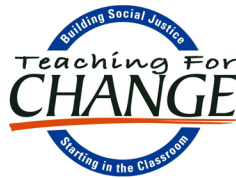


Inside the Volcano: A Curriculum on Nicaragua

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Before the Revolution: Land Distribution in Nicaragua

Why do people revolt? Any understanding of the causes for the 1979 revolution in Nicaragua, indeed for social upheaval throughout Central America, needs to begin with the issue of land: who owns it, and who doesn't.

This opening simulation demonstrates to students the dramatic inequalities in land and income distribution in pre-revolutionary Nicaragua. The exercise not only engages students in understanding some of the causes for revolt in Nicaragua, but also begins to anticipate some of the problems the new government would encounter when it came to power in July of 1979.

It should be noted that this simulation could, with only slight change, be adapted to demonstrate similar conditions which exist today in Honduras, El Salvador and Guatemala.

Goals/Objectives

1. Students will gain first-hand experience with the unequal pattern of land ownership in Nicaragua prior to 1979.
2. Students will reflect on possible responses to inequality.

Materials Needed

- Masking tape, m&m candies (optional)
- Handout #1: **Inequality in Pre-revolutionary Nicaragua**

Time Required

- One class period

Procedure

1. Before class, use the masking tape to mark off a space on the floor roughly 15' by 10'. Divide this area lengthwise into sections that are 60% and 40% of this space.
2. Explain to students that they are going to participate in a demonstration of land ownership in a country in Central America, and that the diagram on the floor represents the total arable (farmable) land in the country.
3. Choose one student to represent the 2% of the population that owns the 60% section of land. Choose about 35% of the class (nine students in a group of twenty-five) to fill in the re-

maining 40% section. These are subsistence or medium-sized land holders.

Note: These figures are very rough, but work fine as an introduction to the issues raised by unequal distribution of agricultural land. See the Agricultural Population of Nicaragua (1978) chart in Handout #1: **Inequality in Pre-revolutionary Nicaragua** for a more precise breakdown.

4. Explain to the remaining students that they are out of luck because they don't own anything but their own ability to work. Ask them to line up along the tape, just outside the rectangle.

Ask these students what choices they have if they want to stay alive. Students should be able to generate at least the following:

- work for someone who owns land
 - turn to crime: steal from the people who have property, sell drugs, engage in prostitution
 - flee the country to seek better conditions elsewhere
 - work to change the inequalities through legal means (land reform legislation, welfare programs, etc.) or illegal means (revolution)
5. *(optional)* Explain that in this simulation m&m candies will represent money and that two m&ms are required to live at a bare subsistence level. Give two packets of candies to the large landowner. One packet should contain 10 to 12 m&ms. This packet is for the owner's personal consumption. Encourage the owner to eat the candies at his or her leisure. Give a second packet of candies to this large landowner. This packet should contain a number of m&m candies roughly equal to the number of students not in the rectangle. This is the owner's wage packet. With the other students listening, tell the owner that these m&m candies may be used to hire the landless to do whatever work the owner needs to have performed. (For the purpose of the simulation the landless might move or clean desks, sweep the floor, or simply pretend they are doing agricultural labor for the owners.) Remind students that everyone needs at least two m&m candies in order to avoid starvation. Competition should be sharp for jobs offered by the large landowner as the landless are starving and the owner

doesn't have enough work to go around. Give two m&m's to each of the small farmers. They are surviving — barely.

6. If you decide not to use the m&m candies, simply tell students the owners are not able, or willing, to hire all the landless. Ask: Of the options we talked about earlier, which would you choose? If some of them say they would try to work for change, ask the small farmers whether or not they would support the efforts of the landless or if they are unwilling to rock the boat. Which changes might they support and which would they oppose?
7. Some discussion questions could include:
- (To the landless): Why did you make the choice you did? e.g., to flee the country, to turn to crime, etc.
 - How did you feel about the treatment you received from the large landowner? from the small farmers?
 - How did you react when you saw there wouldn't be enough work for all the landless and that you might starve?
 - Was there competition between the landless or did people pretty much stick together? Why?
 - Why would some people tolerate these conditions? (Do they lack trust in each other or in their ability to work together? Do they believe the money of the owners will be able to corrupt some people? Don't they deserve any better conditions? Do they think the government will side with the rich against the poor?)
- (To the small farmers): What would convince you to help the landless try to

make conditions in your country more fair?

