However, the party did compromise on several issues, allowing 75 per cent of the constitution to be passed unanimously by the participating parties (Weaver and Barnes 1991, 132).

One of the key areas in which opposition parties were able to exercise influence was in the provisions on freedom of the press and human rights. This was due to the fact that the Frente delegates themselves were divided on these issues.

For example, the orthodox Marxist and nationalist currents of the Frente opposed the incorporation of international human rights treaties. Both orthodox Frente members and the Marxist-Leninist party rejected the idea of individual rights such as freedom of conscience and thought, which were contained in the treaties. But the Christian Assembly members – including Danilo Aguirre Solis of *El Nuevo Diario* and the UPN, and Humberto Solis Barker, who represented the Christian Base Communities – voted with the middle-class opposition parties for their incorporation (Reding 1991a, 30; 1991b, 84). Together, the Christians and middle-class had a majority, and the final draft contained a provision recognizing these treaties, although the language was softened: rather than incorporating the treaties, the rights in the treaties were guaranteed “full effectiveness.” This meant that while the constitution recognized the rights set forth in these treaties, the treaties themselves were not actually part of the fundamental law of

Nicaragua.

In another example, the government censor wanted to incorporate censorship into the constitution. Censorship had been an ongoing debate in Nicaragua, and was opposed by the UPN. The open forums also produced criticisms of it (Asamblea Nacional 1986). An amendment proposed by an FSLN deputy – and *El Nuevo Diario* columnist – prohibited prior censorship except during a state of emergency, and was passed by a large majority (Reding 1991b, 102).

How was the constitution's approach to liberal press freedom – an emphasis on social responsibility, and the preservation of guarantees against state control of press – shaped by the Frente, the traditional elites, and the popular movements?

Certainly, the Frente must be acknowledged as the guiding architect of the constitution's vision of press freedom. However, as we saw above, militating against the more authoritarian tendencies of the Frente were the influence of the Christian movement and the UPN, and the party's need to secure the cooperation of the participating middle-class opposition parties. The influence of the material from the open forums – which reached the FSLN's popular constituency – is less clear, although the two general press freedom themes identified from them, the prohibition of censorship and the right of all Nicaraguans to express themselves in the mass media, are present in the constitution.

In contrast, the constitution came into force over objections from both opposition parties who had abstained from the process and some opposition members of the National Assembly. For much of the opposition, the constitution was, to quote a

headline censored from *La Prensa*, “A Constitution to Suit the Sandinistas.”

In short, the constitutional project of social responsibility and a participatory press reflected the relatively insignificant contribution of the traditional elites. Nonauthoritarian positions on press freedom came from pro-revolution journalists and the Christian movement, as well as from opposition parties more accepting of the Frente’s revolutionary platform – and thus were a long way from the libertarian view of press freedom of the opposition movement.

Case Two:
The Mass Organisations and the *Turbas*

Nicaragua had a long history of authoritarian approaches to the press, and many of the practices of the Somoza era, including censorship and economic controls, re-emerged in revolutionary Nicaragua.

The phenomenon of the *turbas*, however, was not a holdover from the Somoza regime. *Turbas*, or what *La Prensa* would term “divine mobs,” referred to pro-Sandinista crowds who demonstrated against opposition members and opposition media. During the 1984 elections, for instance, pro-Sandinista crowds – sometimes armed with sticks and clubs – disrupted Coordinadora Democratica rallies with chants and threats (Americas Watch 1984, 8).

The *turbas* were clearly aimed at restricting press freedom that allowed certain opposition media to wage a campaign against the government. *Turbas* demonstrating against *La Prensa* called for its confiscation by the government – and sometimes staged public burnings of the paper (Kunzle 1986, 58-9).

For example, on January 14, 1982, Radio Sandino (FBIS 15 January 1982, P10) reported that female market vendors demonstrating in front of *La Prensa* were fired on from the property. The following day (FBIS 20 January 1982, P 14-P15), CDS leaders demanded that *La Prensa* be confiscated; a crowd of “residents of Managua’s eastern districts” demonstrated in front of the newspaper’s office demanding confiscation of the paper. The CDS leaders announced that similar demonstrations were being held nationwide “to repudiate not only LA PRENSA but also elements like Donald Lacayo, who sent a cable in his capacity as a member of the State Council... saying that no arms could come here [to the *La Prensa* offices].”

While *La Prensa* was never confiscated, these incidents could reasonably be expected to have a “chilling effect” in a revolutionary situation where other private enterprises had been confiscated under pressure from members of mass organizations.

During the 1984 election campaign, opposition party leaders claimed that there was a climate of apathy among Nicaraguans due to “fear of reprisals by the mass organizations” (FBIS 11 September 1984, P10).

A wide range of mass organizations were involved in these demonstrations. On June 22, 1984, education workers from a Sandinista union demonstrated in front of *La Prensa* against its editorial line (FBIS 27 June 1982, P11). On August 6, 1986, government radio reported that students and textile workers demonstrated for the confiscation of *La Prensa* (FBIS 7 August 1986, P11). On March 3, 1988, workers of the CST and veterans of the EPS had their turn (FBIS 4 March 1988, 9).

The *turbas*’ significance is that they appear to represent an attack on liberal press

freedom by popular classes rather than the state. If this is so, then the changing influence of the poorer classes in Nicaragua cannot be said to have worked entirely in the direction of the expansion of press freedom.

Were the *turbas* government-orchestrated incidents, or truly actions of the popular classes? Government opponents naturally suspected the former. In its consideration of incidents during the 1984 election campaign, Americas Watch concluded that mass organizations were primarily responsible. They noted, however, that while the government disavowed these hostile demonstrations, “they felt the Nicaraguan people had the right to participate in the political process, even by organizing counter-demonstrations” (Americas Watch 1984, 10). In addition, they noted that it would not be surprising to find government employees and security agents involved in the *turbas*, as many were simultaneously members of mass organizations and unions (Americas Watch 1984).

As discussed previously, the mass organizations were not by any means independent of the Frente, with mass organization leaders often party militants. However, the role of the mass organizations in the *turbas* suggests a degree of popular support for the suppression of the opposition press.

In contrast, there appear to have been few mass demonstrations in support of a libertarian press freedom from either side of the political fence. The government’s closure of *La Prensa* was met with a protest march at the end of September, 1986 (Index on Censorship 10/86, 47). However, reports of public demonstrations and protests against censorship of the media identify participants as opposition journalists and

political leaders from the opposition movement and foreign governments (FBIS 1 July 1987, I8; FBIS 3 June 1988, 17; FBIS 6 March 1984, P19).⁶ Weaver and Barnes (1991, 129-130) report that while the closing of *La Prensa* provoked an outcry in the United States,

there was little reaction inside Nicaragua. *La Prensa* editors confidently predicted that the FSLN could not resist for more than a few weeks pressure to reopen the paper. When *La Prensa* finally did reopen in September 1987, it was in order to comply with the requirements of the Esquipulas peace accord... not because of any internal political pressure.

Among the mass organizations, only the small journalists' union, UPN, championed more freedom for media organizations and demonstrated against repressive legislation (Mattelart 1986, 15; Lobel 1991, 320 n.126). Notably, it was this mass organization whose members had battled state control of the press during the insurrection.

In short, there was little popular action in support of media outlets seeking to exercise a libertarian press freedom. If mass organization members did not act to limit all elements of liberal press freedom, they certainly acted against libertarian press freedom.

The attack of other mass organizations on opposition media can be partly attributed to the authoritarian influences of the FSLN. However, as discussed in Chapter 7, the popular classes would have had little in their experience that would lead them to support a classic liberal conception of press freedom. We can further speculate that the

⁶ A notable exception were demonstrations in support of the Atlantic Coast's Radio VER, which will be discussed in the next chapter.

siege mentality created by the war further contributed to their willingness to attempt to limit media whose reporting was constrained by neither considerations of the war nor media responsibility.

Case Three:
La Prensa, El Pueblo, and the Battle Over Closings and Censorship

If the opposition movement could not prevent the emergence of a relatively controlled, “socially responsible” press, it nevertheless contributed to the continuance of private media ownership and the end of censorship. Despite the fact that they had suffered a loss of influence relative to the popular classes, prerevolutionary elites had considerable leverage with the Frente because of their economic clout and international support.

The case of *La Prensa* is illustrative. *La Prensa* was a prominent paper because of its fight against Somoza under the editorship of Pedro Joaquin Chamorro, a member of the traditional Nicaraguan political and economic elite. The Chamorros were wealthy coffee barons and a prominent Conservative family who had produced several Nicaraguan presidents. Later, *La Prensa* became the flagship paper of the opposition movement, still under the administration of the Chamorros. To a greater degree than the rest of the opposition press, *La Prensa* was well known abroad; in fact, it received funding from the U.S. National Endowment for Democracy and other American sources during the Sandinista era (Smith 1993, 159; Linfield 1991, 279; Blumenthal 1986).⁷

⁷ *La Prensa's* role as an organizer in the insurrection and, later, as the mouthpiece of the opposition movement, meant that it was a paper of considerable prominence. Its international reputation did not mean, however, that it conformed to North American standards of quality or social responsibility. An *Index on*

In April 1980, a dispute erupted inside *La Prensa* over the editorial line of the paper, which mirrored the widening split between the Frente and the traditional political parties and business organizations in the revolutionary coalition. Xavier Chamorro, brother of the slain Pedro Joaquín Chamorro and editor of the paper, wanted *La Prensa* to support the Frente, and was backed by many *La Prensa* staffers. But other members of the Chamorro family, including Violeta Chamorro, were at the time breaking with the revolutionary coalition. Violeta Chamorro and Alfonso Robelo resigned from the JGRN in response to the new pro-FSLN majority in the Council of State, and COSEP threatened that it would not take its seats in the Council of State.

