

ARTICLE APPEARED

525

NATION

26 November 1983

The Lone Ranger

The appearance in New York City of Edén Pastora Gómez, the Sandinistas' best-known renegade, was as tumultuous as some of his other historic performances, though a good bit less lethal. On November 11, he stood on the stage of Columbia University's Altschul Auditorium while an anti-Pastora clique screamed and chanted abuse ("Traitor" . . . "C-I-A" . . . "Hijo de puta") and a pro-Pastora clique screamed and chanted back ("Comunistas" . . . "Pa-sto-ra"). Pastora, who seemed to revel in the confrontation, serenely explained that he had come to the United States to present his "profound analysis" of "the Nicaraguan crisis" and to make clear why his attacks on his besieged homeland are truly progressive, while Nicaragua's other enemies are reactionary agents of U.S. imperialism.

Pastora's U.S. visit was sponsored by Freedom House, his talk by the Columbia chapter of the Young Social Democrats, U.S.A.; both groups seem to agree that freedom is essentially anticommunism. Pastora is a peculiar kind of anticommunist, however, one who continues to profess his admiration for Che Guevara and Fidel Castro (as well as for Maurice Bishop) while insisting that the Cubans leave his country forthwith. He directs a ragtag army, comprising Costa Ricans, Panamanians and a few Nicaraguans, in raids from its Costa Rican bases into southern Nicaragua; there they steal cattle and terrorize peasants. He is fighting, he says, to make the revolution more Nicaraguan and more democratic, by which he seems to mean that the Sandinista leaders should stop driving Mercedes-Benzes and should hold elections sooner than 1985, as they had promised.

Pastora is a man of considerable military but scant political acumen. Like the gunslinger Shane, he is a hero whose context has disappeared. He has been a rebel warrior since at least 1959, first as part of the violent wing of the Conservative Party, then as a Sandinista and now on his own. In between, he took time out to develop a fishing company in Costa Rica and to acquire Costa Rican citizenship. Like the classic bandit at the dawn of capitalism, he is an extreme individualist who makes his laws with a gun and binds his followers to him by energy and audacity.

But the situation has changed: Somoza is defeated and dead. Today, Nicaraguans face the difficult revolutionary tasks of rebuilding a destroyed society, amid external attacks by C.I.A.-sponsored counterrevolutionaries, and developing democracy—which, translating directly from the Greek, they call "people's power." Those tasks require cooperative and collective effort, which "Commander Zero," who earned his sobriquet in the flamboyant attack on the National Palace in 1978, cannot tolerate. In fact, he not only wars upon his former Sandinista comrades; he is forever quarreling with the exiled Nicaraguan bourgeois

(Alfonso Robelo and friends) who are his only visible allies.

Commander Zero's call for defections from the Sandinista Army has brought a much smaller response than he had expected. That is mainly because his complaints about a lack of democracy have little appeal to poor Nicaraguans, who feel that they now have more power over their own lives than ever before. "People's power" means mass participation in local government and in the day-to-day administration of civil institutions, which is just what the Sandinistas' opponents would take away. Thus, many workers and *campesinos* fear that elections might mean not more democracy but less—especially if they brought to authority groups that would reprivatize industry and restore full decision-making power to the owning class. Besides, it is difficult to hold elections while your country is under attack.

Pastora's insistence that elections be held soon is probably rooted in a belief in his own popularity. In fact, it is likely that he would have been elected president of the new regime had elections been held in 1979, since he was the most photographed and best known of the rebel *comandantes*. But now he has killed too many sons and daughters of the people, and has allied himself too closely with their class enemies, perhaps even with the C.I.A., to recover his stature as a freedom fighter. It is a pity that in Nicaragua's hour of extreme danger, he has forfeited the right to raise his "revolutionary rifle" in the country's defense, and instead allows himself to be used by right-wing Nicaraguan and U.S. groups whose concept of freedom would translate into more Mercedes-Benzes for the few and far less power for the people.

There is a legitimate concern about democracy in Nicaragua, and elections will be an important guarantee against abuses of power. However, elections in themselves do not create popular rule, as the continued state terror in nearby El Salvador makes plain. Literacy, economic equality and the experience of broad popular participation give Nicaraguans the chance to develop the most fully democratic government in the region, a chance we hope they will seize and defend despite the grave provocations by Pastora and other enemies of Nicaragua's revolutionary process.

GEOFFREY-FOX