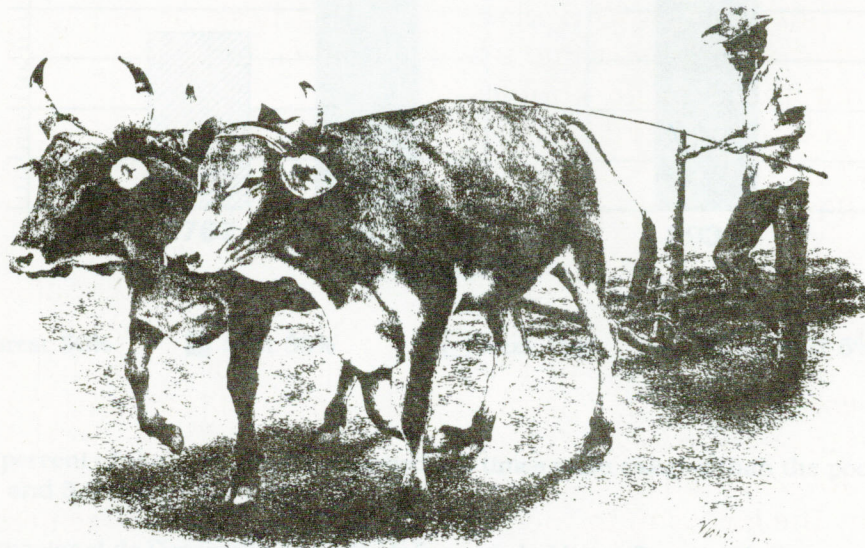
- How do you feel about the rich? Do you resent them? Are you envious and want to be one of them?
- (To the large landowner): When you hired people to work for you, what did you take into account?
- Were you worried the poor might unite against you, either to demand higher wages or even to take away your property and redistribute it?
- Did you use any techniques to prevent the landless from uniting with one another or with the small farmers?
- What would you have done if the poor had attempted to take your land from you?
- How can you justify benefitting from such a grossly unequal distribution of land?
- To all students: What do you think is the history to this system of unequal ownership of land and wealth — how did a few people come to own so much?

8. To help students answer the above questions thoughtfully, you might first ask them to remain in their roles and to write interior monologues from the point of view of their characters: What are they thinking and feeling? What fears and hopes do they have? [Note: An interior monologue is simply a first-person narrative of what's going on in a particular person's mind. Students should be encouraged to write quickly, without worrying about punctuation, grammar or spelling.]

9. Explain that the country the class simulated in the exercise was Nicaragua before 1979. Review the charts and statistics included in Handout #1: **Inequality in Nicaragua.**

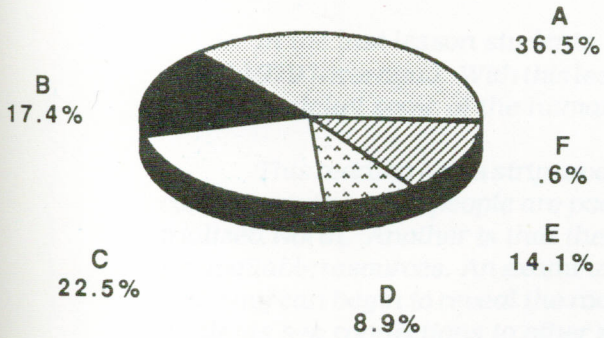
10. Discuss or ask the class to write on the following questions:

- Based on our demonstration, why do you think there was a revolution in Nicaragua in 1979?
- What social groups do you think supported the revolution?
- What do you imagine were the major goals of the revolution?