In the ensuing struggle, workers began to insert *coletillas*, or footnotes, at the end of stories, protesting *La Prensa*'s increasingly anti-Frente stance. UPN staged a walkout when attempts were made to remove Xavier Chamorro from his position (Kunzle 1986, 56). There was talk of a takeover of the paper by the workers, "there being nothing 'free' about control of the press by the rich" (Cook 1984, 36).

In revolutions such as Cuba's, this is precisely what happened. But as the mixed economy and strategy of political pluralism meant that the Frente had to maintain some support among the middle and upper classes, as well as the support of Western donor countries, it did not happen in Nicaragua.

Censorship observer noted that it ignored stories that did not fit its anti-government stance (Caistor 1986). The paper has run such front-page stories as that of a woman who gave birth to a chicken (Todd 1987). However, Nicaraguan journalism in general was of poor quality (Läpple-Wagenhals 1984, 135-6; Americas Watch 1988, 33).

Instead, the Frente began negotiations with the private sector organization COSEP in an attempt to resolve the *La Prensa* dispute. COSEP used its participation in the Council of State as a bargaining chip, announcing that it would not sit in the Council unless the government resolved the dispute in favour of management. However, the dispute was eventually solved within the Chamorro family itself, and Xavier Chamorro and the striking *La Prensa* staffers set up shop – practically next door – with the worker-owned *El Nuevo Diario*. After replacing some of its lost workers, *La Prensa* returned to the newsstands on May 26, 1980.

The later censorship and closings of *La Prensa* similarly reflect a comparative restraint by the FSLN in its dealings with the paper. Despite the repeated closings of *La Prensa* prior to its indefinite closure by the authorities in June 1986, its experience contrasts sharply with the fate of *El Pueblo*, the newspaper of the extreme leftist Frente Obrero trade union.

The papers were strikingly similar in many respects: the only two dailies dating from before the insurrection, both were bitter critics of the government, and in both, journalists were suspected of engaging in clandestine opposition activity. *El Pueblo*'s circulation of 4,000 to 7,000 was much smaller than *La Prensa*'s June 1980 circulation of 65,000 (Läpple-Wagenhals 1984, 60).

El Pueblo, however, was first stopped from distribution as early as July 23, 1979, and banned again on January 21, 1980. Its editor and other editorial board members were imprisoned under the Law of Maintenance of Public Order (Weber 1981, 126-7). On May 23, 1984, the government cancelled the legal status of the paper as a cooperative

on the grounds that it had not been published for four years (FBIS Radio Noticias 23 May, 1984). The paper was not permitted to publish again until August 2, 1984 (FBIS Managua Domestic Service August 2, 1984), during the run-up to the November elections in which the MAP-ML, the far-left party controlling Frente Obrero and *El Pueblo*, had initially refused to participate.

The *El Pueblo* journalists were convicted, according to the trial judge, because they

attacked the revolutionary process and the authorities of the Junta of the Government of National Reconstruction and the Sandinista Liberation Front, without taking into account the profound social transformations that have been carried out to the benefit of the great majority... (Barricada February 11, 1980, qtd. in Rebick 1980).

The paper had criticized the FSLN for its ties to middle-class politicians, and blamed it for the country's economic problems (Rebick 1980). Two days after the installation of the JGRN, the paper had claimed that the new government had made secret agreements with the United States (FBIS 24 July 1979, P10).

In contrast, *La Prensa* was not closed indefinitely until June 26, 1986. And unlike *El Pueblo*, at the time *La Prensa* was finally closed, it was openly calling for continued U.S. funding of the *contra* forces. Its closure came the day after the approval of *contra* aid in Congress, which *La Prensa*'s editor had argued for in the *Washington Post*.

La Prensa's temporary closings of a few days at a time in the early years of the revolution were accompanied by much international publicity, and throughout the decade there was international pressure on the Frente to keep the paper open. For example, the

governments of Latin American countries such as Venezuela and Colombia publicly expressed support for *La Prensa* (FBIS 11 July 1986, F1; FBIS 9 January 1989, 41). *La Prensa* also had the support of the InterAmerican Press Association, which sent a delegation to Nicaragua to investigate conditions (FBIS 12 July 1984, P12; FBIS 20 March 1985, P9).

Moreover, the FSLN was well aware that in the United States, the White House used the censorship of *La Prensa* in its efforts to secure funding for the *contras*: the Office of Public Diplomacy used the theme of human rights violations in its campaign to convince Congress and the American public to support *contra* aid (Kornbluh 1991, 328-9). In turn, the Frente used *La Prensa* in its efforts to secure international support: in 1987, after *La Prensa*'s closing, the Sandinistas promised Socialist International it would allow the paper to reopen in exchange for the organization's help in securing West European political and financial support (Vanden 1991, 308).

The contrast between the treatment of *La Prensa* and *El Pueblo* suggests the strong contribution of both external actors and the middle classes in mitigating state controls on the press. On the one hand, the existence of a wartime situation could have been expected to increase the Frente's willingness to censor all critical press. Yet, the Frente's treatment of *La Prensa*, a paper supported by a rival elite and an external enemy, was considerably more even-handed than its treatment of a newspaper run by one-time revolutionary allies, whose ideology was more in line with the Frente's. Clearly, the impetus for maintaining a degree of media pluralism and private control of

the press came not from the FSLN but the traditional elites and their allies.

It is also possible that the differing treatment of the two papers was due in part to the smaller circulation of *El Pueblo*. The Frente may have felt they could close *El Pueblo* with less public outcry than *La Prensa*. However, in 1980, the year the government closed *El Pueblo*, yet refrained from closing *La Prensa*, the Frente was at the height of its popularity, with less to fear from public opinion than at any other point in the decade.

La Prensa was allowed to reopen a little more than a year later on September 19, 1987. Once again, the weight of international pressure, and the Frente's need to end the *contra* war and obtain the cooperation of the private sector, tipped the scales in its favour.

Its reopening without prior censorship was the result of commitments made by the FSLN when it signed the Esquipulas peace plan. The agreement, signed by the Central American presidents on August 7, 1987, not only aimed at stopping support for insurgent forces in the region, but included specific commitments to open dialogue with political opponents and to respect human right. The latter included lifting the State of Emergency and ensuring liberal press freedoms (Americas Watch 1988, 9).

When Violeta Chamorro informed Daniel Ortega that *La Prensa* wouldn't open as long as it was subject to censorship, she said,

"He became very nervous and explained to me that if *La Prensa* remained closed, Nicaragua would be accused of failing to meet conditions in the peace plan. And I told him, 'There's a simple solution to that problem. Let us open without censorship.'" It did. (Moody 1989, 70)

La Prensa's reopening was part of a general liberalization accompanying the peace process. It was followed in early 1988 by the reopening of other media shut down under the State of Emergency (FBIS 27 January 1988, 20). The State of Emergency was lifted in January 1988 as part of the Esquipulas agreements. As well, the new 1989 media law was written partly to comply with the agreements. Similarly, the abolition of the Law on the Maintenance of Order and Public Security, was agreed to as part of negotiations to secure the participation of opposition parties in the 1990 elections (Goodfellow and Morrell 1991, 388).

In conclusion, we can observe that while some of the drift towards authoritarianism can be attributed to wartime, the impetus for liberalizing controls on the press and preserving private media did not come from the FSLN, but from the bourgeoisie and the Frente's need to maintain a degree of legitimacy among Western nations. And while the middle and upper classes themselves had suffered from a considerable erosion of influence, their influence was bolstered by international – particularly U.S. – support for liberal press freedoms.

Summary

In the Sandinista era, as in prerevolutionary times, liberal press freedom was curtailed by state authoritarianism, but not extinguished. At the end of the revolutionary period, Nicaragua still had privately owned, free enterprise media, and there was wide acknowledgement that, under normal circumstances, the press should not be subject to prior censorship. However, in contrast to the Somoza era, there was growing emphasis

on social responsibility forms of liberal press freedom.

As we saw in the case studies above, the changing status of liberal press freedom ideas and practices was the combined product of the various movements' collective actions.

Both the Frente's popular base and middle- and upper-class parties acted against authoritarian tendencies of the state, as when Christian movements and some middle-class parties won constitutional recognition of international human rights treaties.

However, while popular movements acted against authoritarianism, they could not be said to back a classic liberal articulation of press freedom. Particularly in the case of the mass organizations, which were controlled to a degree by the FSLN, popular action for communication freedoms did not extend to – to borrow a phrase from UPN – the freedom for anyone to say whatever they please.

The main pressure for a free enterprise, libertarian press freedom came from the opposition movement and its international allies, as evidenced by the battle over *La Prensa*.

As we have seen, however, the ability of the opposition to defend these freedoms was often much weaker than that of the popular movements and the Frente to advance their agendas. Hence, the constitution's approach to press freedom mainly reflected the ideas held by the Frente and its popular allies – much to the displeasure of the traditional elites. Nor was the opposition generally able to stage mass demonstrations to defend the rights of opposition media such as *La Prensa*.

On the other hand, when external pressures supported the opposition's fight

against censorship and closures, as in the Esquipulas peace process, the movement met with more success.

In short, which liberal freedoms survived, and in what strength, depended on each movement's ability to further its articulation of press freedom. In turn, this ability reflected the social relations of the revolution.

The decline, after the freedom of the immediate post-victory period, of free market, libertarian press freedoms – such as the right to own a television station – reflected the traditional elites' loss of influence to a rival elite, the FSLN. Throughout the period, the move away from laissez-faire freedoms and the growth of social responsibility reflected the relative strength of the Frente and its popular allies, who for the first time had become a considerable political force.

