



LIVE FROM NICARAGUA: UPRISING OR COUP?

A READER

Live from Nicaragua : Uprising or Coup?

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FOREWORD

Telling the Truth as a Revolutionary Act

by Gabriela Luna

Foreword: Telling the Truth as a Revolutionary Act

By Gabriela Luna

The geographical position, extraction of natural resources, exploitation of cheap labor and possibility of building an inter-oceanic canal have been the axes of imperialist interest in Central America. This has bathed the region's history in blood and resistance, which is why the desperate migrant caravan from the northern triangle of the isthmus is in fact the offspring of U.S. imperialism.

In Nicaragua, the electoral defeat of the Sandinista Front in 1990 brought about the dismantling of the social achievements of the people's revolution and produced profound transformations in the nation's economic, political and social structure, as a result of the application of several neoliberal packages that implied the privatization of major sectors of the economy and a broad reduction in public spending.

This caused a drastic decrease in the quality of life and a 46-point reduction in the Human Development Index, as well as job insecurity, unemployment, peasant exodus, outsourcing and informalization of the economy and a dramatic increase in poverty, social inequality and violence. The outlook up to 2007 was devastating because the destruction caused by the wars of liberation was compounded by this social catastrophe.

Since 2007, hope and life have been redefined with the return of the Sandinista Front to government. The absolute number of undernourished people in the country has been reduced by half, access to free education and health care has been guaranteed to rural communities, maternal mortality has been reduced by 60% and infant mortality by 52%, while access to electricity has been increased from 54% to 96% of the population.

Nicaragua is the safest country in Central America, and is in sixth place globally for women's participation in public and civic spaces. Life in the countryside has recovered dignity, thanks to a policy that prioritizes and values the family economy, making it possible to reduce food imports and become 100% self-sufficient in beans, corn, eggs, milk, fruits, onions, peppers, tomatoes and beef.

These social advances have not been free of contradictions—such as alliances with the private sector and the Catholic Church that lasted until April 2018, when these traditional opponents of the Sandinista struggle began a violent coup attempt. Above all, the new Sandinista model can be fairly accused of not finding a radical path towards the construction of an alternative model to capitalism and not forming new human beings and a new society capable of overcoming the systemic crisis of capital.

The coup attempt took place in an international context where right-wing extremism and fascism have been consolidated in Latin America. In Brazil, former president Lula was imprisoned to prevent him from running for president, while fascist president Jair Bolsonaro has met openly with the CIA. Mike Pompeo, US Secretary of State, has blatantly said that the objective of the US is to destabilize and change government in Venezuela, Cuba and Nicaragua, countries considered by Donald Trump to be an "axis of evil" in the hemisphere.

The attempted coup was intended to eradicate not only the Sandinista Front from political power in Nicaragua but also to tear Sandinismo from the heart and historical memory of the people. The practices of desecrating and burning historical sites of the Sandinista Front, of stripping, beating, torturing, kidnapping and publicly murdering Sandinistas, or publicly burning people, is not new in the history of Nicaragua or Central America.

These practices stem from the Spanish conquest that publicly tortured indigenous rebels. They were then applied by U.S. soldiers in military interventions, by the Somoza dictatorship, and were part of the US' counter-insurgency handbook, applied during more than 30 years in Guatemala and El Salvador to stop the advances of peoples' revolutions in these countries. The CIA's Contra armies applied these practices in peasant communities during the 1980s.

The objective of these practices has always been to create terror in the population and to incapacitate resistance. In 2018, rank-and-file Sandinistas were morally impacted by the images of terrorist violence, such as when Francisco Arauz Pineda, a hero of the guerrilla struggle and son of legendary peasant leader Amada Pineda Montenegro, one of the "Women of Cua" gang-raped by Somoza's National Guard, was publicly burned with a Sandinista flag on his body on June 16th, 2018. Nicaraguans panicked and sobbed in their homes. In the street no one looked one another in the eyes, and confusion reigned. The objective of psychological warfare is for panic to triumph.

The opposition's death roadblocks were mostly manned by socially-excluded poor people who were paid to create chaos and pain. They were politically supported by young upper middle-class university students, who, from the comfort of their homes in gated communities, misunderstood the reality of the roadblocks, and who consumed the mainstream media's version of the crisis.

These media outlets are dominated nationally by the oligarchy. US-owned social media companies provided platforms for a strategy that activated hundreds of young people previously trained by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and the National Endowment for Democracy (NED) to create a dominant narrative. The coup's media blitzkrieg used the advertising pages of Facebook to spread lies, foment hatred and encourage violence—accusing the Sandinistas of the violence against Sandinistas. Everything that smelled of Sandinista thinking was demonized, in an attempt to alter the "common sense" of the Nicaraguan people, especially the youth.

The first sector to break the psychological and horror siege was the moral reserve of the Sandinista Front: its historic rank-and-file membership. Elders began to reorganize, to communicate, to clarify what was happening, to create study circles explaining Gene Sharp's script for regime change in the heat of the moment. Sandinista elders came to teach, and to channel their organizational and moral strength.

In the face of systematic violence against Sandinista families, the only option was local organizing for the protection of families, neighborhoods, towns and cities. Barricades were formed in the neighborhoods and public institutions to prevent arson attacks and assassinations.

These defense barricades, set up over weeks in the cities, towns and neighborhoods of Nicaragua, were made up of members of the Sandinista Front from various generations. They included great-grandparents who had participated in the formation of the FSLN and fought against Somoza, grandparents who fought against the counterrevolution in the 1980s, fathers and mothers who fought in the 1990s “from below” in the defense of the revolution’s social achievements, as well as many anonymous heroes.

This conglomerate had a bit of everything: young people, old people, street vendors, market vendors, the unemployed, retired people, public workers, housewives, ex-military workers, but with one common denominator: these barricades were made up of Nicaragua’s workers. In practice, everyone learned from everyone, and natural leaders emerged from the heart of the neighborhoods who often were not part of any of the official structures of the Sandinista Front.

The lack of sleep, the danger, the constant tension, the sharing of coffee and cigarettes, created the precipitous conditions for intergenerational dialogue. This was political education in practice: young people learned what it means to be a Sandinista, the principles and values of the 1970s Sandinistas, and the historical burden behind their actions. These young people respected and valued the bravery and knowledge of the old guard, while elders respected the strengths of the young people and their understanding of the impact of social media. Since the highways were shut down by rightwing roadblocks, Sandinistas across the country organized themselves to distribute locally sourced food.

The elites in Nicaragua have long believed that the people are ignorant, or “naive” as the oligarchy’s newspaper, *La Prensa*, puts it. The elites have always misjudged the working class’ ability to differentiate between the insufficiencies of the Sandinista political and social project, on one hand, and the grand lies used by US imperialism in Nicaragua, on the other hand. They assumed that if denied their ability to live normally and safely, Nicaraguans would demand a new government. The plan backfired, and the Sandinista Front mobilized more people in the street from April to September of 2018 than in any other period in its history.

During this period, Nicaraguans saw themselves in a new light and were forced to reckon with the strengths and weaknesses of the political process, of living in a capitalist country with a socialist government, under the shadow of the United States. Above all, those three months of resistance clearly demonstrated the immense courage of the people of Nicaragua, especially those without land, without a car, the workers from the inner-city neighborhoods. History again demonstrated the Nicaraguan people’s capacity for resistance and survival, dignity and strength. It was the people’s wisdom that defeated the coup.

...

This marvelous little book was put together in the months after Nicaraguan reality exploded on April 18th, 2018. Its authors and editors are mostly international solidarity activists, journalists and researchers who live in Nicaragua and were witnesses to the violent attempt to force out the democratically elected Nicaraguan government. The organization of the book is meant to allow English-speaking readers, educators, journalists and truth-seekers to independently study the events of 2018 from a number of different

angles—human rights, media, economy, religion and geopolitics. This means that while **Live from Nicaragua** is best read as an organic whole, each individual chapter can stand alone and be used for educational purposes.

While the number of human victims of the ongoing regime change attempt in Nicaragua is many fewer than the Contra War, in a sense the Big Lie is even larger than during the 1980s. Many people in the United States and Europe have believed most of the propaganda put out by the coup attempt's media machine. This has made it more difficult than ever to show solidarity with Nicaraguans—not the wealthy, self-exiled Nicaraguans who have been interviewed on CNN and BBC, but ordinary, vulnerable Nicaraguans who want to live and work in peace. The solidarity workers of the 1980s were critically important in resisting Reagan's war against the Sandinista Revolution. In Trump's war against Latin American progressive movements and governments, who will be the resistance?

Live from Nicaragua is the kind of accessible, rigorously researched, politically relevant, and timely reader that is needed in order to understand the kind of “fourth-generation” conflicts that have been imported from Eastern Europe and the Middle East regions to Latin America in the last few years. As Western powers increasingly apply the regime change script, it is up to people across the globe to rebuild solidarity movements and learn the truth about how imperialist strategies attempt to destroy social fabrics and weaponize confusion.

The US government has applied economic, financial and commercial sanctions against Nicaragua through the infamous NICA Act, with the intention (just as in past experiences in Chile, Cuba, Venezuela and Nicaragua) to “make the economy scream,” as Henry Kissinger put it. Meanwhile, USAID has promised millions more dollars for Nicaragua's right-wing opposition to wage irregular conflict against the constitutional order. While the struggle for Nicaraguan independence and sovereignty is far from over, the fact that the Nicaraguan people resisted the colossus in 2018 should be a source of strength and hope for people across the planet. If Nicaragua can, you can too.

...

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Introduction

by Chuck Kaufman

National Co-ordinator,
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Introduction

By Chuck Kaufman, National Co-Coordinator, Alliance for Global Justice

On April 18, 2018 Nicaragua's ten years of peace and growing prosperity were shattered as rumors spread across the country, at a speed only social media allow, that police were firing live ammunition at student protesters and that two students were dead. That rumor turned out to be false as no one died on April 18, but before the truth could get out, students and many ordinary Nicaraguans poured into the streets the following day to protest and three people did die: a policeman, a Sandinista supporter, and a bystander.

By then, in what has in hindsight, and with available evidence, every appearance of a full-blown and planned "soft coup" seemed irreversible. This effort to topple the democratically-elected government of President Daniel Ortega was originally led by students trained by US-funded "democracy promotion" programs. US-funded non-governmental organizations, the Sandinista Renovation Movement political party, the Catholic Church hierarchy, and as time passed, Salvadoran gang members and international drug cartels have also led the coup. By April 19 it was already too late to counter the lies of the previous day. The coup was underway and its leaders were in control of the narrative both nationally and internationally with the full-throated assistance of the corporate media and establishment human rights groups. That narrative was that Daniel Ortega is a dictator and that he turned his brutal National Police loose to repress and massacre innocent, peaceful student protesters who were upset about changes to the old age retirement system. Never mind that social security is not normally a big concern of students or that in 39 years the National Police had never used lethal force against demonstrators, nor that opposition deaths from April 20 onwards in most cases occurred when they were attacking police or destroying government buildings).

Nicaraguans and internationalists were shocked and bewildered by the sudden spasm of violence in the country and the single, seemingly authoritative story being told about what was happening, who was doing it, and why. But as time passed and the internal contradictions became more obvious within this supposed spontaneous uprising of the people to throw off the shackles of dictatorship, it became important that the international solidarity movement mobilize to combat the disinformation, just as we did in the 1980s to stop US efforts to overthrow the Sandinista government. Historic solidarity organizations such as Nicaragua Network/Alliance for Global Justice (US) and the Nicaragua Solidarity Campaign (UK) joined with long-time solidarity activists and anti-imperialist political analysts in both countries and with Nicaragua-based analysts such as Tortillaconsal.com and North American and European activists living in Nicaragua, to promote a counter narrative that conformed better to the facts-on-the-ground and actual lived history than the regime change narrative.

As Brian Willson and Nils McCune remind us below in "US Imperialism and Nicaragua: "They would not let our flower blossom," the April coup did not spring full-grown from the head of Zeus. It is part and parcel of a nearly 40 year campaign by the US government to maintain control over this Central American country where the US has intervened time and again for over 150 years. Even the most cursory examination of the events of 2018 cannot

help but impress the observer with their similarity to past US practices in Nicaragua, to its current regime change efforts in Venezuela, and to the false flag and fake videos of everyone's favorite terrorists, the White Helmets of Syria.

The coup was eventually defeated in mid-July with the removal of hundreds of roadblocks that had paralyzed the country causing billions of dollars in economic damage and lost jobs, and which had provided bases for extortion, kidnapping, murder, arson and rape. There has been no further significant violence since record numbers of Nicaraguans turned out for the 39th anniversary celebrations of the July 19 Triumph of the Sandinista Revolution. The massive crowds left no doubt that the majority of the populace sided with their elected government and against those who had kept them from working and hostage to fear for three long months. Many of those who committed heinous crimes during the coup months escaped to Costa Rica and Honduras, just like their spiritual fathers, Somoza's National Guard did 40 years ago.

Those who were captured had all their judicial rights protected, until their eventual release under the terms of Amnesty Law 996 approved by the National Assembly on June 8, 2019. This law provides for the conditional release of all persons imprisoned or under investigation for crimes of murder, torture, arson, kidnapping, extortion and other terrible crimes committed during the failed coup attempt of 2018. The law is based on the principle of non-repetition which has extensive antecedents in international law, such as the peace process in Ireland in the 1990s. All, without exception, accepted the principle of non-repetition when they signed the document of their release.

While conditions are returning to normal with gutted government buildings repaired and rebuilt, cruise ships returning to Nicaragua's ports, and people to their jobs, one wouldn't know it from the tone and coverage of the international corporate press. To combat the relentless flow of disinformation and outright lies that is the continued effort by the US and Nicaraguan opposition to win what they could not win through the ballot box or by violence, we offer this Coup Reader for your examination. This book is primarily a compilation of articles written over the last 8-9 months along with some new material that presents quite a different account of the who, what, when, where and why of Nicaragua's failed coup of 2018.

We first place Nicaragua in the historical context of US imperialism in Nils McCune and Brian Willson's "US Imperialism and Nicaragua." There follows an analysis by Barbara Larcom in which she takes apart the false myths that have circulated about the political crisis in Nicaragua in 2018. We then cover the stages of the coup week by week in a chapter by Nan McCurdy and myths and truths section by Barbara Larcom. Included also are an interview by journalist Max Blumenthal, a revealing chapter by myself on US finding of organizations that supported the coup, a review of the human rights situation by international law expert Dan Kovalik, and a chapter on Nicaragua's popular economy by Nils McCune. We complete the Reader with an article on the struggle for balanced media coverage by John Perry, a chapter on the role of the Church by Coleen Littlejohn, and a newly written Conclusion by Dan Kovalik.

No organization or individual involved with this project received any financial or other remuneration from the government of Nicaragua or any other government or government-

controlled entity for our role in producing this book. Except for those, like me, who are paid staff of a grassroots solidarity organization, all labor was voluntary.

US Imperialism and Nicaragua: “They would not let our flower blossom”

S. Brian Willson and Nils McCune



*Blanca Arauz and Augusto Sandino
(Photo: Archive)*

US Imperialism and Nicaragua: “They would not let our flower blossom”

By S. Brian Willson and Nils McCune

Nicaragua is perhaps among the clearest cases of rampant US imperialism producing sustained anti-imperialist movements, in a pattern that has repeated itself since even before the US mercenary William Walker invaded that country to set up a slave state and declare himself president in 1856. The United States’ financial and industrial interests, backed by US military forces, have sought to maintain control over key Nicaraguan resources, infrastructure and a potential interoceanic canal route¹ ever since.

US corporations and the US government maintained an aggressive posture toward Nicaragua throughout the twentieth century and have continued to utilize diverse imperialist strategies to coerce Nicaragua in the first two decades of the twenty-first century. Beginning with the Spanish-American War of 1898, the United States increasingly asserted itself as the sole imperial power over the Caribbean Basin, claiming Puerto Rico as war bounty, and exerting economic dominance over Cuba, Hispaniola, and all of Central America—going so far as to create the nation of Panama in order to build an interoceanic canal. Nicaragua was highly important in this neocolonial endeavor, due to its arable land, fresh water and mining resources, but, above all, its geography as a likely canal route.

Methods used by the imperialist system in Nicaragua have included direct counter-insurgent war (1927-1933), support for despotic pro-US regimes (1934-1979), proxy mercenary warfare (1980-1988), financing of opposition groups (1909, 1980-1990 and 2007-present), use of the Organization of American States (OAS) to pressure Nicaragua (1980-1989 and 2016-present), military bases and exercises with the Honduran government near the Nicaraguan border (2010-present), declarations of Nicaragua as an extraordinary threat to US national security (1985 and 2018), financing of opposition media (2007-present), training of “civic groups” in cyber-politics (2013-present), planning and execution of a “color revolution” or “soft” coup attempt (2018), sanctions to prevent Nicaragua’s access to credit (2018), personal economic sanctions against Nicaraguan officials (2018), and use of US rating corporations to downgrade perceptions of Nicaraguan financial stability (2018).

This continuous trajectory of intervention shows a transition from more overt, military or “push” forms of politics to more subtle tactics involving media-based, “pull” politics premised on capitalizing on the rules of globalized economies, liberal democracies and political legitimacy to discredit and disarm anti-imperialist forces in Nicaragua, in order to restore a docile neoliberal regime. Throughout this history, US imperialism has found strange bedfellows. Historian Michel Gobat has argued that William Walker’s support came not only from the Southern US slaveholding interests that donated to his campaigns to build slave states in Central America, but also from more liberal, Northern US industrial and military figures, and indeed, from the Liberal party of Nicaragua. Likewise, during the two decades of US military occupation of Nicaragua in the early twentieth century, most of the

¹ Karl Bermann, *Under the Big Stick: Nicaragua and the United States since 1848*. (Boston: South End Press, 1986), 123-26.

Nicaraguan elite and its press maintained a reverential glow in editorials and reports about US forces. This was true of both the opposing Liberal and Conservative parties, although US policy after ousting Liberal president Zelaya in 1909 maintained a strong pro-Conservative focus until 1928. Only when a patriot general, Augusto César Sandino, refused to recognize US legitimacy of any kind in Nicaragua, did there begin to emerge a consistently anti-imperialist political tendency. However, there has always been a sizable part of the Nicaraguan political class that favors and appreciates US intervention, reflecting a sense that the legitimacy of the State in Nicaragua begins with US approval.

In 2018, US President Donald Trump declared Nicaragua to be an “extraordinary threat” to national security, and US National Security Advisor John Bolton described Nicaragua, Cuba and Venezuela as a “Troika of Tyranny” that would soon fall with support from the Trump Administration, at the same time as he lauded the election of “like minded leaders,” Jair Bolsonaro in Brazil and Ivan Duque in Colombia. The Nicaragua Investment Conditionality Act (NICA Act), brain-child of Cuban-American Republican Congresswoman Ileana Ros-Lehtinen, which will prevent the Nicaraguan government from accessing international loans, thus limiting its capacity to develop its health care, education, transport and commerce capabilities, was passed by Congress in November 2018.

Historical background

A century-long feud between the Liberal and Conservative parties marked Nicaraguan history even before US imperialism became a factor in national politics. The traditional landed oligarchy and the Catholic Church imposed their will through the Conservative party, which was based in Granada. The Liberal party, based in Leon, was made up of an urban merchant and professional class, with important spaces of participation by workers and peasants. However, the Liberal party was thoroughly discredited through its shameful participation in the United States’ first regime change operation in Nicaragua, carried out through filibuster William Walker in 1856-57. As a result, the Conservatives controlled the Nicaraguan government for three and a half decades, until 1893, when Liberal strongman José Santos Zelaya assumed the presidency after the “July Revolution.” The United States government, led at the time by Theodore Roosevelt, was embarking on its “big stick” policy, which would soon be complemented by what he coined “dollar diplomacy,” through which US banks would purchase the sovereign debts of Caribbean and Central American countries, exercising full control over formally national banks, railroads and shipping channels, and forcing Caribbean and Central American countries to take on debts².

Zelaya and the Regime Change Operation

The Zelaya government created a new constitution that replaced Nicaragua’s electoral congress with obligatory and direct voting and a secret ballot, as well as separating the Church from the State.³ Public education and transportation infrastructure increased as

² Dana G. Munro, *Intervention and Dollar Diplomacy in the Caribbean 1900-1921*. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1964), 537

³ Antonio Esgueva Gómez, *Contexto histórico de las constituciones y sus reformas en Nicaragua*. Instituto de Historia de Nicaragua y Centroamérica, Universidad Centroamericana (Revista de Derecho, No. 10. Universidad Centroamericana, (UCA), Facultad de Ciencias Jurídicas, 2005), 8-9

shipping routes and railroads were built, largely with US capital. However, labor exploitation and labor strife increased during Zelaya's presidency, as he focused on modernization, particularly with regard to commerce and agrobusiness development, leading to countless land grabs and the widespread displacement of indigenous peoples from what would become coffee plantations and shipping routes. Initially enthusiastic with the expansion of commodity flows, US support for Zelaya waned after he appeared to take Nicaraguan sovereignty too seriously. US policy consistently demanded that Central American constitutions prohibit re-elections, yet Zelaya was re-elected twice, in 1902 and 1906.

After Zelaya intervened in Honduras and El Salvador in 1907, with interest in creating a Liberal-dominated federation of Central American states, and the Taft administration assumed the US presidency in 1909, the United States changed positions dramatically on Zelaya, now considering him a danger to US interests and "regional stability." Perhaps most significantly, Zelaya was also reported to be initiating negotiations with the German and Japanese governments to build an interoceanic canal, challenging the monopoly of the US-controlled Panama Canal, under construction at the time⁴.

Given the geographic importance of Nicaragua, US imperialism made a priority of Conservative restoration and the return to a subservient national government. After receiving covert support from the United States, politician Juan José Estrada proclaimed himself interim president of Nicaragua on October 10th, 1909. Estrada represented one of several factions of Liberals unhappy with Zelaya, yet he was nonetheless utilized by the United States as a means by which to maneuver the unpopular Conservative party back into power. Within months, Estrada's military force on the ground was made up of Conservative generals, such as Emiliano Chamorro, using hired troops and weapons supplied by US companies through intermediaries such as Adolfo Díaz. When a counter-offensive by Zelaya led to the arrest and execution of two US nationals, soldiers of fortune hired by the Estrada insurgency, the US Secretary of State, Philander Knox, wrote the notorious "Knox Note" to the Nicaraguan Chargé d'Affaires in Washington on December 1st, 1909, cutting off diplomatic relations with the Nicaraguan government. In late December, Zelaya resigned and left for Mexico by ship from the northwestern port of Corinto, surrounded by US warships⁵.

The Conservative Restoration

During his 10 months in office, Zelaya's successor, Liberal José Madriz Rodríguez, worked tirelessly to negotiate peace with the Estrada rebellion and to restore relations with the US, but Knox refused to accept Madriz's government. US marines were deployed in Bluefields in order to prevent the final defeat of the failing rebellion, and a United Fruit Company subsidiary loaned Estrada money for arms and soldiers. Eventually, the US navy provided Conservative general Emiliano Chamorro with a large shipment of weapons to support the rebellion at the same time as it blocked the arrival of arms purchased by the

4 Michel Tobago, *Confronting the American Dream: Nicaragua Under U.S. Imperial Rule*. (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005), 69-71

5 Kerevel, Yann. "Re-examining the Politics of U.S. Intervention in Early 20th Century Nicaragua: José Madriz and the Conservative Restoration" (2006) https://digitalrepository.unm.edu/laii_research/1

Madriz government⁶. Despite anti-imperialist protests across Nicaragua and in San Salvador, capital of El Salvador, the US presence gradually changed the balance of forces and the Madriz government fell on August 19, 1910. One week later Juan José Estrada assumed the presidency.

In the chaotic aftermath of war, as pro-Madriz, anti-imperialist armed groups still roamed the streets of Managua, the United States lost no time in restructuring the Nicaraguan economy, forcing Nicaragua via the “Dawson Agreements” to take out a \$20 million US loan, to be paid for by Nicaraguan custom receipts. Liberals were rounded up and the Conservative restoration? was consolidated, as even the leader of the rebellion, Juan José Estrada, was ousted by the Conservative-dominated Constitutional Assembly in 1911 in favor of Adolfo Díaz.

In 1912, Conservative president Adolfo Díaz, formerly a mining executive for a US company, transferred control over the Nicaraguan National Bank to the US Brown Brothers Commercial Bank. In response, the National Assembly, with Luis Mena Vado’s leadership as Minister of War, passed a resolution censoring Díaz, who promptly fired General Mena and called on the US for support. Mena and Liberal General Benjamín Zeledón rebelled against Díaz, who in turn appealed to the United States to intervene. Mena’s forces, headquartered in Granada, succumbed under the combined thrust of US marines and recruits of the Conservative government. Taken alive, Mena was exiled. However, Zeledón, based in Masaya, stood up to the marines and was killed in battle. Zeledón’s heroic statements and death in battle are considered one of the first major explicitly anti-imperialist endeavors in Nicaragua. In response to Colonel Joseph Pendleton’s letter asking him to surrender, Zeledón wrote, in part:

“I confess to you that I have read your note that I allude to and I have resisted believing that it could be signed by an educated soldier [...] and serving under the banner of the great (North) American Nation that prides itself on being the teacher of the Democratic Republics of the American Continent; and my sense of disbelief grows sharply when I consider that it is impossible for the Government of the United States of America and, above all, the Senate of the homeland of Washington and Lincoln, to have authorized their servants to come and intervene with armed force in the internal affairs that we Nicaraguans discuss in this land that is ours, and which was bequeathed to us freely, sovereignly and independently by our parents.

“[...] I do not even remotely see the reason you or your superiors could have for demanding the surrender of my positions or the disarmament of my army; consequently, I dare to think that you will withdraw his threats in view of the justice that accompanies me. But if, unfortunately for the honor of the United States of America, you and your bosses disregard the well-founded reasons that I invoke and carry out your pretensions of attack [...] I will do with mine the resistance that the case demands and that the dignity of Nicaragua demands, which we represent, and then, let it fall upon you, your bosses and

⁶ Ibid, 25-28.

the very strong Nation to which you belong, the tremendous responsibilities that History will attribute to you, and the eternal burden of having used your weapons against the weak who have been struggling to conquer the sacred rights of the Homeland.”⁷

With the defeat of the nationalist rebellion, the Conservative government signed the onerous Bryan-Chamorro Treaty in Washington in 1914. The treaty, named for William Jennings Bryan, US Secretary of State, and Nicaraguan General Emiliano Chamorro, gave the US exclusive rights to build any canal in Nicaragua in perpetuity, as well as a renewable 99-year option to create a naval base in the Gulf of Fonseca and a renewable 99-year lease on the Big and Little Corn Islands in the Caribbean, in exchange for \$3 million used by Nicaragua to pay debts to US creditors. US President Woodrow Wilson insisted on a clause that gave the US *a priori* rights to military intervention, but the US Senate balked, and the clause was removed before the treaty was ratified.

Sandino’s Anti-Imperialism

During the US military occupation of Nicaragua from 1912 to 1926, non-military elements of imperialism developed. For example, the Rockefeller Center, funded through the Standard Oil monopoly, began sanitation drives that accompanied US military activities with rural census taking, hiring of local volunteers, and public meetings on hookworm control and prevention.⁸ This is one of the first examples of a non-governmental organization riding on the coattails of the US military. Meanwhile, the United Fruit Company (UFC) was the largest landowner between Colombia and Mexico.

In the countries that United Fruit dominated—referred to as “banana republics,” it controlled the ports ran the postal service, and even created the first network of radio stations across Central America, effectively developing the first mass media (and media monopoly) that reached millions of people. The company vigorously resisted all worker efforts to organize unions, going as far as tearing down all houses and schools as it abandoned whole areas where union organizing was taking place. Although it paid no taxes, United Fruit gave governments money and weapons to repress the many rebellions taking place among the hundreds of thousands of highly exploited banana workers in the region, leading, for example, to the 1928 “Banana Massacre” of several hundred striking workers in Colombia. In addition, politicians needed support from UFC’s radio network, and so were afraid of creating any tension with the conglomerate.

7 Gregorio Selser, *Nicaragua de Walker a Somoza*, Mex Sur Editorial, México, 1984
<https://web.archive.org/web/20010210211308/http://www.patriagrande.net/argentina/gregorio.selser/index.html>; “Patria Grande: Nicaragua”
<https://web.archive.org/web/20010228174107/http://www.patriagrande.net/nicaragua/index.html>

8 Ligia María Peña Torres and Steven Palmer, *A Rockefeller Foundation Health Primer for US-Occupied Nicaragua, 1914-1928*. CBMH/BCHM / Volume 25:1 2008 / p. 43-69



US Marine occupation forces participating in a funeral on the street near the old national palace, Managua, 1927. US Marine photo published in: "Sandino Enfrenta Al Imperialismo", Editorial Nueva Nicaragua, First Edition, 1981.

The geopolitical hegemony of the United Fruit Company was reinforced by the US Marines, which were deployed in Central America and the Caribbean to defend the interests of the corporation dozens of times between 1901 and 1934. The "Banana Wars," as these were called, produced such a trove of experiences in capitalist combat against impoverished rebels that the Marines systematized their learning in the "Small Wars Manual," published in 1940.

In Nicaragua, banana interests were slowed by the need for a railroad system.⁹ The US commercial bank Brown Brothers financed the railway system, and came to control Nicaragua's National Bank. Bundy Cole, a manager of one of Brown Brother's subsidiaries in Nicaragua, famously said in the 1920s, "I do not think any Indian or any negro is capable of self-government." After a Liberal uprising against a US-supported Conservative government led to civil war in 1926, the United States intervened to prevent a Liberal victory, forcing all parties to agree to a power-sharing government that would preserve US interests.

Liberal general Augusto César Sandino refused the terms of the US plan, and, with just 29 men, embarked on a guerilla war against the US occupation of Nicaragua. Sandino's first armed action was the occupation of the San Andrés Mine in Nueva Segovia, where he drove off the US managers and turned over the mine to the workers to run collectively. Sandino was declared an outlaw and US marines were sent to Ocotol to initiate a counter-insurgency campaign. Internationally, Sandino became a symbol of resistance to the US empire, and grassroots anti-imperialist leagues and Communist parties across the Americas debated whether his guerrilla tactics were acceptable or represented a threat to the dominant parliamentary political methods promoted internationally by the Soviet Union.

⁹ Thomas Schoonover and Lester D. Langley, *The Banana Men: American Mercenaries and Entrepreneurs in Central America, 1880-1930*. (University Press of Kentucky, 1995), p. 25



*US Flag flies over US Marine Headquarters, Ocotal, Nicaragua, July 16, 1927.
US Marine Corps. Photo reprinted in Editorial Nueva Nicaragua,
"Sandino: Enfrenta al Imperialismo", First Edition 1982*

The first use in the Americas of airplanes to drop bombs occurred in Nicaragua, as US marines leveled the countryside and forcibly displaced peasants from small towns of the Segovia region in repeated attempts to eliminate Sandino's forces¹⁰. Use of mercenary troops to hunt Sandino eventually became a concerted US effort to build a National Guard in Nicaragua, which US planners assumed would strengthen democratic institutions. Meanwhile, Sandino's writings took on class dimensions, as he insisted that the success of prolonged anti-imperialist struggle would need the unique qualities of workers and peasants.

By 1933, the US government withdrew troops from Nicaragua and announced its "Good Neighbor" policy towards Latin America. Once the US military left, Sandino signed a peace agreement with the Nicaraguan government, insisting on an end to hostilities between Nicaraguans and launching a campaign to support his proposal for the development of a national movement of worker-owned cooperatives, starting with the cooperative set up by his disarmed troops in Wiwilí. However, after a dinner party in Managua in 1934, Sandino was kidnapped by henchmen of the leader of Nicaragua's recently formed National Guard, Anastasio Somoza Garcia. Guardsmen assassinated Sandino, disappeared his corpse and went on to massacre his disarmed former troops in their cooperative in Wiwilí. The leader of Nicaragua's recently formed National Guard, Anastasio Somoza Garcia, assassinated Sandino in 1934, and massacred his disarmed troops. Two years later, Somoza Garcia staged a coup d'état and installed himself as Nicaragua's strongman, with US support.

¹⁰ Neill Macaulay, *The Sandino Affair*.

Franklin Delano Roosevelt famously said of Somoza, “he’s a son of a bitch, but he’s our son of a bitch”¹¹. The Somoza family ruled as a US-supported dictatorship from 1934 to 1979.

The Sandinista Popular Revolution and the Contra War

During the early 1960s, inspired by the success of the Cuban revolution, radical Nicaraguans led by student activist Carlos Fonseca created the Sandinista National Liberation Front. Known as the FSLN for its Spanish initials, this Sandinista Front created an “historic” program to break free from US tutelage and the agro-export model.

After nearly 20 years of sustained clandestine activities, the FSLN managed to lead a massive people’s insurrection that ousted Anastasio Somoza Debayle, the first Somoza’s second son, in 1979, after his regime inflicted tens of thousands of casualties on the civilian population in a US-supported counter insurgency. Thus ended the “stable” playground for the wealthy, right-wing Nicaraguan families and their affluent US investor friends, preserved at the expense of the vast majority of the Nicaraguan people. To this day the US has never forgiven the social-minded Sandinistas (“Sandinismo”) for having forced the end of the Somoza era.¹² The US Congress quickly froze aid to Nicaragua, something it had never done since Somoza came to power in the 1930s. Even earlier, in 1978, as it appeared the Somoza dynasty was nearing defeat, US President Jimmy Carter had authorized covert CIA support for Nicaraguan “democratic” press and labor union elements.¹³

In March 1980, Carter, alarmed at this loss of a US investor haven, ordered Major General Robert Schweitzer to Honduras to confer with its armed forces about becoming a “bulwark” against communism in the Central American region. Carter authorized \$1 million for the CIA to support anti-Sandinista labor groups, media, and political organizations. In mid-November 1980, newly elected, but not yet inaugurated, President Reagan’s transition team met with a small group of exiled Nicaraguans in Honduras in preparations to fight the Sandinistas.¹⁴

In March 1981, during President Ronald Reagan’s second month in office, he issued a Presidential Finding authorizing the CIA to undertake covert activities directed against Nicaragua and its new Sandinista revolutionary government, the *Frente Sandinista de Liberación Nacional* (FSLN). The government was not called that; it was called El Gobierno de Reconstrucción Nacional. An initial \$19 million was allocated for the purpose of *destroying*¹⁵ the Sandinistas, beginning with a 500-man “action team” to engage in paramilitary and political operations.

11 George Black, *The Good Neighbor*, 25-26

12 A similar political dynamic has been occurring in Venezuela ever since socialist Hugo Chávez was first elected in 1999. Internal US documents clearly lay out consistent plans to destabilize and destroy “Chavismo”, Chávez having survived three coups until his death in 2013, and his successor Maduro also surviving various attempts to oust him from power, including at least one assassination attempt with drones. Currently the US Trump administration has recognized an unknown 35 year-old Venezuelan as the “legitimate President,” basically labeling the democratically elected Maduro a “usurper”, and ordering him to oust himself. In effect, the US intends to destroy any political or social movement that curtails the unfettered growth and expansion of private capitalism.

13 “A Secret War for Nicaragua,” *Newsweek*, November 8, 1982, p. 44; Theodore Draper, *A Very Thin Line: the Iran-Contra Affairs* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1991), 17.

14 The National Security Archive, Scott Armstrong, Executive Director, *The Chronology: The Documented Day-by-Day Account of the Secret Military Assistance to Iran and the Contras* (New York: Warner Books, 1987); Peter Kornbluh and Malcolm Byrne, eds., *The Iran-Contra Scandal: The Declassified History* (New York, A National Security Archive Documents Reader: The New Press, 1993).

15 Nítlápan-Envío team, “Upping the US War Ups the Contradictions,” *Envío*, Number 64, October 1986; “Contra view on Ronald Reagan,” *The Guardian*, July 4, 2011. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2011/jul/04/contra-view-on-ronald-reagan>

By summer 1981, Reagan's State Department aide Robert McFarland prepared a report, "Taking the War to Nicaragua"¹⁶, and by December 1981, Nicaraguan exile groups, or "Contras," began combat training at a site west of Miami, and subsequently at training camps in California, New Jersey, and in Florida's Panhandle. Also in December 1981, the "Red Christmas" CIA Operation occurred in the Miskito territory of Northeastern Nicaragua along the Honduran border, where Indigenous communities were forcefully relocated to create a beachhead inside Nicaraguan territory before the Sandinista government forces could establish control of the area. The hope was to create a breakaway state that could ask for US military support.¹⁷ In January 1982, Reagan requested and received, \$5.1 million in US Agency for International Development (USAID) funds to provoke dissent against the new Nicaraguan government among Somocistas *and* among the Catholic Church hierarchy.

By March 1982, the Contra paramilitary force had grown to 1,000 combatants, and CIA-trained Contra demolition teams blew up two bridges near the Honduran border. A secret US Defense Intelligence Agency reported that between March 14 and June 21, 1982, a 100-day period, the Contra's "terrorist group" participated in 106 various "insurgent" attacks in Nicaragua, including the assassination of Sandinista government officials, the sabotage of highway bridges, sniper attacks against small military patrols, and the burning of a customs warehouse and food crops.¹⁸ This was an average of an armed attack every day, a pace that dramatically accelerated throughout the 1980s, daily crippling much of the country. By November 1982, membership in the Contras had grown to 4,000, each combatant being paid \$23/month.

In December 1982, Contra leaders met in Miami to develop strategies to topple the Sandinista government, utilizing a growing number of border sanctuary camps in Honduras.¹⁹ In February 1983, worried about growing stories of Contra atrocities – the blinding, burning, beheading, dismembering, kidnapping, raping and killing of civilians – Reagan spent \$300,000 hiring the Miami-based public relations firm, Woody Kepner Associates, to produce positive images.²⁰ Soon Reagan began calling the Contras "freedom fighters", the "moral equals of our Founding Fathers"²¹, accusing the Sandinista government of "spreading cancer," calling it just downright "malignant,"²² and claiming it was operating as a "totalitarian dungeon"²³.

Reagan's CIA chief, William Casey, gave instructions: "What more can we do about the economy to make those bastards sweat," emphasizing, "I want something that'll make them hurt."²⁴ This was reminiscent of President Nixon's policy in the early 1970s in Chile when he directed the CIA to engage in psychological warfare against democratically elected Dr.

16 Jonathan Marshall, Peter Dale Scott, and Jane Hunter, *The Iran Contra Connection: Secret Teams and Covert Operations in the Reagan Era*. (Boston: South End Press, 1987), 10.

17 Timothy Alexander Guzman, "The CIA's Dirty War in Nicaragua," *Global Research*, April 24, 2018; Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz, *Blood on the Border: A Memoir of the Contra War* (Cambridge, MA: South End Press, 2005).

18 Thomas W. Walker, Ed., *Reagan Versus the Sandinistas: The Undeclared War on Nicaragua* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1987), Ch. 2, Peter Kornbluh, "The Covert War", p. 25.

19 The National Security Archive, 20.

20 The National Security Archive, 23-4.

21 Robert Parry, *Lost History: Contras, Cocaine, the Press & 'Project Truth'* (Arlington, VA: The Media Consortium, 1999), 61.

22 Lindsey Gruson, "Ortega Now Says End to Rebel Aid Can Save Truce," *New York Times*, October 29, 1989.

23 David Hoffman and Joanne Omang, "Reagan Attacks 'Totalitarian' Nicaragua in Push for Rebel Aid," *Washington Post*, July 19, 1984.

24 Bob Woodward, *Veil: The Secret Wars of the CIA, 1981-1987* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2005), 281.

