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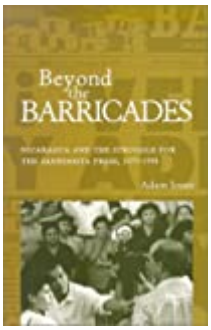

Adam Jones. *Beyond the Barricades: Nicaragua and the Struggle for the Sandinista Press, 1979-1998.* Athens: Ohio University Press, 2002. xxx + 308 pp. $30.00 (paper), ISBN 978-0-89680-223-0.

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Dilemmas of a Revolutionary Press: Mobilization versus Professionalism

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Adam Jones ably examines the history of *Barricada*, the official organ of the Sandinista National Liberation Front (FSLN), from its inception until its closure. *Barricada* began as the Sandinistas' official daily newspaper after the FSLN seized power following the overthrow of Nicaraguan dictator Anastasio Somoza in 1979. During the 1980s, it functioned as a propaganda tool for the Sandinistas even while the editorial board tried to increase the newspaper's professionalism and autonomy vis-a-vis the FSLN. The Sandinista electoral defeat in 1990 greatly augmented the newspaper's independence. Consequently, in order to regain control of *Barricada* and to use it to help the FSLN reclaim the presidency in 1996, the Sandinistas fired the newspaper's editor in late 1994 and put orthodox party officials in charge of *Barricada*. Within one month, approximately 80 percent of the newspaper's editorial staff was dismissed or resigned. Although it returned to its original role as propaganda organ, its subsequent loss of readers and advertisers, along with the electoral defeat of the Sandinistas in 1996, precipitated the newspaper's closure in early 1998.

Jones's book stems from his dissertation, which compared transitional presses under "soft" authoritarian governments in Nicaragua, South Africa, Jordon, and Russia. Although the book is based on archival research and a number of unpublished documents, it mostly rests on *Barricada* newspaper articles and three months of interviews conducted with thirty-seven newspaper staff members and government officials in 1991, 1996, and 1998. Most of these interviews were one-offs. However, *Barricada*'s director and editor-in-chief, Carlos Fernando Chamorr, and the director and editor-in-chief of *Barricada* supplement *Gente* (*People*), Sofia Montenegro, were interviewed eleven and nine times respectively. This, along with Jones's "own bias toward the Chamorro-directed incarnation of *Barricada*," results in a book that is strongly colored by the views of both editors (p. xiii).

When the Sandinistas were in power during the 1980s, *Barricada* assisted the vanguard FSLN party in fomenting the revolutionary transformation of Nicaragua. In light of this role, and since the FSLN was the newspaper's primary and most generous sponsor, Jones ar-

gues that there was little room for "journalistic professionalism and objectivity" (p. 9). Revolutionary solidarity between the FSLN leadership and *Barricada*'s editorial board, along with scarce material resources and the threat posed by the Contras and their supporters in Washington, bound the Sandinistas and their official organ closely together.

Despite adhering to a vanguard conception of the press as well as sharing a commonality of interests and threats, soon after *Barricada*'s founding the editorial staff tried to professionalize the newspaper and move it toward greater institutional autonomy. According to the author, the roots of this "professional imperative" (p. 11) are found in "the influence of the U.S.-sponsored school of journalism in Managua; the professional model of development by pre-revolutionary *La Prensa*; the day-to-day competition between *La Prensa* and *Barricada*; ... [and] the moral economy of journalism" (p. 39). The newspaper's initial goal was to reduce the FSLN's influence in *Barricada*'s everyday operations. As editor, Chamorro was able to ban party leaders from the newsroom and assign one FSLN official as a liaison between the party and the newspaper. Since Jones did not interview any leading FSLN officials regarding these first initiatives, we can only guess that the government turned a blind eye to *Barricada*'s semiautonomous operation because the newspaper remained an uncritical supporter of the Sandinistas and a propaganda tool for mass mobilization.

Even though it was considered dull reading due to its "stilted political coverage and turgidly 'official' tone" (p. xx), during the 1980s *Barricada* was the most widely published newspaper in Nicaraguan history, with a daily circulation of 120,000. In the late 1980s, according to Jones, Nicaraguan civil liberties and freedom of the press expanded due to the scaling-back of the Contra War, the writing of a new constitution, and new market-oriented economic policies. Although these developments appear to be important to the author's argument, Jones gives them little attention.