Despite the dominance of the Sandinistas, however, the continuance of the private sector and its importance to reconstruction and economic survival, meant the prerevolutionary elite maintained some power in post-revolutionary Nicaragua. This ensured the survival of private ownership of the media and pluralism within the media.

As the economic situation in Nicaragua worsened, the FSLN relied increasingly in the mid-1980s on securing the cooperation of the private sector and the domestic opposition. As we would expect, Frente authoritarianism lost ground to libertarian press freedoms at exactly the time that the movement associated with it, the middle- and upper-class opposition movement, was recouping some of the power it had lost in the early part of the decade.

External factors influenced press freedom development both through their effect

on the relative power of social groups, and through their influence on the revolutionary government's policy decisions. For example, opposition movement power was directly augmented by U.S. military and economic support. At the same time, international pressure on the Frente to respect liberal press freedoms bolstered the opposition movement's own efforts to defend liberal freedoms.

The changing status of liberal press freedom formed only one part of revolutionary Nicaragua's reworking of press freedom. The next chapter examines the emergence of new aspects of press freedom that cannot be located within the liberal tradition.

CHAPTER 9

ACCESS AND PARTICIPATION: EXPANDING NICARAGUA'S PRESS FREEDOM DISCOURSE

Introduction

The greatest change the revolution brought to press freedom was not its effect on the duelling liberal and authoritarian traditions inherited from the Somoza era. Rather, it was the introduction of participatory ideas into the country's press freedom discourse. The changes discussed in this chapter went beyond those affecting the freedoms of media organizations – such as pressure for media responsibility or censorship – to ones which redefined the relationship between individuals, groups, and the means of mass communication. We first encountered what are called popular, participatory or horizontal communications in Chapter 1; here, we see them emerge in their specific Nicaraguan forms.

The first section of this chapter outlines the growth of participatory elements in press freedom during the revolutionary decade. These changes occurred on a variety of fronts: I look first at legal changes, and then new policies, practices and institutions. The first section concludes by evaluating to what degree these new ideas had become part of press freedom in Nicaragua.

Then I present three case studies, which examine how different social actors affected the growth of new press freedom elements. The final section reviews the contributions of each movement, and discusses the impact of the revolution's social change on the content of press freedom.

Here, as with the developments described in Chapter 8, events unfolded within a context of domestic instability and external pressures. Some circumstances – such as the authoritarianism that wartime encourages in even the most liberal governments – hindered the participatory project just as they did the liberal project. Certainly the economic costs of war limited the ability of popular groups to focus on activities apart from daily survival, and affected the revolutionary state's priorities in and ability to support communication projects (Mattelart 1986, 12-14).

Other external pressures, notably the U.S. support for the opposition movement and free market interpretations of press freedom, were not as pertinent. As we will see, both the United States and the opposition movement remained largely on the sidelines of participatory press freedom developments.

The Development of New Press Freedoms

The revolutionary period ushered in press policies and practices seeking to put press freedom into the hands of the excluded majority, and identifying the obstacle as economic, not state, power. The ideas of a New World Information and Communication Order, of popular education and popular culture, and of horizontal communication and the right to communicate were reflected in both laws and social projects.

The Legal Framework

The new legal framework shifted the concept of press freedom from liberalism's negative liberty to a positive right: the state was obliged to provide the means for its exercise. A few weeks after victory, the 1979 Statute on the Rights of Nicaraguans recognized the existence of both individual and collective rights, and the state's positive obligations in their exercise. The Statute stated that "It is the duty of the state to use all the means at its disposal to remove any obstacles which impede real equality of citizens and their participation in the political, economic and social life of the country" (Fragaso and Arturo 1980, 74).

Press freedom was conceived of as vested in individual citizens and the public as a whole, *over and against the owners of the mass media*. The initial 1979 Statute on the Rights of Nicaraguans (Article 20) had stated that freedom of information "cannot be subjugated... to the economic power of any group" (Fragaso and Arturo 1980, 78). According to Reding, in contrast to the American freedom of the press, the Nicaraguan constitution's right to information "is vested in the recipient and not the owner of the media. It thus seeks to preclude censorship by economic as well as political powers" (Reding 1991b, 103-4).

In line with this emphasis on audience rights, the new media law of April 1989 created an advisory National Communications Commission whose members included "listeners, readers, or spectators," to advise on the application of the media law and improve access to information (Nicaragua's new media law 1989, 26).

Moreover, this positive right to information was not only the right to receive, but also the right to originate. In a clear departure from liberal press freedom, Article 68 of the 1987 constitution stipulated that the state had the positive duty to promote access of “the public and its organizations” to the mass media against foreign interests and economic monopolies.

In short, revolutionary law shifted the locus of press freedom from the press to “Nicaraguans,” and the source of threats to free expression from the state to media owners.

New Communication Practices

As we will see, the practices of government and popular movements embodied these rights to varying degrees. I will begin by looking at the simple inclusion of the poorer classes into the mass media’s audience, which was driven by the state’s positive obligation to eliminate economic barriers to the right to receive information. I then turn to more radical innovations: the access of new groups to the means of mass communication, and citizen participation in media production.

Expanding the Right to Receive

The revolutionary government began to eliminate economic and structural obstacles to the citizen’s enjoyment of press freedom immediately after the insurrection. Many of the most quantifiable of these changes involved the extension of the press to previously excluded audiences, but did not fundamentally alter media organizations or their relationship to audiences.

Newspaper circulation had traditionally been concentrated among the urban upper classes, but with the revolution, this began to change. Perhaps the most important factor in opening the printed press to the majority was the literacy campaign of 1980, aimed at teaching the rural and urban poor to read, and the adult education programs that followed it.¹ In 1982, newspaper distribution was still limited in rural areas and the Atlantic Coast (Läpple-Wagenhals 1984, 61), but the Frente's party newspaper *Barricada* was distributed to workers and *campesinos* in remote areas by soldiers and union members (Läpple-Wagenhals 1984, 64). *Barricada* also began to tailor its front page stories so they could be read by the newly literate (Cook 1984, 40).

Television transmission was extended to cover less urban areas that had previously been excluded, including Bluefields on the Atlantic Coast (Fung 1981, 67). Local radio stations belonging to the state network CORADEP transmitted programs specifically aimed at *campesinos* (Läpple-Wagenhals 1984, 83; Gomez 1997). Radio programming in indigenous languages increased: prior to the revolution, for example, the Atlantic Coast had only one hour a week in Miskito-language broadcasting. After the insurrection, government and private radio broadcast daily in Miskito.

Film distribution was extended to the countryside through the mobile film units of INCINE, the film production unit of the Ministry of Culture, which also produced short news documentaries (Läpple-Wagenhals 1984, 91-2). The agrarian reform ministry, MIDINRA, distributed its own and other productions to the countryside, and the video workshop of the CST distributed productions to union locals (Halleck 1986, 116-117).

¹ The literacy crusade is described more fully below in the first case study.

New media aimed at the new constituencies of the revolution appeared: *El Tayacan*, the weekly newspaper of the Christian movement (Mattelart 1986, 11); *Caminemos*, a magazine for newly literate rural workers (Bardnt 1991, 75); *El Machete*, a newspaper run by the rural workers union (Ruchwarger 1987, 282); and a radio program and newspaper, *The Women's Voice*, put out by AMNLAE for the nascent women's movement (Walker 1981, 81).

Access and Participation

In addition to this general move from an elite to a mass audience for the Nicaraguan press, the revolutionary government, the mass organizations and other pro-FSLN groups promoted an interpretation of press freedom that stressed not only the right of citizens to receive information, but also their right to have access to newspaper space or broadcast time, and their right to participate in the decision-making and production of messages in the mass media. These ideas of access and participation were interpreted in various ways, from call-in radio shows to training and equipping *campesinos* to produce their own news and documentaries.

At one end of the spectrum were attempts to increase mass media content based on events and interviews involving the poor majority. *Linea Directa*, a radio call-in show started on the Frente's Radio Sandino in 1982, featured FSLN and opposition leaders responding to the questions of listeners (Knox 1987), similar to "town hall" programs aired in Canada. Radio, newspapers, and video regularly featured interviews with

campesinos, *barrio* residents and workers. For example, the state-owned radio stations often broadcast live from factories or work sites (Kopec 1987).

Face-to-face communication was combined with mass media coverage at the *Cara Al Pueblo*, which were weekly meetings between National Directorate members and communities, organized by the CDS. During the meetings, the audience directed questions at the leaders: the results were videotaped and broadcast on national television, thus giving more ordinary people a presence in the mass media.

However, there was significant debate on how free people were to voice criticism during these meetings. Some observers described these shows as “spontaneous and often highly critical” (Halleck 1986, 119). Others disagreed: “Nor did the intimidating atmosphere encourage dissent. The meetings are largely symbolic – theatrical productions designed to dramatize the government’s concern for and closeness to the people” (Radosh 1983, 22).

Worker-control in the mass media was another development in the direction of “democratizing” the media. The far-left *El Pueblo* (shut down shortly after the insurrection) was organized as a co-operative, and *El Nuevo Diario* was the first major Nicaraguan daily to be owned and managed by everyone working at the newspaper.

Most truly “participatory” were the numerous attempts to enable non-media people to produce the media messages. Government ministries, the FSLN, mass organizations and grassroots organizations were all involved in participatory media projects.

One of the oldest of the mass organizations, the agricultural workers' union ATC, had published the paper *El Machete* for rural workers since before the FSLN victory. In 1982, they began to offer communication workshops to their members and opened a column by workers in rural areas who acted as volunteer community journalists. Both moves were part of an effort by the organization to launch a movement of "popular correspondents" in rural Nicaragua.² The FSLN and other mass organizations joined this effort in 1983, and opened up local radio stations belonging to CORADEP to popular correspondents.³ In 1985, the School of Journalism at Central American University (Universidad Centroamericana) joined as instructors.