Salvador Allende's "socialism" by making the economy "scream."²⁵ Thomas Pickering, the US Ambassador to El Salvador at the time, described the Sandinistas as an "infected piece of meat that attracts insects."²⁶ The hatred was both intense and irrational, satanic-like. A commander of the Contra FDN (Fuerza Democrática Nicaragüense – Nicaraguan Democratic Force) stressed the need to "cut the head off the Sandinistas."²⁷

In October 1983, the CIA produced 2,000 copies of a 90-page Manual to guide Contra activities, *Psychological Operations in Guerrilla Warfare*²⁸. It was referred to as a "murder manual" for terrorists based on an earlier one used by the US's "Phoenix" assassination program in Viet Nam in the late 1960s and utilized in El Salvador during the 1980s, when the US funded and directed the death squad government against revolutionary rebels. This Manual's section, "Selective Use of Violence", described the need to hire professional criminals, or thugs, for selective jobs, including sabotage and murder; the neutralizing of key officials, including judges, local Sandinista leaders, police and state security officials; creating martyrs for the Contras by *staging* violence at demonstrations, causing deaths of their *own* supporters with strategically located cameramen to assure images to enhance public relations; and coercing locals to carry out disruptive assignments. The Manual, in effect, was a primer on committing war crimes – grotesque violations of US and international law – directing the Contras to "overthrow" and "replace" the Sandinista government.

Additionally, about the same time, the CIA created a 16-page illustrated comic book, *Freedom Fighter's Manual*²⁹, air-dropped in 1983 over northern Nicaragua. It described its purpose as providing a practical guide to liberating Nicaragua from "oppression and misery" by "paralyzing the military-industrial complex of the traitorous Marxist state", causing "civil disorder", sabotaging industries, and undermining the Nicaraguan economy. It very explicitly described how ordinary citizens could disrupt the everyday workings of the Sandinista government:

- * hiding or destroying important tools
- * calling in sick for work
- * leaving lights and faucets on
- * breaking light bulbs and windows
- * stealing food from government supplies
- * releasing or stealing livestock from farming coops
- * spreading *rumors*
- * making false reports of fires and crimes
- * cutting telephone cables, severing telephone and electric lines
- * stopping up toilets

25 Robert Parry, "Making the Economy Scream," *Consortium News*, October 9, 2013. Allende was violently overthrown and killed in a CIA coup on September 11, 1973.

26 "Envoy Is Said to Assert Nicaragua Is 'Infected'", *New York Times/AP*, Oct 5, 1984.

27 Christopher Dickey, "U.S. Support Bolsters Rebels' Confidence Inside Nicaragua", *Washington Post*, April 3, 1983.

28 Subsequently published by Vintage Books, New York, 1985.

29 Subsequently published by Grove Press, New York, 1985.

- * disabling government vehicles, putting dirt and water in government gasoline tanks and carburetors
- * cutting down trees, blocking highways
- * placing nails on roads and highways
- * instructions on making Molotov cocktails to firebomb police stations
- * etc.

Reagan's initial efforts to destabilize, promote fear, discontent and demoralization, and to accelerate economic collapse, became a ten-year almost fanatical campaign to completely destroy the Sandinistas. A June 1983 CIA National Intelligence Estimate on Contra activity stated, "Fear and uncertainty stemming from the violence have crippled investment, exacerbated capital flight and cut off commercial lending. Fighting in the countryside has reduced traditional seasonal labor migration and cut into harvests."³⁰ This, of course, was exactly the Reagan administration's intention.

In March 1983, the CIA established a \$50 million intelligence network in Central America, with over 150 CIA operatives and technicians that planned infiltrating US agents into Nicaragua and piloting low-altitude spy planes.³¹ In June, President Reagan created a massive domestic propaganda agency, "Project Democracy."³² Congress later provided \$24 million *overt* aid to the Contras. Soon after, the Contras sabotaged Managua's airport, the Corinto port facilities, and an oil pipeline in the western coastal town of Puerto Sandino. In January-February, 1984, CIA "assets" mined Nicaragua's harbors in flagrant violation of all international law.³³

In November 1983, Congress created the "National Endowment for Democracy" (NED) to openly perform one of the tasks that the CIA had secretly been carrying out for years, i.e., interfering in elections in other countries to promote what US Americans describe as "democratic" processes.³⁴ It immediately began funding printing supplies and salaries for the right wing Chamorro-owned daily newspaper *La Prensa* to promote the cause and image of the Contras as achieving "democracy" in Nicaragua.³⁵ Soon it was receiving \$100,000 a year, and after *La Prensa* was shut down for over a year by the government for its pro-Contra articles, it resumed operations with \$250,000 from the NED.³⁶

CIA and NED money increasingly supported various non-military, internal opposition disruptive activities as well. Manipulation of public opinion through controlling news stories that included staging photogenic events, became a daily exercise.³⁷ The CIA created clandestine radio stations in Honduras, Costa Rica, and one on Nicaragua's Atlantic coast aimed at the Miskito Indians.³⁸ The goal was to distort facts and intelligence to make the Contras look good, and especially to convince the US Congress and the US American people

30 Peter Kornbluh, "Uncle Sam's Money War Against the Sandinistas", *Washington Post*, August 27, 1989.

31 The National Security Archive, 26.

32 Ibid., 15.

33 Blum, 292.

34 William Blum, *Killing Hope: U.S. Military and CIA Interventions Since World War II* (Monroe, ME: Common Courage Press, 1995), 303.

35 Parry, 64.

36 Holly Sklar, *Washington's War on Nicaragua* (Boston: South End Press, 1988), 195.

37 Parry, Chapter Two, "Perception Management," 56-78.

38 Walker, ed., Howard H. Frederick, Ch Seven, "Electronic Penetration," 130-140.

of the nobility of the Contra effort, and the repression of the “Marxist tyranny” of the Sandinistas. These efforts continued *ad nauseum* until the 1990 elections.³⁹

The US supplied the Contras with almost daily aerial reconnaissance intelligence identifying the location and movement of Nicaraguan army troops. Aerial violations of Nicaraguan airspace occurred thousands of times from Costa Rican and Honduran territory throughout the 1980s, especially by helicopters and small planes. US ships off the Nicaraguan and Salvadoran coasts were equipped with electronic surveillance devices, in addition to the constant presence of US aircraft carriers, destroyers and battleships. US CIA pilots flew hundreds of air-drop supply missions, keeping the Contras steadily equipped with weapons, ammunition and other supplies.⁴⁰

It was a Goliath versus David operation, the giant US obsessed with destroying the small country of Nicaragua, governed by the “evil” Sandinistas. At various times there were as many as 11,000 US National Guard and regular army troops, including Green Berets plus US Marines in neighboring Honduras, staging threatening maneuvers with Honduran forces, such as “Big Pine” ground, air, and sea operations.⁴¹ Honduras became known as the *USS Honduras* since it was so saturated with US-constructed military bases, in addition to a growing number of more than two dozen Contra sanctuary camps along Nicaragua’s northern border, housing at any one time as many as 12,000 combatant terrorists, and 50,000 to 60,000 of their family members. Several thousand more Contra troops resided inside Nicaragua, or were in camps along the southern Costa Rican Front. Unauthorized USAID combat helicopters regularly ferried Contra troops to various locations as well as supplying their camps.⁴² The US Ambassador to Honduras at the time, John Negroponte, was a key figure in *USS Honduras* conducting the Contra war against neighboring Nicaragua. The famous US Peace Corps was also present with the largest contingent of any nation in the world, well over 300, serving as teachers and basic health care providers for Contra families in the camps.

Reagan’s war was an intentional campaign to “harass” and “pressure” the Sandinistas with “vicious” attacks on small villages, state-owned agricultural cooperatives, rural health clinics, bridges, electricity generating stations, and, especially, key Sandinista leaders. Reagan dismissed reports of Contra atrocities as “Sandinista disinformation”, maintaining a mythology of the Contras as “good” guerrillas.⁴³

In light of mounting Congressional opposition to funding the Contra war, via the restrictive Boland Amendments, Reagan officials met in June 1984 to discuss a way to sustain it by asking third countries to privately fund and maintain the effort, circumventing Congressional power to curtail the CIA’s paramilitary operations. Israel, Brunei, South Africa, Taiwan, and South Korea were among the nations that made contributions, while Saudi Arabia’s King Fahd alone sent over \$30 million, in addition to funds from other members of the World Anti-Communist League (WACL) headed up by retired US General

39 In general, See: Roger Peace, “Winning Hearts and Minds: The Debate Over U.S. Intervention in Nicaragua in the 1980s”, *Peace & Change: A Journal of Peace Research*, Vol 35, Issue #1, January 2010; Parry, Ch 2, “Perception Management, 56-78.

40 Stephen Kinzer, *Blood of Brothers: Life and War in Nicaragua* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1991), 341.

41 Richard Halloran, “Pentagon Details Honduras Action”, *New York Times*, July 26, 1983; Walker, Ch 3, Eva Gold, “Military Encirclement”, 39-47.

42 Dorothy Anger, *Honduran Contra Camps 1989*, November 23, 2018, Dorothy Anger, *Anthropology, Society & Culture*, <http://dorothystewart.net/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/child-photo-d-anger-1989.jpg>

43 Walker, Ch 2, Peter Kornbluh, “The Covert War”, 27.

John Singlaub. Further, many wealthy US citizens contributed millions of dollars for the Contras, among them beer magnate Joseph Coors.⁴⁴

Edgar Chamorro, member of the prestigious Chamorro family, a former Jesuit priest and full professor at the UCA (University of Central America in Managua), was an early member of the Directorate of the main Contra fighting force, the FDN (*Fuerza Democrática Nicaragüense*), serving as their major public relations spokesperson. In 1984, he resigned in disgust at the operations and behavior of the Contras, which were almost totally dictated by the CIA's repackaging techniques, where lies became the rule to confuse the general public, Congress and the press. This even included creating human rights organizations to perpetuate the deception and false propaganda.

From Chamorro's 1987 pamphlet, *Packaging the Contras: A Case of CIA Disinformation*: "In the excesses of inventing an artificial force, and in the need to stage events and to create impressions without consideration for substantial realities, there was no longer a distinction between reality and fiction. The secondary became the primary; image and impression were more important than substance....[L]ies were used to manipulate people and events to such an extent that behind the lies there was nothing but self-illusion and self-deception....[A] negation of the moral distinction between good and evil...led to a legitimization of concepts such as a good war, a good crime, a good rape, a good lie. This is how murder and torture were justified, how the destruction of property and the sabotage of an economy and the social fabric of a nation were excused, all in the name of patriotism and anticommunism."⁴⁵ His comments are profoundly relevant to understanding the rhetoric and techniques of the April 2018 US orchestrated coup described further below.

Earlier in 1984, President Reagan signed National Security Decision Directive (NSDD) #124 ordering economic sanctions against Nicaragua to build pressure on its people. On May 1, 1985, a severe economic embargo was instituted, applying a ridiculous US statutory premise that the "policies and actions of the Government of Nicaragua continue to pose an unusual and extraordinary threat to the national security and foreign policy of the United States."⁴⁶ This ludicrous claim has been repeated in the context of the 2018 coup attempt. The embargo was renewed every 6 months through 1990, and was supplemented by an "invisible blockade" of Multilateral Development Bank (MDB) loans, as the US vetoed or stopped all loans by the World Bank and the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB). The US also applied pressure on European governments to refuse help to Nicaragua. In a particularly cruel, sadistic policy, the US refused *any* help to Nicaragua after its Atlantic Coast was struck head-on in 1988 by Hurricane Joan, one of the most devastating natural disasters ever to hit Central America. A high US government official cheerfully proclaimed that Hurricane Joan was "the biggest victory for the Contras, yet".⁴⁷

In July 1985, Col. Oliver North of Reagan's National Security Council, developed the "U.S. Political/Military Strategy for Nicaragua," a comprehensive three-phase plan explicitly designed to overthrow the Sandinista government, that included the defeat and

44 Walker, Ch 2, Peter Kornbluh, "The Covert War", 31-33, 111-113; Marshall, 13; Sklar, 81-84; Kornbluh, Ed., xvii-xix; Jeff Gerth, "'81 Saudi Deal: Help For Rebels For US Arms," *New York Times*, Feb 4, 1987.

45 New York: Institute for Media Analysis, Inc., Monograph Series: Number 2, 1987, p. 58).

46 Sklar, 265.

47 <http://billgrahamcentre.utoronto.ca/events/2017/9/25/the-biggest-victory-for-the-contras-yet-hurricane-joan-and-the-cold-war-debate-over-natural-disaster-relief-aid>; "'The Biggest Victory for the Contras, Yet': Hurricane Joan and the Cold War Debate over Natural Disaster Relief Aid", Bill Graham Centre Contemporary International History, March 15, 2018.

demobilization of Sandinista armed forces and the implementation of FDN programs."⁴⁸ The plan included directing Contras "to repeatedly...disrupt the economic infrastructure of Nicaragua with priority given to the electrical grid, water, transportation and communication systems", as a "show of force action with maximum psychological benefit."⁴⁹ Of course this plan egregiously violated international law prohibiting the targeting of civilians or civilian infrastructure. By the end of 1985, the Nicaraguan Ministry of Health estimated that 3,652 civilians had been killed, 4,039 wounded, and 5,232 kidnapped during Contra raids.⁵⁰ The toll was mounting.

Brian Willson tells his story:

"My first trip to Nicaragua occurred in January 1986 when I attempted to learn Spanish at a school in Estelí. During the first week, the Contras attacked three farming cooperatives near Estelí, killing eleven campesinos. I watched six of those victims lying in open caskets being carried on horse drawn wagons moving slowly to the Estelí cemetery. I was furious, and sickened.

"Soon after, I visited the US Embassy and spoke with official Garrett Sweeny. He informed me that the two factors determining the future of Nicaragua were: (1) the people's reaction to internal economic shortages due to the economic embargo, including "food shortages", and (2) the military "fortunes" of the contras. The goal of US policy, he said, was "peaceful but the manner in which we pursue it is not."⁵¹ In effect, the US policy was dominated by military terrorism, supported primarily by Republicans in the Congress, while starvation was supported primarily by Democrats.

"On January 13, just over a week after I landed in Nicaragua, the U.S. National Security Council (NSC) launched an all-out campaign to convince Congress and the American people that the Sandinistas were a growing threat to all of Central America. Elliott Abrams, President Reagan's assistant secretary of state for Inter-American Affairs, began this new propaganda campaign with a nationally distributed op-ed piece in which he declared that there was "no question the Sandinista regime is repressive and undemocratic . . . subverting neighboring democratic countries."⁵²

"While studying in Estelí I arranged an interview with a group of Contra prisoners at the nearby penitentiary. I was quite disturbed to hear these impoverished campesinos describe their CIA recruiters enticing them to become Contras to stop Sandinistas from "eating their babies."

Abrams and the Reagan administration were asking Congress for an additional \$100 million to fund the Contra "freedom fighters" to counter the "threat" the Sandinistas posed to neighboring "democratic" countries. In short, Reagan was asking for \$100 million to fund terrorists, which meant many more civilians would be killed before this ugly "secret" war ended. Abrams's op-ed was a part of a massive Orwellian campaign spearheaded by the

48 Kornbluh, Ed., 391.

49 Peter Kornbluh, "Uncle Sam's Money War Against the Sandinistas," *Washington Post*, August 27, 1989.

50 Walker, 27.

51 From personal notes of the meeting.

52 Elliott Abrams, editorial, "Keeping Pressure on the Sandinistas," *New York Times*, January 13, 1986.

White House starting in 1983 to manage “public perceptions,” that is, to “manufacture consent.”⁵³ Obsessed with eliminating the dangerous “virus” posed by Nicaragua’s popular revolution, administration officials knew that the vast majority of Nicaraguans resisted the Contra “freedom fighters” and that the majority of U.S. Americans opposed Contra aid as well.⁵⁴

On June 25, 1986, the US House of Representatives voted to support Reagan’s new request for \$100 million for the Contra terrorists. Ironically, just two days after that vote, the World Court rendered its final decision on Nicaragua’s suit against the United States, in which it ordered the U.S. “immediately to cease and to refrain from training, arming, equipping, financing and supplying the contra forces or otherwise encouraging, supporting, and aiding military and paramilitary activities in and against Nicaragua.” The court also ordered the United States to provide reparations to Nicaragua, later determined at more than \$17 billion. Though the US had been an initial signatory to the treaty creating the court subject to its charter, both Reagan and the Congress blatantly ignored the World Court’s order.

Such disregard for the rule of law was, sadly, not unprecedented. During the Banana Wars at the start of the twentieth century, the United States destroyed the Central American Court of Justice, initially established at U.S. initiative, when that court ruled against the U.S. in regard to its earlier interventions in Nicaragua in 1912 and 1916.⁵⁵

The religious right was also involved in this campaign. Pat Robertson, chair of the Christian Broadcasting Network, one of Brian’s parents’ favorite TV evangelists, was quoted in *Time* magazine saying, “The U.S. has a moral obligation to support ‘freedom fighters’ who battle ‘satanic’ Communism.”⁵⁶ Robertson was adamant that Contra fighters would be “saved” by Jesus as he led religious conversion services in their Honduran camps,⁵⁷ publicly applauding their armed invasion of Nicaragua⁵⁸.

On October 5, 1986, a dramatic event revealed the extent of the US supply network to the Contras, and additionally a strange, direct connection to arms sales to Iran. Two young Sandinista soldiers, 17 and 19 years old respectively, using a surface-to-air missile (SAM), shot down a clandestine US C-123 air freighter carrying 13,000 pounds of military supplies, including 60 AK-47s, 50,000 rounds of ammunition, grenades and their launchers, jungle boots, and water packets originating from Brooklyn, New York.⁵⁹ One of the CIA-supported air crew, Eugene Hasenfus, from Wisconsin, parachuted to safety and was captured by the young Sandinistas. He was part of a four-man crew flying Contra supply missions at an altitude of 2,300 feet about twenty miles north of the Costa Rican border when it was hit by the missile near San Carlos, Nicaragua. Hasenfus survived because he was near the open

53 William Clark, “Public Diplomacy (Central America),” July 1, 1983, published as Document 6 in *The Iran-Contra Scandal: The Declassified History*, eds., Peter Kornbluh and Malcolm Byrne (New York: The New Press, 1993), 21.

54 “Virus” is a term often used by Noam Chomsky.

55 Noam Chomsky, “U.S. Polity and Society: The Lessons of Nicaragua,” in *Reagan Versus the Sandinistas: The Undeclared War on Nicaragua*, ed. Thomas W. Walker, (Boulder: Westview Press, 1987) 288.

56 Richard N. Ostling, “Power, Glory—and Politics,” *Time*, February 17, 1986.

57 Group Watch Profile, “Christian Broadcasting Network,” interview with Honduran human rights official, Dr. Ramon Custodio, December 1985. Group Watch Profile was a project of the Inter-hemispheric Resource Center, now located at Political Research Associates in Somerville, MA (www.publiceye.org) that profiled right-wing private organizations and churches in the United States.

58 Tom Fiedler “Robertson Pledges to Support Nicaragua Invasion,” *San Jose Mercury News*, November 13, 1987.

59 Envio Team, “Hasenfus: Nothing But the Facts,” *Revista Envio* 65 (November 1986), <http://www.envio.org.ni/articulo/3243>.

door ready to kick out heavy boxes of military supplies attached to parachutes, and he had a parachute himself. The pilot and copilot, both of whom had served with Hasenfus in secret CIA air drop operations in Laos in the 1960s and 1970s, were killed. The fourth crew member, a Nicaraguan, was also killed. Until this shoot down, the US had successfully dropped as many as 500 secret shipments of supplies to waiting Contras on the ground.⁶⁰

“Franklin,” head of the “Jorge Salazar” Contra task force of 1,400 mercenary fighters stationed deep in central Zelaya Department, was waiting for the guns and ammunition to fall from the sky that day; despite not receiving the expected shipment, Franklin’s band of terrorists had sufficient weapons eight days later to ambush a passenger bus traveling from Rancho Alegre to La Gateada, about thirty-five miles north of the ill-fated drop site. The group opened fire indiscriminately with rifles and machine guns, leaving two passengers dead and fifteen wounded; two others were kidnapped.⁶¹

The CIA and Reagan of course denied any connection to Hasenfus, but the downing of the aircraft and Hasenfus’s confession exposed what would become known as the Iran-Contra scandal. Eventually, it would be revealed that the United States had engaged in a doubly illegal covert action—illegally trading arms to Iran for U.S. hostages in Lebanon, while using the cash gained from Iran to provide weapons to the Contras in Nicaragua in violation of congressional prohibitions.

Hasenfus knew many details about the complex Iran-Contra funding scheme because he had made over 60 phone calls from his 1986 safe house residency in a fashionable San Salvador neighborhood to his boss, Max Gomez, who was in regular consultation with Vice President George H.W. Bush. But calls were also made to Southern Air Transport in Miami (an airline conducting covert activities for the CIA), to retired Major General Richard Secord, head of “The Enterprise” arms supplying operation, at his home in Virginia, and to Marine Lt. Col North’s number at Reagan’s NSC in Washington, D.C.⁶²

Gomez’s alias was Felix Rodriguez, the son of a wealthy family of Cuban land owners. He had been a CIA operative during the 1961 failed Cuban Bay of Pigs invasion, and served as a veteran of the US war against Viet Nam. In addition to his regular contact with Vice-President Bush, Gomez was in regular contact with Secord and North, who controlled the Swiss bank account used to purchase the weapons. Secord also provided weapons flown or trucked directly to Contra supply bases in Honduras, such as Palmerola, El Aguacate, San Lorenzo, and Jamastran, which last the General Accounting Office concluded had been illegally constructed or upgraded by U.S. engineers in 1984. Weapons from private U.S. donors along with Secord’s international arms suppliers were flown directly from warehouses at Ilopango in San Salvador to Contras deep within Nicaraguan territory, over either the Honduran or Costa Rican borders. All this disclosed El Salvador’s role in the Contra war.

Brian continues:

“I and two other US veterans were eager to meet with Eugene Hasenfus since he was such a direct link between the United States and the Contras. The Nicaraguan government arranged for us to travel with Hasenfus by

⁶⁰ Kinzer, 311.

⁶¹ Ibid.; National Security Archive, *Chronology*, 515

⁶² Ibid., 325.

helicopter, along with a Nicaraguan judicial team and an ABC-TV crew, to the remote October 5 crash site for an inspection. At the crash site, debris was scattered over a wide area—twisted metal and parts of one of the plane’s engines, numerous pieces of AK-47s, boots, portions of wooden ammunition boxes, water packets, etc. We initiated a conversation with Hasenus there.

“He seemed quite willing to talk to English-speaking people who cared about his story. Later we visited him at Tipitapa Prison, located ten miles from Managua. At that meeting, he told us that he was paid \$3,000 a month, and \$750 for each flight. He described his ten secret arms supply flights as originating from Ilopango, San Salvador, sometimes routed over northern Nicaragua from Honduras, other times routed south over the Pacific to Costa Rica before flying over southern Nicaragua.”

Many hearings were held when Iran-Contra became public after Hasenus’s shoot down, but no one was really punished. North never served jail time, and his conviction was overturned on appeal; he actually ran for the U.S. Senate in Virginia in 1994. Secord pleaded guilty for lying and was given two years of probation. He then became a corporate CEO. Earlier in his career he had been involved in the secret air war in Laos from 1966 to 1968.

From other sources we learned that weapons from Secord’s supply lines were sometimes mixed with privately donated weapons, as well as weapons from the Concord, California, Naval Weapons Station. These weapons were temporarily being stored in the International Harvester Company’s warehouse in El Salvador.⁶³

A high-ranking Green Beret officer declared in a December 1986 *Los Angeles Weekly* article that a U.S. invasion of Nicaragua had likely been planned for April 1987, but was delayed by the Iran-Contra revelations that erupted after Hasenus’s confession. Ongoing frenzied U.S. rhetoric and troop movements in Honduras suggested, however, that an invasion still seemed imminent.

The Latin American countries of Colombia, Mexico, Panama, and Venezuela, which had first met on Contadora Island (Panama) in 1983 to confront the militaristic stance of the US in the region, made continual efforts to end hostilities, especially in Nicaragua. Alfonso Chardy, writing in a May 10, 1987, article in *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, said that “U.S. officials sought to disrupt the efforts of the Contadora group of nations to negotiate an end to conflict in Central America because the peace talks complicated efforts to persuade Congress to approve Contra aid.”⁶⁴ The US did not want any real peace that would interrupt their plans to destroy the Sandinista revolution.

In May 1986, a National Security Planning Group was convened due to the fear that Nicaragua was prepared to sign a Central American Contadora peace plan. One official who attended the meeting was reported to have said the administration experienced a “peace scare.”⁶⁵ But in 1986, Congress approved \$100 million for the Contras, money for pure terrorism.

Brian tells us more:

63 Tom Barry, Deb Preusch, and Beth Sims, *The New Right Humanitarians* (Albuquerque, NM: Inter-Hemispheric Education Research Center, 1986), 56.

64 Alfonso Chardy, “Threats Abetted Contras Imperiling Talks Was One U.S. Tactic,” *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, May 10, 1987.

65 Joel Brinkley, “Reagan Offer: A Way to Help Contras,” *New York Times*, Aug. 6, 1987.

“In 1987, while on a six-week US veterans’ delegation observing in the war zones of Nicaragua, the ugliness of the Contra war – the targeting of civilians and civilian infrastructure – was viscerally painful. Schools, health clinics, government buildings, cooperative farms were regularly targeted for destruction as Sandinista leaders were regularly assassinated. Before returning to the US, I arranged to meet with a soft-spoken mechanical engineer from Portland, Oregon who had moved to Nicaragua in 1983 after graduating from the University of Washington. On April 7, I traveled to an ice cream shop in Matagalpa to meet Ben Linder. A unicyclist, clown, and juggler, he was especially popular with the campesinos’ children. In 1986 he moved to tiny El Cuá in the Department of Jinotega and assembled a team to construct a small hydroelectric plant in the neighboring village of San José de Bocay so that peasants could have a few light bulbs and refrigeration for medicines. He shared with me how dangerous things had become for him and his Nicaraguan co-workers. The agricultural cooperative of El Cedro, near the dam construction site, had been recently attacked by the Contras where two residents had been murdered; one of them was a close friend of Ben’s. During that attack, the health clinic, food supply center, and a home had been burned to the ground.

“Sadly, Ben Linder himself became famous for being murdered by the Contras exactly three weeks after our visit, April 28, as he worked on the hydro project with his Nicaraguan coworkers, Sergio Fernandez and Pablo Rosales. David Linder, Ben’s father, a retired hospital pathologist, traveled to Nicaragua and, after personally reviewing the autopsy and talking with the doctor who carried it out, concluded that ‘they blew his brains out at point-blank range as he lay wounded’ after his legs had been seriously injured by grenade shrapnel.⁶⁶ Americas Watch, in a November 1987 report, concluded that Linder ‘appeared to have been summarily executed at the site of a hydroelectric project . . . by the *contras* after an ambush.’

“And, more disgusting, at a formal hearing on Ben Linder’s murder conducted in May 1987 by the House Foreign Affairs Subcommittee, Connie Mack (R-FL) admonished Linder’s parents: ‘I can’t understand how you can use the grief I know you feel to politicize this situation . . . I don’t want to be tough on you, but I really feel that you have asked for it.’ Mrs. Linder responded, ‘That is the most cruel thing you could have said.’ Mack: ‘I don’t consider it to be cruel, I consider it to be to the point.’ Elliott Abrams, assistant secretary of state, testified that Linder’s death need not have occurred but for Nicaragua’s ‘practice of permitting and even encouraging Americans . . . to travel in combat zones’.”⁶⁷

In 1988, Congress began openly financing opposition political parties in Nicaragua. In September 1988, US House Speaker Jim Wright said he “had ‘clear testimony’ from the CIA

66 Personal conversations with David Linder; Judy Butler, “Nicaragua: On the Nicaragua Solidarity Trail,” *Envio* 74 (August 1987), <http://www.envio.org.ni/articulo/3207>.

67 Anthony Lewis, “Abroad at Home; ‘The Most Cruel’”, *New York Times*, May 15, 1987. <https://www.nytimes.com/1987/05/15/opinion/abroad-at-home-the-most-cruel.html>

of its involvement in instigating civil disturbances in Nicaragua," as the Reagan administration "covertly sought to provoke the Sandinista government into cracking down on its political opposition."⁶⁸ Meanwhile, the Central American Presidents continued their several peace initiatives, and at Tela, Honduras, August 7, 1989, they agreed to a requirement that the US-created and sustained Contras be demobilized and repatriated by December 5, 1989 (they were not). When President Ortega arrived at a subsequent October follow-up high level meeting in San José, Costa Rica, there had been several serious ambushes by Contras of Nicaraguan people registering to vote for the planned February 1990 elections. As a result, Ortega threatened to call off the ceasefire that had been agreed to at Tela, since the Contras were in grotesque violation of its terms. An infuriated President George H.W. Bush publically belittled Ortega, calling him a "little man in a military uniform" like an "unwanted animal at a garden party," concurring with a television reporter who described Ortega as "a skunk at a picnic."⁶⁹ Anthony Lewis wrote in an earlier November 19, 1987, *New York Times* column, that the Reagan Administration was fearful of any genuine Central American peace process because in fact: "They want war. That is the policy...As Mr.[House Speaker] Wright said, they 'are scared to death that peace will break out."⁷⁰

Brian continues his story:

"From November 30 to December 14, 1989, I led a small delegation of US veterans to Nicaragua to determine if the US and its Contra terrorist fighters were indeed complying with the Tela Accords to demobilize by December 5. We discovered that a number of assassinations of FSLN members, and others perceived as providing leadership in the communities, were continuing to be murdered on almost a daily basis. Many ex-Contras who chose to return under the agreed upon amnesty were being selected for assassination. On December 1, ex-contra Fermin Cardenas was killed in an ambush just north of Wiwilí in Jinotega Department. He had received training in the U.S. several years ago in North Carolina. In an interview in late 1988 or early 1989, he stated that Contra commander Enrique Bermudez was directly involved in approving operations to destroy U.S. citizen Ben Linder's hydroelectric project in the El Cua area, as well as to murder Linder himself. Cardenas also indicated that Bermudez gave a reward to the Contra who executed Linder."⁷¹

"On December 13, the Contras executed a man about 12:30 p.m. near the village of Susucayan in Nueva Segovia Department. The man executed had been named by the US-backed Unidad Nacional Opositora (UNO-National Opposition Union) to be a local candidate in the upcoming elections. He chose not to be a UNO candidate, and he was identified as a traitor by the Contras and removed from his house, tortured and then murdered. We visited a cooperative near San Ramon, Matagalpa on December 7 and learned that a man had recently been assassinated in a neighboring cooperative.

68 <http://www.brianwillson.com/u-s-waged-low-intensity-warfare-in-nicaragua/> AP story, *San Francisco Examiner*, September. 24, 1988.

69 Noam Chomsky, *Deterring Democracy* (New York: Random House, 2011), 283-290.

70 <http://www.brianwillson.com/the-us-american-way-of-war-intentional-killing-of-civilians-and-civilian-infrastructure/>

71 "U.S.-Waged 'Low Intensity' Warfare in Nicaragua: Report of Veterans Peace Action Team Pre-election Observation Delegation to Nicaragua, November 30 to December 14, 1989"; <http://www.brianwillson.com/u-s-waged-low-intensity-warfare-in-nicaragua/>

“While in Matagalpa City on December 6, we learned of a Contra attack the evening before at a cooperative near the neighboring city of Jinotega. Several people were killed and wounded, and some facilities were destroyed. While in San Pedro De Lovago on December 9, a public transport vehicle was blown up by a mine on the public road, killing or wounding over 20 civilians. On December 13 we traveled from Estelí to Quilalí to visit the 1988 López ambush site where 18 campesinos had been murdered. Heavy Contra activity on and along the road from Palacagüina and San Juan Telpaneca in Madriz Department forced us to travel the longer, more northern route to Quilalí.

“U.S. Reconnaissance overflights were continuing at the rate of one every other day providing the Contras with regular photographic intelligence of positions of Nicaraguan army units and transportation patterns. Several flights occurred in December, tracked by Nicaraguan radar.

“We visited with 75 Mothers of the Heroes and Martyrs in La Dalia, Matagalpa. After hearing their stories over several hours we estimated that these 75 mothers experienced a collective loss of nearly 300 family members due to Contra terrorism during the war. One mother had lost 22 family members, having only her mother left. They expressed in powerful ways that they had suffered enough. ‘How can you help us,’ they asked? ‘We want peace.’ Who and in what manner will we be able to sufficiently represent the suffering, and vision, of those mothers? If we can feel the suffering within us, that it is our suffering as well, and feel the vision within us, that it is our vision as well, then we will be motivated to act in ways we are not even aware of yet.”

Another source of funding for the Contras derived from narcotics trafficking. In US Senator John Kerry’s first term, 1985-1990, he quickly conducted a gutsy investigation of Reagan’s covert efforts to fund the cash-starved, illegal Contra terrorists in Nicaragua through proceeds from drug trafficking under the cloak of national security. Kerry’s 1,166-page report issued in December 1988 concluded that “senior U.S. policy makers were not immune to the idea that drug money was a perfect solution to the Contras’ funding problems.”⁷²

In 1996, investigative journalist Gary Webb revealed a sordid history of cocaine smuggling by the Nicaraguan Contras in a series of articles published in the *San José Mercury News*, later to be told in his exhaustive report, *Dark Alliance*.⁷³ For more than a decade a San Francisco Bay area drug ring sold tons of crack cocaine to Los Angeles street gangs which funneled millions in drug profits to the CIA-backed Nicaraguan Contra terrorists. US officials were aware of this network and did little or nothing to stop it, and Reagan’s national Security Council headed by Oliver North took extraordinary steps to protect the drug trafficking from public exposure. Webb examined thousands of pages of once secret documents of the CIA, FBI, DEA, and Los Angeles police Department, and from the Iran-Contra investigation.

72 Senate Foreign Relations Subcommittee *Report on Terrorism, Narcotics and International Operations, Drugs, Law Enforcement and Foreign Policy*, 100th Cong., 2d Sess, December 1988, 41 (Washington, DC: GPO, 1989). It was popularly termed the Kerry Committee.

73 Gary Webb, *Dark Alliance: The CIA, The Contras, and the Crack Cocaine Explosion* (New York: Seven Stories Press, 1998).

In a June 11, 1989, *New York Times* article, "Bush Pressing Congress to Permit CIA Role in Nicaragua Elections," a State Department official was quoted as saying, "We want to keep the Sandinistas guessing." This reflects the arrogance, interventionist attitude and sadistic nature of U.S. foreign policy directed to Nicaragua.⁷⁴

By 1990, the US administration had spent nearly one *billion* dollars in unsuccessful efforts to overthrow the Sandinista government through its three-pronged approach: (1) funding and directing the national Contra "Low Intensity" Conflict (LIC) terror campaign, (2) enforcing a harsh economic embargo while blocking international loans, and (3) sabotaging genuine democratic elections. Over 30,000 citizens had been murdered, with many more maimed, including thousands of amputees, and even more displaced.

The Neoliberal Period

In 1990, the US-backed UNO and its presidential candidate, Violeta Chamorro, won the election against the FSLN's candidate, Daniel Ortega. Noam Chomsky commented that the Nicaraguan people were voting "with a gun to their heads," as the UNO promised an end to the war if it won the elections. The 1990 turnover of power from the FSLN to the UNO is the only known case in the world of a government that took power through armed struggle peacefully turning over that power through electoral means. After the electoral defeat of the Sandinistas in 1990, former land owners returned to Nicaragua from the USA. They began to take back their former estates through legal and less than legal maneuvering, driving many rural people off the land they had been cultivating. This "agrarian counter-reform" as it became known, left many hundreds of people landless in its wake during the 1990s and early 2000s.

During the three presidential periods from 1990 to 2006, the Nicaraguan government privatized health care and introduced educational "autonomy", which made each public school responsible for paying teachers' and administrators' salaries, essentially passing the cost of education on to parents. By 1996, 34 per cent of the population was considered illiterate, while half a million children and teenagers were outside the school system, in a country with a total population of 6 million people⁷⁵. Nicaragua became the second poorest country of the western hemisphere, after Haiti, as international aid and remittances from Nicaraguan citizens living abroad became the pillars of the economy.⁷⁶ The 2006 Central American Free Trade Agreement, signed by Central American countries as well as the United States, opened the door to "free trade zones" or enclaves for foreign-owned textile factories to take advantage of Nicaragua's cheap labor while avoiding paying taxes. However, the "lost decade" of the 1990s and early 2000s was not simply an uncontested, top-down process; on the contrary, student movements shut down Managua for several months protesting against budget cuts, and rural workers virtually occupied state farms on

74 Robert Pear, "Bush Pressing Congress to Permit C.I.A. Role in Nicaragua Election," *New York Times*, June 11, 1989.

75 U. Hanemann, (2006) "Nicaragua's Literacy Campaign" paper commissioned for the EFA Global Monitoring Report 2006, *Literacy for Life*, Hamburg: UNESCO Institute for Education.

UNDP (1998) Human Development Report 1998, New York: UNDP.

76 J.C. Bonino, (2016) *Globalización a la Centroamericana*, Managua: Alcaldía de Managua.

the cusp of being privatized, creating cooperatives and a bottom-up process of land reform⁷⁷.

Prior to the scheduled February 1990 national election, President Bush informed the Nicaraguan people in no uncertain terms, that if they chose not to vote for the US-selected candidate, Violetta Chamorro, for their president, the vicious US war and economic embargo would continue. The US spent nearly \$50 million creating the UNO Party specifically for the election of an alternative to the FSLN.⁷⁸ The Sandinistas understandably lost as the people were exhausted from war, and followed President Bush's stern suggestion. Chamorro was the fifth of the Chamorro family dynasty to serve as President of Nicaragua in the Twentieth Century. But the Sandinistas were devastated.

More details from Brian:

"I had served as an election observer at the February 25, 1990 elections, monitoring in three small indigenous communities northwest of Puerto Cabezas near the Atlantic Coast. Having no electricity, I observed with others the hand counting of ballots by candlelight into the early morning hours of February 26. Mechanically, the process seemed fair with observers representing the different parties. Later in the day the national results revealed about 55 percent for UNO/Chamorro, and 41 percent for FSLN/Ortega. Though terribly disappointed in the results, I understood that the Nicaragua people were voting with a gun pointed at their head since President Bush had warned the Nicaraguans that a vote for Ortega translated into continued war and economic deprivation. The mechanical process appeared fair, but the national political context controlled by the US made it impossible for Nicaragua to facilitate a process that would reveal genuinely honest voter sentiments.

"When departing from Nicaragua for the US after the elections, the gentleman sitting next to me on the plane was on his last trip as the Sandinista government representative to Europe for Nicaraguan coffee sales. In good English, he sadly shared with me something I have never forgotten: 'It is a shame the US just would not let our flower blossom'. As the plane was accelerating down the runway lifting into the air, I found myself sobbing, wondering whether I would ever see Nicaragua again."

The results brought welcome, celebratory relief for the wealthy Nicaraguan right-wing and comfortable US investors. They could have their rich playground back. Privatization of services and infrastructure for profit was restored at the expense of the vast majority of the Nicaraguan people. Most of the gains of the revolution, in education, healthcare, gender equity, etc., were to be reversed.

In subsequent elections in 1996 and 2002, candidates of the Constitutionalist Liberal Party (Arnoldo Aleman, 1997-2002, Enrique Bolanos, 2002-2007) defeated efforts by the FSLN (Ortega) to regain the presidency. *Wikileaks* cables reveal that the US continued its efforts to block any re-emergence of the Sandinistas, and make clear that if the FSLN had

77 B. Wilson, (2013) "Breaking the chains: coffee, crisis, and farmworker struggle in Nicaragua," *Environment and Planning* 45: 2592–609 <http://dx.doi.org/10.1068/a46262> .

78 <http://www.brianwillson.com/how-the-u-s-purchased-the-1990-nicaragua-elections/>

won, the US threatened to curtail investments, to renew economic sanctions, and to eliminate remittances from the US. Before Bolanos left power at the end of 2006, his administration passed a draconian anti-abortion law banning the practice in all circumstances. This horrible policy is often blamed solely on the FSLN, which regained political power in 2007. The FSLN won subsequent elections in 2011 and 2016, much to the chagrin of the US.