The shocking 1990 defeat of Sandinista presidential incumbent Daniel Ortega left the FSLN leadership weak and disoriented. After handing the government over to the conservative opposition, the Sandinistas were not in a strong position to negotiate with *Barricada* when the newspaper's editorial staff demanded and won greater independence. While the FSLN retained ownership of the newspaper, a new mediating institution known as the editorial council was formed. This new body, which "drew its membership from the Sandinista establishment rather than the party leadership" (p. xxi), advocated greater institutional autonomy for *Barricada* and supported the newspaper's move toward a more professional, western-style reporting. From 1991 to 1994, a period that Jones terms the "autonomy project," *Barricada* established professional ties with other domestic and foreign newspapers, launched a Sunday edition (the first in Nicaraguan history), put greater energy and resources into investigative journalism, improved production, removed insurrectionary logos from the newspaper's masthead, and reoriented itself "in the marketplace of commerce rather than ideas" (p. 66). Instead of being a mouthpiece for the FSLN, the newspaper now sought to "put national interest ahead of narrow sectarianism" (p. xxi). As such, *Barricada* became the watchdog of the new UNO government led by President Violeta Chamorro. Unfortunately, the author never asked *Barricada* editor Carlos Chamorro what he thought of his new role as leader of the opposition press against his mother's administration.

The autonomy project coincided with an internal battle within the FSLN leadership, between the renovationist faction (i.e., FSLN members who wanted to reform the party's economic and political platform) and the orthodox currents (i.e., FSLN members who sought retrenchment). Jones gives scant attention to how this battle was waged and won, as is evident by his comment that this period "is murky indeed" (p. 126). Domestic political machinations matter little to the author; instead, Jones focuses on how the victory of the orthodox (i.e., Democratic Left) undermined *Barricada*'s quest for a more independent and professional press. Since the orthodox current was against *Barricada*'s autonomy project, it is not surprising that the editorial staff supported the renovationist position. After the *ortodoxos* triumphed over the renovationists at the May 1994 FSLN Special Congress, the latter were purged from the party. Six months later, orthodox leader Tomas Borge fired Chamorro and took over as director of the newspaper and president of its editorial council. This act, along with the loss of 80 percent of *Barricada*'s editorial staff, ended the autonomy project and returned the newspaper to its initial role as a passive mouthpiece for the Sandinistas.

According to Jones, even though the Sandinistas had their own radio and television station, complete control over *Barricada* was deemed essential to the FSLN's campaign to regain the presidency in 1996. Party control of the newspaper was crucial since, in the eyes of many orthodox leaders (including the "opportunistic" former President Daniel Ortega), *Barricada* was in collusion with

the new Violeta Chamorro government, a charge that editor Carlos Chamorro adamantly denies and Jones clearly disproves.

Most Nicaraguan readers did not like the return of the old *Barricada*. In the mid-to-late 1990s, the newspaper lost a lucrative textbook contract with the Ministry of Education, and circulation and advertising revenue declined sharply. Due to the severe economic crisis afflicting the country, rank-and-file Sandinistas were unwilling to subsidize *Barricada*. The FSLN's own dire economic state made it impossible for the party to pay newspaper workers, which led many of them to strike over two months of back wages. In this case Jones's analysis would have benefited from Bruce Wright's work on the ideology and practice of the FSLN. In his book, Wright convincingly demonstrates that contrary to expectations, the Sandinistas often took for granted their working-class supporters, many of whom suffered great privation during the 1980s both in the name of political pluralism and due to the constraints placed on the government by the Contras and Washington. The fact that Wright's book is part of the same Ohio University Press series, yet is not mentioned in the author's bibliography, indicates that Jones did not do his homework carefully enough.

In the end, the lack of a quality staff at the newspaper, its loss of identity, plummeting circulation, the disappearance of advertisers, declining revenue, the FSLN's own financial woes, Ortega's defeat in the 1996 presidential election, along with the continuing clash between the mobilizing and professional imperatives at *Barricada*, led Borge to close the newspaper in January 1998.

Although the book is well written, it sometimes gets bogged down in the day-to-day events that led up to and followed Chamorro's departure as *Barricada*'s editor. Despite this minor shortcoming, Jones's work should be read by scholars interested in Nicaraguan history since 1979 or the evolution of a vanguard press. The book will be most useful to upper-level and graduate courses.

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