By 1986, 963 people had been through these communication training workshops, bringing into media production social classes who had previously been unrepresented "on the other side of the microphone." Popular correspondents had on average a third grade education; some had learned to read and write only through the literacy crusade (Rodriguez 1994, 512).

Such efforts also had the effect of involving more women in the media. Between April 1982 and April 1983, *El Machete* published 151 articles by popular correspondents, twenty-two of which were known to be written by women from isolated rural areas in northern Nicaragua (Rodriguez 1994, 511). The participation of women increased in

² Information on the popular correspondents' movement is drawn largely from Clemencia Rodriguez's 1994 paper, "The rise and fall of the popular correspondents' movement in revolutionary Nicaragua, 1982-90."

³ The popular correspondents' movement is discussed in more detail in the third case study below. As will be discussed, the involvement of the FSLN in such projects was not an entirely positive development.

both the mainstream and small media, and women rose to high levels in the Nicaraguan press (Valdivia 1991, 364; Gomez 1997).

Popular participation was also encouraged in other media such as video. In the initial years of the Sistema Sandinista, mass organizations were allowed extensive access to television; however, this initiative was scaled back as “the finished product seldom matched the initial enthusiasm” (Fung 1981, 67).

Through the agrarian reform ministry, the ATC, and nongovernmental organizations such as CEPA, peasants and peasant leaders were able to produce video programs on subjects such as the agrarian reform (Gomez 1997). According to Ricardo Gomez, who worked in Nicaragua with peasants producing such films,

People were very aware they had more chance to express themselves – the peasants were all very aware that this was only possible because the government backed them and otherwise they would have no access to [training] or audio-visual equipment. (Gomez 1997)

This move towards participation in news production was mirrored by efforts to encourage similar grassroots participation in cultural production.⁴ The revolutionary government championed a “popular culture” in which ordinary Nicaraguans, rather than professional artists, produced cultural works. With the opening of video and radio to the grassroots, the mass media began to carry programs produced by *campesinos* on their folklore and history (Gomez interview). According to Ernesto Cardenal, a poet and Minister of Culture, “The most important [accomplishment in the arts] has been the

⁴ In a nation where the FSLN and the revolutionary government were led by poets and writers, the cultural sphere was hardly peripheral to freedom of expression and the press. All three daily papers published literary magazines, and the arts, from murals to theatre to poetry, dealt with the revolution’s ongoing political battles.

development of a democratization of culture, building a culture that is open and accessible to the masses... as participants and as spectators” (Cardenal qtd. in Craven 1990, 110).

The 1987 Nicaraguan constitution stated that “Nicaraguans have the right to education and culture” (Article 58), and that “It is the duty of the state to promote the recovery, development and strengthening of national culture, *sustained by creative popular participation*” (Article 126, italics mine).

To this end, the Ministry of Culture established a network of popular poetry workshops, numbering 75 by 1985. The participants in these writing programs were generally rural or urban workers (Craven 1990, 111). Popular Centres of Culture (CPC) ran recreational events and taught workshops (Craven 1990, 112). A movement of rural community theatre groups, which had its beginnings in agitational street theatre of the 1970s, worked with peasants and farmers in the development of its works (Bolt 1986; Martin 1988; Peters 1989). While the street theatres of the pre-revolutionary era had begun at the suggestion of FSLN leaders, the movement was quite independent, and Alan Bolt, a central figure in this movement, had an on-again, off-again relationship with the FSLN and the revolutionary government.

Lack of training and access to the media were not the only factors that had prevented the majority from participation in the media. The mass organizations went some way in overcoming the historic lack of public debate that in itself posed a barrier to the participation of the mass of Nicaraguans in the press. Within mass organizations Nicaraguans were encouraged to participate in discussions of national and local affairs.

One of the most controversial discussions in the Nicaraguan press during the Sandinista era was over legalizing abortion. In September 1985 the women's organization AMNLAE held a national congress at which delegates from across the country discussed the subject. The FSLN daily *Barricada* launched debate in November 1985 with a front-page report on a study on illegal abortions, and the issue was picked up by the other two national dailies. In the constitutional forums organized by AMNLAE, the debate continued at the community level, and these discussions among ordinary women were also covered by the dailies. One of the authors of the original study, Dr. Ligia Altamirano, commented: "Abortions have always existed and everyone knows that. But who could you talk to? We remember the things we couldn't talk about under Somoza's regime" (BC Nicaraguan Solidarity Society 1986, 11).

The mass organizations and unions similarly fostered public discussion of the new Nicaraguan constitution passed in 1987. Press coverage of the draft constitution was combined with mass organization dissemination of information about it, and later mass organization-sponsored forums on the draft. The forums themselves, involving 100,000 participants, were broadcast live on radio, and were covered on TV and in the national newspapers (Reding 1991a, 30).

Mass organizations also organized their members to participate in the regulation of media. AMNLAE, for example, brought complaints against pro-government media that violated regulations on the portrayal of women – a law which they had pushed for and which they said the government showed little will to enforce (Nicaragua's new media law 1989, 30).

The Status of Participatory Press Freedoms

By the end of the Sandinista era, the right of access to the means of mass communication and participation in the national press had gained considerable standing in law and in Nicaraguan communications theory. The 1989 media law was built on the principles of media responsibility and the right to participate (Nicaragua's new media law 1989). During this period, the School of Journalism of the Central American University produced research and hosted seminars reflecting various strands of revolutionary press theory, and provided support to popular communication projects.

However, towards the end of the 1980s, growth in actual popular participation in the media abated, in part because of the worsening economic crisis and the effects of the war (Gomez 1997; Bardnt 1991; Craven 1990; Rodriguez 1994). Austerity measures undertaken in 1988 and 1989 damaged or halted projects such as the popular culture programs of the Ministry of Culture and the popular correspondents' movement. Through the mid-1980s, the State of Emergency and corresponding censorship and control of the press hindered participatory journalism as well as the traditional national media.

While participatory press freedom was a goal of the Frente, the revolutionary government and the party organization did not always display a clear commitment to or understanding of ideas such as participatory journalism or the right of access. The pressures of the war and economic instability exacerbated tendencies towards verticalism and centralization. The Frente's own newspaper, *Barricada*, was, when it first started, a

highly polemical, rhetoric-laden paper, run in the main by Marxists from other Latin American countries (Cook 1984, 40; Nichols 1982). (It later improved, and made efforts to run stories that would encourage feedback from a wider range of Nicaraguans (Nichols 1985).) In 1986, *El Nuevo Diario* said of the party radio station: “silence is preferable to the falsifications, poor analysis and self-aggrandizement... that Radio Sandino transmits daily” (Madame Mao in Managua 1986, 112).

Government centralization and bureaucracy took their toll. Ricardo Gomez comments that in a video project on which he worked, which was a collaboration between CEPA and the agrarian reform ministry, the ministry would not have done as well working alone “because of bureaucratic reasons.” For example, Dee Dee Halleck comments that among government departments involved in video projects,

despite the collaborative attitude at the highest level of government, there exists among departments a great deal of competition and possessiveness. ... Midinra [the agrarian ministry’s video workshop] has no way to gauge their schedule on the Sistema [Sandinista], because they are not privy to the Sistema’s long-range planning... (1986, 119)

Nevertheless, after the 1990 election of the UNO government, the revolution’s ideas of press freedom had gained sufficient foothold to cause serious conflict both with returnees unfamiliar with or opposed to the changes that had taken place and with the UNO government. At Sistema Sandinista, students protested when not granted the access to broadcast time they felt entitled to, and media managers came into conflict with staff used to collective management of the station (Update: Media 1990, 13). Call-in radio shows on state-owned radio were eliminated by new, more conservative directors, but continued to run on new private stations (Update: Media 1990, 12).

Much of the revolutionary-era media remained, now privatized, and some of it staff-owned. New media connected to nongovernmental associations arose following the UNO victory; notable was Radio Mujer, a project of the Foundation of Women Reporters of Nicaragua (FBIS 8 December 1992, 25). These media, together with the World Association of Community Radio Broadcasters (AMARC) complained that non-government and community radio stations suffered harassment and discrimination from Nicaragua's post-1990 governments (FBIS 27 July 1990, 35; AMARC 1997; FBIS 21 January 1993, 17).

The cases that follow examine the sources of participatory ideas of press freedom, and the factors that influenced their development in Nicaragua. What was the role of popular movements and mass organizations in the growth of participatory elements of press freedom? How did the FSLN affect such developments? What was the effect of the war and the economic crisis on participatory projects?

Case One: The Literacy Crusade

The Nicaraguan Literacy Crusade of 1980 is a good case for examining popular and Frente contributions to participatory communication for three reasons: its scale, its influence on other educational programs in Nicaragua, and its timing.

In scale, the crusade was a massive undertaking, directly affecting about a quarter of the population. More than 50,000 volunteer *brigadistas* (student literacy teachers) fanned out into the countryside for a five-month period to teach literacy; more than 400,000 Nicaraguans learned basic literacy skills (Cardenal and Miller 1986, 95). The

new mass organizations, including the rural workers' union, the teachers' union ANDEN, the women's organization, and the youth organizations lent support to the effort, along with the Ministry of Education. In urban areas, housewives and workers taught literacy in the evenings. Community groups and individuals raised funds for the crusade, and the mass media carried material to support it.

The crusade would have considerable influence on education and communications during the decade, as it established the model for the adult educational programs that followed (Bardnt 1991), and it was a training ground in new educational methods and philosophy in a country with a shortage of trained personnel.