The Second Phase of the Sandinista Revolution

After coming in second in three consecutive presidential elections, Daniel Ortega beat all other candidates with 38 per cent of the vote in 2006 and returned to the presidency in 2007 after 17 years. The incoming Sandinista-led coalition created a National Unity and Reconciliation (NUR) government, with slogans such as “Christian values, socialist ethics, and actions of solidarity.” Within its development plans, the “recuperation of rights” plays a major role, guiding diverse policies, including the renewed literacy campaigns, and the reconstruction of public education and public health care, among other key areas.⁷⁹ Social infrastructure, including roads, parks, farmers’ markets, child care centers, and maternity homes in each municipality of the country, has been the hallmark of the NUR government.

One of the first laws related to the food sector to be enacted by the returning Sandinista government was Law 693, the Law of Food and Nutritional Sovereignty and Security of 2009. This law, the goal of several years of social movement articulation and lobbying, declared food sovereignty and security to be the responsibility of the State, to be carried out in collaboration with territorial and social actors⁸⁰. Aside from Law 693, there are several recent laws that contribute to the argument that food sovereignty is a legitimate analytical lens for understanding Nicaraguan food and agricultural social processes. Law 717 mandates the creation of a fund for purchasing land for distribution to women peasants. Law 765, the Law to Foment Agroecological and Organic Production, establishes norms for agroecological production and the capacity for municipalities to create local ordinances to foment agroecology. New state entities, such as the Ministry of the Family, Community, Cooperative and Associative Economy, have become spaces for promoting small-scale farmers and food producers through fairs, farmers’ markets, micro-loans, and training⁸¹.

These policies have contributed to Nicaragua having among the highest rates of economic growth in Latin America between 2007 and 2018. Nicaragua has the highest human development index score in Latin America, and has been considered the country with the greatest level of gender equality in the region. In 2007, Nicaragua became part of the Bolivarian Alliance of the Peoples of Our America (ALBA), a group of nations seeking a regional integration based on principles of complementarity and respect for socioeconomic models that seek alternatives to capitalist development. For nearly a decade, Venezuela

79 *National Human Development Plan of Nicaragua (PNDH)*, (2012), Plan Nacional de Desarrollo humano Actualizado 2012–2016. Available at <http://www.pndh.gob.ni/>

80 S. Araujo, and W. Godek, (2014) “Opportunities and challenges for food sovereignty policies in Latin America: the case of Nicaragua,” in n.c.s lambek, P. claeys, A. Wong and I. Brilmayer (eds.), *Rethinking Food Systems: Structural Challenges, New Strategies and the Law*, pp. 53–74, London: Springer.

81 Orlando Núñez-Soto. (2015) *Sandinismo y Socialismo*, Managua: Fondo cultural Darío y Sandino.

contributed petroleum and loans to Nicaragua, providing a crucial initial investment for the economy of small-scale producers, while Cuban doctors provided diverse health services.

There is no doubt that the US Government has long been hostile to the ALBA alliance, with particularly violent postures toward Cuba and Venezuela. Until 2016, the official US stance on Nicaragua was not as aggressive, and the Nicaraguan government avoided the kinds of public clashes with United States' imperialism that Venezuela's Hugo Chávez, Ecuador's Rafael Correa, and Bolivia's Evo Morales took on as part of their political strategy. On the part of the Nicaraguan Sandinista government, it is clear that avoiding conflict with the US is a basic need for governing the country, as evidenced by nearly two hundred years of history. Additionally, the unhealed wounds of the Contra war require a permanent emphasis on peace and reconciliation on its part, which would be incompatible with heightened anti-US discourse. However, it is not immediately clear why the United States did not act more decisively against the FSLN government until 2018, although it is likely that the continental geopolitical situation had deteriorated for leftist governments since the 2013 death of Hugo Chávez and, with that decline, the opportunity finally opened up for US imperialism.

Since at least 2010, examining Wikileaks cables, Department of State memos, NED, USAID budgets and documents seized in arrests of 2018 coup suspects, it is clear the US has expended perhaps as much as \$200 million to oust the Ortega-led Sandinista government. Depressed over the 2006 Sandinista electoral victory, the US has had as its explicit goal "the achievement in an immediate future of a government akin to the interest of the US government," to "alienate the ALBA movement from Nicaragua," and the "creation of conditions for regime change." An NDI (National Democratic Institute, one of four core entities of the NED) 2013 memorandum, identified four lines of attack in a strategy to destabilize and change the Nicaragua "regime": (1) training young political leaders; (2) media war; (3) unification of the opposition; and (4) strengthening civil society organizations, preparing a "coup d'état against Daniel Ortega." The US Embassy and USAID have been preparing the conditions for a coup from since at least 2013. Their efforts culminated in the April – July 2018 coup attempt, unsuccessfully as it turned out.

What Really Happened in Nicaragua in 2018: Myth and Fact



by Barbara Larcom

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We all can agree on at least one thing: what happened in Nicaragua in 2018 was heartbreaking. We may disagree about the numbers, or the source of the tragedy. But the loss of life – the numerous injuries – the acts of cruelty – the psychological trauma – the destruction of people’s livelihoods – the devastation of the economy – these have had lasting effects on the Nicaraguan people and others who love them.

Can Nicaragua move forward from these events? An important step in healing will be for all of us to seek the truth together. For a moment, please set aside what you think you know about the conflict in Nicaragua. Examine carefully the facts and arguments presented below. While not comprehensive, they are adequate to prompt a thinking person to question deeply what really occurred. Also please ask yourself, what might be the motives of the various actors involved? Does it make sense that they would act in a particular way, given their position?

This chapter is a brief summary of **four common claims** about the crisis in Nicaragua – claims which are demonstrably false. Each of these myths is countered by selected facts and arguments. You may explore the details in richer depth by delving into the other chapters of this reader.

MYTH #1: The crisis beginning in April 2018 was a spontaneous uprising by ordinary people (see, for example, an article in [Counterpunch](#).)

FACT #1: The crisis was deliberately manufactured, with years of planning in some sectors, by groups opposed to the Nicaraguan government; and chaos was created by a massive, intentional dissemination of rumors and lies as well as criminal activity.

The US government and Nicaraguan NGOs: Over a period of years, the United States has funded training for “democracy and human rights promotion” in Nicaragua, targeted at groups opposed to the Sandinista government. In 2017 alone, Nicaragua civil society organizations and media companies received over [\\$31 million](#) from USAID, of which \$14.5 million was focused on two categories of spending – “government and civil society” and “conflict, peace and security.”

Imagine the impact of this spending in a small, poor country of only [6.2 million](#) people: the US population is over [52 times](#) its size, and the average salary in the United States is about [5.5 times](#) higher than in Nicaragua. Taking those two multiples into account, \$14.5 million would be the equivalent of over \$4.1 billion if it were targeted at groups in the US.

But even those multiples understate the impact, as many Nicaraguans don’t have a salary to compare. Over 8% of the population⁸² subsists only on the food they grow on small family

⁸² Assuming an average [household size](#) of 4.9.

farms, with an additional 9% growing only enough food to sell some of the surplus.⁸³ Still more Nicaraguans subsist in the informal sector in towns and cities. Thus, a significant percentage of the Nicaraguan population – salaried and unsalaried – is economically vulnerable in ordinary times. Additional economic pressure such as US sanctions could have a catastrophic effect on their lives.



International readers might ask yourselves how you would like foreign interference in the functioning of your economy and the selection of your political leaders. Yet Nicaragua has regularly suffered such interference from the US.

The work of the US National Endowment for Democracy (NED) also deserves careful attention. NED is historically affiliated with the US Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), and was created (according to co-founder, Allan Weinstein) to “do what the CIA did, only privately.”⁸⁴ During the bloody Contra war in Nicaragua, NED gave roughly [\\$15.8 million dollars](#) to anti-Sandinista opposition groups from 1984-1990. In the crisis of 2018, even critics of the Nicaraguan government admitted that the NED had [laid the groundwork for insurrection](#) through financial support to the opposition. Between 2014 and 2018, NED gave over \$4 million to various civic organizations.

NED’s ties to the youth movement are also clear: The Civic Youth Movement (MCJ) in Nicaragua was [created and funded by the National Democratic Institute \(NDI\)](#), which is an arm of NED; and the general secretary of the student MCJ is also coordinator in Nicaragua of the NDI.

The role of COSEP: Two protests in March and April 2018, preceding the outbreak of violence, were carried out on questionable bases by persons with little or no vested interest in the issues. The first of these laid blame on the government for not responding effectively to protect the remote Indio Maíz biological reserve from a wildfire, even though [army units, helicopters, and other](#) personnel and equipment were used. There was evidence that the fire was started by someone using a slash-and-burn farming technique. Neighboring cattle ranches had also wanted to expand into parts of the reserve. No attention, however, was focused on these details.

⁸³ [World Bank report](#), page 46.

⁸⁴ Engdahl, F. William. *Manifest Destiny: Democracy as Cognitive Dissonance*. Wiesbaden, Germany: mine.Books, 2018.

The second and larger protest accused the Nicaraguan government of unilateral changes to the social security (INSS) system, unfairly cutting benefits to the elderly while requiring workers to make larger contributions. In fact, this accusation turned the truth upside down; it was the large-business sector that wanted to cut benefits.

The government had been meeting for over a year with the Supreme Council of Private Businesses (COSEP) and labor unions in an effort to keep the INSS system solvent. The large-business sector supported the [draconian changes](#) proposed by the International Monetary Fund (IMF): to eliminate the Christmas bonus/13th month salary, reduce pensions, increase the retirement age from 60 to 65, and double the number of weeks worked before qualifying for benefits (750 to 1,500), as well as to privatize hospitals and clinics.

Instead, President Daniel Ortega proposed changes ([La Gaceta](#), pages 2-3) that would cause less hardship for Nicaraguan workers: small increases in contributions from employees (a 0.75% increase) and the government (1.75%), with a larger increase for employers (3.5%). Ortega also proposed a 5% contribution from each retiree pension in order to provide INSS health care benefits for those receiving only a half-pension; this would aid those who had not paid into the system for the required amount of time, including family survivors of combatants on both sides of the 1980s Contra War. Ortega's proposal also eliminated the "ceiling" allowing the wealthiest Nicaraguans to pay only a portion of their salary into the social security fund.

What was most damaging to the Nicaraguan government was that both corporate and social media misrepresented Ortega's INSS proposal as regressive – in other words, as what the IMF wanted – when the exact opposite was true. This was the start of a misinformation campaign by the opposition.

Facing recalcitrant opponents, the Nicaraguan government didn't budge from the principle of maintaining benefits for workers. COSEP then walked out of the negotiations and, [together with non-governmental organizations](#), called for protests against Ortega's reforms, urging workers to [march in the streets](#) along with students from private universities.

In other words, the business sector called for street protests, ostensibly on behalf of their workers' welfare, while in fact they were acting in their own interests and promoting a proposal that would have hurt workers. It is also noteworthy that, while some elderly persons engaged in protests for a few days, it was students with no direct vested interest in the issue who came out to protest in large numbers. Why would this occur?

Social media: A coordinated [social media campaign](#), begun immediately and simultaneously in multiple cities, was launched on the first day of protest (April 18), along with thousands of fake profiles and sponsored Facebook ads, and several million WhatsApp messages – very disproportionate to such a small population. These distorted the facts about the actual content of the INSS reforms and [falsely reported](#) that a student protester at Central American University (UCA) was killed by police that first day. Outrage at the alleged student death spread all over social media and brought more protesters on the second day, on which there were additional false reports of a "student massacre." Three persons – none of them protesters – died on the second day of protests, in different locations. The full story

is told in the chapter entitled “Nicaragua’s Crisis: The Struggle for Balanced Media Coverage.”

Verónica Gutiérrez was a representative of the student union, UNEN, at Polytechnic University (UPOLI) while these events were taking place. In a later [interview](#), she confirmed that she had been at the university on April 19, when social media “blew up” with claims of a student massacre there. On that day, she fielded phone calls to reassure people that the university was calm; and she and others began contacting a roster of UPOLI students to make sure they were OK. They were able to confirm that no UPOLI student had died. Upon reflection, she later concluded that the sequence of events had been a political manipulation, with the opposition focus rapidly changing from Indio Maíz, to INSS reforms, to deaths blamed on the government, to the need for new elections.

Protest build-up: Suddenly, during the first day or two of widespread protest, large numbers of mortars were also available and in use, even though these small-scale firearms cost about \$3 each and were not affordable in any quantity for everyday Nicaraguans. Some people began asking, what was the source of so many mortars on short notice?

Early in the April crisis, those in opposition to the government also began constructing *tranques*, or roadblocks, to obstruct streets and highways, using whatever materials were at hand. Often these were *adoquines*, otherwise known as “Somoza paving stones,” interlocking blocks which could be pulled up from the highway and stacked to create a blockade. Citizen creation of such roadblocks had occurred every so often, historically, in response to a government action or administration.

Criminal gangs: In the current situation, however, it became apparent that something was different. More and more roadblocks were created over time; yet often they were not operated or guarded by ordinary Nicaraguan citizens, acting in protest, but rather by [criminal elements](#). In some cases, opportunists were looking to extort those needing to pass through; in others, they were paid by opposition leaders to control the roadblocks. A later section of this chapter will cover in more depth the many violent crimes at the roadblocks.

The use of [criminal gangs to create chaos to overthrow governments](#) has been documented in other Latin American countries – and in Nicaragua itself in the past. During the Contra War of the 1980s, US agencies secretly armed the Contras via trades with known Honduran drug lords with connections in Contra camps. Similarly, according to witnesses and the police, some leaders in the more recent violence in Nicaragua were gang members from El Salvador; they came to Nicaragua to mingle with anti-government protesters, with the apparent motive of opening Nicaragua to drug activities which the Ortega administration had managed to keep to a minimum. A [rise in gang and criminal activity](#) was noted, starting shortly before and continuing into the April protests.

Christian Mendoza, aka “Viper”, a known gang leader, was captured by police following alleged criminal operations with his gang members at Polytechnic University (UPOLI) in Managua. [Radio ABC](#), he confessed to an ongoing criminal connection with the following four leaders of civil society:

- (a) **Felix Maradiaga** has historically portrayed himself as a promoter of peace and democracy. He is director of the Institute for Strategic Studies and Public Policies (IEEPP), which received at least [\\$260,000 from NED](#) in the period 2014-2018. During

the protests, Maradiaga went to Washington to denounce alleged Nicaraguan government repression at a meeting of officials of the Organization of American States.

(b) **Luciano Garcia** is the president of [Hagamos Democracia](#), or Let's Make Democracy, a network of reporters and activists. This organization is the [largest recipient of NED funding](#), receiving over \$525,000 in grants since 2014. Luciano Garcia has reportedly declared that Ortega has turned Nicaragua into a "failed state" and demanded his immediate resignation.

(c) **Hugo Torres** is a retired army general who became an opposition leader.

(d) **Moises Hassan Morales** is a former member of the FSLN governing junta and former mayor of Managua. He left the FSLN in 1988.

According to [Radio ABC](#), alias Viper stated that Maradiaga and Torres came to UPOLI to give money to a group called "8 de Marzo" ("March 8th.") The funding was for the group to buy arms and drugs and to perform acts of terrorism.

In another [video interview](#), alias Viper stated that Maradiaga came to UPOLI multiple times, mostly to meet with the people he oversaw directly. Viper met with him only once, when Maradiaga distributed a paper explaining that the purpose of their activities was to create chaos. Viper also said that Maradiaga and Garcia provided arms to another man, Pio Arellano, who distributed them further, as part of the plan for chaos creation. All of Maradiaga's visits to UPOLI took place, however, before a damaging video emerged (also included in the video interview), showing Maradiaga at UPOLI with Pio Arellano who was brandishing a handgun. Maradiaga was reportedly not sighted at UPOLI after that.

A [bench warrant](#) was issued for Maradiaga and Pio Arellano in September; at that point, Maradiaga had been in the US since July and he has not returned to Nicaragua since.

Government attempts at resolution: Throughout this period, the government tried various approaches to understand and/or resolve the crisis. President Ortega called for a national dialogue among various sectors of society. He asked the Nicaraguan Conference of Catholic Bishops (CEN) to be mediators in the national dialogue, and [they agreed](#) (see below).

Another approach was the [Commission for Truth, Justice and Peace](#) (CVJP), authorized on April 29 in a special session of the Nicaraguan legislature with a vote of 74 to 0 (the Liberal party did not participate). The CVJP was approved to work for the following three months, with a stated mission to "understand, analyze, and clarify the violent events and deaths that have occurred in Nicaragua since April 18, 2018." The commission, sworn in on May 6, was composed of five, highly respected Nicaraguans:

(a) **Fr. Francisco Molina Oliú**, Franciscan priest, one of the principal exponents of liberation theology in Nicaragua; formerly priest at Santa María de los Ángeles, which served as a "people's church" in central Managua; founder of the Antonio Valdivieso Center;

(b) **Dr. Mirna Cunningham**, [Miskita feminist](#) and [indigenous rights activist](#); first Miskito/a doctor in Nicaragua; first woman governor of the autonomous region after the Sandinista Revolution; 2011 - 2012, Chair of the [Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues](#) of the UN; president of the [Association for Women's Rights in Development](#) (AWID); vice president and founding member of the Indigenous Initiative for Peace with Nobel Prize laureate Rigoberta Menchu; board member, World Women's Fund;

(c) **Jaime Lopez Lowery**, vice rector of the public National Autonomous University of Nicaragua (UNAN) in Managua;

(d) **Adolfo Jarquín**, Under-Attorney for Human Rights;

(e) **Cairo Amador**, academic and intellectual; brother of the founder of the FSLN, Carlos Fonseca.

“The Commission for Truth, Justice and Peace is in your hands, and we want to tell you that you're completely free to do the corresponding investigations,” said [Gustavo Porras](#), president of the legislature.

Also, on May 4, Nicaragua's Public Prosecutor's Office launched an investigation into the protests and deaths. “We will start a formal and responsible investigation into the loss of life of students and national police,” [said](#) Prosecutor Ines Miranda.

Students and non-students: The first session of the national dialogue was held on May 16. President Ortega and Vice President Murillo attended along with representatives of the national university system, labor unions, and the opposition Civic Alliance for Justice and Democracy, composed of COSEP, representatives of “civil society” organizations, and student movement representatives. A list of major players can be found [here](#).

Instead of a dialogue, however, many student representatives chanted, “Murderer! Murderer!” as Ortega and Murillo entered the room. During the discussion, student leader Lesther Alemán made an impassioned [speech](#), accusing Ortega of presiding over genocide. He added that the students were not present to engage in dialogue; rather, they were demanding a cease-fire and the resignation of Ortega and Murillo.

Not all students were making these demands. Leonel Morales, a student at UPOLI and a representative of the student union UNEN, [spoke out in protest](#) of the takeover of his university by non-students, and of the roadblocks creating violence and chaos. He would pay dearly for his public comments, in an event detailed later in this chapter.

In early June 2018, three Nicaraguan university [students traveled to Washington](#) to lobby US government officials for help in their fight against the Ortega administration. They were accompanied by Migueliuth Sandoval, the widow of journalist Ángel Gahona who had been slain on April 21 (allegedly by the police, but later shown to be by two local criminals as explained here, in [English](#) and [Spanish](#)). Their trip was sponsored by Freedom House, a right-wing advocacy group with US government funding. While in DC, they met and posed for photos with ultra-conservative Senators Ted Cruz and Marco Rubio and Representative Ileana Ros-Lehtinen, author of the [NICA Act](#) applying sanctions to FSLN officials and to the Nicaraguan economy. They also met with top officials in the State Department and USAID. In all these meetings, they [urged](#) that US sanctions be applied to six key Nicaraguan leaders and that the US push for Nicaraguan presidential elections, scheduled for 2021, to be moved forward.

Some student representatives, however, who had been active in the protests and the national dialogue, disapproved of this junket to DC. Harley Morales, leader of one of five student movements in the university coalition, [told the newspaper El Faro](#) that he was appalled:

“That trip was very strange, we are very unhappy with that trip, including with our representative. When we planned it, there were already many actors who

wanted to intervene in the agenda. That happened from the beginning. I mean organizations, opposition politicians, some more to the right... This trip was financed from the United States (Freedom Foundation) and an agenda was imposed on them, and that is terrible. It was they who decided which students would go....

“We had a clear-cut idea that they would attend the OAS General Assembly.... We didn't know about the meetings with Ted Cruz, Ileana Ros or Marco Rubio. We are very dissatisfied with that.... They didn't tell us they were going to those meetings.... All the movements now have advisors. Movers and shakers. Children of politicians, businessmen....”

Meanwhile, unrest was rife at various public universities in Nicaragua, and two of these were seized and taken over. Evidence of deliberate deceit came to light concerning some student protesters, in connection with the criminal gangs already mentioned. One example is Dania Valeska, a student at UNAN in Managua, who with others was involved in the seizure and takeover of that public university. She was videotaped bidding a [tearful good-bye](#) to her mother while supposedly facing death hiding behind a barricade during an extended gunfight; the story is told in more detail in the chapter on the media, referred to previously.

Valeska was later arrested and gave [testimony](#) about the occupation of the university by several gangs, who were stratified in their roles, power, and access to locations within the campus. In the takeover, representatives of UNEN, the student union, were driven out of the building, and the few remaining student protesters (including Valeska) were restricted to limited roles including crimes such as theft.

Please observe Valeska's demeanor during her testimony to the police. She does not appear threatened in any way, even though she later claimed that the police were pointing guns at her.

A similar seizure and takeover took place at Polytechnic University (UPOLI) in Managua. In the same [interview](#) previously mentioned, UPOLI student Verónica Gutiérrez discussed the deception of students which occurred during the first days of protest, with heavily armed non-students controlling the third floor of her university. She was a UNEN representative at her school and later participated in the national dialogue.

Additional details about UPOLI were provided by the arrested criminal alias Viper, mentioned earlier, who [confessed](#) his connections to his own gang and to organized crime more widely. Viper used UPOLI as a meeting site, reportedly bringing in as many as 35 persons with arms, making Molotov cocktails, and urging the youth to attack symbols of the government in order to create chaos. The third floor was off-limits to those occupying the university, except for the gang; some captured victims were reportedly tortured on the third floor.

The role of the MRS: Dania Valeska's [testimony](#) also included information about the MRS (Movimiento Renovador Sandinista), a political organization and a former political party which opposes the FSLN government. Valeska stated that, during the occupation of the UNAN, she operated alongside a young woman whose first name she provided, Yesbeling, aka Pancha. Pancha reportedly held mid-level authority among those who took over the university; she told Valeska and others that she was in regular contact with Dora

María Tellez, MRS founder, and received funds from Tellez intended for use by those occupying the UNAN. Those at the bottom of the hierarchy of occupiers, like Valeska, did not see much benefit from these funds, complaining of a lack of food and water, while there was allegedly skimming and pilfering at upper levels.

There is also evidence of MRS involvement with the takeover of UPOLI. Verónica Gutiérrez, Leonel Morales, and other UNEN and labor representatives held a [press conference](#) on April 26, denouncing the takeover of their university by non-students, and stating that they were being funded by MRS, which was allegedly bringing arms, clothing, and food to these non-students. Students reported seeing various MRS leaders at UPOLI during this period, e.g., Victor Hugo Tinoco, meeting with those holding high-level positions in the occupation.

The role of the Catholic Church hierarchy: Church leaders played a crucial role during the crisis, and they were far from impartial. In their Sunday masses, several supported the collective opposition to the government, the Civic Alliance. Moreover, in a private meeting in early June, the Nicaraguan Conference of Catholic Bishops (CEN) handed Daniel Ortega a [letter](#) stipulating conditions that must be met; and CEN's Secretary, Monsignor Mata of Estelí, [publicly called on President Ortega to resign](#), warning that otherwise he or his family could be killed. Thus, these Catholic leaders placed themselves in a situation in which they had a serious conflict of interest.

In particular, [Monsignor Báez](#) “emerged as the face of the opposition, with a commanding presence over social media.” He argued that there was no contradiction between the roles of mediator and defender. “One thing that has to be clear is that being the mediators of a dialogue does not make us neutral before injustice, before human rights violations, before the death of innocents,” he said.

President Ortega changed his attitude toward church leaders over time. “I thought they were mediators, but no,” he said. “They were committed to the coup-plotters, they were part of the plan with the coup-plotters.” He also refused a proposal by the bishops to move up the 2021 elections to 2019.

The [February 5, 2019 report](#) by the Commission for Truth, Justice, and Peace (CVJP) included this comment (page 57):

“Throughout the whole process, certain bishops maintained that they could perform two roles at the same time: that of mediators and that of defenders and promoters of the sector opposed to the government.... This error had serious consequences. The language of some bishops radicalized people and inflamed tempers, and even led to strong divisions in the Catholic community.”

In some instances, ordinary people grew upset with church leaders, when they perceived the leaders as not defending them, in favor of others. An example of that was in [Diriamba in July 2018](#). Senior Catholic clergy, including Monsignor Báez, traveled an hour from Managua to Diriamba to rescue a group of “Franciscan missionaries and paramedics” allegedly trapped in the basilica. Upon arrival, they were accosted by an angry crowd calling them murderers. Monsignor Báez’s shirt was ripped and he got a cut on his arm.

Why did this happen? Because people had just retaken their local church which had been under the control of the opposition and criminal elements. As described in [this song](#)

and [other sources](#), the people discovered a [cache of weapons](#) in the church, stored there with permission. A large amount of medical supplies pilfered from the local health center was also found. At least one person had been kidnapped and held for several days in the church until people rescued him. And finally, the residents of Diriamba [had just endured](#) over [a month of violence](#) at [local roadblocks](#) – and [no priest or bishop had ever come](#) to check on their well-being. While word of Monsignor Báez’s minor injury spread around the world, the underlying causes received no such attention; and the angry crowd was misnamed “ [paramilitaries](#).”

For more on the church’s role, see the chapter entitled “The Catholic Church Hierarchy: Their Role in Nicaragua’s Current Political Crisis.”

To summarize: Several sectors have been identified for their longer-term involvement in this seemingly sudden “uprising:” the US government, via USAID, NED, certain members of Congress, and the NICA Act; NGOs and a youth movement funded by NED and USAID; the large-business sector, represented by COSEP; criminal gangs; some university students; the Movimiento Renovador Sandinista (MRS); and the hierarchy of the Catholic Church.

MYTH #2: The protesters were peaceful (see, for example, this article in [The Atlantic](#).)

FACT #2: While some protesters were indeed peaceful, a fundamental underpinning of the crisis was violence carried out by groups in opposition to the government.

Some evidence of violence by the opposition was provided in the previous section, but there is much more. A few additional examples of opposition violence will be given here, with many more details provided in other chapters of this reader.

Attempted murder: UPOLI student Verónica Gutiérrez’s [interview](#) and her participation in a [press conference](#) were previously mentioned. Her friend Leonel Morales, another UNEN representative, also spoke out strongly at the [press conference](#), and later at the [national dialogue](#), against the takeover of the university by non-students and the MRS funding of arms brought into the UPOLI. In retaliation, he was [targeted](#) by criminal gangs. They [dragged](#) him from his girlfriend’s house, beat him, shot him three times, and left him for dead in a ditch on the side of the road. Miraculously, he was rescued and survived, although he has undergone months of medical treatment. Speaking from his hospital bed, in [this video](#) he [appealed to the country](#) to come together to bring peace back to Nicaragua.

Murder: Contrary to opposition claims, of the 253 total confirmed deaths connected to the crisis, 48 were identified as Sandinistas and 22 were police officers. These numbers may be surprising to some readers, because they are in contrast to the 31 deceased who belonged to “groups of spontaneous demonstrators.” For the remaining 152 there is reportedly no reliable information as to their political affiliation. In total, the deaths of 140 people are attributed to the hundreds of roadblocks raised by the opposition across the country. ([CVJP report](#), page 6)

Some well-known Sandinista figures, sadly, appear to have been murdered because of their support of the FSLN. [Lenin Mendiola](#), for example, was [shot and killed](#) by armed

delinquents participating in an opposition march in Matagalpa on August 11, that began at the cathedral.

There are other reports, of course, besides the CVJP report, and these claim other numbers of deaths and circumstances. The CVJP report, however, is thoroughly done, with detailed information on each deceased person. The same cannot be said about some of the other reports.

For more information comparing reports on deaths related to the crisis, see the chapter entitled "Human Rights in Nicaragua."



*The burnt out shell of the pro-Sandinista Nuevo Radio Ya .
The radio station was attacked by armed gangs with
over 20 staff inside who escaped thanks only to the bravery
of police and firefighters who rescued them under fire
from opposition gunmen.*

Arson: On the second day of protests, demonstrators also [attacked and burned](#) government buildings in several cities. Over the next weeks, more municipal offices, public radio stations, universities, and homes of Sandinistas were [burned](#). Granada, Estelí, Masaya, León, Managua, Tipitapa, Diriamba, and Chinandega were affected, among other places. The first university student killed, on April 20, was incinerated, the victim of arson at the CUUN university in León (covered in detail by this video in [English](#) and [Spanish](#)).

Some in the opposition have claimed that the Nicaraguan government burned its own buildings. The claim is nonsensical. The country had been tranquil until the protests erupted. What would be the motive for the government to be so self-destructive?

According to the [report](#) (page 31) published by the Commission for Truth, Justice, and Peace (CVJP), by July 2018, "Fifty-five per cent of municipalities (84 out of 153) suffered

severe damage to public infrastructure for a total amount of almost \$28 million. The municipalities most affected by criminal groups were Masaya (27% of total damage), Managua (19%), and Matagalpa (17%).” (Here are links to the [Spanish](#) and [English](#) summaries.)

Snipers: While the Nicaraguan police have been accused of firing live bullets at protesters, there is evidence of non-police snipers being used against the protesters and the police. For example, on May 30, peaceful Mothers’ Day marchers were tragically felled by snipers. The police were accused of these murders, but in fact the source of the shots was not determined, and [twenty police officers](#) themselves suffered gunshot wounds. A recent documentary (in [English](#) and [Spanish](#)) examines the evidence for what happened that day.

Here is an account written by a US person living with their Nicaraguan family. Personal details have been removed to protect everyone involved:

“Our neighbor here ..., whom we have known for years, is a member of the antiriot police. He told us that the day the roadblocks/barricades were removed ..., that he was one of [number] who were the first to step outside the police station. There was only one way out. When they stepped out, there was a sniper on top of [named] building who was waiting for them and began picking them off, one by one. He was the only one who wasn’t shot and had to try and drag his friends out of harm’s way. One was killed, and the others luckily survived but with major injuries.... After the fighting they were able to capture several people. He said many of them were foreign gang members, mostly from El Salvador.

“...He also said that early on in the protesting they would be receiving fire from protesters and meanwhile, they could see someone firing on the protesters from behind. He said apart from the rifles, pistols and serious weapons, even the mortars were getting larger and more sophisticated and that they were putting glass, nails, and marbles inside them. He showed me welts on his legs from being fired at. He said, absolutely that their orders were to not use live ammunition. He said they used rubber bullets and tear gas. Not until the decision was made to remove the barricades [in mid-July] did the antiriot police use live ammunition.”

There are other accounts of non-police snipers in [“Dismissing the Truth,”](#) the report which responds to Amnesty International’s false claims about the Nicaragua crisis.

Roadblocks: Early in the national dialogue, any hope of reaching agreement was fading until parties went into closed session at the urgent request of the Bishop of León, Bosco Vivas Robelo. As a result of the private session, President Ortega agreed to withdraw the police to their barracks, in exchange for a promise by opposition leaders to start to negotiate the elimination of roadblocks on the highways and not to build new ones. Sadly, the opposition did not fulfill their part of the agreement; many more roadblocks were erected, with armed criminal groups controlling them. Ortega, however, kept his part of the bargain; police remained in their barracks for several weeks.

In the meantime, unfortunately, in the absence of police, violence spread, especially at the roadblocks. Opposition groups halted traffic at the roadblocks on major highways for

over two months; these became areas of [extreme violence](#) and crime, including [kidnapping](#), [torture](#), [murder](#), and even burning people alive. They were often maintained by paid gang members. Several Catholic bishops, unfortunately, [supported](#) the roadblocks and used churches to [hide weapons and criminals](#). Some [priests were actually present during tortures](#).

The roadblocks crippled the economy, not only of Nicaragua, but the surrounding countries. Over [400 truckers](#) from various Central American countries were held at roadblocks in Jinotepe for over a month, unable to maintain themselves nor to transport their goods to their destination. Eventually the ambassadors from their countries and others insisted on a meeting with the president of the Nicaraguan legislature, Gustavo Porras. The situation had turned into an international incident, and the ambassadors demanded that the Nicaraguan government do something to free the truckers and their vehicles. Until then, of course, the police had remained in their barracks at the order of President Ortega. He decided to send the police to clear the roadblocks, and shortly afterward the highways were cleared, earning [heartfelt thanks](#) from the truckers.

The [report](#) by the Commission for Truth, Justice, and Peace (CVJP) contains an extensive analysis of events related to the roadblocks (page 17), as well as testimony from victims and survivors. This includes the impact of the roadblocks where most of the deaths occurred and which were used for "illicit activities and the excessive use of violence to inflict bodily harm, abuse, rob, humiliate, violate, dominate, torture, destroy or even kill" (page 21).

Siege of police stations: Police stations in two major cities, Masaya and Jinotepe, were [attacked](#) with mortars, Molotov cocktails, and gunfire every day for [over a month](#) as the police remained in their barracks without retaliating, on orders from President Ortega not to confront the "protesters." The police station and municipal hall in El Morrito, Department of Río San Juan, were attacked by persons firing assault weapons from a caravan of vehicles; four police officers and a schoolteacher were killed, and nine police were kidnapped and threatened with death before being released. (A video about this incident is available in [English](#) and [Spanish](#).)

Attacks on hospitals, health centers, and ambulances: These physical attacks were also widespread, as described in this 107-page [document](#).

MYTH #3: The Nicaraguan government response to the protests was brutal
(see, for example, this piece in [The New York Times](#).)

FACT #3: The government was restrained in its response.

Alleged murder of protesters: Groups opposed to the government, as well as certain human rights organizations, claimed that the government murdered over 300 mostly young Nicaraguan protesters and injured at least 2,800 more. (See, for example, this piece in [The Washington Post](#).) There are several factors, however, that make this claim highly questionable.

As previously noted, among the 253 persons who lost their lives in events related to the Nicaraguan crisis, at least as many FSLN and government supporters were killed as

protesters; yet all the deaths are blamed on the government. Why would the government kill its own supporters?

Notably, only seven high school students and eight university students died – and these over time in various locations – contradicting media coverage that there was a "student massacre." A large [majority](#) of the dead were workers (60), street vendors (57), and unemployed persons (40). These persons are *least likely to be adversaries of the government*. *Why would the government be motivated to kill them?*

The motives and past behavior of each side must also be considered in more general terms. Since the government was being blamed for all deaths and injuries, it had everything to lose and nothing to gain by killing protesters. The opposition, on the other hand, would gain from an increase in deaths, bolstering its demand that the FSLN government should be replaced. Moreover, under President Daniel Ortega, and until April 19, the Nicaraguan police force was [recognized internationally](#) as a model of community policing.

Another consideration is that trained snipers were apparently used to target murder victims, according to ballistic and forensic reports. But [why assume](#), without evidence, that the snipers were pro-government or FSLN supporters? Recall, for example, the stories previously shared, of the police themselves being targeted by a sniper. Also, many victims died of a clean shot to the [head or neck](#), and none was shot in the back. The Nicaraguan police are said to be trained to shoot in the mid-torso region; even if police were using live ammunition, and they reportedly were not, this would not be their *modus operandi*.

In certain cases, the police were accused of murdering Nicaraguan citizens when doing so would have been nearly impossible. For example, the Velásquez family in Managua was [burned alive](#) in the Carlos Marx neighborhood and the police were accused of their murder; but the entire neighborhood was surrounded by roadblocks and even firefighters were unable to enter. A [video](#) was presented that allegedly showed the police entering the neighborhood, but it was later proved to have been filmed on April 21, weeks prior to the tragedy. The truth of the arson attack is the subject of this investigative documentary in [English](#) and [Spanish](#).

A second example is an area called "sniper alley" (because of attacks there) in the Monimbó part of Masaya; it was inaccessible to the police for several weeks, because the [entire city](#) was circled by roadblocks and the police were confined to their barracks.

In mid-July, after the majority of Nicaraguans had grown weary of the roadblocks and realized the violence was actually coming from the opposition, President Ortega ordered the removal of the roadblocks in a careful and strategic way to ensure as few casualties as possible. Afterward, the violence subsided and the [only people who died](#) from the political turmoil were Sandinistas, including Lenin Mendiola mentioned above.

Alleged refusal to treat wounded protesters: The Ortega administration was accused by the opposition of giving an order to the Ministry of Health not to treat wounded protesters. This claim, however, was disproved in two sources supportive of the opposition. The first is [this video clip](#) from a TV interview by Carlos Fernando Chamorro of *Confidencial* with several doctors from different parts of Nicaragua, all of whom contradicted Chamorro's statement that they were instructed not to treat protesters. The video ends with Dr. Sonia Castro, Minister of Health, also strongly denying that she gave or would give such an order.

The second source was a press conference published by the conservative daily *La Prensa*, in which a hospital chief of surgery [denied claims](#) that he had been fired, or that hospital officials had refused care to protesters at the beginning of the conflict. "I repeat," he said, "as the chief of surgery, I repeat [the] order: to take care of, I will be clear, to take care of the entire population that comes here, without investigating anything at all."

Alleged political prisoners: The Nicaraguan government was also accused of holding and torturing, as political prisoners, as many as 1,000 people who had done nothing more than to speak out peacefully against the government or to participate in peaceful demonstrations (see, for example, this piece in [Havana Times](#).)

To begin, the number of prisoners was exaggerated. In December 2018 the [CVJP](#) confirmed the presence of 438 persons in the country's main prisons following the violent events of 2018. New visits in January 2019 confirmed that 76 people had been found not guilty, leaving a total of 362 inmates (page 15). This result also shows that the Nicaraguan judicial system was working, given that a notable percentage of cases received a "not guilty" verdict.

There was also evidence of good treatment for the prisoners. For example, the CVJP report provided details on access to communications and relationships with family members, medical care, and other services provided, such as cultural and sports activities. "Among the detainees, none showed evidence of bodily injury and none said that they had been subjected to torture, cruel or inhumane treatment." Neither did the CVJP find evidence of disappeared persons, often alleged by opposition activists. Human rights organizations also admitted there are [no reports of missing people](#) in Nicaragua.

Most importantly, those remaining in custody at that point could not reasonably be called "political prisoners." They had been convicted of, or were still facing charges for, [serious crimes](#) like murder, rape, kidnapping, or other violent acts such as those described above.

The prison system kept and provided records about various aspects of their care while in custody. An example taken from among the government's list of convicted prisoners (from November 5, 2018) was the following:

Wilfredo Antonio Orozco Urbina 33 years old, [DOB, government ID and address listed, but omitted here], from Tipitapa, located in the Tipitapa Penitentiary, sentenced to 15 years for terrorism at the order of the 7th District Panel of Judges of Managua, captured July 1, 2018, entered prison July 5, to complete his sentence July 3, 2033.

As of November 5, 2018, he had received:

- 6 family visits
- 1 attention by a doctor
- 11 activities in the sun
- 4 packages [from family or friends]
- 2 judicial reviews

In addition, on February 27 2019 the government began to release, for house arrest instead of prison, over 100 selected prisoners from the penitentiary system of Tipitapa at

La Modelo and La Esperanza. ([“Government Gives House for Prison to More Than One Hundred Prisoners”](#)) This arrangement came immediately following an economic negotiation between the government and opposition business leaders. The daily newspaper *El Nuevo Diario* (2/27/2019) presented several videos of released young people from León being greeted by their relatives.

