I: Nicaragua's education is one area where the Sandinistas accomplished in terms of improving health care and general living standards.

Q: What is the present educational situation in Nicaragua?

A: In terms of health, they've made a concerted effort to reduce all kinds of mortality and morbidity, in terms of both curative medicine and preventive medicine. One of the problems is that there are no decent figures from Somoza's regime, but I can give you some examples of some of the more spectacular achievements. There are oral rehydration projects that have reduced infant mortality due to diarrhea to fifth place; it used to be in first place.

And I should point out that, particularly to get vaccinations such as for polio, measles, DPT, and malaria, you have to have access to virtually all of the population, and this is one thing that the Sandinistas have been able to accomplish, in part because of their literacy campaign. They had 100,000 workers go out and at night teach a great majority of illiterate Nicaraguans how to read, and the illiteracy rate went from something like 59 percent to something like 12 percent. It was a remarkable campaign.

There are a lot of lapses in the health delivery system, and that has to do with questions of education. But a great deal of attention is being paid to building more hospitals and to educating new health workers. One of the things that was pointed out to us was that having to pay so much attention to the threats to Nicaragua's sovereignty not only requires a lot of economic resources, but it takes the attention of the most important members of the government away from reconstructing the country. This is a country that was devastated by an earthquake in '72, and downtown Managua is still devastated, and then devastated by the war against Somoza. Now all of this attention that has produced really spectacular results, a lot of that is now being forced to be paid elsewhere.

Q: What is the present educational situation in Nicaragua?

A: Nicaragua's education is one area where the Sandinistas from the very beginning paid a lot of attention, in addition to this literacy campaign which, as I said, was very impressive and got a lot of awards, recognition from international bodies, from other countries. In terms of formal education at all levels there are over a million students. In a sense, you can say that more than one-third of the population is in classrooms, and that's because of the demographic structure of Nicaragua, it's a very young country.

Many people who were previously directors of universities now are in charge of that department. But the situation in Nicaragua in terms of primary, secondary, and higher education, is remarkably healthy. In the market we talked to one man, and he said he was very pro-Sandinista. We asked why. He said, "Now I'm free." We said, "What's that mean?" He said, "I can read."

"I think that you can't compare Nicaragua with El Salvador. El Salvador is hell."