Intervention in Nicaragua

■ Recent Times' editorials reveal a serious misunderstanding of an important Nicaraguan reality ("Sit Down and Shut Up," July 7, and "Push Getting Close to Shove," July 12). In the February election, incumbent President Daniel Ortega received 40% of the vote in his loss to Violeta Barrios de

Chamorro. This in spite of 10 years of U.S.-sponsored war and economic embargo that reduced the Nicaraguan economy to a shambles.

Before the war and the embargo began to take their toll, the Sandinistas were making respectable progress in addressing the social devastation left behind by Anastasio Somoza. They made impressive gains in health care, brought education to peasants who had never seen the inside of a school, and presided over a growing economy. Had Washington not destroyed the Sandinista experiment, it is virtually certain that Nicaragua's voters would have returned them to power.

New President Chamorro plans to dismantle the Sandinistas' "preferential option for the poor," and she is eager to help former Somoza supporters regain the land they lost after the Sandinistas took power. Where, in a program based on the economics of Milton Friedman, do you expect Ortega to find room for the "cross-ideological reconciliation" you advise him to promote? Where in these plans do you find Chamorro's intention to "heal the wounds of conflict?"

The Sandinistas should be taken seriously on their merits. Rather than calling on Ortega to "sit down and shut up," The Times should advise Chamorro to work toward a political economy that will not favor the rich at the expense of the poor.

Worse advice is your call for Nicaragua's (right-wing) neighbors to consider armed intervention in Nicaragua. unthinkable except within the frame of reference established by cold warriors and conservative economists. Nicaragua's only hope for internal stability depends on Chamorro recognizing that nearly half of Nicaragua's population will not tolerate a return to the past.

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