Plans for releasing more prisoners continued thereafter. In a generous attempt at peace and reconciliation in the country, on March 21, 2019, the government [agreed](#) to release within 90 days all those detained since the crisis began in April 2018. The process was monitored by the International Red Cross. As of this writing, all such prisoners have been released via a conditional amnesty, Amnesty Law 996 approved by the Nicaraguan National Assembly on June 8, 2019. Each released prisoner had to sign a document promising not to repeat their crimes or their liberty would be revoked.

Alleged flight to Costa Rica to escape government violence: There have been claims that thousands of Nicaraguans fled to Costa Rica in terror of the Nicaraguan government and have asked for political asylum there. (See, for example, this piece in [The Guardian](#).) In fact, however, numerous Nicaraguans [have always gone](#) to and from Costa Rica to find work and send money home to their families; unemployment caused by the political crisis was another reason for emigration to a neighboring country. Many Nicaraguans who did not actually flee violence, including some who were already living in Costa Rica, have now taken advantage of the Costa Rican asylum process in order to get economic help and legal status from that government. Also, no doubt some Nicaraguans who allegedly committed violent crimes during the crisis did flee to Costa Rica to escape punishment. The Nicaraguan government has announced that all those who left the country are free to return.

MYTH #4: Daniel Ortega is a dictator.

FACT #4: The Nicaraguan government is observing the country’s constitution and laws.

“Ortega y Somoza, son la misma cosa.” (“Ortega and Somoza, they are one and the same.”). This is an often-heard claim by the opposition which couldn’t be further from the truth. Anyone who lived through the Nicaragua of the 1970s in Matagalpa, or Estelí, or Masaya, or many other parts of the country, can relate their memories of horror that the dictator Anastasio Somoza was repeatedly bombing people in his own country in an attempt to retain power.

Moving on from this hyperbolic claim, however, let us consider whether there is evidence that Daniel Ortega and his administration are being dictatorial in some lesser sense. This is a claim made by the opposition, which also asserts that a large majority of Nicaraguans want him to resign from office (see, for example, [IPI Global Observatory](#).)

Ortega alleged to be ineligible to run in 2016: Some claim that Ortega was constitutionally ineligible to run for a third term, but that his “stacked” Supreme Court allowed him to run. (See, for example, claims in [The Washington Post](#).) This refers to the fact that the Supreme Court upheld the appeal of President Ortega and 104 mayors that they had the constitutional right to elect, to be elected, and to be re-elected as citizens of the Republic. Similar appeals, it should be mentioned, occurred and were upheld by the

Supreme Courts of Costa Rica and Colombia in support of their respective presidents, Arias and Uribe.

Also of note is that in Honduras, after President Manuel Zelaya was overthrown in 2009, allegedly for proposing the elimination of term limits for future presidents, a subsequent President Hernandez did not even request a Supreme Court ruling. The Nicaraguan opposition and the US State Department [did not question the results](#) in either Costa Rica or Honduras.

Ortega's election alleged to be fraudulent: Another opposition claim was that Ortega's 2016 election was fraudulent (see, for example, this [BBC](#) article.) Recognized [public polls](#) by M&R Consultores before the election, however, showed that Ortega and Murillo enjoyed the support of 66.3% of voters; and in fact they won the election by a higher margin than that. Also, as mentioned by [Chuck Kaufman](#), in 2006 Ortega;

“...won by the slimmest plurality of 38% against a divided opposition. He won re-election in 2011 with 63% of the vote, and in 2016 by 72.5%. The Organization of American States officially accompanied the vote. They made recommendations for some electoral reforms which the government agreed to, but said that the outcome reflected the legitimate will of the people. Dictators don't win fair elections by growing margins.”

S. Brian Willson was an international election observer for the 2016 Nicaraguan presidential elections. He [pointed out](#) that within the total population of six million, 70% or 4.2 million were registered to vote. Of those registered, 60%, or 2.5 million, actually voted. Among the nine parties with presidential candidates, FSLN candidates Ortega and Murillo won over 72% of all votes, or 1.8 million. In other words, the Sandinistas won 43% of all registered voters, including those registered who did not cast their vote.

Other parties alleged to be excluded from the electoral process: Opposition claims were greatly exaggerated that [other parties were excluded](#) from the electoral process. There were [reported to be](#) nine presidential candidates on the 2016 ballot. Of course, the opposition was actually referring to exclusion of the Movimiento Renovador Sandinista (MRS) and of a coalition led by Eduardo Montealegre of the Independent Liberal Party (PLI). The opposition failed to acknowledge that the [MRS lost its legal status](#) as a political party because its leaders had been unable to get more than 1.3 percent of the popular vote, not enough to qualify them to run in elections.

Similarly, Montealegre was removed as PLI leader in a Supreme Court ruling, in favor of a rival who had filed a lawsuit; and he chose not to reassemble the coalition under a new banner, instead claiming that the forthcoming elections were illegitimate. Even before the court ruling, however, the last poll indicated that less than six percent of respondents had planned to vote for the PLI coalition, reported by [Christine Wade](#) to be “[b]ogged down by factionalism, beset by corruption and an absence of compelling leadership, and bereft of policy platforms that have voter support....”

Ortega and Murillo alleged to be corrupt (see, for example, [InSight Crime](#)):

Claims of Ortega-Murillo corruption are, at the very least, highly problematic. [Chuck Kaufman](#) of Alliance for Global Justice points out in “The Case Against Ortega:”

“They used to say that Fidel Castro was the richest man in the world? They made that claim by assigning the value of all Cuba’s state-owned property and resources as Fidel’s personal wealth. Well that’s how they come up with the claim that Daniel is enriching his family while in office. I realized how this argument was being spun in 2008 when the Sandinista Renovation Movement leadership attempted to convince a delegation I was leading that the Ortega government has spent zero cordobas on poverty alleviation. They defended that insultingly obvious lie by assigning all of the Venezuela oil aid, which was providing the funds for Zero Hunger, Zero Usury, school lunches, peasant agriculture and small business loans, to Ortega’s personal balance sheet!

“The World Bank, the IMF, the EU countries have all singled out the government of Nicaragua for its effective use of international loans and grants. That means the loans and grants were spent for the purposes they were given, not siphoned off into the pockets of Ortega and his supporters like happens in so many countries. You can’t fulfill the UN Millennium Goals to cut poverty in half, you can’t grow the economy by 5% a year without significantly increasing income disparities if you are pocketing international aid, and you can’t grow tourism without displacing small and medium businesses, not to mention residents, if you are pocketing international aid.”

Media alleged to be government-controlled: Claims are made that all major media in Nicaragua are controlled by the government, which works to quash opposition media. (See, for example, [NPR](#) and [BoingBoing](#).) Such claims, however, are quickly put to rest by anyone who experiences the multiplicity of media sources of all political stripes in Nicaragua – many of which are very critical of the government with no apparent retribution. *La Prensa*, *Havana Times* and *100 Noticias* are just three such examples. This issue is dealt with in detail in the chapter entitled “Nicaragua’s Crisis: The Struggle for Balanced Media Coverage.”

Alleged human rights violations: Also according to opposition groups, the FSLN government is routinely violating the human rights of the Nicaraguan people, as attested to by national and international human rights organizations (e.g. [Human Rights Watch](#), [Amnesty International](#)). Again, like other claims, this is open to serious challenge. In the chapter entitled “Human Rights in Nicaragua” you can read the truth about Nicaragua’s human rights and also read extensive extracts from the report [“Dismissing the Truth,”](#) which responds to Amnesty International’s false claims about the Nicaragua crisis.

Just one example is provided here, to give a sense of how poorly the human rights organizations performed. The independent investigators of the Inter-American Commission for Human Rights (IACHR) had not even begun their work in Nicaragua when the IACHR presented what they [called a final report](#) to the Permanent Council of the Organization of American States (OAS). Moreover, the information used by the IACHR to produce that report went through at least two stages of what was little more than a rumor mill: [IACHR reporting](#) relied on accounts by opposition human rights NGOs which themselves depended on opposition news media. IACHR did no independent investigation of the evidence, and it

also rejected any information supplied by the Nicaraguan authorities and the National Assembly's independent Truth Commission (CVJP).

The opposition failed to offer a genuine alternative: The opposition used these claims of "dictatorship" to demand the resignations of President Ortega and Vice President Murillo. The claims, however, had little foundation. As Camilo Mejia [points out](#), the opposition portrays itself as "a strong and unified movement that represents the sentiment and interest of the Nicaraguan people against a repressive dictatorship." In reality it is far from a cohesive movement. Beyond its unified demand for the president to step down, there were serious differences, which meant they were unable to issue a united call for policy changes or to present any program which might have widespread appeal.

Differences existed between pro-choice civil society organizations and the pro-life and homophobic Catholic Church. There was disagreement as well between student groups, who openly advocated a prolonged general strike, and wealthy business groups, who would have lost revenue from such a strike.

Most importantly, the opposition was sharply divided in its broad politics. There were those who [considered themselves leftists](#), even Sandinistas, who argued that the government had moved away from revolutionary principles. At the other extreme were those who sought support from the US government, even meeting with three of the most right-wing members of the US Congress (Ros-Lehtinen, Rubio and Cruz). This latter faction expressed support for [the Nica Act](#), a measure with damaging economic consequences for their own country. Ros-Lehtinen had [allegedly](#) even been involved in talks in Honduras to revive "the Contras" who had fought the Sandinista government in the 1980s. Some opposition students also traveled to El Salvador and [met with leaders of the right-wing ARENA party](#), which has such a murderous history in that country.

A leading opposition party even circulated what was said to be a call for a ["final offensive"](#) on June 1, with plans to set up a "patriotic junta" and a provisional government. They did not address the question of who would choose this junta and how this would promote "democracy."

Closing comments

A minority alliance in the country should not be able to impose its will by force, when it cannot even put together a coherent platform and has repeatedly failed at the election polls. Neither should it appeal to the United States for assistance in overthrowing its own government. In short, does the effort by the opposition sound like "democracy" promotion? Or simply using the word "democracy" to promote its own purposes?

It's unlikely, however, that the traditional Nicaraguan ruling class - now in the opposition - would have been emboldened to try their luck with the April 2018 insurrection, if they had not had the encouragement, the open political support, and the vast resources of the US and its large and powerful imperial system. This system includes the mainstream and social media, as well as the OAS, EU, and international financial institutions like the IMF.

The future of Nicaragua should rest with Nicaraguans, not with foreign governments or even with internationals who love the country. And if the majority of the Nicaraguan people had wanted to oust a “dictatorship” a year ago, nothing could have stopped them. After all, they did it 40 years ago.

How Nicaragua defeated a right-wing US-backed coup

Max Blumenthal interviews Nils McCune



*Opposition sniper firing from behind a barricade
(Photo: Carl David Goette-Luciak)*

How Nicaragua defeated a right-wing US-backed coup: A report from Managua

An interview by Max Blumenthal of Nils McCune (from Moderate Rebels Podcast Ep. 22, Transcription July 2018)

Listen to original: <https://soundcloud.com/moderaterrebels/nicaragua-right-wing-us-coup-managua-episode-22>

Ben Norton: Moderate. Rebels. You are listening to ‘Moderate Rebels’, I’m Ben Norton. This is a special episode in which Max Blumenthal is reporting from on-the-ground inside Nicaragua. And in the episode he debunks a lot of the talking points we’ve been hearing about the recent unrest in Nicaragua in Western corporate media outlets. Particularly Max outlines how there has been an attempted rightwing U.S.-backed coup against the Sandinista government, and Max has an informative interview with Nils McCune who is a researcher who actually lives *in* Nicaragua, unlike many of the Western journalists who have been misleadingly reporting on what’s been going on with a pro-opposition narrative. We’ll cut directly to Max’s report from inside Nicaragua, but first, here’s a clip from that interview:



Max: I’m here in Nicaragua, which has just celebrated the 39th anniversary of the Sandinista Revolution, the defeat of the dictatorship of Anastasio Somoza, and this anniversary occurred on a very momentous date this year because it also marked the defeat of a U.S.-backed coup attempt, something that can only be described as a coup attempt, another regime change operation modeled partly after the ‘color revolutions’ that we saw in Eastern Europe, Gene Sharp-style, with elements of Syria and Libya mixed-in.

I’m going to talk about that with my friend Nils McCune, who has been living in Nicaragua for several years and has been working with the rural campesino movement. He lives in Tipitapa and has lived through a very precarious few months. Nils, I want to just ask you, how did you wind up in Nicaragua? Talk a little bit about the work you’ve been doing here, and then we can get into the events that began this April.

Nils: Sure, thanks Max. So I come from a labor background in the United States and as a kid I started to get more interested in the environmental question and the question of food,

because it seems to be a way that people can become politicized in an important way. So I guess in my university education I started working on something called agroecology, which is the idea of how we can feed ourselves as peoples without destroying the planet, without requiring resources from other countries or other places. And that work first led me to do a master's degree in Cuba, which is the country that has the most advances in agroecology in the world based on their 'special period' and how they've been able to creatively get past the blockade put on them by the United States.

And in 2012, I came to Nicaragua, which is a country that has a long agrarian history, the land reform of the 1980s during the Sandinista Revolution, and has the potential to be the country within Central America that can produce its own food. Right now Nicaragua produces between 80-90% of its own food. The last few years I've been working at four different schools that the Via Campesina has here for social movement youth to learn the technical but also the political aspects of agroecology.

Max: Ok, so you were basically in a strategically-important location when a coup attempt began, something that was regarded in Western media as an uprising. The New York Times has called it 'resistance'. I think in an article in the magazine edited by former Israeli prison guard Jeffery Goldberg has referred to it as a 'moment of Democratic potential'. This began on April 18th. What did you see?

Nils: Well, I remember the first reports when people started writing me from all over the world saying, 'Hey, what the hell's going on there? Are there protests, is the government killing people?' And you know, it's a small country here, we all kind of know who's who and from the beginning it was clear the rightwing was pretty involved in the very beginning of what was happening here. So I told people, 'No, this is just, you know, it's an attempt to move the waters a little bit, it's an attempt for these NGOs that are sponsored by the United States and European Union, to try to make sure that they get those grants for next year.'

I never thought that making a splash would turn into a full-scale regime change operation. But from the beginning there were also people telling me, 'Hey, look, but friends of mine on the left, or friends of mine who were in Nicaragua in the 1980s or people who are really progressives are all saying that this is real, this is a protest movement and the government is being repressive.' So, from the first moment living here it was very clear that it was a rightwing operation to make some waves, but it was also clear that this had the potential to divide the international left.

Max: Well, that division has taken place and I think we can get into that, it's pretty easy for the gulf to widen. We'll talk about that down the line in this discussion. But what happened on April 18th? A lot of younger Sandinistas referred to a massive media manipulation, there were events at the public university UPOLI, where it was said that a student had died—the student turned up alive the next day. Then three people were killed on April 19th, and they all turned out to be on the government's side, or bystanders. Correct me if I'm wrong, and tell me exactly how this began and what took place over the next few days, and what was it like for you being in Tipitapa?

Nils: Yeah, so it's interesting looking back, hindsight is 20/20, and there were several dress rehearsals for the regime change operation. It happened earlier this year, first there

was a spattering of news across the country of child abductions, and the national police had to come out several times with public statements saying, 'This isn't real news, this is something that's getting spread on social media. Nothing to be concerned about.' And then in the very beginning of April I think it was, or the end of March, a fire broke out during the hot, dry season of Nicaragua, in a very important forest reserve that's in the southeast part of Nicaragua called Indio Maiz, which is a biodiversity hotspot, the lungs of Mesoamerica.

This fire, which was started by a young farmer who was burning an area to plant rice, got out of control. It's an area where there's no roads, and to travel there would require some combination of air and small boats. So, the Nicaraguan government had a very difficult time containing the fire for the first five or six days. There were experts who thought that this fire would last for several months and a protest movement erupted of well-to-do university students in Managua, closing roads, shutting down traffic, and complaining that the Nicaraguans had not accepted the help of 60 Costa Rican firefighters. There's a lot of details to all that because Costa Rica and Nicaragua have a long history—Costa Rica took some land from Nicaragua the last time it intervened here. So, when the Nicaraguans said 'No' to the sixty military firefighters, it was because what Nicaragua needed at that time were airplanes that would allow it to put out the fire.

So, that fire luckily went out on its own pretty much after a rainstorm. And then, just a week later, COSEP, which is the organization of business owners that is like the US Chamber of Commerce, walked out on negotiations with the government and with labor unions about a new law around social security. The social security system here in Nicaragua is public, but it's been running a loss of nearly 80 million dollars per year. There was a need to find solvency, and the IMF had asked Nicaragua to raise the retirement age and double the number of weeks that a worker would need to pay into the system to be able to have a retirement check.

The Nicaraguan government had its own counter-proposal which was to maintain the retirement age at 60 years old, to maintain the number of weeks that people would need to work, also to maintain a partial pension that's available for people who were affected by the civil war here in the 1980s, and to increase the amount that people would pay from their paychecks by 0.75%, to increase the amount that employers would pay by, I believe it's 2.5%, and to increase the amount that the government would pay from 0 to 0.5%. So, there were these very slight increases all around but the largest increase on employers, and also the reform would have ended a loophole that allowed high-income individuals to claim a low-income in order to access health benefits.

So there are some details to the reform but what's interesting is that the *empresarios* here, the Chamber of Commerce, COSEP, called for protests, and the next day there were protests of mostly middle-class university students from private universities who had protested the fire. It's very unlikely that they even knew what the reform consisted of at that time, but on April 18th they did protest.

What happened next is really incredible, Max, because we started getting hit up on our cell phones, on WhatsApp accounts and Facebook, by all kinds of frantic messages that night, and all day the next day talking about repression, talking about a student being killed.

And on Facebook, paid advertisements and sponsored content that called for people to rise up in arms against the police.

Max: Let me see if I can play one of those right now:

¡Muchachos, muchachos escúchenme todos! Mi nombre es Brut Steven. Repito, mi nombre es Brut Steven. Estamos encerrados en el edificio de la UPOLI. ¡Estamos encerrados, necesitamos ayuda! La Juventud Sandinista, los antimotines nos están tirando disparos, estamos nerviosos todos. Estamos nerviosos, todos estamos nerviosos, se pueden escuchar detonaciones. Estamos encerrados en el edificio de la UPOLI. Nos van a quemar la UPOLI con nosotros adentro. ¡Ayúdenos! ¡Recen por nosotros!

So what the hell was that, it sounds like a little bit phony to me?

Nils: So Max, you have to understand the context here, Nicaragua is very safe country, it's a place where people have been studying, in fact it's been a place where people send their kids from around Central America because it's such a safe country. And this recording obviously breaks all of that. So what it's saying, it is a boy saying, he introduces himself, he says, 'look, I need help, we're students trapped inside UPOLI, outside are Sandinista youth and riot police and they're going to burn our building with all of us locked up inside here. So please help, pray for us.' And in the background, you start to hear these sounds of explosions right as he said, 'We can hear explosions,' you start hearing explosions.

I mean, for me, listening to it, I can just imagine somebody at a mixing table cuing the explosions. It's a joke, right, it's a fake recording. We've interviewed someone who was there at UPOLI at the time, whose mom heard this, called her frantically, and she said, 'No, we're here, we're protesting, but we're fine.' So, what we have is a partial truth, where there were students who were protesting the INSS reforms without necessarily knowing what they were protesting, but feeling like the process hadn't included them, that they hadn't been properly consulted. But then that gets mixed in with this fake news saying that there's a police massacre of students, which for anyone who has a conscience, is a very, very hard thing, no one could accept that in this country.

This was the 19th of April, and that night there were conflicts in several Nicaraguan cities as people start to throw stones at police, and attack the INSS buildings, they tried to burn them with Molotov cocktails. In Tipitapa, a young man was killed, a Sandinista youth, and it's still not totally clear how he died. It seems he may have been protesting, but it's not clear, there were people who were protesting in Tipitapa who were given arms by a local anti-Sandinista politician, there was a police officer who was killed near UPOLI and somewhere else in Managua (I'm not sure whether it was a worker who was killed).

So on April 19th there were three deaths, and on the morning of the 20th all of those deaths were erroneously reported in the media here as repression. So the 20th and the 21st were days of full-scale riots across Nicaragua, of young people having confrontations with police, and also of young people protesting for peace. It was interesting that the Sandinistas rallied more people, each of those days there were more people rallying in support of the INSS reforms and in support of peace than there were against the INSS reforms and looking to burn down the *alcaldías* [mayors' offices] and burn down public buildings. But of course

all of this got swept into this media narrative that just talked about repression of peaceful protesters.

Max: Next you had, first of all, let's put the UPOLI occupation in context. This became a base of operations for the opposition. This is a public university, one of the two main public universities in Managua that really serve the poor and working-class young people from all around Nicaragua, all the way from Bluefields, Leon, wherever, and they were not able to go to school. Schools were being trashed. Who was at UPOLI? Who was in the building?

I got to meet Veronica Gutierrez and Leonel Morales, who are two students—Leonel opened the door for the quote-unquote students who came into UPOLI, he was the student union leader, he's now in the hospital, and we can talk about him later. Basically he was nearly killed and left for dead for turning against the opposition, but who was in UPOLI, and who is Felix Maradiaga? What was he doing there? This is a really key figure in the whole story. What was going on in the 3rd floor of UPOLI? I think you can kind of tell the story of this coup attempt if you start from there.

Nils: Sure so, the thing to remember here is that each day that passes the government is trying to figure out what the hell is going on and respond to whatever happened the day before, and meanwhile there is a very elaborate plan for each day. So what happened with UPOLI is that there was fake news of a student death on April 18th, people started receiving that news in the evening, people are talking about it, concerned about it, students want to show their solidarity. So April 19th, the students of UPOLI decide they're gonna have a march. They tell Leonel, who is their president, 'Look, isn't the student union going to support us?' So, he marches with the students and at the student union, there's a march, really to clear up the question of the student who was reported to be killed.

After that march ended, there was a whole other group of people who arrived outside of UPOLI and started getting in a conflict with police officers, they throwing rocks at cops, trying to create a battle situation. Because the police used tear gas that day, and people were being affected by the tear gas, Leonel opened up the gates of the university to allow people who were fighting against the police to enter into the university.

Nicaragua has a law of university autonomy, so that means that the police officers are not allowed to enter the university unless they have the permission of the chancellor. So the protesters took refuge in the university, the police stayed outside, and this mix of students and non-students are in the university for several days, and as Veronica and Leonel told us, each day the operation started to take form.

Immediately, rather than neighbors who were feeling solidarity and bringing a plate of food, they were getting truckloads of food. They were getting truckloads of clothing so they wouldn't have to leave the university, they were getting *lots* of money, and they were starting to get *morteros* - mortar launchers, a traditional homemade weapon here that shoots off a ball of gunpowder. It's not a very effective weapon for killing somebody but it'll sure make people keep their distance because it can't kill somebody but it can destroy your face or break a rib.

So these makeshift weapons started showing up, truckloads of rocks started showing up, very large amounts of money started showing up, and after Daniel Ortega gave a speech

calling for peace, and calling for dialogue, and reversing the decision to reform the social security system, the student union said, 'Ok, let's meet with everybody else who's here.' So they had a meeting with groups that call themselves civil society that had been present in UPOLI agitating for months before these protests started in April. At that meeting the student union said, 'Look, this is great if you guys want to continue to protest, but because they've rescinded the reform, the protest needs to leave the university now. Because we have a university, we have a responsibility towards our university to make sure it doesn't get destroyed, to make sure people don't miss too many classes. So take your protest somewhere else.'

And upon this conversation finishing, these two student leaders who we were able to talk to learned from the security guards at the university that a group had entered into the university armed, looking for them. Because they weren't going to let these university leaders push out the protest movement. So the student leaders escaped, they made a press statement that said, 'Look, we're the student union. We left with our students, and those who continue to be in UPOLI are not students.' So that was this initial slap in the face to the coup attempt, because the coup from the beginning had the strategy to take over university spaces which by law here, police can't get into, so it would allow them to create an operation.

So the operation they created was through this very interesting figure named Felix Maradiaga, a Harvard-trained, U.S.-raised, Nicaraguan who has also—he's an Aspen fellow—who has been a hardcore opposition leader for several years here, but through a very highbrow NGO called IEEPP, which is an 'Institute for Economic Studies and Public Policy', which talks about community safety, studies of crime and different sources of public policy in the country. Its main emphasis has been to try to end the armed forces in Nicaragua, to try to propose that the military would be dismantled here. So, for many years this has functioned as a mouthpiece for a Washington policy that would disable Nicaragua's ability to stop the imperial will here because obviously a country that has an independent foreign policy and its own army is more powerful than a country without an army.

This guy, in the moment that the conditions produced a social rupture and everyone in the country is being bombarded with fake news, starts to deliver money and weapons to UPOLI. There are photos of him with armed men and a very important organized crime figure installs himself in UPOLI, a guy named Viper, that's his code name. He was there for several weeks, the state media started reporting on his presence in UPOLI and the opposition media denied it. Then finally this guy left UPOLI and was subsequently arrested. When he was arrested, Felix Maradiaga sent out a tweet to his fans saying, 'Let's all go and demand that our prisoners be released from Chipote.' But then of course he said he had never heard of Viper and didn't know who he was. But Viper gave a very interesting declaration in which he said, 'Yeah, my job was to foment crime across Managua, to create panic, including car jackings, including assaults and even murder.' He said, 'Yeah, the one who was telling me what to do was Felix Maradiaga.'

So it's a phenomenal situation here where we have someone who is the closest opposition figure to U.S. intelligence, this very highbrow Aspen fellow, who is ordering hits in Managua, and who is ordering car jackings, and who is ordering arson. All to create

panic, to try to put the population into a confused state which would allow the opposition to take over the government here.

Max: And it nearly did, however I think one of the fatal flaws was the lack of public support. The public basically rejected these criminal elements. Just quickly about Felix Maradiaga, I think we can talk a little bit more about him. I tried to go to his office the other day at IEEPP, I've written about him at a Greyzone Project, an article on how the National Endowment for Democracy has boasted of laying the groundwork for insurrection.

Basically, Maradiaga is the main contact for the National Endowment for Democracy, which is the regime change arm of the U.S. government, responsible for funding opposition movements that have led regime change operations, some of them known as color revolutions, across the world, including in Mongolia where it smashed the legacy of socialism and installed a rightwing libertarian government responsible for record inequality in that country. There are many countries where the NED has been responsible for destabilization under the guise of spreading democracy and human rights.

From 2014 to 2017 the National Endowment for Democracy dumped about \$4.1 million dollars into Nicaraguan opposition media. It's been active in the country since the '80s, when it started supporting the Contras through a front group run by Oliver North. Felix Maradiaga, just to wrap up the story, he wasn't at his office in this really wealthy neighborhood of Managua.

It was completely shuttered because he was in Washington with his crew, meeting with Mark Green, who is the director of USAID, which is another U.S. government body that funds opposition groups in Nicaragua to secure \$1.5 million dollars for the Coup 2.0, the next round. I don't know if Maradiaga will be back but he was seen at UPOLI with a beard next to armed figures, figures carrying guns. This is on video, it's widely available, everyone in Nicaragua has seen it, in Washington they haven't seen it. He shaved his beard and he kind of looks pretty legit, he looks like he could be Marco Rubio's legislative aid.

Victor Cuadras was also at the USAID meeting - he was one of the original students who were revered as defenders of democracy here. Most of those students, or many of them come from UCA, University of Central America, which is a private school that serves the wealthier population, so you do have a class divide among the students. The students at UPOLI and at UNAN, which is a big public university that reflects the legacy of Sandinismo, which was utterly ransacked.

I got to visit the campus the other day. I think any American who cares about public education would've been shocked to see what was done to this school by armed elements and these so-called students who occupied it, and just trashed the women's dorms, they demolished the reproductive health center which was providing free health care including OB-GYN and rehabilitation services to the local community, they just trashed it. They burned the child care center which served 300 children who were the children of the staff and that was because that was the base of operations for the armed elements. I was easily able to find homemade grenades just lying around there. And two students were on hand to really emphasize their resentment of these more privileged students and the criminal gangs

who protected them, who destroyed their school - it prevented them from going back to class for least six months.

It's not just them, you have students from other parts of the country who relied on UNAN in order to get internet, which they don't have at home. It's something I've been noticing when I talk to working people here, you talk to anyone who drives a taxi or sells food in the street or runs a shop and they say, 'I couldn't afford to go on strike, I have to work'. The people who can afford to not work for awhile, the upper class, the upper-middle class to the extent that it exists, they're the ones that can afford to do so. And those are the students who could study at home because they have wireless connections. The other students couldn't.

So you can definitely speak to that, speak to the class divide, but let's also talk about the role of the Catholic Church here, because it was supposed to serve—first of all, a national dialogue was called by president Daniel Ortega where the student Lester Aleman, another one of these students who appears to have been involved in National Endowment for Democracy training courses (they've trained over 5,000 young people here, according to one of the trainees I've met)—they made the call for regime change in the national dialogue, in one of the first sessions. They said, 'The only way we're going to stop these protests is if you leave, Mr. President.'

The Catholic Church was supposed to be mediating the dialogue, they're supposed to be a force for peace, for de-escalation, but instead we saw the Catholic Church at violent road blocks with priests egging on armed elements. We saw Bishop Silvio Baez tweeting, pretty much calling for regime change. The bishops just clamoring for the president to go while posing as mediators. So talk a little more about the role of the Catholic Church.

Nils: Yeah I think what's interesting about a coup that's not a direct military coup is that it depends on manipulation. And it depends on lies. So, what we saw here was a very polished opposition that would show up in the National Dialogue, called for by the president, who also invited the Catholic hierarchy to mediate the dialogue. The opposition, which in the dialogue called itself the Civic Alliance for Justice and Democracy, was made up of a "who's who" of aristocracy and oligarchy families, people who are heads of US-funded NGOs, and this group of students called the 19th of April movement.

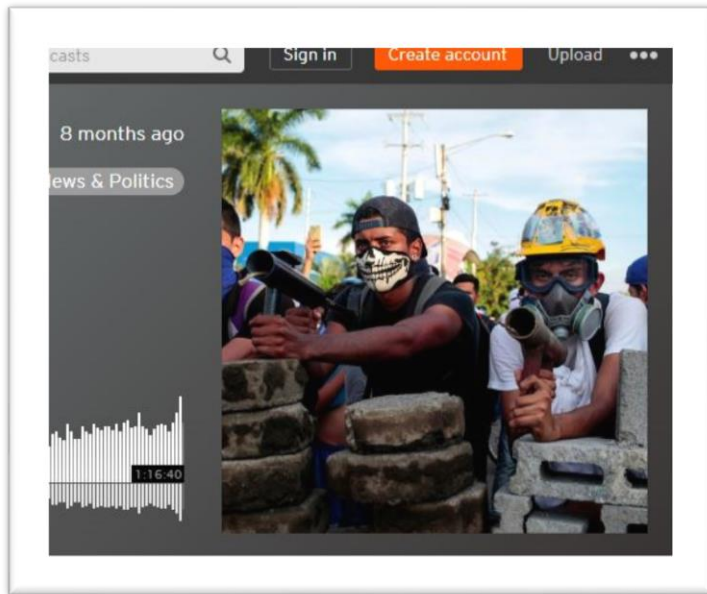
What's interesting about the way these work is there's a need for one clean-cut opposition that can talk to the cameras and then a very, very violent opposition that can control the streets and the cities. And I think the mistake that was made here by the opposition was to try to do a lot without counting on popular support. And without popular support, they had to resort to hiring gangsters, using paid pickets, buying weapons to arm the opposition, and starting to create spaces for drug gangs to take over these armed roadblocks that you mentioned, Max. So –

Max: The *tranques*.

Nils: The *tranques*. The famous roadblocks. This country was *trancado*, which means that the *tranques* prevented transportation, they prevented people from getting to work, they became centers for crime, petty crime, like robberies and forced toll for workers who needed to cross a roadblock to get to work, but also hate crimes including rape, including

beatings of Sandinistas, public torture, all kinds of humiliation. People were stripped naked and painted in the blue-and-white colors of the national flag. And some people were burned.

So, from this phase of media manipulation around something that pretended to be a student protest, the coup attempt here, at the same time as the National Dialogue began, shifted into a new phase, which was based on very aggressive street tactics to trap people where they were, and only let non-Sandinistas move around freely. But they didn't even allow non-Sandinistas to move around freely. They forced Sandinistas and non-Sandinistas to feel fear in the streets and that was something new here in Nicaragua.



So from this first moment, I'd say when probably 90% of the population who had received these messages was sure that the police or Daniel Ortega had ordered some heinous crime, over the next month, and as the National Dialogue started to form and you see people like Lester Aleman really positioning themselves to be future candidates, rather than trying to propose anything interesting for the country, while the government at this dialogue had very thoughtful responses, showed a real clear interest in the dialogue succeeding, and the Catholic Church as mediator sending out these incredible Tweets

warning the president that if he didn't leave the country and resign, that he and his family could be murdered. So there's bizarre stuff coming out of the priests.

As this phase took hold many, many people started to see the opposition as their kidnapers who were keeping them away from work, who were keeping them away from seeing their kids, who were putting them in danger. And it became clear that these roadblocks were being financed and they were being attended to, logistically, by the Catholic Church in each city. Many of the people working on the roadblocks were altar boys, the people who were bringing food to the roadblocks were church workers. The people who would bring the roadblocks back once the population would rise up and push them out using their own mortar launchers – the priests would come back and lead the march of *tranquistas* – the roadblock criminals – to take back their role of closing off traffic.

We saw all of these things and a population that for a week or two had been convinced that the government had committed these heinous crimes, start to see that they were dealing with a very manipulative opposition, with a two-faced church, with a private industry which had betrayed its very beneficial relationship with the government, and a student movement which wasn't really made up of students.

So, one by one, the pillars of the coup attempt started to fall and, you know, this Gene Sharp model is to knock out the pillars of support for a government, and one of the key elements is to plant distrust in the police. So that's been, I think, the major element of this coup attempt, is to try and plant distrust in the police. I think they had hoped the army would come out into the streets because there was so much violence in the streets. The very first day of the National Dialogue, the bishops, the students, the NGO leaders had one demand, which was for all of the police to go into their barracks. The government complied with that demand, asking only for the roadblocks to be removed. The opposition didn't want to remove the roadblocks and so what we had over the next weeks were roadblocks set up everywhere across the country because the opposition was basically working under conditions of impunity.

And hate crimes proliferated across the country. There were many, many Sandinistas who had their homes burned and ransacked. Thousands of Sandinistas went underground to try and prevent themselves and families from being hurt. People moved from house to house. There were daily and nightly vigils by workers and sympathizers of the government to make sure that the Sandinista headquarters in each town weren't burned down.

I think there were a total of about 65 government buildings burned across the country. Dozens of Sandinista headquarters in different towns were burned down and no other party has been attacked. No human rights organization has had its offices attacked. No opposition NGO has been attacked. Only the Sandinista Front, and as you mentioned, universities, public infrastructure –

Max: Radio Ya!

Nils: Right, a Sandinista radio station which is independent but has a leftist focus. So, this turned into this massive, shocking and terrifying wave of terror and hatred towards Sandinistas across the country. And that lasted for a very long time because the police were in their barracks.

I think the order from the government was to not let the police leave their barracks until the population was really sure that the police weren't the ones who were committing these crimes, because even as these hate crimes were being committed, all of the opposition media and all of its social were telling people that these were either self-attacks of Sandinistas against themselves to be able to justify attacks against peaceful protesters, or they would switch the identity so that the Sandinista who had been killed would now be counted as a peaceful protester who was the victim of government repression.

So you have this incredible situation of manipulation that's happening at the same time as a wave of hate crimes against Sandinistas. And really, Max, that was what we all lived through for many weeks, and it was terrifying.

Max: And this story hasn't been told in the US. It's almost like there is a deliberate cover-up. Having been here, it's amazing, to actually look into the eyes and hear the voices of people who were tortured, brutally tortured, simply for being Sandinista. I arranged to meet some of them. Many of their stories had been reported in local media, so I knew some of their names.

I wanted to meet one person in particular, Sander Bonilla, who was tortured on camera with a Catholic priest presiding directly over the torture on camera. It wasn't reported in the US, I don't know why. His testimony hasn't been recorded by any human rights group, I don't know why – well, of course I know why, he's an inconvenient victim for Washington, which just for some reason seeks to destabilize this country.

So I go to meet Sander Bonilla in the City Hall in Managua, and the entire room is filled with people who are desperate to talk to some reporter who would listen to them. Because no Western reporter had bothered to come here and talk to the people who were tortured. No human rights group had bothered to talk to them. The whole room is packed. I'm with my friend Thomas Hedges, we're recording a lot of what we've seen on camera, we're going to work on a documentary soon, and we had just a limited amount of time to take people into a room and record what they had to say.

And one after another, they would sit at a desk with us and break down in tears, describing how they were brutally tortured by opposition criminals for the crime of being Sandinista – starting with Sander Bonilla, who said that he had burning plastic bags dripped on his skin after he was kidnapped at a roadblock and taken to an unknown location with a mask over his head, and that the priest who presided over his torture has been since imploring him to rescind his testimony, while opposition media says that he's a liar. He showed me his wrists, which still bore the scars of the rope that was used to tie him up.

I listened to an entire family break down in tears, describing how they were kidnapped and tortured. The father was missing an eye; *his* father had bandages all over his legs; a son had a giant scar on his face. And the mother did the talking, while the father, the son, and the grandfather sobbed behind her.

Why, it's just unbelievable that everywhere I went I met people like that, including randomly. I went to Masaya, which is the city where the opposition attempted to declare a junta, much as the Syrian opposition set up rebel-controlled zones in places like East Aleppo and Idlib, Raqqa, where ISIS declared its capital. And you know, East Aleppo's occupation by Gulf-funded rebels started with a version of the roadblock. They started setting up roadblocks and boxing the area in, keeping everyone out so that they could develop their own narrative which was repeated faithfully by Western reporters.

That's what the opposition attempted to do in Masaya, which is a city about 35 minutes from Managua, a city of 300,000. Its most densely populated area is Monimbó, and this meant that this was the easiest place to strangle with the roadblock.

And the most ferocious roadblocks were set up there, with armed gangs who would extort motorists and terrorize the local population, particularly those like Emilio Alarcón who were Sandinista, who was pulled out of his house and smashed in his face. He lost five teeth, I met him when he had stitches. He was better, but he showed me photographs of his face and it looked like, you know, like a Stromboli. He said, "They just beat me because I'm Sandinista, and I'm Sandinista because they put a roof over my head, they gave us electricity and they paved the street."

You know, a lot of these areas – and I was here twelve years ago, and I’ve been to these areas – and they didn’t have paved streets then, under the neoliberal government of Bolaños. That’s partly why there’s deep support for the Sandinistas.

Nils, I want to ask you to speak to the public mobilizations, because you know this has been presented as a government against the people. I don’t think these roadblocks would have been defeated without massive public mobilization.

Some people refer to Sandinista paramilitaries, but we know that the police, because of a demand in the national dialogue, were ordered to stay in their stations for a month and a half or two months and were not able to go out and take out the roadblocks; and so average citizens started taking them on as well. So speak about what you saw in Tipitapa and elsewhere as far as public mobilization.

Nils: Yeah, thanks, Max. It’s so complex, because there were phases, right? This coup attempt has gone through so many phases by now.

There was this moment when the roadblocks had taken over the country, the police are in their stations, crime is – especially around the roadblocks – is becoming something that’s just abominable. There was a ten-year-old girl who was raped at a roadblock in Tipitapa, in the community of Las Maderas.

And Sandinistas are starting to talk to each other and say, “Look, we haven’t been told anything by the government. This National Dialogue doesn’t seem to be going anywhere. Everyone knows the role that the church is playing.” Sandinistas’ houses are being marked with these very eerie pastel colors, these three dots in pastel colors.