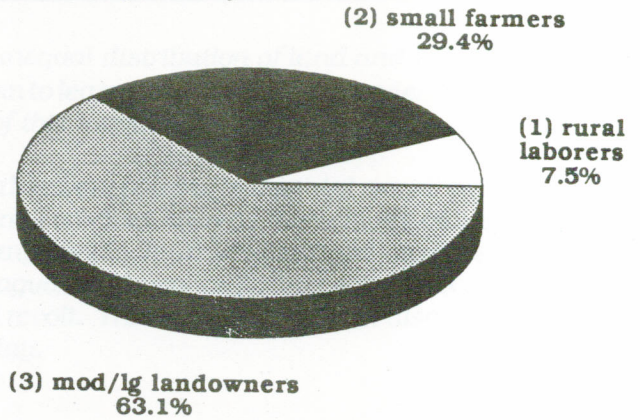


Inequality in Pre-revolutionary Nicaragua

Agricultural Population of Nicaragua (1978)



Distribution of Rural Income (1972)



- A. Holders of less than subsistence parcels
- B. Seasonal farm laborers
- C. Holders of subsistence parcels
- ▨ D. Holders of medium-size parcels
- ▩ E. Full-time salaried workers
- F. Owners and managers of large landholdings

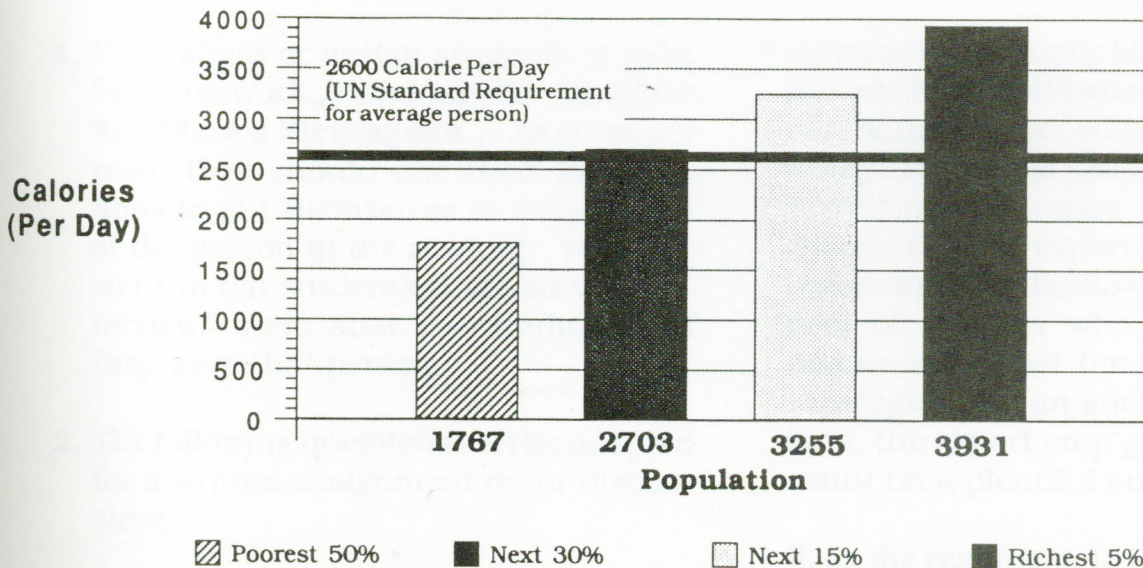
- (1) 51% of economically active rural population
- (2) 45.5% of economically active rural population
- ▨ (3) 3.5% of economically active rural population

Source: CIERA

Source: Unidad de Analisis Sectorial, FAO Informe, 1979.

Source: CIERA

Nutritional Intake by Income Group (1971)



Note: The richest 5 percent of the population consumed 2.2 times more calories than the poorest 50 percent; 2.5 times more protein; and 3.5 times more fats.

Source: Fondo Internacional de Desarrollo Agricola, Informe de la Mision Especial de Programacion a Nicaragua, 1981, p. 54.