Finally, the crusade was one of the first actions of the new government, reflecting its desire to transform society into one based on a "logic of the majority." A literacy crusade had been a promise of the Frente long before the insurrection: the historic program of the FLSN, first published in 1969, called for a massive campaign (FSLN 1986, 13). Prior to the revolution, the FSLN had carried out clandestine literacy instruction.

The timing of the crusade was significant: in 1980, the revolutionary government had to cope with extensive damage from the insurrection and a lack of funds, but the *contra* war had not yet begun, despite isolated incidents. U.S. economic pressure had not yet materialized either, and the Frente enjoyed wide popular support domestically and abroad – even though the broad coalition that had overthrown Somoza was already beginning to break down. Thus, many of the later external constraints on government policy had not yet emerged.

The crusade signalled an abrupt break from prerevolutionary educational policies.

In the Somoza era,

The educational disparities that the structure engendered were stark. Of the approximately 70 percent of the children who were of elementary-school age who actually entered the primary grades in 1976, over half dropped out within a year... For the poor, they [the social order and its corresponding educational system] generally created feelings of inferiority; for the wealthy and middle class, attitudes of superiority. (Miller 1985, 20)

A census taken by the revolutionary government in 1979 showed an illiteracy rate of more than 50 per cent, as high as 90 per cent in rural areas (although the effective illiteracy rate during the campaign was found to be closer to 40 per cent) (Miller 1985, 20). While literacy teaching did take place in the Somoza era, it was by church-sponsored groups, who were harassed by the regime (Miller 1985, 21). *La Prensa* organized a national literacy program – using a primer written by Daniel Ortega’s father – but Somoza persecuted the teachers involved, and the National Congress censured the Education Ministry for allowing it to happen (Brackley 1985, 43; Miller 1985, 21). A government-sponsored literacy program, Plan Waslala, actually used literacy teachers to spy on peasants.

The 1980 literacy crusade was designed by the revolutionary regime not simply to teach literacy. It had the larger purpose of enabling people to participate in the development of the country and helping to change power relations in the majority’s favour. As well, the government wanted to demonstrate its commitment to the poor majority (Miller 1985, 22-3).

The designers of the crusade saw it as first and foremost a political project, and only secondarily a pedagogical one. This sprang from their view that all education is political, serving either to uphold a status quo or to change it; the crusade organizers opted for an education in the interests of the majority.

This view of the education, and the methods that would be chosen for the crusade, reflected the new thinking on literacy and development of the late 1960s and 1970s. In forums such as UNESCO, and from thinkers such as Paulo Freire and Tanzania's Julius Nyerere, a new idea of development and education was being formed. Literacy teaching without social change was coming under attack; Nyerere and Freire saw authentic development and education as enabling people to participate in their own development and liberation (Miller 1985, 6-12).

The ideas and methods of Freire had already become part of the experience of popular movements through the work of the Christian communities prior to the insurrection (see Chapter 7). For instance, before the revolution, Ernesto Cardenal, the brother of the crusade's director, had founded a Christian community on the archipelago of Solentiname, where he discarded sermons in favour of community dialogue. Many of the crusade leaders were Christians, including 300 priests and nuns, who had previously done rural development work with the poor (Miller 1985, 176).

Crusade organizers also drew on the experiences and advice of many other countries in both the planning and implementation of the crusade, with Paulo Freire himself acting as one of its advisors. Cuba, which had held its own literacy campaign,

supplied 1,200 teachers. Staff and volunteer teachers came from many other countries as well.

Teaching methods were based on Paulo Freire's work, built around the process of *conscientizacion*, which used a text built on students' lives, and dialogue that analysed this reality to solve problems. A teacher using Freire's approach would begin by presenting learners with pictures showing scenes from their everyday lives, and from group discussion identify key words that reflected important issues in a community. These words would be used not only to teach reading, but also to encourage learners to analyze their collective problems and organize to solve them (Freire 1992; Hirshon 1983, 49).

The crusade was distinguished by the participation of women and the poorer sectors of Nicaraguan society, not only as students, but as teachers, organizers and leaders. In the case of women, for example, over half the *brigadistas* were female (Miller 1985, 200), and it was newly literate women, more often than men, who became popular teachers in the adult education programs that followed up the crusade.

In contrast, the opposition movement and middle classes did not appear to support the crusade. One report notes that organizers faced opposition from some middle-class parents to their children's participation, while working-class parents were generally not antagonistic (Education for change 1981, 4). Alfonso Robelo argued that the crusade's main goal was to consolidate support for the Sandinistas (Epstein 1980, 12) and he began publicly calling for people to drop out of the campaign. The head of COSEP argued that the crusade was designed to "domesticate the minds of the poor,"

when it should have been “selling freedom and democracy” (Miller 1985, 178). Local landlords in the countryside also expressed opposition (Hirshon 1983). The opposition’s foreign ally, the United States, expressed concern about Cuban influence on the campaign. In isolated areas, former National Guardsmen – at this point operating without opposition endorsement – murdered, abducted, or raped *brigadistas*.

Such opposition did not appear to significantly lower participation in the crusade, or to cause the government to change its methods. Miller (1985) reports that “COSEP and opposition leaders like Alfonso Robelo who spoke out against the crusade tended to lose a certain amount of credibility with the general populace because the majority of Nicaraguans felt an extraordinary pride in and identification with the program” (213).

Later, as the *contra* war heated up and the United States increased its pressure on the Sandinista regime, popular education projects were affected by regime opponents and their U.S. ally. For instance, in 1983, Nicaragua asked thousands of Cuban teachers and doctors to leave under pressure from the United States (Schlesinger 1983). In 1983, 750 people were killed by the *contras*, 50 of whom were personnel of the adult education program that followed the campaign. People withdrew from popular education classes; some *campesinos* hid their books (Miller 1985, 214; Hirshon 1983, 221).

Educator Robert Armove notes that at the end of the 1980s, social and economic conditions had deteriorated to Somoza-era levels and, as a result, illiteracy rates had climbed by more than a third, with the absolute number of illiterates approaching pre-crusade levels (1994, 50). Adult education centres closed, and plans for producing adult education texts locally with community involvement were disrupted (Bardnt 1991).

The opposition's critique of the crusade as authoritarian reveals little appreciation for the ideas of popular communication and education underlying it: as an alternative, they espoused a crusade aimed at teaching reading and writing through the use of "nonpolitical" texts. However, their fears that the crusade was influenced by a desire to indoctrinate the population were not entirely unfounded.

The Frente's project of democratic communication and education conflicted with its desire to consolidate its power and particular vision for Nicaragua, and this appears to have led crusade personnel to seek to control the content and outcomes of the crusade's "dialogue." The government departed from Freire's participatory methods in important respects. A national text was used instead of locally-based materials, and slogans instead of single words (Bardnt 1991, 64). Sample questions meant to guide teachers in conducting a dialogue treated people as members of a social group, not as individuals:

This omission was probably due in part to the concern that values and attitudes of cooperation and community responsibility should be stressed instead of those of selfish, self-seeking individualism... Some planners were worried that such wide-ranging discussions could have led participants to express opinions that were not in accord with the common good, thus disrupting the possibilities for developing a revolutionary commitment. (Miller 1985, 89)

The legacy of the prerevolutionary period also placed limits on the degree to which the literacy crusade advanced a truly participatory experience of education and communication. Few were familiar with such methods, and the nation's teaching force was conservative in both politics and teaching methods (Miller 1985, 215).

To summarize, some of the gains of the literacy and the adult education programs were eroded in later years by the effects of the war and the economic crisis. However,

the crusade not only enabled most Nicaraguans to read the country's newspapers for the first time, but widely introduced a new idea of participation in education and communication.

Both the revolutionary elite and popular organizations were driving forces behind these new concepts. However, the crusade's participatory approach was tempered somewhat by authoritarian tendencies both within the Frente and among crusade personnel.

On the other hand, among the middle-class opposition and in the United States, there was considerable unease, and some active opposition, to the crusade's underlying philosophy, which fundamentally departed from previous models of education. This had slight effect on the outcome of the crusade, however, because the opposition movement had little leverage in the face of the Frente's popular support, and the United States had not yet swung its support firmly behind the Frente's opponents. The nascent *contra* forces, while responsible for some *brigadista* deaths, did not seriously disrupt the crusade.

Case Two: Minority Groups and Media Participation

Prior to the revolution, the Atlantic Coast region was a particularly egregious example of the exclusion of many Nicaraguans from any meaningful exercise of press freedom.

As a whole, the region was largely excluded from the mass media. Physical communication was restricted, since no road linked the Atlantic Coast to the Pacific

region. Nicaraguan television was unavailable, and telephone service was extremely limited. While telephone capacity in Zelaya (the Atlantic Coast) doubled from 1978 to 1980, the department still had only 2 per cent of the national telephone capacity, in an area with 7 per cent of the population and 60 per cent of the land mass (Läpple-Wagenhals 1984, 47-8). Outside the towns, the situation was even worse: Brownlee (1983) reports that newspapers in the town of Puerto Cabezas rarely made their way to Miskito villages, and that radio ownership, literacy, and access to education were all higher in Puerto Cabezas than in the surrounding rural areas.

Within this environment, minority groups collectively suffered systemic discrimination and exclusion, with education and mass media in their native languages either limited or unavailable. The illiteracy rate in Miskito villages was 80 to 85 per cent (Brownlee 1983); Somoza had outlawed the teaching of English-speaking children in their native language (English: An oppressed language 1981, 8). Radio was the primary mass medium for the Miskito population, yet only one hour of radio broadcasting a week from one station in Puerto Cabezas was in their language (Brownlee 1983).

With the revolution, the national television system was extended to the Coast, and cross-country telephone relays and a road linking the two coasts were constructed. Libraries were either expanded or established in both the towns and rural areas (English: An oppressed language 1981, 8-9).