But Sandinistas’ houses are marked across the town and at least five or six in each town have been burned down. Sandinistas are really under attack, and it’s life-and-death, I’ve never lived through something like this before. Everybody I knew started sharpening a branch or carrying a knife around with them.

And then the next week, a knife wasn’t enough, because the opposition had moved from mortar launchers to rifles, pistols, and AK-47 weapons. It was a very, very strange moment, where we really, really felt like we were under attack. I couldn’t leave my town, I couldn’t leave my town for 80 days. I had looked at flights, I had a work opportunity, I missed two plane flights. I was looking at ways that I could get my family out via water, because there’s a large lake in Nicaragua. But the case is that there was no way out.

And in this moment, Sandinistas started to get together. People were talking, and they were doing these nightly vigils around some of the key spaces in each city to make sure that the opposition wasn’t able to just destroy the entire public infrastructure. Because really, the idea is not just to take out one government and put in another, it’s to prevent Nicaragua from ever having a strong state again. So in this context, yeah, people organized.

At first there were cases, before the roadblocks became so armed, in which women organized and pushed out a roadblock, merchants organized, people who sell at the local farmers’ market organized, and they pushed out roadblocks.

But the roadblocks came back and they came back with heavier weapons. Many of these weapons were provided by opposition leader Francisca Ramírez or Medardo Mairena, who were leaders of what they call a peasant movement, which really is an anti-Sandinista movement, that's all it is. But they do use paid pickets and they do have good access to weapons. So the roadblocks became even more armed, it became something where it was unclear what we could do.

You know, the waiting game just lasted forever, but eventually the roadblocks started having to pay less to the people who were running them. So first they were paying about 500 córdobas a day, which is about 2 ½ times what they normally earn here. Then they were getting 300 córdobas a day, which is still a great salary here. Then they were being offered 100 córdobas a day, but of course all the alcohol they could drink, all the marijuana they could smoke, all the food they could eat.

But as the money started to go down, the roadblocks were starting to get in fights with one another, they were getting into armed fights with one another. It was turning into something ridiculous. There wasn't really a political purpose to it. There are very few people who have been involved in roadblocks who have any proposal whatsoever for the country. Most of them are just paid pickets.

So the population over this period of time had become increasingly organized, increasingly armed. And as they start to arrest the roadblocks, they started covering their faces, because – I haven't had a chance to describe to you, but Sandinistas have been – all over the country they have had their photos published on rightwing websites, they have had their names published on rightwing websites, there have been lists published of businesses that should be burned down for not supporting the strike of the opposition. In many cases, they show somebody's picture and the next day the person is attacked.

So under this incredible sense of threat and violence – and it was a real risk all the time, every time my wife left home – it was like living in a war in a sense. In the 80s, the Contras never invaded the cities, they never took a major city, but all of a sudden this violence is happening in all of our cities.

So under those conditions, with the police in the barracks, many people figured out a way to get armed to protect themselves. Many people built up the walls around their house, other people moved into friends' homes. So there's been this monumental process of self-organizing.

I don't think it's been a violent process, it's been a process of getting organized and recognizing the conditions under which we're living, which is that if the people don't do anything about it, this government is going to fall. And if it falls, all of us could be targets.

And so, I haven't seen the famous pro-government paramilitaries, but there is a situation where there are civilians who cover their faces, when they're doing vigils around city centers; and there are also police who cover their faces when they're pushing out the roadblocks.

So at a certain point here, Max – probably the first major offensive of the government, counteroffensive of the government, was on June 19, exactly two months after the

beginning of the protests, when they liberated all the routes, all the highways, to get into Masaya. And they got into the beleaguered police station which had been under siege by anti-government gangs for 60 days.

After that, slowly across the country, police started taking out roadblocks. And, you know, outside the country this is all presented as total repression against nonviolent protesters; inside the country the police are heroes, because they're the ones who have been dying to enable Nicaraguans to return to peace.

Max: And you know how I know that there was a regime change operation afoot – and when I say “regime change operation,” I mean an attack not just on a government but on the nation-state, a plan to reduce a country to a failed state like Libya – is that Ken Roth surfaced after the Nicaraguan government had essentially won and removed the roadblocks, allowing the economy which had bled \$500 million to start functioning again, allowing citizens to start moving around.

Ken Roth, the dictator of Human Rights Watch, who has been in the same position for 25 years, catering to a small cadre of billionaires and elite foundations with almost no constituency base, blamed the government for every single death. Meaning that zero Sandinistas died according to Ken Roth. Mike Pence basically said the same thing.

We met Enrique Hendrix, who carried out a forensic study of the death count which had been tabulated by ANPDH, the main human rights group here, that used to be funded by the US. It was founded in Miami, and the US Congress gets all its statistics from it.

And even this human rights group, when he went person by person, he found that – this researcher Enrique Hendrix found that – about 60 people had died who were government supporters, Sandinistas. And about the same number died who were involved in armed activity to overthrow the government, who may have been actually shooting at police or citizens.

The rest of the people – there were duplicate deaths, there were bystanders, there were people who died in accidents during that period. And so the death toll has been totally manipulated, as it was in Venezuela. People have been burned on the government side. Basically all the information we're getting outside of Nicaragua – is slanted towards one side.

And there's a push to sanction this government now, in the US Congress, led by Ileana Ros-Lehtinen, part of the hydra of Ted Cruz, Marco Rubio, and Ros-Lehtinen, who are kind of Cuban right-wing exiles. And they want to start attacking Nicaragua's economy. Nicaragua's economy has been making a lot of achievements these past few years, I think we've been looking at 5% growth each year.

I mentioned that I'd been here before Ortega was elected, and the country has been transformed in many ways. Managua has certainly been transformed. Visiting the city center and seeing the Salvador Allende Port, where public space has been created for families, and food in really nice restaurants is subsidized. It used to be a terrifying place to walk around, and now it's beautiful, and it's much safer than downtown Washington DC is

at night. This is a mixed economy, where a lot of things are subsidized to make life easier for workers.

People have been doing well until the sanctions started, like the Global Magnitsky Act. And what these sanctions did, first with the Magnitsky Act, was to threaten businesses that work with the government. And so it forced a lot of these businesses, or pressured them, to join the coup. And now we're going to see a deepening attack on the economy.

So I want to ask, what are you expecting here in the next few months, in the next year, and what is at stake – because I think a lot of people have been listening to this and getting a lot of details – but why does the United States want to destabilize Nicaragua, a country that presents no threat whatsoever?

Nils: Yeah, you know, it's a tough one. I think internally there's one situation, externally there's an entirely different one. Internally, you know, the greatest threat that Nicaraguans face is the penetration of hatred into our lives, the way that using fake news and social media, disturbing images, we could lose ourselves and become like other Central American countries where organized crime is rampant and human life has lost much of its value.

You know, we haven't had that here. It's a country where kids feel safe playing in the street all evening, where people can walk home from work at three o'clock in the morning, where you can get drunk in the street and the only thing that'll happen is someone will put a newspaper over you so you don't catch a cold. It's an interesting country in that sense, you know.

And the idea that we could hate each other is really terrible, and the fact that through this combination of citizens getting organized, the government having a very conciliatory tone throughout, and eventually the police clearing the roadblocks, has created a pathway towards reconciliation and peace here.

That's really important to be clear about. Nicaragua can heal from what it's been through in the last three months. It has to be an honest – it can't be a one-sided reconciliation. This is not just a government defeat of a coup attempt, it's really the Nicaraguan people coming together to realize that they need to live together in peace, whatever their differences of opinion are, and look for democratic solutions to democratic problems, right?

So that's one side of it. The other side of it is that, now that the opposition, the hard-core opposition, has been defeated entirely, militarily, it has been defeated in terms of its popular support, it has been defeated in terms of having any cards to play – it's just shown everything it had, this was its one big chance. The preachers who were in favor of the coup have shown themselves, the priests who were in favor of the coup have shown themselves. And so it's a really, it's an exhaustive attempt.

So what they've done is immediately focus on the international arena. And as you know, it's a very tough moment for the left in Latin America, there have been lots of defeats lately, and the bigger economies are controlled by the right again – Argentina and Brazil. The election of López Obrador in Mexico is very important, but he hasn't taken office yet.

But in general, it's the worst context in maybe the last twelve years in Latin America. And that means that Nicaragua doesn't have the votes to defend itself at the Organization of American States. It was being defended by Nicaraguan Foreign Minister Denis Moncada along with the foreign ministers of Venezuela and Bolivia. Of course, Cuba doesn't participate in the Organization of American States.

And the United States, which has developed its capacities to affect the economies of other countries to a phenomenal degree, right? It's no longer a blockade, it's no longer sanctions in the old sense, but it's these very highly sophisticated forms of financial war that they're able to carry out on a country. Nicaragua is getting its name dragged through the dirt. Its peace is being called dictatorship around the world.

If the Sandinista Front were pulled out of power by force, this country would be plunged into chaos. There would be 30,000 people to begin with, in the first year, if the Sandinista Front were taken out of power by force. So the first thing that we need to be clear about is that the solution to this will require democratic methods and the Sandinista Front can't be taken out by force.

But unfortunately, the European Union, the big NGOs, the United States, the World Bank, all of the organizations that have played a small but key role in Nicaragua's economic growth of the last decade, are pulling their support right at the time when the public infrastructure here has been decimated by this regime change operation. So it's a very dismal outlook right now.

The long-term outlook, I'd say, is that the Sandinista Front is stronger than before, so politically there could be some stability that comes out of this, we hope. But economically it's going to be very, very difficult for Nicaragua to rebuild without access to credit, without access to loans, and having this continued psychological war potentially against some investors in this country.

Max: I want to ask you about one of the groups that has been sending people around the world to clamor for – and not explicitly – but to implicitly clamor for economic attacks on Nicaragua under left-wing guise, under the guise of *Sandinismo*. I'm referring to the MRS, the Movement for the Renovation of Sandinistas. They're a party that has participated in Nicaraguan politics and typically polls around 2%. I was here when they were at their height, when they got...

Nils: Six percent.

Max: Six percent, OK. So that was their high point. But they poll really well among the Western intelligentsia and the NGO world. They poll really well among the Open Society Institute and USAID, and they head up many of the foundations, these MRS figures.

And they have played an important role in dividing the Western left on the question of Nicaragua and painting Daniel Ortega not only as a dictator but as a figure with very little popular support.

Nils: I think that for decades, probably for centuries, the elite have done politics, right? And everybody else has the job of carrying out the economic activity that allows the elite to stay where they are. And in Nicaragua, that model lasted for decades and decades until the

1920s when, out of the civil war that the United States got involved in and used as a pretext to occupy Nicaragua, a figure named Augusto César Sandino formed his own army to fight against the US presence here.

And that army was based upon the idea of a difficult struggle in which the elite would cede ground to workers and to peasants, because only workers and peasants have the strength to carry out a long-term struggle for their own interests that's capable of beating imperialism. That was his thesis, and he developed guerrilla warfare in the Americas, he was the first person to use it.

It was successful. The US Marines left Nicaragua after six years of occupation. And then Sandino was betrayed and killed by Somoza, the Somoza regime got started. But the reason that's important to keep in mind is that when the Sandinista Revolution successfully took power in 1979, there was a combination of oligarchy families that were very unhappy with Somoza, as well as young revolutionaries from all social classes.

So several of the cabinet-level, cadre of the Sandinista Front of the 1980s were in fact the children of these oligarchy families, for example, the Cardenal brothers who were the Ministers of Education and Culture, as well as Carlos Fernando Chamorro who was the editor of La Barricada. During that time there was a role for the black sheep of oligarchy families to get to be revolutionaries in that context.

But as soon as the Sandinista Front lost power in 1990, there was an exodus of these children of the oligarchy from the party, because they were used to being ministers. They didn't want to have to be opposition figures in an opposition party, they didn't want to have to defend the gains of the revolution out on the street, fighting cops. They didn't want to suffer with the Nicaraguan people.

Many of them left and bought houses in Los Angeles or in Miami or in Spain. Many of them went on to write books.

So these people have led their illustrious lives. They've maintained contact in many cases with the US solidarity activists who gave their time, their energy, their sweat, sometimes their lives, to support the Sandinista Revolution, and who were often able to make good friends with well-off Sandinistas who spoke English, people who had high-level positions in the Sandinista Front.

The ex-Sandinistas have always had the ear of the US and European Left. And this party, the MRS, was formed out of a combination of legitimate grievances with the Sandinista Front at the 1994 congress, as well as a social democratic tendency which at the time wanted to reject Marxism, said that socialism was a passé idea, and wanted to form new alliances.

So once that party was formed, they started to create their own idea for what they could do. They never had popular support, they never did neighborhood organizing like the Sandinista Front had, and they never went out to defend the gains of the revolution. So as soon as they went into an election, they were able to garner only this classic 2%.

Meanwhile, the Sandinista Front, with all of its errors, stuck with and suffered with the large majority of the people and has never had less than 35% support here. So that's really a key to start to understand these two political forces that claim the Sandino tradition.

There's a little bit more to it. There's a figure named Monica Baltodano who has an ultra-left analysis. So we have the MRS, which has a social democratic analysis, which is the MRS Movement for Sandinista Renovation, and then there's an ultra-left MRS, which is the Movement for the Rescue of Sandinismo.

In both cases, they're the intellectual left-sounding arm of reactionary politics in Nicaragua, which have continually tried to destroy the Sandinista Front and destroy historical memory of struggle, to enable the elite to turn Nicaragua into a copy of several other countries where the Left has never been able to successfully take power and run a country.

The secret here, and what makes Nicaragua different, is that there is a historic memory of defeating the Somoza regime and defeating the elite, in building up a popular basis for a nation. And that memory is what allows Nicaraguans to face imperialism. It's a constant source of strength, and that's what they're going after.

So that's my take on the MRS. They're very strong outside of the country, they're very weak within the country. There's not one MRS member in Tipitapa because it's a very working-class city. I would doubt that there are any working-class MRS members in all of Nicaragua. They do hold enormous sway over the NGO sector, and they are who have been the most agile in receiving foreign support in this country.

Max: Well, it looks like for now the rightwing and the *tranquistas* and the NGOs have failed in Nicaragua. We'll see what happens over the coming months as they come back for more. They've left behind a trail of chaos, and I think you are living through that right now.

You've asked me to keep this interview short, and we went over an hour, because you have to drive home at night and it's not safe getting back from Managua to Tipitapa. That wasn't the case before April when this chaos began to unfold. So I'll let you get on the road, Nils McCune, but that was an incredible discussion. I learned a lot, and I hope everyone else did.

This is Moderate Rebels and I'm Max Blumenthal in Managua, Nicaragua. I've got a flight back tonight, and I'll be producing several articles and a documentary in the coming days and months, so look out for that. And you can support this show at Patreon.com/ModerateRebels. Thanks again for listening.

The Events of 2018 and their context

by Nan McCurdy and Stephen Sefton

BISMARCK MARTÍNEZ *HÉROE DEL AMOR Y LA PAZ*

Se unió al **FSLN EN 1977**

NACIÓ EL 1 DE OCTUBRE 1962
en el Barrio La Luz, Managua

EN 1979
fue alfabetizador,
participó en los cortes de café,
caña y algodón.

Integró las **MILICIAS POPULARES SANDINISTAS.**

Trabajó en la Dirección de Información y Comunicación (DIC)

DESDE 2002
era trabajador de la Alcaldía de Managua, en el área de Ornato

333 DÍAS
de búsqueda

28 DE MAYO DEL 2019
fueron encontrados sus restos mortales

CAPTURADO
En el tranque San José de Jinotepe

JUNIO 29
del 2018 fue secuestrado

TORTURADO
y grabado por los tranqueros

ENTERRADO
en un cauce natural

JP **Juventud** Presidente

Bismarck Martinez was a local government worker from Managua who was detained, tortured and murdered by Civic Alliance activists at the notorious Colegio San José barricade in the southern city of Jinotepe in early June 2018. After over a year of searching for his body, his remains were found in a makeshift grave. He was buried in Managua on June 6th 2019

The Events of 2018 and Their Context -

Part one to July 2018

By Nan McCurdy and Stephen Sefton

In this section we present a summary of the main events based on the weekly news briefs published by NicaNotes interspersed with articles published at the time. that help us understand the national context.

NicaNotes April 13 to April 28, 2018

Indio-Maiz Forest Fire

A devastating forest fire in the Indio-Maiz nature preserve was brought under control with the help of airplanes and helicopters from Mexico, Honduras, and El Salvador and advisers from the US. Some of the political opposition criticized the government for turning down Costa Rica's offer of help due to their not having the necessary equipment. The fire encompassed 22 sq. km. A local farmer was accused of illegally starting the fire on the edge of the reserve to prepare for sowing crops. The fire affected 1% of the forest, which should recover by means of natural regeneration and environmental restoration, including help offered by UNESCO. After the events of April 18- -23, some observers surmised the protests around the Indio Maíz fire were a trial run for a coup attempt around the pretext of the Social Security reform. (El Nuevo Diario, Apr. 13; Tortilla con Sal, Nicaragua News, April 12; Informe Pastran, Apr. 13)

Reform of the Nicaraguan Social Security Institute (INSS)

In the first week of April 2018, talks between the government and the private sector business organization (COSEP) broke down. COSEP wanted to cut back coverage and privatize services, while the government wanted to guarantee and improve existing social security entitlements and maintain the age for retirement. On Monday April 16, the INSS published reforms which would increase employers' contributions by 3.25% and workers' contributions by 0.75%, with a 5% tax on pension benefits to improve health coverage for pensioners. This was approved by the National Union of Older Adults. Although it marked a minimal change for the working class, COSEP called on students to protest.

Protests

On Wednesday April 18 private university students held marches against the social security reforms claiming they threatened the rights of workers and pensioners. There were clashes between members of the Sandinista Youth and the student marchers. Police tried to restore order. An intense social media campaign targeted students in other cities like Leon and Estelí with unsubstantiated allegations of police violence, including a report that a student from the private Central American University (UCA) had been killed. This was later proven to be false, but on April 18th it fanned the flames of violence as it went viral on social media.

The following day, Thursday the 19th, many students continued to protest, but by this time they were infiltrated by armed opposition supporters and paid criminals who killed police officer Hilton Manzanares Alvarado. Two other young men were also killed: 1)

Richard Antonio Pavon Hernandez, 17-year-old Sandinista Youth member who was shot in the abdomen near the Mayor's Office in Tipitapa. His parents are historic combatants. 2) Twenty-nine-year-old supermarket worker Darwin Manuel Urbina Urbina who was shot near the UPOLI on his way home from work by someone with a shotgun, most likely part of or paid by the opposition. He was not on any side so the person who shot him was not specifically going after him but killing in order to have deaths to assign to the government.

On Friday April 20 coordinated attacks by violent armed opposition demonstrators, both students and paid criminals, took place in Managua, León, Masaya, Granada, Bluefields, Chinandega, Jinotepe, Estelí, Diriamba and elsewhere. Suddenly thousands of mortars appeared on the scene. Using mortars and other weapons the protesters violently attacked INSS buildings, municipal town halls, Sandinista offices, schools, private businesses, residences, radio stations and in some cases used arson. On Saturday April 21, President Ortega called for dialogue. COSEP accepted the proposal and the Catholic Archbishop of Managua, Cardinal Leopoldo Brenes, called for peace. Protestors stepped up their attacks in several towns, including Masaya, where gangs burned down the internationally famous handcrafts market.

On Sunday April 22 President Ortega repealed the Social Security reforms and asked the Catholic Church to mediate a dialogue. This was expected to put an end to the protests, but the violent upheaval continued, which bolstered the theory that the Social Security reform was only a pretext for a coup to unseat President Ortega. On April 23 the opposition propaganda outlet *Confidencial* reported that 23 people had died during the protests. By the end of the week their death count had risen to 40. But in fact, from April 23 to May 10 no deaths related to protests occurred. Interestingly, the opposition held large protest marches in several cities without incident during that period.

Cristhian Emilio Cadena, 23 years old, was burned alive defending the University Center of the National Autonomous University (CUUN) in Leon from protesters. The CUUN was totally burned and destroyed on April 20 by protesters. Cadena's wife, Ms Salinas Teran said "He was killed defending the CUUN. He was an agro-ecology engineering student at the university, and when he finished classes he had a hotdog stand." (TN8, 4/28/18) <https://www.tn8.tv/departamentos/449024-aclaran-joven-calcinado-leon-murio-defendiendo-cuun/> Burning of the CUUN: <https://www.vivanicaragua.com.ni/2018/04/20/sociales/grupos-de-vandalos-prendieron-fuego-a-las-instalaciones-del-cuun-unan-leon/>

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Context - Nicaragua's Social Security System

"Nicaragua - Next in Line for Regime Change?," *Tortilla con Sal, Telesur*, 4/21/18

<https://www.telesurenglish.net/opinion/Nicaragua-Next-in-Line-for-Regim...>

<http://www.tortillaconsal.com/tortilla/node/2538>

After Nicaragua's right wing parties won the 1990 elections, the three subsequent neoliberal governments mismanaged the INSS, cutting back coverage and reducing benefits. During the same period, millions of dollars of INSS funds were misappropriated to fund private sector businesses and make illicit payments to individuals. When a new Sandinista government took office under President Daniel Ortega in January 2007, the social security fund had an unsustainable deficit and a much-reduced contribution base. Since then, the INSS has increased the number of people covered by social security and also extended the benefits the system provides. These now include hemodialysis, oncology therapies, spinal surgery, ophthalmology, neurosurgery, hip and knee replacements, kidney transplants and other very expensive, specialized procedures.

Despite having greatly increased the number of people contributing to the system, the INSS is still running an annual deficit of around US\$75 million. The dispute between the government and the private business sector is over how to fund that deficit. For their part, the Union of Older Adults, which lobbies for better pension rights and health benefits for senior citizens, supports the government's proposed Social Security reforms, which include a 5% deduction from pensions in exchange for full rights to the same health care as active workers.

The private business sector wants to reduce costs by applying the following neoliberal plan:

- raise the retirement age from 60 to 65
- eliminate the reduced pension paid to retired people who were unable to complete the 750 weekly contributions required to receive a full pension
- eliminate the minimum pension that ensures no one has a pension lower than the minimum wage for industrial workers
- eliminate the annual Christmas bonus equivalent to one month's pension
- no longer maintain the value of the pension against the national currency to compensate for the annual sliding devaluation of 5% applied by the Central Bank
- double the number of weekly contributions to qualify for a pension from 750 to 1500
- privatize the INSS medical clinics

The government wants to protect the social security health system and increase social security coverage and benefits as a collective public good by:

- gradually increasing the employers' contribution by 3.25%

- increasing the employee's contribution by 0.75%
- increasing the government's contribution for public sector workers by 1.25%
- removing the salary ceiling so that people earning high salaries pay social security contributions proportionate to their income
- deducting 5% from retired peoples' pensions so they receive the same health care benefits as active workers (which they currently do not)
- keeping the number of weekly contributions to qualify for a full pension at 750
- maintaining the reduced pension, the minimum pension, and the Christmas bonus
- maintaining pensions' value against the annual 5% devaluation
- keeping all INSS clinics in the public system

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Opposition protests turn to violent attacks

“Nicaragua regains its balance after social reform protests” *Tortilla con Sal, April 30 2018*

<https://www.telesurenglish.net/analysis/Nicaragua-Regains-Its-Balance-A...>

On April 18 rival groups of students clashed violently in Managua and then students protesting against the government fought with police who were trying to restore order. The government condemned the protests which inflamed the demonstrating students, many of whom had supported the Sandinista government's very successful social and economic programs. Then from April 19 onward, extremist opposition activists hijacked the student protests, attacking hospitals, government and municipal authority offices, public buildings of all kinds, university precincts and even the country's brand new national baseball stadium. Among many similar incidents, in the small southern town of Diriamba, hundreds of opposition activists attacked and seriously damaged the municipal offices which were defended by just 12 police officers.

Similar attacks occurred in other cities, including Managua and the northern town of Estelí where municipal workers occupied their offices to defend them against possible attacks by opposition activists. Estelí's municipal offices were attacked on the night of Friday April 20 by over 500 people, most of whom local police identified as outsiders brought in from other areas but including both some local students and a number of local criminals. With police trying to keep order, the attackers fired over 1000 mortar rounds and threw at least 17 Molotov cocktails in an attempt to destroy the municipal offices and other targets nearby. 18 police officers and 16 municipal workers were wounded. Among the protesters, two young students were shot dead and numerous people injured. The fighting lasted for five hours, covering an area of around 16 blocks with the attackers using firearms and knives. While the opposition media blame the police for the deaths, local reporters in Estelí insist it is impossible to assign blame in such confused events without a detailed investigation.

Nationally, most estimates, including the opposition online media outlet *Confidencial*, as of April 23 estimate around 20 people killed in the violence. Among the dead were two police officers and a journalist with a Sandinista TV channel, while other fatalities include Sandinista and opposition activists as well as bystanders caught up in the violence.

The pattern of the attacks suggests a well formulated plan with preparations already in place before the protests started. For example, outside Managua there was no violence reported in large towns like Matagalpa, Jinotega and Ocotal. By focusing on Managua, Masaya, León and Estelí, the opposition extremists tried to create a comparison between their violent offensive and the centers of insurrection against the Somoza dictatorship in 1979.

Whoever funded the very widespread attacks also supplied regular firearms and a quantity of artisan made weapons produced on a semi-industrial scale. Overall the attackers fired many thousands of mortar rounds, each one costing almost a dollar. The cost of transport to move hundreds of militants between Managua, Masaya, Leon and Chinandega, Estelí, and towns around Granada also runs into many thousands of dollars. In Managua, impoverished young delinquents were paid US\$10 to US\$15 per day to participate in the attacks plus food, alcohol, cigarettes and in some cases drugs. Clearly, the

opposition extremists who hijacked the student protests for their own ends were well organized, funded and prepared long before the protests even began.

Starting Sunday April 22 numerous sectors, including religious and business, reacted against the violence increasingly calling for it to stop. In Managua, thousands of ordinary people mobilized extensively to defend their neighborhoods from marauding looters. That day, President Ortega announced the repeal of the Social Security reforms and called for an inclusive national dialogue. In towns outside Managua, life abruptly returned to something like normal as if someone had thrown a switch. On Monday April 23 funerals for the dead, as well as protest marches in Managua and elsewhere, went off peacefully.

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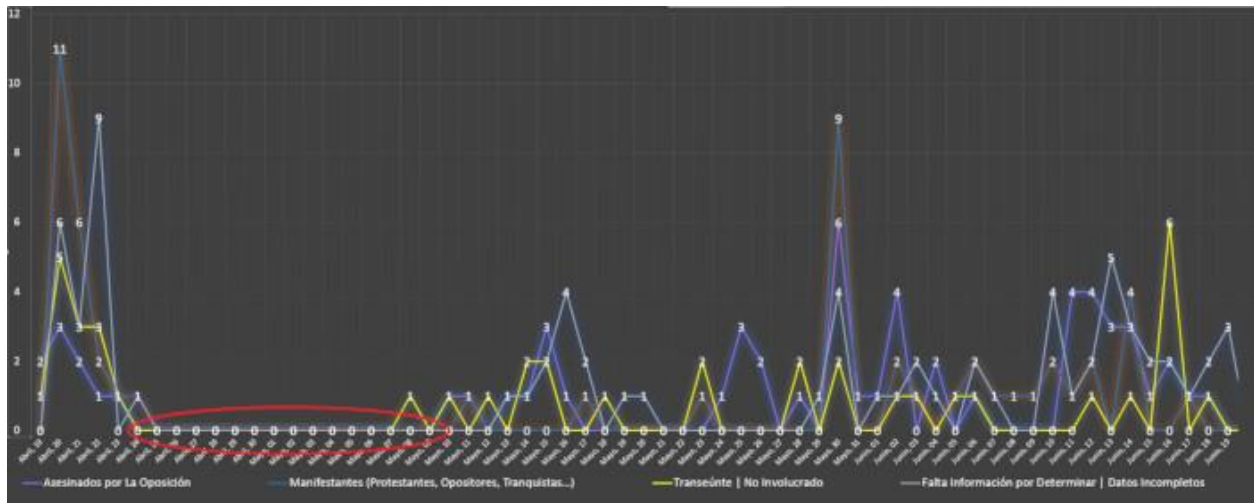
The 15 Days of Protests without Deaths

Enrique Hendrix, 9/10/18

<http://tortillaconsal.com/tortilla/node/4192>

During the 17-day period from April 23 to May 10, three major protests took place: April 23, "Walk for Peace and Dialogue" convened by *COSEP*; April 28, "Pilgrimage and consecration of Nicaragua to the heart of Mary" convened by the *Catholic Church*; and May 9, "National March for Justice and Democratization of Nicaragua" convened by the *Movement for Nicaragua* and the *April 19 Student Movement*. Fortunately, none of these three demonstrations reported clashes or deaths.

However, during that period, there was no decrease in violence in the vicinity of some university campuses, especially the Polytechnic University of Nicaragua (UPOLI), where on [May 8 a man returning from his job was shot in the neck and killed by a hand-made weapon](#). But after May 10 there was an increase in the number of Nicaraguans killed.



Pattern of deaths between April 19 and June 19. There is a period of approximately two weeks during which fortunately no deaths were reported. The graph was fed with information from CENIDH, CIDH and ANPDH reports.

Why did deaths suddenly start to occur again and much more frequently after those two weeks? Was it that the "Peaceful Civic Struggle" without deaths was not having enough impact? One not only needs the support of the population to overthrow a government, but also the support of the international community, and the best way to obtain international support is by accusing a government of "genocide".

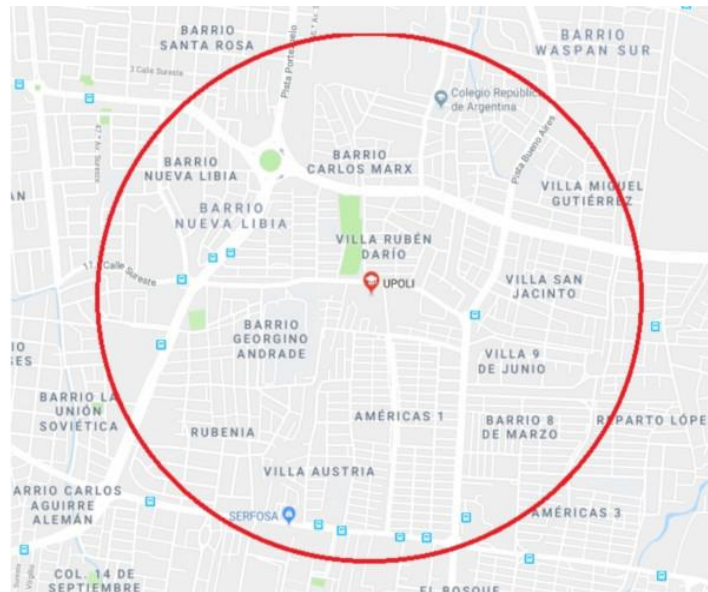
The human rights organizations ([CENIDH, CIDH and ANPDH](#)) took charge of this – their main task was to inflate the death tolls in order to obtain national and international

condemnation of the government. But at that point the opposition had not yet unmasked its “soft coup” agenda.

But the question remains: Why were there two weeks without deaths? Was it an impasse or a pause by the opposition groups pondering how to conduct the protests? The answer must consider at least two elements: the UPOLI and the anti-government Rural Workers Movement which represents a small number of rural workers’ groups in eastern Nicaragua.

At **the UPOLI**, which had been taken over by April 23, there was recruitment and regrouping of young people, very few of whom had a clear socio-political objective. Many soon left, such as those in the Nicaraguan National Student Union ([UNEN](#)) [who saw that the people occupying the campus were being financed and armed by the Sandinista Renovation Party \(MRS\)](#). But the UPOLI was primarily occupied by criminals, drug addicts, gang members, and other marginalized people.

During those two weeks the UPOLI was organized into a base of criminal operations. An internal hierarchy was established and roadblocks and checkpoints were consolidated within the security perimeter of the campus, affecting more than ten neighborhoods in Managua’s 6th District.



Perimeter in which the UPOLI occupiers ran roadblocks and checkpoints to facilitate their criminal activities.

The role of the anti-government Rural Workers Movement (Anti-Canal)

The first two times the Movement came to Managua to participate in national marches (for the April 28 "Pilgrimage and Consecration of Nicaragua to the Heart of Mary" and for the May 9 "National March for Justice and the Democratization of Nicaragua"), it apparently took the opportunity to launch a plan of action against the government. Then and on subsequent visits to the capital, the Anti-Canal group used the Metropolitan Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception of Mary of Managua as a command post.

Once their plan was ready, they left Managua on May 10 and went back to their communities. But many stopped along the way to begin installing roadblocks around the country. This was documented by a newspaper the same day they left Managua: "[The anti-canal peasants at the roadblocks are the same ones who participated in the March for Peace in Managua.](#)" San Pedro de Lóvago, Chontales was the first roadblock built, and then they were spread to other municipalities.



*The Catholic Church escorting a Rural Workers caravan as they returned to their municipalities after participating in a march.
Photograph May 31.*

Added to this, the organizations that had been protesting (COSEP, AmCham, FUNIDES, MpN, IEEPP, FAD, among others) had time to organize themselves and identify/create "university student leaders" to be presented as the face of the university community.

Meanwhile, on April 24 the Catholic Bishops Conference agreed to mediate the National Dialogue, but did not set a start date until 20 days later. It was later shown that the Bishops had coordinated with the protesting groups.

Why did the Bishops Conference wait so long to start the National Dialogue? If they were really clear about the urgency of the National Dialogue, there is no justification for them to wait 20 days before starting it. That time period simply allowed tensions in the

streets to heighten and for the opposition movements to regroup, as was done with the UPOLI occupiers and the anti-government Rural Workers' Movement, who were sowing chaos and destabilization throughout the country. Remember that the Rural Workers' Movement was in constant contact with the Catholic Church, had its command post in the Managua Cathedral, and was protected by the Bishops Conference.

By the time the opening date for the National Dialogue was announced, the opposition Rural Workers' Movement had already set up roadblocks in at least 20 municipalities of Nicaragua. Apparently the opposition did not want to show up for the National Dialogue without any means to pressure the government.

**See the study of deaths in the Appendix: Monopolizing Death by Enrique Hendrix, and here: <http://tortillaconsal.com/tortilla/node/3546>*

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NicaNotes May 3 to 14, 2018

US VP Denounces “Repression”

US Vice-president Mike Pence denounced the recent “repression” of protests in Nicaragua during a White House ceremony on May 2 swearing in new US ambassador to the OAS, Carlos Trujillo. Pence said the Trump government will stand firmly against oppressors in Nicaragua, Cuba, and Venezuela to promote “freedom” in the hemisphere. “In recent weeks, the government of Nicaragua has brutally repressed its own people for raising their voices in peaceful protests,” Pence claimed, echoing corporate media reports. (El Nuevo Diario, May 3)

CENIDH Reports 45 Deaths

The Nicaraguan Center for Human Rights (CENIDH) released a report in early May stating that there were 45 deaths in the recent protests and more than 400 people injured. Besides the names of the victims, the report also listed the television channels supposedly closed by the government during the disturbances and the journalist killed in Bluefields. Other openly US-funded human rights groups are claiming higher death totals. (Informe Pastran, May 4; El Nuevo Diario, May 5)

Opposition Students Form Coalition

Students opposed to the government formed a coalition in response to an invitation by the Catholic bishops to appoint representatives to the national dialogue that will be moderated by the bishops. Coalition spokesperson Valeska Valle said that, since the invitation on May 3, “we began an arduous process of dialogue in which we have agreed on the most important demands for the democratization of the country.” The students have not yet chosen their representatives to the dialogue, but they have rejected the Truth Commission’s calling it “illegitimate.” (El Nuevo Diario, May 6)

National Assembly Chooses Truth Commission

The National Assembly elected five members to the Truth Commission which will investigate the days of violence in April following the government’s announcement of reforms intended to shore up the social security system. Catholic liberation theology priest Uriel Molina and indigenous people’s activist Mirna Cunningham, who helped found and lead the Autonomous University of the Caribbean Coast, are the best known to international solidarity activists. Also included are Jaime Lopez Lowery, a former police official who is now vice-rector of the National Autonomous University of Nicaragua, Adolfo Jarquin Ortel, a former Liberal Party member and diplomat, and media commentator Cairo Amador. (El Nuevo Diario, May 7)

Catholic Hierarchy Offers to Mediate Dialogue

The Nicaraguan Bishops Conference on May 14 released an announcement saying that “After listening to the clamor of the vast majority of society and conscious of the gravity of the situation in the country and even though the circumstances for a dialogue are not the best, we announce the beginning of dialogue this Wednesday May 16 at 10:00 am.” Managua Archbishop Cardinal Leopoldo Brenes stated, “The church will be mediator and witness in this dialogue. We want to make clear that the church does not have solutions for all the particular questions, but together with the different social forces, we will accompany those proposals that best respond to human dignity and the common good, so that they can

be translated into public policy.” He bemoaned the continuing confrontations, including one in progress in Sebaco, and called for an end to the acts of violence. (*President Ortega asked for a National Dialogue on April 22 and invited the Episcopal Conference to mediate. It took them twenty-two days to actually begin the dialogue. During this time the opposition continued their violence and began to set up roadblocks.*) (Informe Pastran, May 14; El Nuevo Diario, May 14)

Foreign Ministry Invites IAHRC to Observe Human Rights Situation

The Nicaraguan Foreign Ministry on May 13 invited the Inter-American Human Rights Commission (IAHRC) to visit Nicaragua “as soon as possible with the objective of observing on site the human rights situation in Nicaragua.” The Foreign Ministry expressed its firm commitment to provide all necessary assistance to the Commission while it is in Nicaragua. It is hoped that the visit will lead to a clarification of the facts surrounding violations of human rights that have been reported. The visiting members of the IAHRC will meet with bodies created by the government such as the Human Rights Ombudsman, the Public Ministry, and the Truth, Justice and Peace Commission created by the National Assembly along with other organizations including Nicaraguan human rights organizations. Myrna Cunningham and Cairo Amador said that the National Assembly’s commission had called for inviting the IAHRC as well as the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights. (Informe Pastran, May 14; El Nuevo Diario, May 14)

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The National Dialogue

from "Dialogue in Nicaragua – an inauspicious start", *Tortilla con Sal, Telesur, May 12, 2018*
<https://www.telesurenglish.net/news/Dialogue-In-Nicaragua-An-Inauspicio...>

Ever since Saturday April 21, the Nicaraguan police have limited themselves to a policy of not responding to violent provocations by right wing gangs and only doing the minimum necessary to control public order. That followed the announcement by President Daniel Ortega of a dialogue process to be mediated by the country's Catholic Church hierarchy and the acceptance of that initiative by the country's main business organization, COSEP. The sequel to those decisions has been extreme, persistent violence from right wing political groups, ever more intense disinformation on the social networks and in opposition news media and also intense right wing efforts to sabotage economic life via roadblocks and unsuccessful calls for national strike action.

While the moderates on Nicaragua's right wing have ostensibly called for dialogue and an end to the violence, the most reactionary people in the business sector and the Catholic Church either openly encourage the violence or dissemble their support in unconvincing blanket condemnations of "all violence".

For example on the night of April 21 [Piero Coen](#), Nicaragua's wealthiest individual and leader of Nicaragua's most important transnational business group, distanced himself from COSEP's call for an end to the violence. Likewise, the right-wing church hierarchy refuse to condemn their political allies' support for violence that has continued to claim lives despite the announcement of the national dialogue process.

In recent days, right wing gangs burned down municipal authority buildings in Managua and in La Concepción near Masaya. They attacked and damaged municipal authority offices in Chinandega and Granada, shot dead three people in Managua and also shot and seriously wounded four police officers on traffic duty. Other incidents have seen the gangs attack a school bus carrying children with disabilities, threaten and damage commercial premises and carry out numerous attacks on drivers and passengers in public buses, private vehicles and taxis. Right wing gangs have occupied the public National Autonomous University (UNAN) and are also preventing classes in the private Polytechnic University (UPOLI). The UNAN authorities have [publicly denounced](#) the role of the right wing CENIDH human rights organization in the occupation of their university.

After over two weeks of talks, the Catholic Bishops Conference finally secured agreement from Nicaragua's fractious opposition over their participants in the proposed National Dialogue. Then, on May 11, the bishops presented [a letter to President Daniel Ortega](#) setting out four preconditions for what was supposed to have been dialogue without preconditions. Their four preconditions are:

- * Immediate entry to Nicaragua of the Inter American Commission on Human Rights to investigate and clarify "deaths and disappearances" of people in Nicaragua.

- * Suppression of "paramilitary bodies" and "shock forces" that intimidate, coerce and attack ordinary citizens and also the non-use of police for "any type of repression".

- * Immediately stop all forms of repression against peaceful protests, ensure the physical integrity of people involved in the National Dialogue and all citizens.

* Give “credible signs” of a willingness to negotiate for peace, respecting the human rights of all citizens and neither oblige public employees to take part in political party demonstrations nor “paralyze national transport” with such events.

In response, [President Ortega wrote](#) in the most conciliatory terms possible, accepting the preconditions and merely noting “great concern over the climate of fear in communities where, well beyond the peaceful protests that we respect absolutely, devastating violent actions proliferate, damaging the quality of life of Nicaraguans of all ages who cry out to God for a return to normality”.

The pro-opposition bias of the Bishops Conference is hardly news. However, the language of the letter’s four preconditions is unusually provocative. The Nicaraguan government had already said it will allow a CIDH mission to visit Nicaragua. But the mention of deaths “and disappearances” adopts the inflammatory language of opposition human rights organizations who have inflated their lists of people killed in the recent protests with various individuals who subsequently protested the false reports of their deaths or whose families have insisted that the deaths had nothing to do with the protests. In any case, if the CIDH do their job, it should become clear that no credible evidence exists of any forced disappearance by Nicaragua’s police or anyone else.

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National Dialogue Begins in Search of Peace, Justice and Democracy

Maryolitt Arosteguí, Tortilla con Sal, 18 May 2018



Before the eyes of millions of Nicaraguans, the long awaited televised National Dialogue opened in Managua with the participation of President Daniel Ortega and Vice President Rosario Murillo as well as economic advisers to the government, NGO representatives, students, business people and rural workers. The official installation of the National Dialogue Round Table was organized by the Catholic Bishops Conference of Nicaragua (CEN). President Ortega highlighted in his message his gratitude to the bishops, "I would like to thank the Bishops Conference for the effort they have made to establish this dialogue. Today the Nicaragua that was growing, that attracted investments, that breathed tranquility and peace, that Nicaragua is deeply wounded. (...) All of us are hurt by deaths; blood has no difference. The same blood flows in all of us and the death of a brother hurts all of us," the President said.

Despite constant attempts by students and other opposition activists to shout him down, President Ortega rejected claims that the police have fired on peaceful protests. Ortega said that the police have orders not to fire and the proof is that, when the Masaya police barracks were attacked, the police resisted for many hours, without returning fire. He demanded removal of the roadblocks which are impeding movement of thousands of workers in Managua's Free Trade Zones, so they will not continue affecting the economy of the country.

President Daniel Ortega also responded to questions about the actions of official authorities and the looting, vandalism, damage to public property, stalemate and outbreaks of violence, saying, "Should the National Police tolerate such acts? So everyone applies the law as they think? Every day protestors march here." President Ortega asserted that paramilitary gangs have taken over Managua's Polytechnic University and "have an arsenal of firearms, not just homemade weapons."

Cardinal Leopoldo Brenes referred to Pope Francis who, in addition to following with concern the situation in Nicaragua, urged him to continue with renewed enthusiasm his valuable service to society, through a national dialogue from which no one is excluded.

Despite the moderate message of Cardinal Brenes, Bishop Abelardo Mata of Estelí addressed President Ortega telling him that what is happening in Nicaragua is a revolution and that the government should resign. Bishop Mata's words echoed the remarks of opposition student leader Lester Aleman who said that for the opposition the dialogue is not about negotiating anything but rather to receive the government's surrender.

The National Dialogue Round Table will continue to seek solutions to the conflict in Nicaragua. President Ortega again pointed out that the people must continue to defend the peace that Nicaragua has achieved in recent years.

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NicaNotes May 21 and 22, 2018

IACHR Releases Report

The representatives of the Inter-American Human Rights Commission (IAHRC) who have been in Nicaragua to investigate the current crisis released their preliminary report on May 21st. You can read the report in Spanish here:

<http://www.oas.org/es/cidh/prensa/comunicados/2018/113.asp> The report said there had been 76 deaths in the recent protests; 438 people were detained by the authorities with three remaining in jail. The national dialogue chaired by the Catholic Bishops Conference released a communique at the end of yesterday's meeting which stated that the participants agreed to accept the 15 recommendations made by the IAHRC. Dialogue participants agreed to the appointment of a commission to follow up on the recommendations and on a second visit by the IAHRC.

Unfortunately, no agreement was reached on lifting all the roadblocks, a proposal made by representatives of small and medium businesses (CONIMIPYME) to permit free movement of vehicles. After long debates, opposition members continued to insist on the resignation of the entire government and the appointment of a transition junta. (Informe Pastran, May 21)

OAS Head Praises "Climate of Negotiation" for Election Reforms

Luis Almagro, Secretary General of the Organization of American States, said that in Nicaragua there is a climate of negotiation that, with the participation of the OAS, has made concrete advances for the next presidential elections and these will have all the guarantees that the opposition and civil society have demanded. He added that OAS representatives are in permanent contact with the government, the Church, businesspeople, and representatives of the opposition. At a forum on democracy at George Washington University in Washington, DC, he said to representatives of civil society who accused him of being an accomplice of dictatorship that he was an accomplice in seeking a transparent and just electoral process and that there were opposition members who did not respect democratic process. A high-level mission of the OAS that has worked with the government on election reform arrived in Nicaragua on May 22. (Informe Pastran, May 21, 22)

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NicaNotes May 22 to May 30

Guest blog May 30 by Nan McCurdy

Like most Nicaraguans and people like me who lived there for thirty years, I spend most of my time now reading, listening to and watching news and talking to our kids, siblings, nieces, nephews and friends about what is going on.

By 1pm California time I had seen so many different acts of violence in the news that I thought it would be worth documenting a few of them below. The Dialogue broke down last week when the opposition refused to use their power to end the roadblocks that are paralyzing the nation and promoting violence. Today there was a mini-dialogue with three negotiators on each side.

Then just a few minutes ago, as I was finishing this summary, the Mediation Committee published a communique: They called for: 1. An end to the violence and the fulfillment of the first three points in the recommendations from the Inter American Commission on Human Rights; 2. An end to violence against the media; 3. An end to the promotion of violence and the use of fake news by the media; and condemned attacks against the UNI (Engineering University) and Radio Ya (described below). The opposition representatives committed themselves to try to convince those involved in the roadblocks to “flexibilize” them (note they do not say “end”). Both sides agreed to go back to the full Dialogue to discuss the agenda item on “democratization”.

Masaya Governmental Offices Burned

In Masaya early today, May 30, unknown elements burned governmental buildings where the Prosecutor’s office and part of the police were operating. Despite the fact that the firefighters came to try to put it out, the fire spread through much of the neighborhood. It should be noted that because the opposition has burned down a number of government buildings and Sandinista houses over the last month that officials have begun removing important documents, furniture, etc. (La Prensa, <https://www.laprensa.com.ni/>)

Teachers Demand End to Violence

Teachers demanded justice today in the case of Jose Jirón, a murdered teacher. This teacher worked at the Carlos Fonseca Amador School in Matagalpa. Jiron was shot as he was walking home from teaching a class. The teachers demanded an end to violent acts around the country. The teachers are part of the biggest teacher’s union, ANDEN. They also denounced the roadblocks that impede free circulation around the nation. They protested that the markets cannot be supplied, products have increased in price and families are suffering. They expressed their indignation that, due to the road blocks children all around the country are not receiving their free lunch provided by the Ministry of Education. (Canal2tv.com)

High School Teacher Kidnapped in Managua

Groups that took over the UPOLI (Polytechnic University) in Managua over a month ago today kidnapped a high school teacher, Jose David Flores Hernández. Flores was part of a large group of teachers and students marching today demanding an end to the roadblocks in order to have freedom of movement so that students can go to school. Flores teaches literature at the Isaias Filippi Institute. (Radiolaprimerisima.com)

Men Shot in Carazo

Two armed men in a vehicle shot at the home of Uriel Calderon, President of the Foundation of Historic Combatants in Carazo. Jose Andres Calderon and Jaffer Aaron Jarquin were wounded and taken to the hospital. (Radiolaprimera.com)

Two Parents Wounded at Jinotepe school

Unknown elements damaged the Manuel Hernandez school in Jinotepe and wounded two parents who tried to defend the school. (Canal2tv.com)

Vehicles Stolen from UNAN

Six vehicles were stolen from the UNAN (National Autonomous University) in Managua in the early morning hours. (Canal2tv.com)



Managua Roadblock near the UNI, Photo El 19 Digital, May 30

Radio Station Burned in Managua

Protesters burned down the installations of the pro-Sandinista radio station “Tu Nueva Radio Ya” located in front of the UCA (Central America University). Protesters had attempted to burn it down in the first days of the protest. Firefighters escorted by police put the fire out. Bystanders say the attack was promoted by a journalist from 100%Noticias, Jackson Orozco. Journalist Bismarck Garcia called for respect for the freedom of expression: “We will hold Miguel Mora responsible for any aggression against “Radio Ya” personnel or installations. We do not incite violence.” (See below more about Miguel Mora below) (Radiolaprimera.com)

Communique from National Engineering University (UNI) in Managua

The National Engineering University (UNI) sent a communication to Channel 2 saying that at about 6am various groups of people in vehicles took over the university, taking control of all the entrances and kicking out the guards. UNI representatives called for respect for human life and also expressed fear that those who have taken over the university will damage their chemical, engineering and communication laboratories, etc. They stated that the only solution to this crisis is the Dialogue. (Canal2tv.com)

Opposition Media Openly Call for Coup

100%Noticias (TV) owner Miguel Mora put this on his twitter twice: “If you want change for Nicaragua, to go from dictatorship to democracy, you should read this book by Gene Sharp”. Here you will find basic directions for peaceful civil resistance. (It is a book that has been used for regime change).

OAS Secretary General Speaks Out

One of the major events last week was a statement by Luis Almagro, Secretary General of the Organization of American States about part of the opposition and even called them liars. On a radio round-table called “A Los Cuatro Vientos”, today four journalists said his remarks were directed at Violeta Granera, former head of the Civil Coordinator. The opposition wants Almagro’s approval for a coup, but he said the only option for Nicaraguan is an electoral one. <http://www.trincheraonline.com/2018/05/24/almagro-toma-bando-en-la-crisis-politica-del-pais/>

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NicaNotes May 30 to June 6, 2018

16 Killed, 30 Police and Sandinistas Wounded in Mother's Day Violence

May 30, Nicaraguan Mother's Day, saw enormous violence and death. Eight of the dead were in Managua. Three were killed in Masaya. One person was killed in Chinandega and four people were killed in Estelí. In Managua witnesses said that some shots came from the area near the baseball stadium. As shots were fired in Managua thousands took refuge in the Central American University (UCA). There were also many people who took refuge in the Cathedral and in the Metro Centro mall. (note: despite the many protesters there is no video footage of the killers).

At the end of the opposition march protesters got into the new Denis Martinez Baseball Stadium and vandalized it. And near the Engineering University (UNI) there were once again confrontations between different sectors with mortars. 100% News TV station falsely said the station was attacked by Sandinista sympathizers with rocks which broke a window at the entrance. Nearby, anti-government protesters burned down Radio Station "Tu Nuevo Radio Ya" with over 20 workers inside. Opposition protesters attacked the police and firefighters trying to save the besieged radio workers. Protesters also burned down the offices of ALBA Caruna credit union near the UCA.

Two Sandinistas were killed and over 20 wounded by anti-government protesters at a roadblock in La Trinidad, Estelí, where armed opposition activists blocked buses from the north traveling to Managua for a pro-government peace event (held about a mile from the area of the anti-government march). The Inter American Commission on Human Rights said it received complaints about dead and wounded, about attacks on the media, public buildings and universities. (19 Digital, END 5/30 6/1/18) **See June 2019 Documentary: Youtube, Juventud Presidente, 180 Llaves de la Verdad, 30 May.**

Cristhian Mendoza, El Viper, Arrested

According to the authorities, on May 31 at 7pm, the police captured various subjects among them Cristhian Josué Mendoza Fernández, alias "Viper", Andrew Salvador Úbeda Martínez and Katherin Maurian Ruiz López accused of organized crime, murder, car theft among others. [Students who have been at the UPOLI say Mendoza was one of those in control during the most violent days and taking orders from Felix Maradiaga.] (Radiolaprimerisima.com, June 1)

Four Detained for Setting Fire to Government Complex On June 1 in León, Aníbal Toruño, Álvaro Montalvan, Byron Estrada and Gerald Chacón were detained for burning the German Pomares Complex where seven government institutions are housed. Two buildings were severely damage and the rest moderately damaged. (Radiolaprimerisima.com, 6/1/18)

Government of Nicaragua Will Meet with OAS to Discuss Electoral Reforms

On June 1 the OAS published the timeline of work proposed to the Nicaraguan government for the implementation of recommendations to reform the electoral system, outlined by the OAS in 2017. On Sunday the government will meet with the OAS to define a plan of activities to carry out the reforms. (El Nuevo Diario, 6/1/18)

Pope Francis Calls for Dialogue, Justice and Peace

Pope Francis has responded to a letter sent to him by President Ortega on April 29. In the letter Francis encourages different sectors of Nicaragua to find the route to justice, dialogue and peace. "Mr. President, I received your letter, which makes me a participant in the situation going on in this beloved country. You manifest your will to dialogue and look for an understanding between all parties," he wrote. The Pope said that a humble and sincere dialogue is a good way to bring about peace. He called on all sectors to be responsible and to reject all violence that only contributes to multiplying division and suffering especially among the poor and vulnerable. (El Nuevo Diario, 6/1/18)

Newspaper La Prensa Lays Off 120 employees

On June 2, journalists who have worked for La Prensa newspaper for many years said it has entered into a financial crisis and has had to let 120 employees go. The paper had cut in half the number of published pages due to the fall in advertising. The justification for the cutbacks is the current economic situation of the country. The editor of the editorial page, Luis Sanchez, was sent into retirement. All who worked with him also lost their jobs. (El Nuevo Diario, 6/2/18)

US Citizen Killed in Rubenia

US citizen Sixto Henry Vero, age 48 (bar owner). His body was found dead about nine blocks from the UPOLI in the early morning of June 2. Neighbors report they saw armed men on motorcycles and in trucks. The shooting went on quite a while and terrorized the neighborhood around 3:30am. The perpetrators had their heads covered. They were chasing Vero and another man. At a June 4th press conference, the police said they have identified two of the perpetrators as Néstor Molina y Ezequiel Leiva. Police Commissioner Sergio Gutierrez said a group of men with guns and mortars probably attacked Vero to rob him. US ambassador Laura Dogu said the death of a US citizen is a great concern to the embassy. (El Nuevo Diario, 6/3/18) **See June 2019 Documentary in English: Youtube, Juventud Presidente, 180 Keys of the Truth, Mafias Exposed.**

Attackers Kill Police, Burn Buildings and Terrorize Masaya Population

On Monday June 4, delinquents attacked the Masaya Police Station with high-powered weapons wounding 22-year-old Jose Abraham Martinez and killing Major Marlon Gerardo Garcia. The previous night the delinquents robbed citizens, homes, cars and motorcycles. According to Police Commissioner Avellan, the attackers were being paid C\$500 Córdobas a day and provided with alcohol and drugs. They also attacked the building of the Prosecutor and burned the Attorney General's building and part of the Municipal building. (19 Digital 6/4/18)

Opposition Destroys Granada Municipal Building and Markets

June 6 opposition protesters burned the famous colonial-style municipal building as well as the markets where hundreds of vendors and small business people lost their livelihood. (El Nuevo Diario, 6/6/18, see photo overleaf)



Granada Municipal Building Burned by Protesters, June 6, Photo: El 19 Digital

OAS General Assembly Delegations Want Peace and Dialogue Various Latin American delegations expressed their support for an end to the violence and in favor of the dialogue in Nicaragua in order to peacefully resolve the crisis. The delegations called on Nicaraguans to resolve their differences peacefully and avoid death, destruction of public and private property and follow the human rights recommendations of the Inter American Commission on Human Rights. The outline of the declaration did not disavow or delegitimize the government of Nicaragua; rather it exhorted the government to consolidate representative democracy with respect for the principal of non-intervention. Delegation members found most satisfactory the acceptance by the government of the visit by the Inter American Commission on Human Rights from May 17th to the 21st to observe the human rights situation in the country, as well as the acceptance by the government of the creation of the interdisciplinary, international group of independent Experts (GIEI) to investigate the events since April 18. (Informe Pastran, 6/4/18).

Masaya Family Court Burned

Johanna Flores, General Director of Adoptions for the Ministry of Family, said the burning down of the family courts in Masaya will negatively affect the rights of children and affect all the judicial processes of families, adolescents and children in Masaya. All of the files were destroyed in the fire so people, primarily women, will have to begin from zero in putting together documentation for their cases. Families where there are children who need their child support payments will be most affected. (6/6/19)

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Personal testimony of violence in Masaya

from "Interview about situation in Masaya" Tom Ricker, June 6th 2018

<https://www.quixote.org/update-on-nicaragua-interview-about-situation-in-masaya/>

Over the last week there has been an increase in violence in Nicaragua. In Masaya several people were killed, government buildings burned, a market ransacked, and ongoing blockades of the roads leading into the city. Much of the media attention about the ongoing political crisis in Nicaragua has ignored the conflicts in cities outside of Managua, or focused solely on accusations of excessive force by the police. We feel it is important for people to understand the complexity of the situation, and the ways in which violence and intimidation are also being used by opposition groups, with most of the people simply caught in the middle.

This week, I interviewed John Perry, who has lived in Masaya, Nicaragua for the last 15 years, and works as a volunteer with a local NGO in the field of sustainable rural development. We talked about the situation in the city over the last few weeks. The views expressed here are John's, based on his observations. *There has been a tremendous amount of violence in Masaya over the last week. Several people have been killed, a school was set on fire, and people assumed to be supporters of the government have been attacked, or houses set aflame. What have you been seeing and hearing from friends in the area?*

Until mid-April, Masaya was a peaceful city (and Nicaragua the most peaceful country in Central America). All that changed when police responded violently to a student protest in Managua. This awoke a lot of resentment in Masaya against the government, including from its previous supporters, and roadblocks appeared in the streets. There were pitched battles between pro- and anti-government groups. Even demonstrations calling for an end to violence (like one I took part in [on Sunday May 6](#)) were attacked.

Since then the violence has become far worse. Ransacking of businesses (with people running off with TV sets and motor bikes), destruction of public buildings (including the tourist market) and burning down the houses of Sandinista sympathizers have become a nightly occurrence. We are in the bizarre situation where Masaya's people (for the most part) are destroying their own city.

The international media has been focused solely on a narrative that presents protesters as peaceful, and laying almost all of the blame for violence on state forces. It sounds like things are a lot more complicated than that. Does the violence in Masaya seem to be coordinated?

All that can be said for certain is that the media's simplistic narrative is wrong. Both 'sides' are using violence. Protesters claim that government sympathizers are destroying public buildings, but even if this were true, would they then burn their own homes? If you look at the BBC coverage [here](#), it faithfully follows the narrative. Yet you look at the photo and observe (a) the road has been ripped up to make the roadblocks and (b) those manning them have lethal weapons. In what other country would this be regarded as exercising a constitutional right to protest (which is what the protesters claim)? In what other country would the police not arrive in force to remove the roadblocks and arrest those holding the weapons?

Throughout the country, roadblocks have been the dominant strategy of the opposition to create tension and put pressure on the government. I understand you are actually trapped between two different roadblocks, and that travel is difficult, if not impossible outside the city. Can you say what it is like to be in a blockaded city now?

Masaya is effectively cut off by road from everywhere else and has been for several days. We live outside the city so can only enter it on foot. There are two major problems with the roadblocks. One is obvious – they disrupt the normal life of the city, preventing people from working and getting food, preventing deliveries to shops. In a city where most work in low-paid jobs, this is creating enormous hardship. My wife walked to the Masaya market this morning and came across a young woman trying to walk to the hospital who had started to give birth in the street. She persuaded a passing cyclist to take her to the Red Cross on his crossbar.

But an even more serious aspect is the intimidation. People are being asked for their papers at the roadblocks by masked youths carrying homemade mortars; they're having their bags searched. Anything linking them to the government or police means they won't get past – or worse. A police guy in civilian clothes was ordered to burn his police uniform publicly (it was hidden in his rucksack). In other cases, people have been stripped and humiliated. We had a call for help from a policewoman who lives between two roadblocks, and who is scared stiff her house with two young children will be burnt down while she is at work.



Burning home of Masaya Mayor's brother, May 12, El 19 Digital

It seems amazing that the roadblocks have been allowed to continue – though I assume the government is reluctant to order the police out to break them up by force. It seems like this is a strategy that will turn on the opposition eventually – as it is wreaking havoc on people's lives. Do you see this going on much longer?

It's very difficult to say. Many of the Masaya roadblocks are at head height so it would be extremely difficult for the police to remove them unilaterally. Even the riot police lack the equipment that most police forces have in developed countries. So the only route to peace is through negotiation – the process of national 'dialogue' being led by the Catholic Church – but which has made only sputtering progress so far.

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From Nicaragua: defeating the attempted coup

Tortilla con Sal, Telesur, 6/12/18

<https://www.telesurenglish.net/opinion/Nicaragua--Defeating-the-Soft-Co...>

The government strategy has been to accept extraordinary levels of opposition violence and intimidation so as to allow the opposition to discredit themselves with public opinion. The opposition violence and roadblocks have disrupted economic life, affecting thousands of small businesses, throwing tens of thousands into unemployment and causing hardship for many thousands of people with serious health problems. The opposition paramilitary violence has destroyed numerous public buildings and government offices in various cities, decimated the tourist industry, and cost the lives of too many people. Some of the worst violence has been in the tourist cities of Granada and Masaya where hundreds of businesses have been practically destroyed. In that context, the Catholic bishops categorically betrayed their mediation role last week by presenting President Ortega with an undisclosed ultimatum very obviously in sympathy with the political opposition and demanding a response in two days.

Following that ultimatum delivered on June 7, the opposition paramilitaries staged a wave of attacks against government offices in León, Masaya and Jinotega, also attacking police stations elsewhere to steal firearms, kidnapping and torturing police officers. In an attack on Monday June 11, a gang of paramilitaries killed two more police officers, wounding two in Mulukukú in the country's northern Mining Triangle. The opposition intensified their roadblocks almost completely stopping traffic along the highway between Managua and the north of the country. That same day, police acted to clear some of the roadblocks in what many people view as the beginning of President Ortega's response to the bishops' ultimatum. The government decision to act against the roadblocks strangling the economy is clearly supported by a majority of people in the country.

The Western media has ignored the role of organized crime and delinquents. From the start of the crisis on April 18 criminals and youth gangs have operated alongside right wing extremists to foment civil disturbances and lethal violence. One notorious group responsible for various murders, including one of a US citizen, was broken up by police on May 31. The group operated out of the private Polytechnic University UPOLI occupied initially by students and then by opposition protesters, including this group of criminals. Its leader gave testimony that Felix Maradiaga was their main contact giving them orders.

The police have accused right wing political activist Felix Maradiaga of involvement with that criminal group. Maradiaga, one of the leaders of the opposition protests against the government is currently in the United States where he went to lobby against the Nicaraguan government in the Organization of American States General Assembly on June 4 and 5.

During that OAS General Assembly, Nicaragua's diplomats defeated opposition efforts to secure any condemnation of President Ortega's government. Secretary General Luis Almagro had previously denounced deceitful and misleading statements from Nicaragua's opposition, insisting on a constitutional resolution of the country's crisis. That led Felix Maradiaga to accuse Almagro of being President Ortega's accomplice, to which Almagro retorted that he is indeed an accomplice, but an accomplice of democracy against anti-

democratic moves in violation of constitutional norms. Subsequently, the United Nations Secretary General expressed his satisfaction that the Nicaraguan government is working closely with the OAS to reach a negotiated settlement, a position supported by the European Union and, at least nominally, even by the US State Department.

These setbacks at the international level for Nicaragua's political opposition have been followed by the collapse of the Catholic bishops' credibility as mediators for the dialogue and the emergence of clear majority support nationally for an end to the violence and the economic damage and distress it has caused. In this new context, Nicaragua's Sandinista government seems to be moving cautiously to clear the roadblocks while at the same time developing local initiatives for peace and dialogue aimed at isolating the violent opposition paramilitary groups. While the next couple of weeks may well see the beginnings of a political settlement of the crisis, achieving that outcome is likely to come at the price of yet more death and destruction from Nicaragua's opposition extremists.

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NicaNotes June 20 to 25, 2018



*Sandinista Youth Sander Bonilla Tortured June 21
in the presence of a priest*

Anti-Sandinistas Kidnap, Torture Sandinista Youth member

On June 21 the protestors who maintain a roadblock in Zaragoza, León, kidnapped and brutally tortured Sander Bonilla, a member of the Sandinista Youth from Sutiava, Leon. [The video is gruesome. In it a priest appears whom people from Leon have identified as Guillermo Barrios. Although you can only see his clothing, at one point he asks not to be filmed but, people in Leon recognized his voice. Dozens, if not hundreds, of Sandinistas have been kidnapped and tortured in the last two months. The perpetrators usually take videos and put them on Facebook to terrorize the Sandinista population.] Here is a compilation of the torture of Bonilla and interviews with him.

http://www.tortillaconsal.com/video/04_nicaraguan_opposition_torture_of_sandinista_victims_mzg7Z-0vQjM&t=2s.mp4 (Channel 8, June 21)

Delinquents Ransack and Burn Home of Teacher in Jinotega

On June 21 a criminal group ransacked and burned the home of teacher Mayra Garmendia in Barrio Panorama, Jinotega. The group first fired on the house with the family inside. The family was able to flee out the back. Many people in Jinotega express anger and frustration at destabilizing groups that cause horror and chaos. (Channel 8, June 21)

Workers Condemn Acts of Terror

On June 22 members of the National Employees Union condemned acts of terrorism, violence, destruction and threats by delinquents financed by those attempting to carry out a coup. Domingo Lopez, general secretary of the UNE, in the name of the workers, demanded the immediate fulfillment of agreement #6 of the Dialogue from June 16 which mandates an end to all forms of violence and threats, and the immediate implementation of

the removal of roadblocks by the Commission of Verification and Security. (Channel 6, June 22)

Nicaraguan Government Rejects IAHCR Report

The report on *Human Rights in the context of social protests in Nicaragua* issued on 22 June by the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IAHCR) has been rejected by the Nicaraguan government as 'subjective' and 'partial'. The heavily biased report, running to some 50 pages, makes not one mention of the kidnappings, torture and killings meted out against pro-government supporters and Sandinistas by the extreme right wing opposition and armed thugs, basing its findings solely on testimony received from or reported by members of the opposition or gleaned from media hostile to the Nicaraguan government. It even includes the deaths of people supposedly killed by police brutality who are still alive. In his address to the Organization of American States (OAS), Nicaragua's Foreign Minister Denis Moncada said the report deliberately omits all the armed attacks, sieges, harassment and kidnappings by protesters. You can read the entire Nicaraguan response here: <http://www.nscag.org/news/article/246/nicaraguan-government-rejects-biased-iahcr-report> (Radiolaprimerisima.com, Canal 2, June 22)

Caravan for Peace, Stability and Dialogue on Ometepe.

On June 23 hundreds of families on the Island of Ometepe drove for peace from San Jose del Sur to Altagracia. On bikes, motorcycles, cars, trucks and buses they expressed their support for the government and their repudiation of the report from the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights. They rejected it for being one-sided – it did not report on the Sandinistas killed by the opposition, the terrorism and torture of people; the destruction and burning of Sandinista homes and public property which has been extensive. They traveled to the town hall for a celebration of Carlos Fonseca, Father of the Revolution. They demonstrated against roadblocks that stop free-circulation; they cause fear, more poverty and stop progress (even though there are no roadblocks on Ometepe). Many people on the Island make their living from tourism and they are suffering economically now. (Channel 8, June 23)

Baby Killed with One Shot to Head

On June 23rd, one year old Teyler Leonardo Lorio Navarrete was killed by a gunshot to the head near the Polytechnic University UPOLI Saturday morning. There remains a large group of delinquents in the eastern part of Managua where many people have been killed in the last two months, including a US citizen. (Channel 8, June 23)

The Supposed Attack on the UNAN

This history is told by residents of three Managua neighborhoods near the American Nicaraguan School (ANS) and seven or eight blocks from the Autonomous University of Nicaragua (UNAN):

“Students first took the UNAN in the early days of protest. Today it appears to be held primarily by delinquents. In Lomas de Monserrat, San Angel and Villas de Catalina people of different political stripes live together peacefully, including some famous singers like Katia Cardenal and Norma Helena Gadea. There are also high-level Sandinista functionaries like Francisco Lopez as well as those from private enterprise. Since April we have had to deal with a lot of roadblocks set up by the students/delinquents all around the area. All night

long we hear gunshots and mortars. About 12:30 am of June 23, we were frightened by a lot of gunshots and yelling next to the three neighborhoods on the main road that we all use to enter. Armed hooded delinquents were trying to get into Monserrat to go to the house of Francisco Lopez. Security guards at the entrance kept them out, but they continued attacking until morning – it was a nightmare. This morning, June 23, we were surprised in the Monserrat neighborhood by the visit of some priests, members of NGOs, hooded armed men and media in front of PAEBANIC [a local bank]. They were looking for the delinquents from last night (who were apparently apprehended by residents and taken to the police). An older woman from our neighborhood tried to tell the priests and media what had really happened but the priests shushed her. This group was clearly here to mount a media lie. The three delinquents caught by the population and taken to the police were released to their families a few hours later.”

This is a longer and very interesting story. Here is the link in Spanish. <http://www.redvolucion.net/2018/06/23/la-verdad-sobre-el-supuesto-ataque-a-la-unan-managua-contado-por-los-vecinos-de-lomas-de-monserrat/> (Redvolucion, June 23)

Ransacking Continues in Buildings Burned in Diriamba

In April, hooded armed men connected to the roadblocks burned and ransacked the police station. Since then the roof, ceiling, doors, and iron bars from the cells and the windows have been stolen. The police vehicles and motorcycles were also stolen. (Videos after the first burning of the Police Station show a priest and others stealing what was left inside). The Town Hall and the office of the Prosecutor were ruined. The Sandinista Youth House was burned. In nearby Jinotepe hooded armed men destroyed and ransacked a number of buildings including SILAIS (government health office), MTI (Ministry of Transportation), Farem-Carazo (a regional university), UNEN (the University student’s building), ENACAL (the Nicaraguan Water Company), the Court, and others. <http://www.qhubo.com.ni/que-pasa/41723-ciudades-semidestruidas/> (La Prensa, June 24)

Inter-American Commission on Human Rights Arrives to Participate in Dialogue

On June 24th, two lawyers from the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR) arrived in Managua with two more expected to come to participate in the National Dialogue. They are part of the MESENI follow-up for Nicaragua. The representatives told the media that first thing Monday morning they will meet with the members of the Catholic Bishops Conference who are mediating the dialogue. (Radio la Primerisima, June 24)

FMLN Expresses Solidarity with Nicaragua

On June 24, the FMLN, the governing party of El Salvador, condemned the vandalism suffered by a society that was winning enormous ground in the area of citizen security. “From here, our solidarity is with President Daniel Ortega and the FSLN. We know that you will advance with wisdom, patience, with respectful dialogue, and with strength like you have already shown,” expressed Medardo Gonzalez, FMLN General Secretary. During the Thirty-Fifth National Extraordinary Convention of the FMLN, they decried actions being carried out against countries governed by the left. (TeleSur, June 24)

Masaya Municipal Worker Shot Dead

On June 24th, the population and municipal workers of Masaya were clearing streets of

roadblocks and trash in the Barrio Ulises Tapia Roa. They were attacked by hooded armed men who shot dead Carolina de Los Angeles Collado Delgadillo, a municipal employee. (National Police Incident Report, June 24)

Opposition Paramilitary Kill Young Man in Jinotepe

Twenty-three-year-old Cristopher Roberto Castillo Rosales was murdered by hooded armed men on motorcycles in his neighborhood in the early morning. His brother is Sandinista militant Ferson Castillo Morales. Roberto's father, Roberto Castillo Cruz said, "I ask for justice. And I ask that the human rights organizations take note of all of the atrocities so they won't continue to do this – my son was brutally gunned down." (19 Digital, June 25)

MITRAB Machinery Station for Northern Nicaraguan Is burned

A violent group took over the large machinery station of the Ministry of Transportation and Infrastructure in Sebaco, Matagalpa, and set fire to the vehicles and warehouses. Nine workers were kidnapped and taken to the roadblock near the bridge and eventually freed. Two of them were beaten up. The armed men forced their way in threatening those present with M16's and AK47's. This is where the machinery is stored that is used to build and repair roads in Matagalpa, Jinotega and all of the north. Minister of Transport Oscar Mojica said the delinquents claimed to be protesting peacefully. They wouldn't let the firefighters enter to put out the fires. Very near the burning warehouses are tanks with 50,000 gallons of gasoline. (Informe Pastran 6/25/18)

Violent Groups Destroy Seven INATEC training Centers

On June 25, Loyda Barrera reported that seven Technical Training Centers of INATEC (The National Technology Institute) were destroyed between April 18 and June 23. INATEC is a government technology training program serving families and businesses. Infrastructure was damaged and equipment, furniture and vehicles were stolen in Leon, Masaya and Chinandega. Barrera most lamented the murder of the accountant at the center in Boaco Jorge Gaston Palacios Vargas, and the kidnapping of the Director of the Juan de Dios Munoz Center, Melvin Chavez, who was badly beaten. INATEC is working on how to reactivate the centers and restart classes for more than 48,558 students from 91 municipalities who have not had classes for over two months due to the violence. (Radiolaprimerisima.com, June 25)

Violent groups Burn Municipal Offices and Machinery in Matagalpa

On June 25, armed, hooded delinquents attacked Matagalpa's municipal offices, ransacked and stole materials from the building and set it on fire. Firefighters arrived in time to save the heavy equipment used for building and repairing roads.

<https://www.tn8.tv/sucesos/452182-criminales-destruyen-incendian-plantel-alcaldia-matagalpa/> (Radiolaprimerisima.com, June 25)

Policewoman Killed in Nagarote Bringing Police Deaths to Twelve

On June 25, Armed hooded gangs attacked a group of citizens, municipal workers and police in Nagarote killing policewoman Zaira Julissa Lopez. The group that was attacked was removing roadblocks from the streets. Lopez is the twelfth police officer killed since April 19, 2018. (La Voz de Sandino, June 25)



Citizens Remove Roadblocks and Fix Roads. Photos: El 19 Digital

In Leon, Two Shot Removing Roadblocks

On June 25, the population, along with municipal workers and their machinery, and police, removed roadblocks on principal thoroughfares in San Felipe and Hermita de Dolores neighborhoods in Leon. The population had suffered for a number of days because of the roadblocks and the armed vandals manning them. Later, delinquents attacked the people taking down the roadblocks and two people were shot. <http://www.canal10.com.ni/accion-10/una-persona-muerta-y-dos-heridas-en-enfrentamientos-en-leon-41373> (La Voz de Sandino, Channel 10, June 25)



Masaya Citizens Take Down Roadblocks.

The Masaya population is taking part in removing roadblocks to have free circulation, peace and security. They had already removed some and on June 4th people were cleaning the rest

of the trash. Workers, students, and businesses were back at their normal routine today. (Channel 4, June 25)

Teachers and Schools Affected by Violence

Twenty-three teachers have been affected by violence since April 18, including nine teachers who have been kidnapped and tortured. Two teachers have had their homes ransacked. One teacher was run over. Many more have been threatened. Fifty-one schools were damaged. The Education Delegate for the municipality of La Concepcion, Walter Torrez Vivas, was run over by Eniel Sanchez Garcia in a clear attempt to kill him. In Jalapa, Lilliam Peralt, a counselor, was threatened and her home ransacked.

In Rio San Juan, professors Carol Luque and Amparo Lopez received death threats written on school walls and doors. The school was locked because the threats included burning it down if they continued to hold classes. In Jinotepe, the food warehouse of the Education Delegation was ransacked. In Masaya, the Hermanos de Japón School was ransacked and destroyed. This was one of the best-equipped schools in Masaya and served 682 students. On June 20 in Sandy Bay, the Jonny Jocker School was ransacked and all the books and student information were burned. In Nueva Guinea, on June 20 at the Corino Obando Palma Center, hooded attackers burned educational material and damaged much of the school's infrastructure. (Channel 2, June 25)

UNESCO: Nicaragua Denounces Crimes against National Patrimony.

A Nicaraguan government delegation denounced to the United Nations Organization for Education, Science, and Culture (UNESCO) crimes against cultural patrimony as well as effects on education. The government delegation stated that those carrying out the attempted coup use hate, fear and destruction as weapons to destabilize the country and infuse chaos. (6/25/18)

From Nicaragua - breaking out of the "soft coup" psychosis

Tortilla con Sal, Telesur, June 24 2018

On Saturday June 23rd, violent opposition gangs murdered a female municipal worker in Masaya and killed a one year old child in Managua. Both deaths resulted from attacks by opposition armed gangs on municipal workers clearing the gangs' makeshift roadblocks to allow free circulation of traffic. Even those deaths the opposition media and NGOs are blaming on the government and the police. Commenting on this reversal of the facts, FSLN international relations representative, Carlos Fonseca Terán noted in [a television interview](#), "Various elements make up this violent screenplay, but I'd summarize it like this: Sandinistas have neither the right to defend ourselves, nor the right to let ourselves be killed. Although it sounds absurd, if we defend ourselves they say we're paramilitary gangs attacking peaceful protesters, but if we don't defend ourselves and get killed, we become just one more in the list of their dead."

Fonseca also recalled how during the visit last May by IACHR [Inter-American Human Rights Commission] Executive Secretary Paulo Abrão to Nicaragua, an armed opposition gang in Managua attacked unarmed Sandinista supporters returning from a peace march. The social media immediately reported that the Sandinistas were attacking peaceful opposition student protesters. Paulo Abrão arrived at the scene, only to rouse the opposition supporters saying, as Fonseca recalls, "Continue the struggle; you are in the right; your struggle is a just one; we support you! ...and that's been recorded and circulated. It should provoke an international scandal or lead to the IACHR removing Abrão for the sake of the organization's prestige or at the very least to maintain the appearance that they are supposed to have 'experts'. It's self-evident these people aren't investigating anything."

Within Nicaragua itself, the process of national dialogue continues as the government progressively and cautiously removes the roadblocks around the country, finally restoring national economic life to normality. Majority opinion in Nicaragua is critical of the Catholic Church bishops mediating the national dialogue for their clear bias in favor of the political opposition. Evangelical churches in particular have complained that they are not represented in the national dialogue despite serving over half the Christian population.

Opposition representatives in the national dialogue have dropped their demand for President Ortega to resign and now aspire most urgently to bring forward the presidential elections currently scheduled for 2021. The OAS has already been working with the Nicaraguan authorities for almost two years now on electoral reforms for which a schedule has also already been agreed. It remains to be seen what the eventual outcome of the dialogue process will be. But the opposition's attempted coup d'etat has clearly failed and they are obliged now to operate within the current legal institutional framework defined by Nicaragua's Constitution.