In addition to this general expansion of access, the revolutionary government's policies advanced the collective rights of minority groups to press freedom. A literacy crusade was conducted in the English, Miskito, and Sumu languages, and the Bilingual

and Bicultural Act gave official recognition to English and the Miskito and Sumu languages. Broadcasting in minority languages increased by 1981 to four stations, including the independent Radio VER (later closed), which broadcast in Spanish, English, Creole and Miskito, and a daily hour-long show on national radio from Managua in Miskito and Sumu. The new mass indigenous organization, MISURASATA, broadcast on VER (Brownlee 1983).

Legislation passed during the revolutionary period supported the right of Atlantic Coast inhabitants to participate in the media not just as individual Nicaraguans, but as peoples. In the 1989 Media Law, the advisory National Communications Commission included two (of a total of twelve) representatives from the Atlantic Coast:

The Atlantic Coast received the two positions in part to ensure the rights of its population to participation as guaranteed in the autonomy process, and also because the Atlantic Coast is isolated geographically. . . It is especially necessary for the people on the coast to be able to develop their own media. (Nicaragua's new media law 1989, 26)

These changes reflected the new legal recognition that communication rights belonged to groups as well as individuals: the 1987 Constitution not only provided that the state should promote access to the mass media for "the public and its organizations", but also stated that, in addition to prohibiting discrimination on the grounds of language or culture, "The Communities of the Atlantic Coast have the right to the free expression and preservation of their languages, art and culture... The state shall create special

programs to enhance the exercise of these rights” (Political constitution of the Republic of Nicaragua 41, 45-6).⁵

The revolutionary government certainly played a large part in the recognition of press freedom as a minority group right. As early as 1969, the FSLN committed itself to the elimination of discrimination against the indigenous populations of the Atlantic Coast, and to the promotion of the region’s indigenous culture (FSLN 1986, 19).

However, the changes on the Atlantic Coast cannot be seen as simply the result of government policy, but rather as the result of interactions between the revolutionary government and minority group movements.

While the government was the instigator of the first great social program of the revolutionary era, the literacy crusade, it was MISURASATA and the Miskito villagers who argued for and got literacy crusades in the written minority languages of Miskito, Sumu and English (Brownlee 1983; Center for Atlantic Coast Research and Documentation (CIDCA) 1986). The organization was given responsibility for co-directing the campaign in the Miskito and Sumu areas and supplying the literacy workers (CIDCA 1986, 127). The churches of the Atlantic Coast region collected funds for the campaign.

In other instances, the demands of minority groups did not get such a welcoming reception from the Frente. The fate of the AM radio station VER (Voz Educativa

⁵ These developments are interesting in light of the discussions taking place in that era in international forums. Third World organizations such as the Organization of African Unity had promoted the idea of “people’s rights” as well as individual human rights (Roach 1989). Both cultural rights and the right to communicate had been proposed not simply as individual rights, but as group or people’s rights (UNESCO 1970; Roach 1989; Fisher 1983, 40).

Regional), as related by Bonnie Brownlee, one of the project's researchers (Brownlee 1983; 1984), reveals the limits the revolutionary government placed on the press freedom of the Atlantic Coast's minorities.

By the beginning of 1981 the FSLN had minority language broadcasting on national radio, as well as Miskito programming to support the literacy campaign, which was carried on both government radio and the private minority-language station Radio VER. But, from 1979 to 1981, the local revolutionary government on the Atlantic Coast was also in open confrontation with Radio VER.

Radio VER was a U.S. AID-funded development project begun prior to the insurrection, although the radio station itself was on the air before the revolution for only three days. The original purpose of the VER project was to disseminate information on agriculture, health and nutrition in Creole English, Miskito and Spanish. The AID mandate did not allow political news reporting. It was a classic U.S.-style development communications project.

As originally conceived, VER was to have been participatory radio insofar as Brownlee had intended to seek input on programming from the Miskito villagers. The upheaval of the revolution interfered with these plans, but VER nevertheless became a significant voice for the various communities of the region. Its programming involved only minimally the health and agriculture information that was originally planned, but came to include programming from the indigenous organization MISURASATA, from various churches, a Creole cultural program, news and music in Miskito, and literacy programming in Spanish and Miskito from the government (Brownlee 1983). Brownlee

comments, “In probably more important ways, however, the course of events has worked to mould VER into more of a participatory tool for development than any of us could have imagined three years ago” (1983, 67).

With the revolution, the local revolutionary junta assumed that it should run the station. Local and national officials needed to communicate with the population and VER, as the only radio station covering the northern part of the Atlantic Coast, became a target for control (Brownlee 1983, 66).

Brownlee reports that in 1980, the station suffered two armed closures by local militia and Cuban technicians, as well as harassment of the employees. One of these closures apparently resulted from VER reading a *La Prensa* story over the air that officials felt violated the media laws (Brownlee 1983, 149). The closures resulted in mass demonstrations by Miskito Indians and the Creole, Spanish and Chinese inhabitants of Puerto Cabezas, and staff protests, and on both occasions the station reopened.

Brownlee credits mass demonstrations in support of Radio VER for the “rather singular degree of autonomy” that VER was able to maintain up to January 1981 in a country “where any non-Sandinista broadcast or newspaper article may be considered a threat” (Brownlee 1983, 8). Such grassroots demonstrations were not common in Puerto Cabezas, and contrasted rather sharply with the response of VER listeners to the local junta’s broadcasts, which they switched off (Brownlee 1983, 36).

Despite the support of listeners, the local revolutionary government prevailed in this instance:

The final blow to Radio VER came in February 1981, when the local junta ransacked the station, arrested the director, and threatened him with a two-year jail sentence. He quit and fled the country. The station continued in some form for a time, but at this writing, VER no longer is “the voice of the *Costeños*.” (Brownlee 1984, 166)

The VER incident reveals several tensions that shaped press freedom in the Atlantic Coast. First, the Frente’s commitment to improve *costeños*’ lives competed with their need to consolidate power and with their authoritarian tendencies. The FSLN’s views had been shaped by a class-based, rather than an ethnic, struggle: thus, while the party wished to improve the lot of *costeños*, it sought to do this through integration of the region, not minority group rights.

Furthermore, the local junta did not necessarily reflect the aspirations of the government in Managua: local government cadres were sometimes inexperienced and untrained, with limited knowledge of the Atlantic Coast (Smith 1993, 226; CIDCA 1986, 128; Walker 1991c, 98). The Miskito programming on Managua radio, that read hundreds of listener letters on-air, contrasts sharply with the local junta’s “half-hour harangue against the United States” (Brownlee 1983, 36) on local radio.

In short, as the Frente had not developed a clear commitment to minority press rights, they were likely to resort to authoritarianism when they felt minority groups’ demands did not coincide with the consolidation of the revolution.

Minority group pressure was thus key to advancing group press rights, particularly after 1981, when indigenous organizations moved into the counterrevolutionary camp. The war lent the indigenous movement considerable leverage: by the middle of the decade, the FSLN had re-evaluated its policies on the Atlantic Coast, and was working

with the independent indigenous organization MISATAN and some of the indigenous armed opposition on an autonomy plan for the Atlantic region. The result for press freedom could be seen in the recognition of minority group rights in the 1987 Constitution and the media law described above.

Thus, both the FSLN and indigenous movement acted to bring minority group rights into press freedom. However, while the Frente had been somewhat open to the demands of minority movements, indigenous and minority rights movements had not been a part of their revolutionary movement. As a result, the grassroots movements of minority peoples were the primary driving force for change, both in cooperation with and in opposition to the Frente.

Case Three: Access and Participation in Radio

As in many developing countries, radio is a more important news source than newspapers or television for Nicaraguans. During the insurrection, radio broadcasters had played an important role in the fight against the dictatorship and had developed the innovative “journalism of the catacombs” when the dictatorship closed down their broadcasts. Radio was recognized as a vital tool by the FSLN, whose clandestine Radio Sandino was, according to National Directorate member Humberto Ortega,

the principal agitational element in the insurrection and the strike... Without a radio to orient the movement of the masses... there would not have been a revolutionary triumph. (qtd. in Rothschuh Villanueva 1986, 34)

After the Sandinista victory, the general pattern of ownership of radio changed slightly, as radio stations owned by Somoza or those identified with him were confiscated and formed into the state network of regional stations, CORADEP.

However, programming initially stayed much the same, dominated by entertainment. By 1982, Lpple-Wagenhals (1984, 79) reports, overall radio programming was similar to prerevolutionary programming, although educational programs had increased and the ideological content of some radio had changed.

From 1982 on, however, radio changed dramatically, and in contradictory ways. The FSLN's Radio Sandino launched the call-in show *Lnea Directa*, in which listeners could phone in questions to members of the National Directorate and later to opposition leaders (Knox 1987). Radio Sandino also broadcast *Workers in Action*, featuring discussions on economic and defence problems live from the factory floor or work site. Nongovernmental organizations aired radio programming focusing on the previously excluded majority. For example, CEPA produced the program *Peasant Christ*, which interviewed peasants and community leaders in the Christian Base Communities and aired on several CORADEP stations (Gomez 1997).

The ATC began training popular correspondents that same year, and in 1983 the FSLN joined the effort and the regional radio stations of CORADEP began to broadcast popular correspondents' reports (Kopec 1987; Rodriguez 1994). In 1986, 30 per cent of the regional stations' information originated with popular correspondents (Rodriguez 1994, 512).

The changes in programming on CORADEP and Frente stations made the poor of the rural areas of Nicaragua visible in the media for the first time. Rodriguez reports that the popular correspondents “made an important contribution in demystifying mass media, radio in particular. Listening to a radio-story written by a friend or neighbour undermined perceptions of this medium as an unreachable institution” (1994, 514).

Ironically, the moves towards more participatory radio began at the same time that other pressures were moving radio in a distinctly authoritarian direction. In 1982, with the *contra* war and external pressure on the regime worsening, the government declared a State of Emergency. From March 15, 1982 to June 15, 1982, all radio newscasts and political opinion programs were suspended, and all radio stations had to carry the newscast *The Voice of the Defence of the Fatherland* from the government station Voice of Nicaragua (FBIS 17 March 1982, P10; FBIS 15 June 1982, P13). Until the lifting of the State of Emergency in January 1988, many independent newscasts remained closed; those that were allowed to reopen during the State of Emergency agreed to abide by government guidelines (Americas Watch 1988, 35).

Thus, while *La Prensa* was the centre of attention in the debate on censorship during the Sandinista era, radio actually suffered more from censorship, with numerous news programs put off the air. Radio was also subject to the same restrictions as newspapers when reporting on economic and security matters. This hampered efforts towards a more inclusive journalism by limiting reporting on a wide range of subjects, including the Atlantic Coast and the military draft, to official sources.

In addition to State of Emergency restrictions, the development of a “radio war” generally encouraged broadcasting that was distinctly top-down and non-participatory. As part of the *contra* war, the radio stations of neighbouring Honduras and Costa Rica, and clandestine radio stations of the *contra* forces, broadcast pro-*contra* programming into Nicaragua (Frederick 1986; 1990). The Frente’s response to this was to adopt similar tactics: “Everyone in the Nicaraguan war of ideologies is using radio and other electronic and non-electronic means of propaganda to win the hearts and minds of opposing populations” (Frederick 1986, 80). What Mattelart terms “the logic of war” encouraged a distinctly nonparticipatory approach to communication: this logic, he writes, “gives rise to a model of communication whose natural tendency is to underestimate the critical capacity of the receiver” (1986, 16).

During the State of Emergency, the government radio station La Voz de Nicaragua saw its broadcasting as “directed to defence, to instruction, to education for defence, a defence organized by the population...” (qtd. in Läßle-Wagenhals 1984, 149). In short, the war intensified authoritarian elements in the FSLN’s approach to communication.

As the decade progressed, participatory projects in radio declined. Radio Sandino’s *Linea Directa* was taken off the air in 1985, returning (to a private station) only after the beginning of the peace process (Knox 1987). CORADEP generally lost some of its participatory character, although participatory projects continued (Gomez 1997).

The reasons for the decline in participatory radio were due partly to the economic crisis, but the authoritarianism and censorship of the revolutionary government were also a deciding factor. In her study of the popular correspondents' movement of northern Nicaragua, Clemencia Rodriguez (1994) argues that while FSLN involvement in the movement in 1983 gave popular correspondents access to radio and greater resources, it also introduced rather less participatory conceptions of journalism.

Rodriguez argues that FSLN support for the movement was driven by their desire to counterbalance *contra* propaganda. As a result, popular correspondents were selected for training workshops according to ideological criteria, and the FSLN soon centralized control over the movement so that it was an appendage of the FSLN. When the economic crisis of 1988 came, FSLN funding was cut, and the movement, no longer independent of the Frente, crumbled.

While the FSLN had encouraged participation in radio, and obtained a UNESCO grant in 1987 to support participatory radio stations (Robinson and Norsworthy 1988, 140), in its general move towards radio censorship, and the radio war, it came into conflict with the grassroots' conception of popular journalism. Popular correspondents' reports were censored by Sandinista Base Committees in co-ops and work centres, and some popular correspondents recalled being threatened: a popular correspondent from UNAG reported, "some of my mates [other PCS] even got death threats where they were told they were going to have their heads slashed because of some of the stories they were airing on the radio" (Rodriguez 1994, 518).

The history of the popular correspondents' movement suggests that while the revolutionary elite's material support of participatory projects aided their growth, the party's involvement could also dilute or destroy such initiatives, particularly when the party, rather than popular groups, was the dominant participant.

In summary, both the FSLN and the popular classes contributed to the growth of access and participation in radio. However, particularly as the decade progressed, the party also limited change: the Frente's popular allies lost out to the party's growing priority – maintaining power during a time of crisis.

Summary

The rise to power of the FSLN was accompanied by the growth of new elements of press freedom: press freedom as a positive right, as a collective right of classes or peoples, as the right to have access to the means of mass communication, and as the right to participate in the media. These rights both emerged in the revolution's communication practices and projects and were recognized in legislation and journalism scholarship.

While such ideas lie outside the limits of what is generally accepted as liberal press freedom, they do not reject its ideals. As discussed in Chapter 1, they are a response to the barriers to free speech that groups have experienced in liberal press systems. In this respect, they seek to retrieve one of the original meanings of liberal press freedom.

Various movements affected the development of such elements in Nicaragua's press freedom. As discussed in Chapter 7, popular movements and the FSLN championed an articulation of press freedom that emphasized the ability of non-elites to participate in the mass media.

However, while popular movements had in some cases worked for participatory communication for many years before the revolution, the Frente's contribution was more problematic. Although popular movements formed the main base of support for the Frente, the party's approach to communication included vertical, undemocratic elements. The war and the economic crisis served to accentuate this authoritarian approach to communication.

This authoritarianism impeded the development of the more participatory journalism the party ostensibly supported. Attempts by the party and government to control radio, for example, were detrimental to the popular correspondents' movement and to independent projects such as Radio VER.

Popular communication initiatives led by or involving the Frente often had a dual nature. For example, within mass organizations – and in the *Cara Al Pueblo*, which the CDSs helped organize – observers have reported both authoritarian and democratic communication. In the case of the literacy crusade, organizers apparently wanted to encourage ordinary people to speak – but feared the result.

Thus, while both the party and grassroots movements fought for these new press freedoms, popular movements appear to have been key to their survival. Projects in popular communication that began as – or became – initiatives of the FSLN were

vulnerable to the shifting priorities of the revolutionary leadership. For example, the popular correspondents' movement, while gaining resources through its relationship with the FSLN, was seriously affected by the government cutbacks of the late 1980s. On the other hand, the gains in indigenous communication rights appear to be due in part to the independence of the indigenous movement from the Frente.

In stark contrast to the popular classes, the middle-class opposition movement did not participate in popular communication projects, and in some cases, openly opposed them. The opposition movement appears to have had little *direct* effect in its opposition to participatory concepts of communication freedom. *Indirectly*, pressure on the Frente to reach an accommodation with the middle classes led to economic policies detrimental to participatory communication projects. The *contra* war's direct human and economic costs also affected such projects, as in the case of *contra* attacks on adult education workers.

The addition of new meanings to the general discourse of press freedom reflects the revolution's change in social relations. The move towards participation and access was possible because of the improved position of previously excluded social groups.

Had the revolution's struggles failed, these ideas would have been confined to isolated discussions and projects. The upsurge of popular movements brought these ideas into the general discourse of press freedom. With the popular classes as the main base of support for the new state, a new dominant articulation of press freedom began to emerge combining participatory ideas with other elements.

In comparison, because of the upper classes' relative loss of position in relation to the majority, they failed to influence these developments. In contrast to the fight for liberal press freedom's survival, no external allies provided any pressure against participatory press freedom.

The growth of participatory elements was tempered by the fact that while popular movements formed the main base of support for the FSLN, the party could not be equated with its popular allies. Its ideology was not identical to that of the groups lending it support and, moreover, government policy reflected the influence of other forces. Hence, in the late 1980s, as popular movements began to find the FSLN increasingly blocking their demands, participatory initiatives in areas such as radio and culture also declined.

CHAPTER 10

CONCLUSION

The Effect of Social Change on Press Freedom in Nicaragua

By any standard, prerevolutionary Nicaragua was a failure for liberal press freedom. While legal controls on the media were considerable, they accounted for only part of the actual repression of the press. Moreover, the press freedom that did exist was largely irrelevant to lower-class groups.

In the Sandinista era, a new articulation of press freedom was taking shape which combined elements from the prerevolutionary fight for liberal press freedom with new ideas and practices – some liberal, some going beyond traditional liberalism. However, at the same time as press freedom was acquiring new meanings, it was blighted by persisting authoritarianism.

Between these two periods, Nicaragua experienced the most dramatic political and social upheaval of its history. The overthrow of a dictatorship that had dominated Nicaraguan political life for decades opened the way for various social groups to participate in public life. Nicaraguans of all classes were organized as never before. But most dramatically, popular groups – *campesinos*, urban and rural workers, minorities, and the urban poor – were able for the first time to influence how their country was run.

In control of the new revolutionary state stood the FSLN. While the party was clearly an ally of the popular movements, it had to balance the demands of its popular base with the continuing power of the middle and upper classes, who had both economic clout and external allies; international pressures; and its own priorities. As a result, while the power of popular groups had increased, both the traditional elites and the party placed limits on it.

This thesis argued that changing social relations shape press freedom in a society. If this is so, then the press freedom that was emerging in revolutionary Nicaragua should reflect the changes in the relationships among social actors.

As this thesis discussed, social movements in Nicaragua promoted press freedom according to the ways in which they had historically been excluded from it. In the Somoza era, the middle-class and private sector opposition had suffered mainly legal and political limits on civil liberties; in contrast, popular movements had first and foremost experienced economic and social – and on the Atlantic Coast, cultural – barriers to free expression.

Consequently, emerging from the revolution were two different struggles for press freedom. Both the opposition movement and popular groups, including portions of the pro-FSLN bloc, fought state control of the press, although only the opposition movement championed a classical liberal variant of press freedom. The FSLN and popular movements championed group rights to press freedom, and the right of access to and participation in the mass media. However, although popular movements formed the

main base of support for the Frente, the party's ideology also included distinctly vertical, undemocratic approaches to communication.