However, for the foreseeable future opposition violence is likely to continue, with the aim of creating a constant climate of fear and hatred fed with systematic media falsehoods endlessly blaming their violent crimes on the government. For the government, the objective has to be a return to rationality among the general population who are trapped in a kind of collective psychosis.

As Carlos Fonseca Teran puts it, “their minds and souls are being attacked by a machinery scientifically designed to achieve that.... as part of the People and defenders of the People’s interests, we cannot fall into the mistake of seeing ordinary people who are trapped in this psychological warfare as blameworthy, or as our enemies. They are not! To the contrary they are our people and we have to continue defending them.” He adds, “It’s like when a left-wing party loses elections, that isn’t the fault of the people either, it’s that the revolutionary forces were not up to achieving their objective. It’s not that the People have to measure up to us. It’s we that have to measure up to the People.”

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SICA blasts foreign interference in Nicaragua

Morning Star, July 2nd 2018

<https://morningstaronline.co.uk/article/sica-blasts-foreign-interferenc...>

The System of Central American Integration (SICA) called for an end to violence in Nicaragua last night, saluting the will of the Sandinista government as the US ramped up rhetoric over the weekend.

The organisation, which represents member states across the Central American region, called for “peace and respect for sovereignty without foreign interference in Nicaragua.”

A statement signed by representatives from the Dominican Republic, Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Panama, Honduras, Belize and Nicaragua expressed its “confidence in dialogue and reconciliation as necessary paths toward construction and preservation of peace.”

SICA called for “an immediate cessation of violence in all its forms, which has resulted in insecurity, death, and destruction of public and private goods.”

The group condemned calls by US senators, including Marco Rubio and Bill Nelson, who are pressing for sanctions to be taken against Nicaragua for “corruption and human rights violations.” Mr. Rubio has met Nicaraguan opposition groups and previously hosted the student leaders behind the anti-government protests. The right-wing opposition continues to demand the resignation of President Daniel Ortega.

Venezuela warned the United Nations Human Rights Council that an attempted coup was being waged in Nicaragua.

“We oppose the topic of human rights being used to attack Nicaragua. We call on the people and governments of the world to reject the violence and terrorism in Nicaragua and to support the inclusive dialogue promoted by the Sandinista government,” its delegate said.

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The Events of 2018 and Their Context

Part two :
July to December 2018



Correcting the record: what is really happening in Nicaragua?

By Kevin Zeese and Nils McCune, [Popular Resistance](#) 7/10/18

<https://popularresistance.org/correcting-the-record-what-is-really-happening-in-nicaragua/>

There is a great deal of false and inaccurate information about Nicaragua in the media. Even on the left, some have simply repeated the dubious claims of CNN and Nicaragua's oligarchic media to support the removal of President Ortega. The narrative of nonviolent protesters versus anti-riot squads and pro-government paramilitaries has not been questioned by international media.

This article seeks to correct the record, describe what is happening in Nicaragua and why. As we write this, the coup seems to be failing, people have rallied for peace (as this [massive march for peace held Saturday, July 7 showed](#)) and the truth is coming out (e.g., [the weapons cache discovered in a Catholic Church on July 9th](#)). It is important to understand what is occurring because Nicaragua's is an example of the types of violent coups the US and the wealthy use to put in place business dominated, neoliberal governments. If people understand these tactics, they will become less effective.

Mixing up the Class Interests

In part, US pundits are getting their information from media outlets, such as Jaime Chamorro-Cardenal's *La Prensa*, and the same oligarchical family's *Confidencial*, that are the most active elements of the pro-coup media. Repeating and amplifying their narrative delegitimizes the Sandinista government and presents unconditional surrender by Daniel Ortega as the only acceptable option. These pundits provide cover for nefarious internal and external interests who have set their sights on controlling Central America's poorest and yet resource-rich country.

The coup attempt brought the class divisions in Nicaragua into the open. Piero Coen, the richest man in Nicaragua, owner of all national Western Union operations and an agrochemical company, personally arrived on the first day of protests at the Polytechnic University in Managua, to encourage students to keep protesting, promising his continued support.

The traditional landed oligarchy of Nicaragua, politically led by the Chamorro family, publishes constant ultimatums to the government through its media outlets and finances the roadblocks that have paralyzed the country for the last eight weeks.

The Catholic Church, long allied with the oligarchs, has put its full weight behind creating and sustaining anti-government actions, including its universities, high schools, churches, bank accounts, vehicles, tweets, Sunday sermons, and a one-sided effort to mediate the [National Dialogue](#). Bishops have made [death threats](#) against the President and his family, and a priest has been filmed [supervising the torture](#) of Sandinistas. [Pope Francis](#) has called for a peace dialogue, and even [called Cardinal Leopoldo Brenes and Bishop Rolando Alvarez to a private meeting in the Vatican](#), setting off rumors that the Nicaraguan *monseñores* were being scolded for their obvious involvement in the conflict they are officially mediating. The Church remains one of the few pillars keeping the coup alive.

A common claim is Ortega has cozied up to the traditional oligarchy, but the opposite is true. This is the first government since Nicaraguan independence that does not include the oligarchy. From the 1830s through the 1990s, all Nicaraguan governments– even during the Sandinista Revolution– included people from the elite “last names,” of Chamorro, Cardenal, Belli, Pellas, Lacayo, Montealegre, Gurdíán. The government since 2007 does not, which is why these families are supporting the coup.

Ortega detractors claim his three-part dialogue including labor unions, capitalists, and the State is an alliance with big business. In fact, that process has yielded the [highest growth rate in Central America](#) and annual minimum wage increases 5-7% above inflation, improving workers’ living conditions and lifting people out of poverty. The anti-poverty [Borgen project reports](#) poverty fell by 30 percent between 2005 and 2014.

The FSLN-led government has put into place an economic model based on public investment and strengthening the safety net for the poor. The government invests in infrastructure, transit, maintains water and electricity within the public sector and moved privatized services. e.g., health care and primary education into the public sector. This has ensured a stable economic structure that favors the real economy over the speculative economy. The lion’s share of infrastructure in Nicaragua has been built in the last 11 years, something comparable to the New Deal-era in the US, including renewable electricity plants across the country.

What liberal and even leftist commentators overlook is that unlike the Lula government in Brazil, which reduced poverty through cash payouts to poor families, Nicaragua has redistributed productive capital in order to develop a self-sufficient popular economy. The FSLN model is better understood as an emphasis on the popular economy over the State or capitalist spheres.

While the private sector employs about 15% of Nicaraguan workers, the informal sector employs over 60%. The informal sector has benefitted from \$400 million in public investments, much of it coming from the ALBA alliance funds to finance micro loans for small and medium-sized agricultural enterprises. Policies to facilitate credit, equipment, training, animals, seeds and subsidized fuel further support these enterprises. The small and medium producers of Nicaragua have led the country to produce 80-90% of its food and end its dependence on IMF loans.

As such, workers and peasants– many of whom are self-employed and who accessed productive capital through the Sandinista Revolution and ensuing struggles– represent an important political subject of the stable, postwar social development of the last decade, including the hundreds of thousands of peasant farmers who have received land title and the nearly one-quarter of the national territory that has been given collective title as territory of indigenous nations. The social movements of workers, peasants, and indigenous groups were the base of popular support that brought the FSLN back into power.

Land titling and assistance to small businesses have also emphasized equality for women, resulting in [Nicaragua having the lowest level of gender inequality](#) in Latin America and ranked 12 out of 145 countries in the world, just behind Germany.

Over time, the FSLN government has incorporated this massive self-employed sector, as well as *maquiladora* workers (i.e. textile workers in foreign-owned plants located in free

trade zones created by previous neoliberal governments), into the health care and pension system, causing the financial commitments to grow which required a new formula to ensure fiscal stability. The proposed reforms to Social Security [were the trigger](#) for the private sector and student protests on April 18th. The business lobby called for the protests when Ortega proposed increasing employer contributions by 3.5% to pension and health funds, while only slightly increasing worker contributions by 0.75% and shifting 5% of pensioners' cash transfer into their health care fund. The reform also ended a loophole which allowed high-income individuals to claim a low income in order to access health benefits.

This was a [counter-proposal to the IMF proposal](#) to raise the retirement age and more than double the number of weeks that workers would need to pay into the pension fund in order to access benefits. The fact the government felt strong enough to deny the IMF and business lobby's austerity demands was a sign that the bargaining strength of private capital has declined, as [Nicaragua's impressive economic growth](#), a 38% increase in GDP from 2006-2017, has been led by small-scale producers and public spending. However, the opposition used manipulative Facebook ads presenting the reform as an austerity measure, plus fake news of a student death on April 18th, to generate protests across the country on April 19th. Immediately, the [regime change machine](#) lurched into motion.

The National Dialogue shows the class interests in conflict. The opposition's Civic Alliance for Justice and Democracy has as its key figures: José Adan Aguirre, leader of the private business lobby; Maria Nelly Rivas, director of Cargill in Nicaragua and head of the US-Nicaragua Chamber of Commerce; the private university students of the April 19th Movement; Michael Healy, manager of a Colombian sugar corporation and head of the agribusiness lobby; Juan Sebastian Chamorro, who represents the oligarchy dressed as civil society; Carlos Tunnermann, 85-year-old ex-Sandinista minister and ex-chancellor of the National University; Azalea Solis, head of a US government-funded feminist organization; and Medardo Mairena, a "peasant leader" funded by the US government, who lived 17 years in Costa Rica before being deported in 2017 for human trafficking. Tunnermann, Solis and the April 19th students are all associated with the Movement for Renovation of Sandinismo (MRS), a tiny Sandinista offshoot party that nonetheless merits special attention.

In the 1980s, many of the Sandinista Front's top-level cadre were, in fact, the children of some of the famous oligarchic families, such as the Cardenal brothers and part of the Chamorro family, in charge of the revolutionary government's ministries of Culture and Education and its media, respectively.

After FSLN's election loss in 1990, the children of the oligarchy staged an exodus from the party. Along with them, some of the most notable intellectual, military and intelligence cadre left and formed, over time, the MRS. The new party renounced socialism, blamed all of the mistakes of the Revolution on Daniel Ortega and over time took over the sphere of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in Nicaragua, including feminist, environmentalist, youth, media and human rights organizations.

Since 2007, the MRS has become increasingly close with the extreme right-wing of the US Republican Party. Since the April violence began, many if not most of the sources cited by Western media (including, disturbingly, Amy Goodman's Democracy Now!), come from

this party, which has the support of less than 2% of the Nicaraguan electorate. This allows the oligarchs to couch their violent attempt to reinstall neoliberalism in a leftist-sounding discourse of former Sandinistas critical of the Ortega government.

It is a farce to claim that workers and peasants are behind the unrest. [La Vía Campesina](#), the National Union of Farmers and Ranchers, the [Association of Rural Workers](#), the [National Workers' Front](#), the indigenous [Mayangna Nation](#) and other movements and organizations have been unequivocal in their demands for an end to the violence and their support for the Ortega government. This unrest is a full-scale regime change operation carried out by media oligarchs, a network of US government-funded NGOs, armed elements of elite landholding families and the Catholic Church, and has opened the window for drug cartels and organized crime to gain a foothold in Nicaragua...



Armed Protesters at a Roadblock near the UPOLI Universidad Politecnica, April 21, Photo: VOA

On the Violence

One of the ways in which reporting on Nicaragua has ventured farthest from the truth is calling the opposition “nonviolent.” The violence script, modeled on the 2014 and 2017 [guarimba protests in Venezuela](#), is to organize armed attacks on government buildings, entice the police to send in anti-riot squads, engage in filmed confrontations and publish edited footage online claiming that the government is being violent against nonviolent protesters.

Over 60 government buildings have been burned down, schools, hospitals, health centers attacked, 55 ambulances damaged, at least [\\$112 million](#) in infrastructure damage, small businesses have been closed, and 200,000 jobs lost causing [devastating economic impact](#) during the protests. Violence has included, in addition to thousands of injuries, 15 young people and 16 police officers killed, as well as over 200 Sandinistas kidnapped, many of them publicly tortured. Violent [opposition atrocities](#) were misreported as government

repression. While it is important to defend the right of the public to protest, regardless of its political opinions, it is disingenuous to ignore that [the opposition's strategy requires and feeds upon violence and deaths](#).

National and international news claim deaths and injuries due to "repression" [without explaining the context](#). The Molotov cocktails, mortar-launchers, pistols, and assault rifles used by opposition groups are ignored by the media, and when Sandinista sympathizers, police or passers-by are killed, they are falsely counted as victims of state repression. Explosive opposition claims like [massacres of children](#) and [murders of women](#) have been shown to be false, and the cases of torture, disappearances and extrajudicial executions by police forces [have not](#) been corroborated by [evidence](#) or due process.

While there is evidence to support the opposition claim of [sniper fire](#) killing protesters, there is no logical explanation for the State to use snipers to add to the death toll, and counter-protesters have also been victims of sniper fire, suggesting a "third party" provocateur role in the destabilizing violence. When an entire Sandinista family was burned to death in Managua, the opposition media all cited a witness who claimed that the police had set [fire to the home](#), despite the house being in a neighborhood barricaded off from police access.

The National Police of Nicaragua has been [long-recognized](#) for its model of community policing (in contrast to militarized police in most Central American countries), its relative lack of corruption, and its mostly female top brass. The coup strategy has sought to destroy public trust in the police through the egregious use of fake news, such as the many false claims of assassinations, beatings, torture, and disappearances in the week from April 17 to 23. Several young people whose photos were carried in opposition rallies as victims of police violence have [turned out to be alive](#) and well.

The police have been wholly inadequate and underprepared for armed confrontations. Attacks on several public buildings on the same night and the first major arson attacks led government workers to hold vigils with barrels of water and, often, sticks and stones, to fend off attackers. The opposition, frustrated at not achieving more police conflicts, began to build roadblocks across the country and burn the homes of Sandinistas, even shooting and burning Sandinista families in atrocious [hate crimes](#). In contrast to *La Prensa's* version of events, Nicaraguans have felt the distinct *lack* of police presence, and the loss of safety in their neighborhoods, while many were targeted by violence.

Since May, the strategy of the opposition has been to build armed roadblocks across the country, closing off transport and trapping people. The roadblocks, usually built with large paving stones, are manned by between 5 and 100 armed men with bandannas or masks. While the media reports on idealistic young people running roadblocks, the vast majority of roadblocks are [maintained by paid men](#) who come from a [background of petty crime](#). Where large areas of cities and towns are blocked off from government and police forces, drug-related activities intensify, and [drug gangs](#) now control many of the roadblocks and pay the salaries.

These roadblocks have been the centers of violence, workers who need to pass through roadblocks are often robbed, punched, insulted, and, if suspected of being Sandinistas, tied

up, stripped naked, [tortured](#), painted in blue-and-white, and sometimes killed. There are three cases of people dying in ambulances unable to pass roadblocks, and one case of a 10-year-old girl being kidnapped and raped at the roadblock in Las Maderas. When organized neighbors or the police clear roadblocks, the armed groups run away and regroup to burn buildings, kidnap or injure people in revenge. All of the victims that this violence produces are counted by the mainstream media as victims of repression, a total falsehood.

The Nicaraguan government has confronted this situation by largely keeping police off the streets to prevent encounters and accusations of repression. At the same time, rather than simply arrest violent protestors, which certainly would have given the opposition the battle deaths it craves, the government called for a [National Dialogue](#), mediated by [the Catholic Church](#), in which the opposition can bring forward any proposal for human rights and political reform. The government created a parliamentary [Truth and Peace Commission](#) and launched an independent Public Ministry query.

With the police off the streets, opposition violence intensified throughout May and June. As a result, a process of neighborhood self-defense developed. Families who have been displaced, young people who have been beaten, robbed or tortured, and veterans of the 1979 insurrection and/or the Contra War, hold vigil around the Sandinista Front headquarters in each town. In many places, they built roadblocks against opposition attacks and have been falsely labeled paramilitary forces in the media. In the towns that do not have such community-organized roadblocks, the human toll from opposition violence is much greater. The National Union of Nicaraguan Students has been particularly targeted by opposition violence. A student delegate of the National Dialogue, Leonel Morales, was kidnapped, shot in the abdomen and the face and left to die in June to sabotage the dialogue and punish him for challenging the April 19th students' right to speak on behalf of all Nicaraguan students. Morales was in the hospital for months and will always suffer from the damage to his jaw.

There have been four major opposition rallies since April directed toward mobilizing the upper-middle class Nicaraguans who live in the suburbs between Managua and Masaya. These rallies featured a who's-who of high society, including beauty queens, business owners and oligarchs, as well as university students of the April 19th Movement, the moral high-ground for the opposition.

Three months into the conflict, none of the mortal victims have been bourgeois. All have come from the popular classes of Nicaragua. Despite claims of total repression, the bourgeoisie feels perfectly safe to participate in public protests by day — although the last daytime rally ended in a chaotic attack by protesters against squatters on a property of, curiously enough, Piero Coen, Nicaragua's richest man. The nighttime armed attacks have generally been carried out by people who come from poor neighborhoods, many of whom are paid two to four times the minimum daily wage for each night of destruction.

Unfortunately, most Nicaraguan human rights organizations are funded by NED and controlled by the Movement for Sandinista Renovation. These organizations have accused the Nicaraguan government of dictatorship and genocide throughout Ortega's presidency. International human rights organizations, including [Amnesty International](#), have been

criticized for their one-sided reports, which include none of the information provided by the government or individuals who identify as Sandinistas.

The government invited the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR) of the OAS, a Washington-based entity notoriously unfriendly to leftist governments, to investigate the violent events of April and determine whether repression had occurred. The night of a controversial skirmish in the highway outside the Agrarian University in Managua ended a negotiated 48-hour truce, IACHR Director Paulo Abrao visited the site to declare [his support for the opposition](#). The IACHR [ignored the opposition's widespread violence](#) and only reported on the defensive violence of the government. Not only was it categorically [rejected by Nicaraguan Foreign Minister Denis Moncada](#) as an “insult to the dignity of the Nicaraguan people,” [a resolution approving the IACHR report](#) was supported by only ten out of 34 countries.

Meanwhile, the April 19th Movement, made up of current or former university students in favor of regime change, sent a delegation to Washington and managed to alienate much of Nicaraguan society by [grinning into the camera with far-right interventionist members](#) of the US Congress, including Rep. Ileana Ros Lehtinen, Sen. Marco Rubio and Sen. Ted Cruz. M19 leaders also cheered Vice-President Mike Pence's bellicose warnings that Nicaragua is on the short list of countries that will soon know the Trump Administration's meaning of freedom, and met with the ARENA party of El Salvador, known for its links to the death squads that murdered liberation theologian Archbishop Oscar Romero (see photo overleaf). Within Nicaragua, the critical mass of students stopped demonstrating weeks ago, the large civic protests of April and May have dwindled, and the same-old familiar faces of Nicaraguan right-wing politics are left holding the bill for massive material damage and loss of life.



Tweet

Para que nos entendamos bien. La gira de estudiantes de la Alianza Cívica de #Nicaragua es coordinada por ARENA, cuyo fundador mayor Roberto D'Aubuisson es el creador de los escuadrones de la muerte y autor intelectual del asesinato de Mons Romero y los jesuitas de la @UCA_ES

Translate Tweet



7/3/18 10:05 AM

Tweet your reply



Civic Alliance Students Meet with ARENA Party Leaders, El Salvador, June 10, Foto: El Faro

Why Nicaragua?

Ortega won his third term in 2016 with 72.4 percent of the vote with 66 percent turnout, very high compared to US elections. Not only has Nicaragua put in place an economy that recognizes the poor as producers, with remarkable results raising their standard of living in 10 years, but it also has a government that consistently rejects US imperialism, allying with Cuba, Venezuela, and Palestine, and [voices support](#) for Puerto Rican independence and a peaceful solution to the Korean crisis. Nicaragua is a member of Bolivarian Alliance of the Americas (ALBA) and the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States, a Latin American alternative to the OAS; neither include the US or Canada. It has also allied with China for a proposed canal project and Russia for security cooperation. For all of these reasons, the US wants to install a US-friendly Nicaraguan government.

More important is the example Nicaragua has set for a successful social and economic model outside the US sphere of domination. Generating over 75% of its [energy](#) from renewable sources, Nicaragua was the only country with the moral authority to oppose the Paris Climate Agreement as being [too weak](#) (it later joined the treaty one day after Trump pulled the US out, stating “we opposed the Paris agreement out of responsibility, the US opposes it out of irresponsibility”). The FMLN government of El Salvador, while less politically dominant than the Sandinista Front, has taken the example of good governance from Nicaragua, recently [prohibiting mining](#) and the privatization of water. Even Honduras, the eternal bastion of US power in Central America, showed signs of a leftward shift until the [US-supported military coup in 2009](#). Since then, there has been massive repression of social activists, a clearly [stolen 2017 election](#), and Honduras has permitted the expansion of US military bases near the Nicaraguan border.

In 2017, the US House of Representatives unanimously passed the Nicaraguan Investment Conditionality Act ([NICA Act](#)), which if passed by the Senate will force the US government to veto loans from international institutions to the Nicaraguan government. [This act did pass on Dec. 20, 2018.]

US imperialism will cripple Nicaragua’s ability to build roads, update hospitals, construct renewable energy plants, and transition from extensive livestock raising to integrated animal-forestry systems, among other consequences. It may also signify the end of many popular social programs, such as subsidized electricity, and bus fares, and free medical treatment of chronic diseases.

The US Executive Branch has used the Global Magnitsky Act to target the finances of leaders of the Electoral Supreme Court, the National Police, the city government of Managua and the ALBA corporation in Nicaragua. Police officers and public health bureaucrats have been told their US visas have been revoked. The point, of course, is not whether these officials have or have not committed acts that merit their reprimand in Nicaragua, but whether the US government should have the jurisdiction to intimidate and corner public officials of Nicaragua.

While the [sadistic violence continues](#), the strategy of the coup-mongers to force out the government has failed. The resolution of the political crisis will come through elections, and the FSLN is likely to win those elections, barring a dramatic and unlikely new offensive by the right-wing opposition.

An Upside-Down Class War

It is important to understand the nature of US and oligarch coups in this era and the role of media and NGO deception because it is repeated in multiple Latin American and other countries. We can expect a similar attack on recently elected Andrés Manuel López Obrador in Mexico if he seeks the changes he has promised.

The US has sought to dominate Nicaragua [since the mid-1800s](#). The wealthy in Nicaragua have sought the return of US-allied governance since the Sandinistas rose to power. This failing coup does not mean the end of their efforts or the end of corporate media misinformation. Knowing what is really occurring and sharing that information is the antidote to defeating them in Nicaragua and around the world.

Nicaragua is a class war turned upside down. The government has raised the living standards of the impoverished majority through wealth redistribution. Oligarchs and the United States, unable to install neoliberalism through elections, created a political crisis, highlighted by false media coverage to force Ortega to resign. The coup is failing, the truth is coming out, and should not be forgotten.

Kevin Zeese is an attorney who co-directs the US-based [Popular Resistance](#). Nils McCune is on the Technical team of IALA Mesoamerica (Agroecological Institute of Latin America in Nicaragua) and a research fellow at the University of Michigan.

* * * * *

NicaNotes July 3 to July 30



Trucks from Central America Held up at Carazo Roadblocks for More Than a Month

Carazo Truck Drivers Applaud Lifting of Roadblocks

Salvadoran truck driver José Flores was effectively kidnapped along with many others for 36 to 38 days in the municipality of Jinotepe, Carazo. (Over 200 long haul trucks from various parts of Central America were held up at roadblocks in Nicaragua.) Flores thanked the police profusely for freeing him so he can return to El Salvador and continue to work in peace. We are returning to our families and we hope that blood stops being spilled here. I don't understand why those guarding the roadblocks have forced us to stay here. Speaking to the police Flores said, "God bless you and we thank you for supporting us". He said the government did a great job freeing them from those who had them and their vehicles virtually kidnapped. (Radiolaprimerisima.com, July 8; Informe Pastran, July 3)

Last Goodbye to Historic Combatant killed by Delinquents.

Just a week earlier Roberto Castillo's son Cristofer Castillo was shot by hooded snipers on motorcycles. On July 6, Roberto himself was killed by hooded delinquents; his body was found in the Jinotepe trash dump near a roadblock. Soon after his son was murdered, he had made a video that circulated widely on Facebook. In the video he indicated that the culprits were those at the roadblocks and he begged for all the killing to stop. The Castillo-Rosales family is devastated by the loss of Roberto and Ferson. (Channel 8, July 6) See Video: <https://www.telesurtv.net/news/grupos-violentos-asesinato-fsln-nicaragua-20180705-0105.html>

Two Police Killed in Carazo

Two of the police involved in reestablishing order on July 8 in the municipalities of Jinotepe and Diriamba were killed about 6:00 am. The police were freeing citizens and international truck drivers who had been held at roadblocks for more than a month. Those shot were

Sub-Official Hilario de Jesus Ortiz Zavala and Policeman Faber Antonio Lopez Vivas. Senior Commissioner Cesar Cuadra stated that in these municipalities attackers committed crimes such as murder, torture, assault, kidnapping, arson of homes and institutions, extortion and more, causing fear and chaos in the population. (Radiolaprimerisima.com, July 8)



Sandinistas Walk for Peace and Security Photo: Jairo Cajina

<https://www.el19digital.com/el19tv/ver/titulo:12537-caminata-por-seguridad-y-paz>
<http://canal4.com.ni/index.php/discursos/42032-presidente-comandante-daniel-en-caminata-por-la-seguridad-y-la-paz-7-de-julio-del-2018> / (19 Digital, Channel 4, July 7)

Tension in the Basilica in Diriamba

Informe Pastran reported that a Catholic Church mission headed by Managua Archbishop Cardinal Leopoldo Brenes and Papal Nuncio Monsignor Waldemar Stanislaw went to Diriamba and Jinotepe on July 9, a day after the National Police removed roadblocks with a number of people wounded and killed. In Diriamba, they were met by a group of citizens who protested because the clergymen had not come to their aid when they were being held hostage in the city and subject to all types of outrages. (Informe Pastran, July 9)

Diriamba Population Greets Police with Shouts of Joy

Families, especially women, went to the streets with applause when the police began to arrive to work on reestablishing security and peace. After over a month of their town being besieged by armed attackers financed by the right. The relief and happiness of the population was enormous. Finally, they can begin to take on their daily routines with security and calm. (Channel 6, July 9)

Young Man Tortured in Diriamba Basilica for Three days

The population of Diriamba went in the church on July 9. Someone took a video and another interviewed a young man who described how he was kept and tortured there for three days because he is a Sandinista. He said the priest beat him frequently. He said protesters kept every kind of firearms in the church and snipers would shoot at Sandinistas from the church tower. Here is a photo of some of the arms found in the church. (Channel 2, July 9)

https://twitter.com/Canal2Nicaragua/status/1016442015284973568/photo/1?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw%7Ctwcamp%5Eem

Population of Diriamba Denounces Church Complicity with Terrorists.

Many members of the population of Diriamba denounced the complicity of Catholic Church priests with those who held the town and many international truck-drivers hostage for 34 days. Hundreds of family members congregated in the central park in front of the Basilica of San Sebastian. They demanded that Father Cesar Castillo turn over the church to the population because he has used it to help the protesters. They also demanded he turn over all the weapons that are in the church. The people chanted "Take out the weapons; the Father must leave; we want the church". On Sunday free circulation was reestablished; the roadblocks were taken down by the police and the people. (Voz de Sandino, July 9)

Diriamba Families Indignant about Priest's Complicity with Terrorists

Multiple videos that circulate on social networks show the Diriamba population angry at those who held the town hostage for over a month. The citizens surrounded the San Sebastian Basilica in Diriamba demanding the priests leave and for the church to be turned over to the population. People became even angrier when the Cardinal and other priests traveled to Diriamba together with opposition members including Sebastian Chamorro, Sandra Ramos and others, when during the month that the town was held hostage, they never came to check on people or show their concern. People saw that the Cardinal, priests and opposition leaders came to protect the coup supporters who took refuge in the church. Protesters hid weapons in the church that they used for criminal activities. (19 Digital, July 10)

<https://www.el19digital.com/articulos/ver/titulo:78876-indignacion-de-las-familias-ante-complicidad-de-obispos-con-los-que-promueven-el-terrorismo->

Additional Videos about Diriamba:

Diriamba citizens go into the church and find firearms.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Seue3aQ8-hM>

You can hear the level of anger and they call the priests "murderers" and call for them to get out of the church, also because they gave refuge to the terrorists.

Women Describe the Horrors they lived – Nicaragua

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=x5t7h0FRKQw>

Health supplies found that were stolen from health center

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Jz1Xh9Vb1pM>

Citizens denounce Bishop Silvio Baez for Hitting a Girl

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NMLc74XWSpE>

Police and Teacher Ambushed by “Peaceful Protest”

On Thursday, July 12, four police officers and a grade school teacher were killed in the small town of Morrito, Rio San Juan, when a “peaceful” opposition march was used as cover for a deadly assault as it passed the police station. The pictures of the dead policemen make clear they were unprepared for combat. Yet the opposition initially said that “it was the police who opened fire on the march, and some marchers, who happened to have weapons, fired back.” When this story led to questions as to why the peaceful marchers were actually armed, it was changed. Then it was alleged that it was workers from the adjoining town hall who fired on their colleagues, the police. However, a journalist for 100% Noticias TV news program was giving the true version when the station cut the signal. It turns out that one of the dead police officers was his brother. Nine police, four women and five men, and others, were kidnapped after the killings and taken fifty km north to the roadblock at San Pedro de Lovago. This roadblock and area are directed by two opposition leaders who have participated in the Dialogue, Francisca Ramirez and Medardo Mairena. Mairena was captured at the airport on July 13 trying to escape the country. He is accused of organizing the attack in Morrito, providing the weapons and vehicles. (Channel 8, Radio la Primerisima and Channel 2, others July 12) See Documentary June, 2019: Youtube, Juventud Presidente, Llaves de la Verdad, Matar y Mentir.



Four police and a teacher massacred in Morrito July 12

Kidnapped Police in Morrito are Freed

The nine police kidnapped in Morrito Thursday from the police station were freed late Friday. Six have bullet wounds but are stable. One of the women was thrown off a cattle truck and has fractures. They all were beaten. Five municipal workers were also wounded.

Those killed were Commissioner Luis Emilio Bustos Lopez, Sub-Official Major Requene, Official Evert Mairena and Fausto Tellez. The attackers arrived in a number of very nice trucks armed to the hilt. The attackers were dropped off and the vehicles taken away until the operation was over. (Radiolaprimerisima July 13)

https://nuevaya.com.ni/ofician-misa-a-policias-asesinados-en-rio-san-juan/?utm_source=browser&utm_medium=push_notification&utm_campaign=PushCrew_notification_1531607526&pushcrew_powered=1 Mass for murdered Police officers

Police Officer Kidnapped, Tortured, Killed and Burned

Agent Gabriel Vado Ruiz was kidnapped July 14 in route to a family reunion in Jinotepe, Carazo. Vado Ruiz was then taken to Monimbo Barrio in Masaya and tortured until his death Sunday morning July 15. The attackers put his body against a roadblock and lit it on fire. They then took videos and pictures and put them on Facebook. Below is a link. (Telesur, July 16)

<http://www.radiolaprimerisima.com/noticias/general/246432/asesinan-y-queman-a-oficial-de-policia/>

Thousands Participate in Reenactment of 1979 Strategic Retreat from Managua to Masaya

This year's *Repliegue* (Strategic Retreat) was done with great excitement and participation despite serious opposition violence still occurring. Most of Masaya has been freed of roadblocks, however Monimbo still has dozens of roadblocks and many gangs. This year people didn't have the trust to leave their motorcycles and vehicles parked in order to walk in to hear Daniel Ortega's speech. Near the beginning of the march in Managua people were attacked at the traffic circle near the UNAN (Nicaraguan National Autonomous University that has been held by gangs since April). Ten people were shot and one has since died. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GPDDOLARLRQ> (July 13)

Mexico Will Not Support Coups

Beginning December 1 with the installation of the new president Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador, Mexico will be ruled by the principles of non-intervention, self-determination, and peaceful solutions to conflict, according to Mexican analyst Miguel Angel Ferrer. He said that Mexico would not be involved in the affairs of Venezuela or Nicaragua nor participate in US efforts to overthrow their governments. (Informe Pastran, July 13)

Papal Nuncio Admits There Are Dead on Both Sides

In a press conference given by Cardinal Brenes and the Papal Nuncio Waldemar Stanislaw, the Nuncio said, "The dialogue has to be kept alive. There are dead on one side and the other, and this should be recognized. And we should all examine our consciences." Some observers said that the Nuncio was sent to Nicaragua by the Pope to get the other clerics in line as some are openly on the side of the opposition instead of impartially mediating the dialogue. Some priests have allowed their churches to be used by armed gangs paid by the opposition. At least four priests are now implicated in torture of police and Sandinista sympathizers. (Tu Nueva Radio Ya, Radio 580, July 14)

Authorities Arrest Twenty-Four Who Used the UNAN as Their Base

Twenty-four National University-related attackers were detained over the weekend of July 14 and 15 and have already admitted to many crimes. Hundreds of weapons were found on

them and at the National Autonomous University of Nicaragua (UNAN) which was taken over in May and from which many crimes were carried out. On July 14 a large group had left the UNAN with their high-powered weapons and were given cover in a nearby Catholic Church, Divine Mercy. With help from the priests, a caravan was organized to get the arms out of Divine Mercy and take them to the Managua Cathedral. Starting in May the police had begun to receive constant complaints of robberies and assaults from the UNAN neighborhood.

The detained included those who killed 27 yr. old Jose David Oviedo, a security guard, on May 25, on the south side of the UNAN. Other detainees included members of the Francisco Javier Hernández Morales gang, alias “Pancho Enano”, who were arrested in a white truck license #M 067185, armed with pistols and revolvers and carrying a large quantity of marijuana. They admitted to assaulting a USAID driver and stealing his vehicle, a grey Hilux, license CD0207, and two 9mm Glock pistols, which they had used to rob people. Eventually they abandoned the truck to a human rights organization. Members of this gang burned Radio Nicaragua and a number of vehicles and assaulted various security guards, stealing weapons.

Aquí, los lindos estudiantes enseñando la gran hazaña, presos deberían de estar, estos idiotas



*Masked men who burned down the UNAN Child Development Center.
July 14, 2018, photo: El !9 Digital*

On July 11 in Nindirí the police captured three men in a Mazda CZ13224. They were transporting military-style weapons from the Managua Cathedral to Monimbo. One of the three detained was Kevin Rodríguez Espinoza Gutiérrez, 21 years old, founder of the M19 movement, participant in the take-over of two universities – the UNAN and the UPOLI with Victor Cuadras and Lester Aleman. They planned criminal, destabilizing acts like burning and destroying public buildings, homes, radio stations and criminal acts against people. They were involved in burning “Tu Nueva Radio Ya” Radio station where 22 workers barely made it out alive; and they burned down the Caruna building. Four of those arrested were in a Blue Toyota Prado, license M185-381, carrying rifles, pistols, revolvers and hand-made guns. (Note: The Toyota Prado is one of the most expensive Toyotas sold in Nicaragua).

Miguel Angel Gonzalez was part of the group that killed US citizen, Sixto Henry Vero on June 2.

Edwin Antonio Altimirano is accused of being one of the killers of the two policemen in San Jose Oriental, Managua on June 11. (Tu Nueva Radio Ya and Radio la Primerisima, July 16)

Videos showing terrorists at the UNAN, their weapons, how they make their fake videos. To see the video, place the link in the youtube search bar.

Sandinista Caravan was attacked on its way to the Repliegue at the round-about Rigoberto Lopez Perez by the attackers that were from the UNAN. Ten Sandinistas were shot.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=E9pJNd0yoFA>

Here the delinquents are staging a media show. In the background audio, you can clearly hear them talking about guns and needing more weapons and magazines.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Vb72PP4Td9E>

More proof of them with weapons that same day:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GASg6UBQmhc>

Confession of one of the UNAN delinquents that was caught when he tried to go back to the UNAN:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zlwbXv9Lukk>

More proof of them heavily armed and staging the attacks:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=C-AixyWv3BE>

Here is a recap that shows even more evidence of them not only with rifles, shotguns, and handguns but also with snipers.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4HPVDZ1G4HY>

The room at the UNAN used to fabricate bombs and homemade weapons:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LAL6dMTwju8>

What was left after the terrorists burned the historic CDI “Arlen Siu”:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZgIkZXEGe-Q>

Proof that the delinquents in the UNAN were in cahoots with the Catholic Church:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uECrMpdKq4g>

Medardo Mairena and Pedro Mena Accused of Murder

Medardo Mairena and Pedro Mena were formally accused by a Managua prosecutor of murder, terrorism, organized crime, kidnapping, robbery and others. Under murder they are accused of being responsible for the killing of the four police officers and teacher in Morrito. The initial hearing is set for August 15. (Tu Nueva Radio Ya, July 17)

Monimbo, Masaya, Almost Free of Violence and Roadblocks after Two Months

For more than two months the people of the historic neighborhood of Monimbo in Masaya were held captive by hundreds of large roadblocks. But, on July 17, the Police spent the day helping the people return to peace and free circulation. The INATEC school was freed on July 18 – known as “the Day of Happiness” because Somoza left on this day in 1979. Homes, schools, the historic market, museums, the town hall, the cultural house, the museum, health offices, office of the prosecutor, the family violence courts, and the area where all of the Masaya road-making equipment and trash trucks are parked were burned and destroyed in those months, much to the horror of the population and the nation. The most recent barbarity was the torture, killing and burning of the body of Police Sub-official Gabriel Vado Ruiz on July 14 and 15.

Attackers surrounded and besieged the Masaya Police station for 45 days. The police inside defended the station from guns, bombs and mortars. Jose Abraham Martinez was killed by the terrorists June 3. The roadblocks had been installed in April and May, impeding free circulation of the people. People were charged to pass through, assaulted, kidnapped, violated, and more. The attackers took over INATEC, a national training center and used it as one of their headquarters. It was here that Vado Ruiz was tortured and killed. (19 Digital, La Voz del Sandinismo, July 17)

Sandinista Militant Killed with 26 Shots in San Jose de Bocay, Jinotega

Sandinista militant Jose Luis Centeno Rodriguez was shot 26 times and killed July 17 in San Jose de Bocay, Jinotega. People from the area denounced the terror campaign against Sandinistas. (Tu Nueva Radio Ya, July 17)

Masaya Priest Identified as Accomplice in Murder of Agent Vado Ruiz

In Masaya, San Juan Bautista Parish priest Harvin Padilla directed a terrorist gang that tortured and killed Agent Gabriel de Jesus Vado Ruiz. The messages on his phone are the proof: “I advise you that I am Father Harvin in the San Juan Church...Keep the terrorists tied up however you can because it’s good evidence for the international countries...look for how to hide these *#*# even in the bottom of a latrine...try to get them not to upload photos and videos to Facebook of the one you are burning, so there won’t be a problem...if you hear the church bells be alert.”

<https://www.el19digital.com/articulos/ver/titulo:79096-cura-es-complice-de-terroristas-que-asesinaron-a-sub-oficial> (19 Digital, July 17)

Massive Crowd Celebrates July 19, 2018





Photos: El 19 Digital

President Ortega awarded the “Order of Augusto Sandino” to Amada Pineda, one of the women of El Cua. Her son, Francisco Pineda was killed, burned and profaned in June. (El 19 Digital, July 20)

107 Detainees Freed in Masaya

On Monday, July 23, the Municipal Government and Police of Masaya invited the family members of 80 persons in custody and released them to their families. The detainees signed contracts not to be involved in any kind of violence. On July 27, the authorities freed 27 more people. “This is a sign of reconciliation we are giving,” Avellán said. “This is the greatest sign of solidarity we can give to their families and to them. Most of them were fooled and used. We have been catching the leaders fleeing to Costa Rica, leaving their underlings to take the rap – a bunch of young people – who believed in them at the beginning. But today the Nicaraguan population is totally clear in their rejection of them.” He went on to state, “We also want to say to the population that we are going to take the necessary measures with the leaders of these groups. We will apply the laws to them. They have to pay for their crimes: murders. Police and other citizens were tortured, burned and murdered. Those who burned the town hall have to pay. Those who burned homes of Sandinistas have to pay. Of all those we have been investigating, there are 23 who will be accused and go before the competent authorities; they will get a fair trial and the right to defense. This will happen here in Masaya and a similar process will happen in other municipalities.”