The middle and upper classes ensured the tenuous, if fluctuating, survival of elements of a free market press freedom. The strengthened lower-class and minority groups introduced an emphasis on the ability of ordinary citizens to participate in the mass media. The Frente itself, while supporting these new kinds of press freedom, also placed controls on the press.

As this study's model of press freedom development would suggest, the most dramatic change in the meaning of press freedom mirrored the most notable shift in Nicaragua's social relations: as popular groups entered Nicaraguan political life, press freedom changed to reflect their experiences.

Of course, reality has a way of being messier than theory, and the case of Nicaragua is no exception. The revolutionary press system took shape in the context of an uprising that caused massive human and material damage, followed by the *contra* war and economic crisis. War or similar states of emergency tend to increase controls on free speech and freedom of the press: we cannot know how authoritarian the press system would have been had the *contra* war not erupted. Nor can we know how participatory communication projects would have fared had economic problems been less severe.

As well, while press freedom is shaped by social change, it is not simply the sum of movements' goals and actions. Even revolutions do not present a *tabula rasa*, and prerevolutionary continuities in institutions and their personnel, in practices and beliefs, sometimes thwarted the best of intentions.

While much authoritarianism in the Sandinista era can be attributed to the ideology of the new elite, the FSLN, some was due to beliefs and behaviours persisting from the Somoza period. For example, paternalistic attitudes and methods persisted in the literacy crusade – despite organizers’ conscious intent to use participatory methods.

The Role of Popular Movements in Press Freedom Development

What does the case of Nicaragua suggest about the conditions likely to produce a press freedom that includes the equal right to receive and originate communication?

Chapter 2 argued that in cases where social relations became more equal, popular movements would tend to shape press freedom in more egalitarian ways. In the case of Nicaragua, the increased power of lower-class and minority groups was mirrored by the emergence of ideas and practices intended to overcome economic, institutional, and cultural barriers to free expression through the press.

This presents an interesting parallel to England in the nineteenth century, where the rising power of the working class and its entry into political life was accompanied by a similar challenge to economic barriers to free expression – in that case, the fight for cheap papers.

Of course, neither the social changes nor the changes in press freedom were identical in these two cases. To begin with, the change in social relations differed in degree and speed: in England, the rising power of the working class never led to a revolution. The English and Nicaraguan cases involved different social movements, with different identities and goals: popular participation in the Nicaraguan revolution

included social classes other than the working class, whose goals went far beyond the nineteenth-century demands for labour and voting rights.

Moreover, while both the English and Nicaraguan movements sought to extend press freedom to excluded groups, in nineteenth-century England this translated into the more recognizably liberal aim of abolishing state taxes.

Nevertheless, the parallels do suggest that under certain conditions – among them the prior presence, however weak, of liberal press freedom – popular movements will seek to redefine or expand that freedom in response to their experiences of exclusion from it.

Many of the communication rights championed by the pro-FSLN bloc and popular movements in Nicaragua have been proposed in both the West and the developing world: the right of access to the means of communication, the right to participate in the media, and press freedom as a group right. The case of Nicaragua suggests that one way in which press freedom can come to include such rights is through the growing strength of popular movements.

The Discourse Approach to Press Freedom Development

How does the approach to press freedom development used in this thesis compare to that of previous studies of press freedom in Nicaragua?

This thesis argued that press freedom is best characterized as a changing discourse shaped by social struggles. That social relations affected press freedom development would be of little interest if every social group to push forward press

freedom gave it the same meaning. Viewing press freedom as a discourse – that is, as a body of changing elements that are not necessarily linked to each other, rather than as a model with specific predefined elements – provides an open-ended model of press freedom development. It allows us to explore press freedom development in a nation when, as in Nicaragua, press freedom takes on meanings different from those in the West.

Using the discourse concept helped broaden the scope of this thesis to include developments in press freedom not falling within the liberal tradition. As discussed in Chapter 4, much of the literature on press freedom in Nicaragua focuses only on developments falling within current liberal models of press freedom.

This thesis argued that those studies of the Nicaraguan press system that used a variation of the “models” approach to press freedom development were unable to explain why press freedom development took a particular path.

In *Four Theories*-inspired models of press freedom development such as Merrill’s (1974), change in the press system should correlate with a shift to another stage of society with a different political theory, economic level, and so on. If change in press freedom is the result of a shift to a new societal type, then the causes of this societal shift are the explanation for press freedom change.

Examinations of the Nicaraguan communication system that used such an approach, such as those by Brownlee (1984) and Läßle-Wagenhals (1984), tended to look for causes of press freedom change in the ideology of the revolutionary regime. Researchers working from the assumption that post-victory Nicaragua was a new

“model” of society focussed on government ideology as they assumed the revolutionary regime was restructuring society in its image.

In short, such studies identified a particular group – Nicaragua’s new revolutionary elite – with a full-blown ideology and its corresponding press model, both of which it imposed on Nicaraguan society.

Yet, as Brownlee herself noted, it wasn’t possible to identify the revolutionary press system with any one of the several commonly recognized press models. Clearly what happened in Nicaragua was more complex than a shift from one model to another, corresponding to a new type of society.

Abandoning the models approach allowed this thesis to look for the historic influences on specific observed elements of revolutionary communications. This thesis found that no one movement or group could be totally identified with either a complete version of a known press model or the entire body of press ideas and practices observed in Nicaragua. Tracing the contribution of other groups in Nicaragua to press freedom made it apparent that what was occurring in Nicaragua was not reducible to a shift from one model to another, each with separate backers. Rather, press freedom change had resulted from the collective actions of various movements, sometimes competing, sometimes allied.

Press freedom change could not be attributed to a change in the elite controlling the state and hence to a change in state ideology. Changed social relations, and not simply a change of government ideology, had widened what press freedom could mean in

Nicaragua. In fact, government policy was as much a reflection as a cause of the evolving meaning of press freedom.

Understanding press freedom change as shaped by social relations also explains the dramatic changes that take place in the press during revolution without resorting to a “revolutionary” model of the press. In a revolution, social change is sped up, so that it becomes dramatically visible. If press freedom is shaped by social changes, then changes in press freedom should also become compressed into a narrower span of time. Thus, the press phenomena observed in revolutions – a sudden upsurge in the number of media, the entry of new groups into the press – no longer appear as peculiar to revolutionary situations, but rather as the intensification of developments which are always underway. If the changes to the press in revolution are a special instance in an ongoing process, rather than a separate press model, then we would expect both the continuities that Nichols (1982, 1985) observed, and the proliferation of new ideas and practices documented by scholars such as Rothschuch Villanueva (1986).

Seeking the historic influences on various elements of the revolution’s press freedom also allows us to forecast the shape of press freedom in Nicaragua in the future.

Studies of press freedom in Nicaragua that focussed on the governing elite’s ideology would naturally expect press freedom change to mirror changes in government. However, this thesis found that developments in press freedom during the Sandinista era were not direct reflections of Sandinista ideology, but rather, reflected the balance of social forces in Nicaraguan society.

Therefore, we would expect that press freedom ideas and practices championed by popular groups would survive to the extent that the increased strength of these groups was maintained. Any rollback in the social relations change of the revolution should similarly decrease the presence of such elements. Of course, in addition to social change, press freedom would also be influenced by external pressures and by institutional inertia – as we saw in the case studies of the Sandinista era, old practices and ideas take time to die.

In Nicaragua, the dramatic social change of the revolutionary period was indeed followed by a period of rollback or correction – a common dynamic in revolutions. It is difficult to pronounce on the degree to which revolutionary social changes are permanent, partly because it is difficult to say when a revolution is truly over. However, in the post-1990 period, the Sandinistas and their popular allies remained a significant force, with the FSLN adopting a strategy of “governing from below” – despite the fact that they have up to now been unable to win the national elections. On the other hand, though it was not possible to turn back the clock to the Somoza era, many of the reforms of the revolutionary period have been softened.

We would expect press freedom to reflect this shift, moving towards free market practices favoured by the opposition movement and away from the combination of participatory press freedom and media responsibility of the Sandinista period. And indeed, this is what has occurred. While media and organizations devoted to more participatory approaches remain, the post-1990 period is significantly more oriented

towards a free market approach to the press – television and many radio stations, for example, are once again privately operated.

We should expect press freedom to be continually changing just as a society's social relations are constantly shifting. While this study confines itself to press freedom change in the first decade of the Nicaraguan revolution, developments in this period were not isolated from those coming before and after. The press freedom elements described in Chapters 8 and 9 belonged to an *emerging* articulation of press freedom. Unlike a press models approach, viewing press freedom as a discourse highlights the fact that press freedom never arrives at a finished form, that even as we observe a new arrangement of elements emerging in one period, the next shift may be under way. Just as there is no closure in social change, there is none to be found in press freedom development.

While movements shape press freedom according to their own interests and experiences, when they do so, their contribution to press freedom will reflect preexisting ideas and practices, including authoritarian ones: they are essentially adding new brushstrokes to a work already in progress. This highlights the importance of considering the environment within which movements develop and the ideas to which they have access, rather than simply imputing certain positions to lower-class groups.

It would be interesting to apply the approach of this thesis – that of tracing the changing contributions of social forces to press freedom according to their changing strength – to predict possible future directions of press freedom development in other nations. However, the specific arrangement of ideas and practices that emerged in

Nicaragua was the product of its particular combination of external pressures, its pre-existing press freedoms, and the particular ideas and experiences of the various social groups in Nicaragua. Other countries will develop press freedom in light of their own constellation of pressures, press freedom history and social experience.

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