Commissioner Avellán was one of the police in the Masaya headquarters besieged for a month by a large group of armed protesters that made nightly mortar attacks. They constantly threatened to kill the police, who were also without food the last days before being rescued by the National Police.

Student Leader, Shot Three Times, Finally Able to Share Story

Leonel Morales is an UPOLI student, the elected leader of the UNEN, National Union of Nicaraguan Students and also a member of the National Dialogue, elected by the Public University Students. The UPOLI is a Baptist/public university where a lot of the violence took place for months.

“Since the night I was kidnapped God has put angels on my path,” referring to the doctors who saved his life. At the National Dialogue meeting Morales denounced the students who were participating with the opposition because they weren’t elected and because of the violence their group was carrying out.

On the night of June 13th Morales was kidnapped from his girlfriend’s home. “When they kidnapped me there was a truck and about twenty motorcycles full of guys. They were excited that they had Leonel from the Dialogue – “the toad” (meaning “traitor” or “spy”). They had me for a long time taking me from one roadblock to the next. They beat me along the way. They kept saying they would kill me and burn me. They put me in the back of the truck and everyone had their guns on me. That’s when they shot me in the face and I lost consciousness. Sometime later they threw me on the road and that woke me up. Once they saw I was awake they started shooting and thanks be to God, there was a canal and I threw myself in it. I played dead and they left. Time passed and I finally saw a couple and yelled to them as best I could. Then someone else came by, heard me, and with the neighbors they helped me – they called an ambulance and the police.”

Morales was in a coma when he arrived at the hospital and was put in intensive care for over a month. One shot was in his lung, another in his liver and the third totally destroyed his jaw. Because of the grave threats from the opposition his location is always kept secret. “Sincerely, I want peace. I want to be able to walk in the streets, to go on the marches for peace and justice. And now I’m well enough I can watch the news in the morning, mid-day and at 6pm. I wanted to be in the Plaza for the July 19 celebration. Here I have my FSLN flag. And just for having a certain political ideology they do this kind of thing to a person. Sincerely, it’s not right. Imagine what my life was like before this.” “And the different human rights organizations and the Inter American Commission for Human Rights – do you think they have come to see me or tried to find out what happened? Not once. I really hope other young people can see what is happening and not just be influenced by social media.” Pictures and a story in Spanish: <https://www.el19digital.com/articulos/ver/titulo:79565-leonel-morales-lider-de-la-unen-yo-quiero-que-haya-paz-> (19 Digital, July 27)

Wife of Policeman killed in Masaya Denounces Manipulation

Police Lieutenant Karla Torres Hernández’ husband was Sub Official Gabriel Vado Ruíz who was abducted July 14, tortured and killed on July 15 and then burned for hours in Monimbo, Masaya, by armed, hooded men related to the Monimbo roadblocks. The Lieutenant says she last chatted with her husband about 10am Saturday morning July 14 as he was coming home on leave. “He always traveled in civilian clothes but had a police uniform shirt in his

bag that he was going to mend”. He should have been home by 11am so she began calling around, terrified, since she knew of so many people who have been tortured by those related to the opposition who work at the barricades. Later that day someone let her know that there were pictures of him only in his undershorts, being tortured but still alive. “They were the undershorts I had just given him,” she said. On Sunday, she got the news he had been killed and his body burned as if in a satanic ritual. “They took everything out on him. Why do they have so much hate? He never carried a gun”.

The couple have a one-year-old child. They both worked in neighborhoods with at-risk youth and with youth suffering from addiction. Vado was only twenty-three years old. “La Prensa [the newspaper that has received US funding since the 80s] seems to want to make me feel worse – they get everything wrong,” she added. A July 27 La Prensa article about her husband had the picture of him dead propped up against a barricade in Monimbo. However, they put the wrong name – Kelvin Javier Rivera Lainez. And La Prensa wrote that on the 17th when the police went in to clear out the barricades, he was still alive – that he had been shot nine times and kept alive by opposition doctors. Lieutenant Torres asks La Prensa to stop lying and manipulating the horror her husband suffered and that she continues to suffer. She also asks that people stop making fun of her husband on social media.

To see pictures of Lieutenant Torres and a story in Spanish: <https://www.el19digital.com/articulos/ver/titulo:79573-manipulacion-golpista-profundiza-dolor-de-familiares-de-policia-quemado-en-masaya> (19 Digital, July 28)

<https://www.laprensa.com.ni/2018/07/26/nacionales/2453152-policia-estaba-vivo-cuando-paramilitares-ingresaron-a-masaya-aseguran-estudiantes-de-medicina> (La Prensa, July 27)

Brazilian Medical Student Killed

On July 23 at approximately 11:30 pm 29-year-old Reyneia Gabrielle Da Costa Lima Rocha, a Brazilian medical student was killed on her way home from her work at the Police Hospital. The most recent police report on July 27 says authorities have arrested 42-year-old Pierson Gutierrez for shooting and killing her with a M4 Carbine gun. (Channel 2, July 27)

The Government to Help People Who Lost Homes

The government announced this weekend they will provide help for 70 families that lost their homes to destruction and burning. They also announced that psychological help will be available around the country for all of the traumatized people who want to make use of this service. Vice President Rosario Murillo said, “People want justice and reparations for those who lost family members, and for those who were kidnapped, tortured, raped, beaten and those who lost their homes and their means of work.” (Channel 6, July 28)

Nicaraguans March in Managua to Demand Justice

Thousands of Nicaraguans marched on July 28 to demand justice and reparations for the victims of coup terrorism and human rights for all. This is the third similar march in Managua in the last two weeks. There have also been marches for justice for the victims in many of the municipalities. The majority of participants in the Managua march were under

thirty and the day included many cultural activities. The march culminated with a large musical concert. (Canal 4, July 28)

Prospects for an Expanded Dialogue

President Daniel Ortega has asked UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres for the UN to play a role in mediating an expanded national dialogue. He has also approached the Vatican and the European Union. Guterres and Germany's foreign minister have both expressed willingness to help Nicaragua find a peaceful resolution in the wake of the failed coup of the last three months. The Nicaraguan business sector has approved of involving the international bodies in the dialogue. The Nicaraguan Liberal parties, which weren't included in the round of dialogue, are demanding a seat at the table in the new round. Details remain to be worked out. (Informe Pastran, July 30)

Trump Condemns Nicaraguan Government

A statement on July 30 from US President Donald Trump reads: "The United States strongly condemns the ongoing violence in Nicaragua and human rights abuses committed by the Ortega regime in response to protests." The Trump administration called for "free, fair, and transparent elections" in Nicaragua and said it would revoke or restrict visas for some Nicaraguan officials and announced an additional \$1.5 million in aid to "continue support for freedom and democracy in Nicaragua, providing a critical lifeline for civil society, human rights organizations, and independent media currently under threat from the Ortega regime." [Note: The \$1.5 million simply adds to the millions given to non-governmental organizations and the media who are behind the coup, including human rights organizations (one of which was founded in the 80s to defend the 'contras'), by the National Endowment for Democracy, one of the US institutions that have fomented the coup.] (The Hill, Washington DC, July 30)

Health Personnel Fired for Coup Activity

Sixteen doctors say they are being accused of financing coup activities. They told this to CENIDH (Nicaraguan Center for Human Rights) in Esteli. The doctors work at the government hospitals in La Trinidad and Esteli. On Saturday health personal were fired in Leon and Jinotepe. (Note: The dismissed doctors abandoned their hospital posts and served in ad hoc opposition medical posts to avoid any record being kept of peoples' injuries. This facilitated opposition lies against the government about "victims of live rounds". In Leon, the doctors wouldn't let the Minister of Health into the main hospital. The worst infraction is that some of the doctors working in government hospitals told the press they were ordered not to care for protesters, which has been proven to be a lie.)] (El Nuevo Diario, July 30)

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The Case against Daniel Ortega

NicaNotes Blog, July 25, 2018, by Chuck Kaufman

<https://afgi.org/the-case-against-daniel-ortega>

The Nicaragua Network/Alliance for Global Justice and I have recently been called Orteguistas (Ortega supporters). We used to be called Danielistas before it became necessary to the narrative to demonize him completely by denying him the practice in some parts of Latin America of calling those you respect, like Fidel and Che, by their first names. In case you are not clear, calling someone an Orteguista is an insult on par with calling someone a Stalinist or a Trot. It doesn't really carry any meaning anymore; it is just used as a pejorative to discredit the person or organization it is aimed at.

I'm sure the Ortega government would be surprised of that characterization of us. We have not had even informal relations with Ortega or the FSLN since the mid-90s when a report we sent to the National Directorate following the Zoilamerica charges was taken as interfering in Nicaragua's affairs and we were cut off from party structures.

Not having ties to the FSLN did not relieve us of the obligation to expose and oppose our government's intervention in Nicaragua's sovereign affairs. We continue to support the Sandinista Revolution and its institutions, but our main focus is to change our own government, a charge given to us by many Nicaraguans, high and low, in the 1980s.

But, perhaps because we didn't have direct contact with the FSLN or the government, since the FSLN's return to power with the 2006 election of Daniel Ortega as president, we haven't really countered the disinformation campaign against Daniel, his wife, and his government. We mistakenly assumed that the demonstrably improving standard of living, the reduction in poverty, infant and maternal mortality, the lack of Nicaraguans coming north to the US border, the return of economic and political rights stripped from the people during 17 years of neoliberal US vassal governments, would outshine the lies.

Partially because of our failure to counter the lies before they took on the weight of truth, opposition forces in Nicaragua and their US overlords mistakenly thought they could drive out the democratically elected government. As a result, over 200 people are dead. The coup has failed thanks to the support of the majority of the Nicaraguan people for peace, but half a billion dollars in damage has been done and the peace is incomplete, like Venezuela's, without the resolution, accountability, and truth-telling needed for true reconciliation.

The case against Daniel Ortega

First and foremost, we all know that Daniel is a dictator, right? We know it because corporate and progressive press alike can't say his name without the modifier, dictator. So what are the criteria to be a dictator? When I googled "dictator definition" the top one was pretty clear: "a ruler with total power over a country, typically one who has obtained power by force."

Have we forgotten that after losing the highly unequal 1990 election, Daniel Ortega was the first Head of State in Nicaraguan history to peacefully pass the sash of office to a successor of another party? That election was free, but hardly fair. The US spent more per

voter in support of its candidate, Violeta Chamorro, than Bush and Dukakis combined spent per capita in the 1988 US presidential election.

Fraud denied the FSLN a return to office in 1996 so it wasn't until 2006 that Nicaraguan voters, tired of structural adjustment, power outages, and a moribund economy, returned the FSLN to the presidency headed by Daniel Ortega. He won by the slimmest plurality of 38% against a divided opposition. He won reelection in 2011 with 63% of the vote, and in 2016 by 72.5%. The Organization of American States officially accompanied the vote. They made recommendations for some electoral reforms which the government agreed to, but said that the outcome reflected the legitimate will of the people. Dictators don't win fair elections by growing margins.

Now some people argue that the 2011 and 2016 elections were unconstitutional. Granted the 1987 political constitution contained a one-term limit for executive offices. Ortega challenged the prohibition of re-election and the Supreme Court threw out term limits, just the same as the Costa Rican Supreme Court did when Oscar Arias made a similar appeal a number of years earlier. And, of course, in Honduras, after overthrowing President Manuel Zelaya after he merely proposed doing away with term limits for future presidents, Juan Orlando Hernandez did not even ask for a Supreme Court ruling. The Nicaraguan opposition and the US State Department did not contest the results in either Costa Rica or Honduras.

So, failing to meet any of the criteria of the charge of dictatorship, we must find Daniel Ortega not guilty on that count.

The second charge of the indictment is that Ortega is forming a family dynasty like the Somoza dictatorship. To be a dynasty there is at least a minimum requirement of succession of office by another family member. I don't know what is in Daniel's heart and mind, he might very well dream of passing on the presidency to his wife or one of his children, but it hasn't happened yet, and the only way it could happen would be with the votes of a majority of Nicaraguans in a free and fair election. In the US, the Bush family can rightly be called a dynasty. They have Sen. Prescott Bush who was the father of President George H. W. Bush who was the father of George W. Bush. That dynasty hopefully fizzled out with the failure of George W's brother Jeb in 2016. The Clintons were a contender for dynasty, but Hillary Clinton's electoral failure in 2016 destroyed that dream.

So, failing to meet any of the criteria of dynasty, we must find Daniel Ortega not guilty.

The next charge in the indictment is corruption. Do you remember when they used to say that Fidel Castro was the richest man in the world? They made that claim by assigning the value of all Cuba's state-owned property and resources as Fidel's personal wealth. Well that's how they come up with the claim that Daniel is enriching his family while in office. I realized how this argument was being spun in 2008 when the Sandinista Renovation Movement leadership attempted to convince a delegation I was leading that the Ortega government has spent zero cordobas on poverty alleviation. They defended that insultingly obvious lie by assigning all of the Venezuela oil aid, which was providing the funds for Zero Hunger, Zero Usury, school lunches, peasant agriculture and small business loans, to Ortega's personal balance sheet!

The World Bank, the IMF, the EU countries have all singled out the government of Nicaragua for its effective use of international loans and grants. That means the loans and grants were spent for the purposes they were given, not siphoned off into the pockets of Ortega and his supporters like happens in so many countries. You can't fulfill the UN Millennium Goals to cut poverty in half, you can't grow the economy by 5% a year without significantly increasing income disparities if you are pocketing international aid, and you can't grow tourism without displacing small and medium businesses, not to mention residents, if you are pocketing international aid.

The one sub-charge of corruption that might hold water would be that of nepotism, the favoring of his children for jobs that he controls. That is a fairly minor crime and one that is common almost everywhere in the world. I don't know whether it is a fair accusation.

So, failing to meet any of the criteria of the major charge of corruption, we must find Daniel Ortega not guilty. On the minor charge of nepotism, we have a hung jury.

The fourth charge in the indictment is that he controls all the institutions of government. Well, so does Trump. In addition to the executive, legislative, and judicial branch that we are familiar with, Nicaragua has a fourth independent branch, the Supreme Electoral Council, which runs elections. This is a common branch of government in Latin America. The way magistrates are chosen for the Electoral Council and the Supreme Court is that the president nominates them and the National Assembly, the legislature, elects them. Other parties can and do put forward their own slates of magistrates. During Daniel's 2007-2011 term, the FSLN had the largest caucus in the National Assembly, but not a majority. Magistrates and Justices were selected by compromise and included supporters of multiple parties. Voters gave the FSLN a majority in the legislature in the elections of 2011 and 2016. That's how bourgeois democracy works. The parties that get the most votes hold the most power.

So, failing to prove that a crime was committed, the charge of controlling all public institutions is dismissed.

The final major count in the indictment is that following peaceful demonstrations by students on April 18, 2018, against reforms to the social security law intended to restore the fund to solvency, Ortega ordered the National Police to fire live ammunition at peaceful protestors. On April 18, a student was allegedly killed (who later turned up alive), causing a series of marches, riots, paralysis of the country from hundreds of roadblocks, over 200 deaths including protestors, police, and Sandinista supporters, and the loss of economic activity and governability for three long months.

This is the most serious of the charges. No one explains why a police force that in 39 years had not repressed the Nicaraguan people would suddenly go berserk. International reporting and reports from the human rights community, both Nicaraguan and international, have been one-sided and ignore evidence that does not fit the narrative of the violence being one-way directed by the government against the "peaceful" "student" opposition.

The only way the truth will ever be known and guilty parties held accountable, is if the violence ends through dialogue and a fully independent, internationally-funded investigation and truth commission takes place. No verdict is possible until that happens.

Having disposed of the major charges against President Ortega and finding nothing that justifies an extra-constitutional removal from office that would throw the country into a Libya-like chaos, I personally, and the Nicaragua Network/Alliance for Global Justice will continue to support the legitimacy and the platform of the Sandinista Front for National Liberation and its leader President Daniel Ortega. If that makes us Orteguistas, well then we will wear that label with pride even though it is inaccurate.

But, before I end this blog, I want to deal with three charges brought by people who consider themselves Left of the Sandinistas.

The first is that the Ortega government is a neoliberal government. That is true to the extent that neoliberalism is the dominant economic model that even social democratic governments must bow to in order to survive. But, the Ortega government is not slavishly devoted to neoliberalism like its US-backed succors. It told the IMF to go to hell and made them like it when its poverty alleviation and targeted economic subsidies worked.

That Nicaragua, the second poorest country in the hemisphere, has any leverage at all with the IMF, the enforcer of neoliberalism, is a tribute to Ortega's effectiveness as a national leader. But due to Nicaragua's size and small economy, his leeway in independently deciding economic policy is strictly limited. The Central American Free Trade Agreement (CAFTA-DR) is a good example. Free trade agreements are the epitome of neoliberalism. Former US Trade Representative Robert Zoellick passed on the message to Ortega in advance of the 2006 election that as long as he sticks with CAFTA, the US doesn't care who is president. Let's work for a day when the US doesn't have the power to tell another country's president what to do rather than criticize Ortega for taking an offer he couldn't refuse.

Another charge from the Left is that Ortega kowtows to the US by cooperating with the Drug War and allowing US troops on Nicaragua's national territory. I would not use the word kowtow, but the charge has some truth. Daniel is personally extremely opposed to all drug use. Even without the US militarized Drug War he would oppose the decriminalization and legalization of any drug including marijuana. Besides, the Nicaraguan Army wants the little toys it gets from the Pentagon for cooperating with the US Drug War. Daniel also does not want a return of the Contra War. Even in the 80's he had a propensity to make compromises on the belief that the US would play fair. It never has. On the positive side, unless they manage to do so through the present turmoil, the international drug cartels have not gained a foothold in Nicaragua and Nicaragua does not suffer the social problems and violence of its northern neighbors.

And finally, there is the charge that Ortega criminalized abortion. That is not a factual statement, but it might be true to say he didn't stop the criminalization of abortion. Abortion has always been criminalized in Nicaragua, but the Liberal Party President Jose Santos Zelaya who was president from 1893-1909 when he was overthrown by the US, adopted an exception to save the life or health of the mother. In 2006, in the final year of the Bolaños administration, the Catholic hierarchy and evangelical protestant leadership created a campaign to completely criminalize abortion. It became an election issue, of course.

In order to neutralize the Catholic bishops who had openly campaigned against him in previous elections, Ortega told the legislators in the Sandinista caucus that he was not imposing party discipline for the vote and they should vote their conscience. Some voted no on criminalization, the majority abstained, but enough voted with the right-wing legislators to pass the bill. What Ortega's detractors leave out is that under his government not a single medical official or woman has been prosecuted under the law. Compare that with El Salvador where women who have had natural miscarriages have received long prison sentences, and I think we have to find Ortega not guilty on that charge too.

I think it is an indictment of us on the Left in the US that so many of us are willing to accept the groundless charges against Ortega and his government because we have a deep-seated bias against government period. It is a small step from believing unconsciously that all government is bad to believing false negative charges against any particular government. What I find completely distressing is those on the Left who are willing to throw away all the advances of the Sandinista Revolution with support for a coup that will only benefit the Nicaraguan oligarchy and US goal to restore hegemony over Latin America. I am very disappointed, although I am also encouraged that as we've begun to fight back against the disinformation, many more people are coming forward in support.

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“We are seduced by the fact that the children eat and go to school.”

NicaNotes Blog, August 2, 2018, by Katherine Hoyt

<https://afgj.org/NicaNotes-we-are-seduced-by-the-fact-that-the-children-eat-and-go-to-school>

“We are seduced by the fact that the children eat and go to school.”

– Orlando Nuñez Soto speaking about Cuba

The phrase that has been going through my head for the last few weeks is something that Orlando Núñez Soto said a number of years ago with relation to Cuba: “We are seduced by the fact that the children eat and go to school.” It can also be applied to Nicaragua. I am seeing that, on the issue of the violence in Nicaragua, people on the left, be they Nicaraguans or concerned foreigners, break down into two groups. The first group is composed of those for whom free education and health care, land titles, dependable electricity, food and transportation subsidies, expanding potable water and sanitation, renewable energy, rising minimum wages, farm-to-market roads, low crime, high levels of GDP growth, declining Gini coefficient, declining poverty rates, declining infant and maternal mortality rates, etc., are enough to allow them to close their eyes to certain adjustments in election results and other questionable partisan political and governmental activities. And those achievements now make it difficult for those same people to believe (in spite of some shocking videos) that the police would have changed from one day to the next, from community policing to working hand in glove with blue shirted, black hooded goons. (I count myself among that number.)

In the second group are those who find that material improvements are not enough for them or they are not particularly interested in them. They want an open political system with democratically run political parties, term limits, an end to closed-door decision-making, clientelism and nepotism, and much more, including removal from office of men who have abused women and girls. Some have been trained in liberal democratic forms by non-governmental organizations financed by the United States and European countries. They were appalled by the police reaction to demonstrators at the beginning of this uprising, believe that the authorities are responsible for almost all the subsequent deaths and feel that this reveals the true character of the FSLN government.

But, let’s take a look at the political uprisings of the last few years especially those of the so-called “Arab Spring,” which were similar to the events in Nicaragua in that they were demands for liberal democratic reforms. We see that none of them (with the possible exception of Tunisia) experienced results, after the head of state was forced out of office, that improved the lives of citizens. In Nicaragua, the political parties are notoriously ineffective and have not been visibly involved in the recent events. The groups and individuals that have been involved have no joint program or any program at all and seem to incoherently span the political spectrum from right to left. And some have carried out brutal acts of violence that, much as others among them liken themselves to the Sandinistas of the 1970s, the FSLN of that period would never have committed. (I know; I lived in Nicaragua for the last eleven years of the Somoza period.) Does some of this brutality

indicate that organized crime and drug traffickers have gotten involved on one side or the other? Or on both?

And where will this go from here? The uprising has been put down and it remains to be seen if the various bodies, national and international, assigned to investigate the over 250 deaths will complete their missions and if the culpable will be brought to justice. The dialogue mediated by the Catholic Church has been on again, off again (it is now off) but may result in something good. The government and the Organization of American States say they have been working steadily on the electoral reforms that were agreed upon months before the uprising began. These reforms are with an eye toward the presidential elections of 2021 while the opposition continues to demand that those elections be moved up to 2019.

The economic damage has been enormous. The government has announced that highway and other construction projects will move forward and will be a boost to getting the economy back on its feet. However, the government was already feeling the crunch from the economic problems in Venezuela. As one example, Nicaragua's cattle ranchers had come to rely on Venezuela's large purchases of beef. That has dropped down to almost nothing. Big agriculture and big business, both of which were in coalition with the Ortega government and benefitted from both ALBA and CAFTA, now appear to be breaking away. The government is turning to the medium, small and micro (MIPYME) sector which forms 40% of the economy (and is a more natural ally) for support. Because Nicaragua has such a high rating for completion of projects from the World Bank, the Inter-American Development Bank and other international financial institutions, loans from these agencies will probably continue but some bi-lateral aid will likely be cut. It would be a moral travesty for the United States Congress to pass the so-called Nica Act, which would use the US vote in the financial institutions to try to stop loans to Nicaragua, or to approve the new proposal for sanctions by Senator Melendez.

But, on the personal, family, and neighborhood level, Nicaragua has been ripped apart by this crisis. Both sides apparently have lists of people they want to harm or even kill. Whether Nicaraguan society can knit itself back together again will depend on the actions of the President, the investigative commissions, and the Catholic Church and other religious bodies that the people look to for moral guidance. We have to wish them well.

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NicaNotes August 8 to September 11, 2018

SICA Willing to Help Mediate the National Dialogue

During the commemoration of the 31st anniversary of the signing of the Esquipulus II accords, Vinicio Cerezo, former president of Guatemala and current Secretary General of the System of Central American Integration (SICA), said that this regional organization is willing to accompany the process of national dialogue in Nicaragua. The Nicaraguan government had proposed SICA as well as the United Nations as mediators and guarantors, in a new phase of the dialogue. Most Nicaraguan political parties also want to participate. (Informe Pastran Aug. 8)

IMF Representative Believes Nicaragua Can Return to Growth

The Representative of Nicaragua to the IMF, Manuel Coronel Novoa, told Informe Pastran that after a decade of firm macroeconomic stability and maintaining a position as one of the fastest growing economies in Latin America (together with Panama and the Dominican Republic), Nicaragua's economy has, since April, confronted a political shock which puts its impressive record of social achievements at risk. Coronel Novoa stated that in the last decade Nicaragua's gross national product doubled and direct foreign investment quadrupled. Real growth in GDP reached an average of 4.8 annually. Before the shock, despite receiving a recommendation to reduce exonerations and exemptions, the fiscal position of the government was enviable. Since the shock the consequent fall in tax revenue has complicated the fiscal panorama. The country needs to find a financial bridge to maintain its social programs, its public investment and to restart the economy. (Informe Pastran Aug. 9)

Attackers Kill Son of Famous Sandinistas in Matagalpa August 11th. During an opposition march in Matagalpa Lenin Mendiola was shot near the march, which took place in the afternoon. Mendiola, a Sandinista, is the son of Benigna Mendiola and Bernardino Diaz Ochoa, historic peasant and union leaders, both jailed and tortured by the Somoza National Guard. Benigna was also a National Assembly Deputy. The song "Venancia" by Carlos Mejia Godoy was about her. Benigna and other family members demand justice for Lenin. The march of 200 opposition members began at the Matagalpa Cathedral where Bishop Rolando Alvarez, who has worked closely encouraging the opposition, presides. Police investigators said "The gunshots were begun by terrorists in the march at the time it was passing City Hall; Mendiola was shot in the back near this time and died as he was being transferred to the hospital.

The sister of Lenin Mendiola said, "The opposition is saying that he was participating in the march. Don't be disrespectful, don't be irresponsible. We are Sandinistas yesterday, today and forever. Even though it hurts terribly and we could say 'an eye for an eye, a family member for a family member,' we have made the message of peace and love of the Sandinista Front and of Comandante Ortega our own. And let the Sandinista leadership guide us at this time. That's how we feel. Even though we are torn up we continue preaching 'no more violence, no more dead'. There is no justification for what they have done. When the Sandinistas march, we don't have one single death. When the right - the coup-makers march - well, there are the results - there is my brother, dead." Lenin's mother, Benigna Mendiola, says that her heart breaks for the other mothers like Amada Pineda whose son was killed and burned in Managua. "Our sons are about the same age".

Doris Tijerino [Sandinista fighter from an early age, Chief of Police, National Assembly Deputy]: “The actions of the Sandinistas have all been to promote peace and reconciliation, and defense of citizen rights. Those things don’t deserve the response of murder. It was murder. It wasn’t just by chance; it was directed at him. It was planned. The march was just a pretext.” Four suspects were captured and are being processed. At least one tested positive for gunshot residues. All four were part of the opposition march. What is known is that the four began shooting when the march was in front of the Town Hall. Then they went south, still shooting, where they shot Mendiola who was on a motorcycle waiting for his wife in front of a home. The detailed investigation included interviews of many who were watching the march as well as videos. (Police Press Report Aug. 11, La Nueva Radio Ya Aug. 11, 19 Digital Aug. 12, Chanel 8, Aug. 13, Radiolaprimerisima Aug.12; <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mtf3rVHGVv8>)

Thousands Walk for Peace with Justice

With the reestablishment of peace and normality in Nicaragua, people are demanding justice for the victims of the violence since April. This weekend thousands of people walked all over the country to support the families who have lost a member or had someone tortured, or had their home or business burned. In Managua, marchers specifically asked for justice and retribution for the 198 victims of terrorist violence since April which include Lenin Mendiola, gunned down in an opposition march in Matagalpa on Saturday. See photos: <http://www.lavozdelsandinismo.com/nicaragua/2018-08-12/justicia-para-las-victimas-del-terrorismo-es-la-exigencia-en-toda-nicaragua/> (La Voz del Sandinismo Aug. 12)

Big Business Wants a Political Agreement

President of COSEP Jose Adan Aguirre stated that what is needed to bring the economy back is a political agreement that includes early elections. “Our economic crisis is due to our political crisis.” He added that different kinds of pressure are needed to get the government back to dialogue: pressure from governments, international organizations and pressure from the people. “We’re talking about an economy that is suffering a tsunami blow. We are suffering a humanitarian crisis that includes the dead, unemployment of 200,000 positions [over half the unemployed were fired by big companies], and migration”. (Informe Pastran, Aug. 13)

Budget Cuts Will Not Affect Fundamental Programs

During his speech celebrating the 38th anniversary of the Naval Force, President Daniel Ortega said that the National Assembly will discuss budget cuts of US\$235.2 million for the rest of 2018 due to an income drop of 9.2%. He stated that the General Budget reform will not affect fundamental programs or the ability of institutions to work and provide services. From 2007 to 2017 every budget reform meant more money for the institutions. “This is the first time, as a result of the terrorist coup that attempted to destroy the economy to overthrow the government, that there will be a cut in spending.” He went on to say, “Until April 18 our economy was recognized and admired internationally. And especially admired since we are a country with few resources, with a low level of income and yet we could achieve so much in favor of our families in health, in education, in the struggle against poverty; tourism was developing very well; investments were increasing; the country was growing.” The attempted coup provoked loss of life, that’s the most painful, the most tragic

thing, because lives cannot be recuperated, he noted. (Radio la Primerisima, Aug. 13, El Nuevo Diario Aug. 14)

Initial Hearing for Medardo Mairena in Managua

The initial court hearing before Judge Henry Morales began against Medardo Mairena Sequeira, Pedro Joaquín Mena and Silvio Saúl Pineda Bonilla accused of various crimes committed against the State of Nicaragua. The Public Prosecutor's Office accuses them of organized crime, kidnapping, aggravated robbery, obstruction of public services, injuries and damages against individuals and the Nicaraguan State. Mairena is also accused of planning and guiding the massacre of four National Police agents and a school teacher in the municipality of Morrito, Rio San Juan, on July 12. (Channel 8, Aug. 15)

Attacks on Public Water Wells in Managua by Protesters Investigated

On August 15 near the end of a Civic Alliance opposition march, armed protesters attacked public water wells of ENACAL, the National Water Company, located near the La Virgin traffic circle. The police report states that a group of people who participated in the march attacked the wells with firearms and mortars threatening the lives of the security guards and the well-being of families in the community. Protestors demanded release of all those detained for violent acts during the recent coup attempt as well as a resumption of the national dialogue moderated by the Catholic Bishops Conference. (Radio La Primerisima, Aug. 15; Informe Pastran, Aug. 15)

State Department Has Not Changed Travel Advisory

Despite stability returning to Nicaragua with almost no coup-related violence in the last three weeks, the US State Department continues to advise US citizens to reconsider travel to Nicaragua and asserts there is a great deal of crime and civil unrest. For example, the advisory talks about roadblocks but there have been no roadblocks since about July 20th. [This writer personally believes they know very well that peace has returned, but as part of the coup effort they do not want tourism to return to Nicaragua. Nicaragua is peaceful and stable and wants tourists to return.] (August 15, 2018)

Tourism Businesses Ask Foreign Government to Lift Travel Alerts

Nicaragua's small and medium tourism businesses issued a call for foreign governments to lift travel alerts that they may have issued advising their citizens to avoid travel to Nicaragua. The statement said that "Based on the fact that security and peaceful daily life are being restored in our country, we, the businesses and investors in the tourism sector urge the elimination of the travel alerts." (Informe Pastran, Aug. 16)

Citizen Initiative Demands Laws Be Applied

On August 17 citizens all over the country began collecting thousands of signatures to demand the Supreme Court apply the full force of the law to those captured and involved in violent actions during the failed coup attempt. The title of the initiative is: *They should pay for their crimes*. This is another action demanding justice and reparations for the victims of terrorist crimes. (Channel 2, Channel 8, Radio Ya, Aug. 17)

Parliamentary Group Backs Nicaragua against Foreign Interference

The Left Parliamentary Group (GPI) of the Central American Parliament (PARLACEN) issued a declaration on August 16 in Guatemala in which it reaffirms support for the Government of Reconciliation of Nicaragua and for its just position rejecting foreign

interference in its internal affairs. PARLACEN is the legislative arm of the System of Central American Integration (SICA), and part of its mission is to contribute to strengthening community and international rights, making it clear that any interference in the affairs of a country or group of countries is disrespectful of international rights. (Radio Ya, Aug. 17)

Nicaraguans Continue Demanding Justice

On August 18th, thousands of people walked to demand justice and reparations for all the 198 dead, victims of terrorism as well as for people tortured and humiliated and for those whose homes, businesses or vehicles were destroyed and burned. Nicaraguans have come out every weekend by the thousands for over a month all over the nation.

See photos: <https://www.el19digital.com/articulos/ver/titulo:80322-paz-y-justicia-demandan-miles-de-nicaraguenses-en-managua>

<https://nuevaya.com.ni/miles-de-nicaraguenses-participan-en-caminata-exigiendo-justicia-por-victimas-del-terrorismo-golpista/>

<http://www.lavozdelsandinismo.com/nicaragua/2018-08-18/nicaraguenses-claman-justicia-para-las-victimas-del-terrorismo/> (El 19 Digital, La Voz del Sandinismo, Aug. 18)

Home of Sandinistas Burned in Mulukuku, RACN

In the early morning hours of August 20 in the community Pueblo Nuevo Sislao, 40 km northeast of Mulukuku, part of the North Caribbean Autonomous Region, a heavily armed group burned down the home of Sandinista leaders. The family was able to flee, according to Rodolfo Alvarado. (Radio La Primerisima, Aug. 20)

Accused Terrorists on Trial for Crimes in Masaya

Christian Rodriquez Fajardo and his wife Maria Adilia Peralta are charged with terrorism, organized crime, kidnapping, murder, profaning of cadavers, financing of terrorism, burning of government buildings and atrocious crimes against government workers. According to investigations they began receiving money from organizations in Miami in April. The prosecutor stated that they were the ones supporting the people at the roadblocks in Masaya, its municipalities, and in Granada. Their right-hand person, from Monimbo, known as Chilo, is on the run. He was in charge of contracting the roadblock defenders. One of their many victims was police officer Rodrigo Alfredo Barrio Flores. Barrio was stopped at a roadblock and on finding something in his billfold attackers brutally tortured and left him for dead, dumping his body in the weeds. Another victim was police official Gabriel de Jesus Vado Ruiz, killed on July 14 (Channel 8, 8/24/18)

<https://www.tn8.tv/sucesos/456060-terroristas-juicio-crimenes-masaya/>

Nicaraguans Again Walk for Justice

On August 25, more than a hundred thousand Nicaraguans walked demanding justice and reparations for the victims of terrorism. They were also commemorating the 38th anniversary of the famous Literacy Campaign and the 39th anniversary of the founding of the Sandinista Youth. Walking all through Managua to arrive downtown on the Simon Bolivar Avenue, they demanded the recognition of the human rights of all Nicaraguans. Famous literacy teacher Orlando Pineda pointed out that the first mandate of the revolution, given to the youth, was to erase illiteracy. He said Nicaragua inherited a 54% illiteracy rate from Somoza.

See photos: <https://nuevaya.com.ni/nicaragua-protagoniza-inmensa-caminata-pidiendo-justicia-para-las-victimas-del-terrorismo-golpista-2/> <https://www.el19digital.com/> (Nueva Radio Ya, 8/25/18)

Analyst Says Nicaragua's Image Internationally Manipulated to Create Bias

Security expert Francisco Javier Bautista stated that at the international level Nicaragua's image has been manipulated to create prejudice against Nicaragua. Bautista [who was second in command of the National Police until 2005] says that in the last four to five weeks he has observed an accelerated return to normalcy in businesses, in transport, and in the general economic and social activity of the population. The damage done from April to July is, in the first place, the human and moral damage, which he said is irreversible. Also, people were accustomed to being proud of Nicaragua's levels of peace, stability, security, tourism and growth and suddenly this all fell apart. The second important type of damage was the material and economic: Some experts estimate as many as 100,000 jobs were lost or about 8% of formal employment. The third type of damage was to Nicaragua's image. In the international media, there was a great deal of manipulation and bias against Nicaragua. The actions of the OAS Secretary and others could be counterproductive if they take biased positions towards without looking for consensus and equilibrium. (Radio La Primerisima, 8/25/18)

Foreign Minister Moncada Meets with UN Secretary General

Nicaraguan Foreign Minister Denis Moncada addressed the crisis in the country today with UN Secretary General António Guterres who reiterated the need to achieve a "politically inclusive" solution that "leaves no one behind." The meeting between Guterres and Moncada was the second in just over a month. The meeting, held on July 19, was at the United Nations headquarters. No restoration of dialogue is foreseen, nor is it known what role the UN will play. "When we have something to announce, we will announce it," said Guterres' spokesman, Stéphane Dujarric. Foreign Minister Moncada said that his meeting with Guterres was "very good, an excellent meeting." (Informe Pastran 8/27/18)

Two Men Found Guilty of Murder

Brandon Christopher Lovo Teyler and Glenn Abraham Slate were found guilty of the murder of journalist Ángel Gahona and for grave injuries to police official Carlos Anselmo Rodríguez in Bluefields on April 21 near the Town Hall. Ernesto Rodríguez, Sixth Judge of the Criminal Trial District, considered that the evidence presented together with expert and documentary witnesses, were conclusive to determine the guilt of the accused. The trial consisted of eight public sessions. The prosecutor called seventeen witnesses. Slate said that he was trying to shoot Gahona, not the policeman. This session lasted 13 hours. The prosecution requested the application of the maximum sentence established by law (30 years) for the crimes of murder, attempted murder, illegal possession of arms and ammunition, exposure of people and abandonment of persons. Sentencing will happen on August 30. Assistant prosecutor Inés Miranda Mercado expressed her satisfaction at being able to get justice for the journalist Ángel Eduardo Gahona. (Channel 8, Channel 2, 8/27/18; see June 19 Documentary: *Angel Gahona's Murder* <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SfBiqo0oCxU&t=2s>).

Leader of Violent Acts in Masaya gave Public Testimony on August 27 and asked Forgiveness

The brother of Christian Rodriguez Fajardo, Santiago Adrian Fajardo Baldizon, arrested August 23, gave public testimony on August 27 in which he recognized his brother as the leader and person who received money for the criminal activities in Masaya. Santiago Fajardo is accused of terrorism, kidnapping and organized crime, and is considered to be one of the leaders of the violent groups. Santiago asked for forgiveness from the population and from President Ortega and Vice President Murillo. (Police Video, 8/27/18)

Four in Managua Charged in Coup Crimes

As part of the National Police investigations into serious crimes committed during the failed coup since April 18, police spokespeople announced last week four arrests in Managua. The detainees were charged with attempted murder, illegal possession of arms and ammunition, aggravated robbery, and destruction of public and private property. "Two shotguns, 23 AK rifle cartridges and three mortar launchers were seized during the detention of the terrorist group," the police announced. Two people were arrested in Chontales Department last Sept. 7. "The arrested criminals were involved in murders, kidnappings, robberies, erecting of barricades and destruction of public and private property. Our Institution reiterates its firm commitment to continue the investigation to arrest and bring to justice those who endanger the safety and wellbeing of Nicaraguan families," Deputy Director of the Judicial Investigative Department of the National Police Farley Roa stated. He also announced the arrest of four people in Leon and Chontales Departments. "Those arrested were involved in kidnappings, robberies, erecting of barricades and destruction of public and private property. The detainees were remitted to competent authorities to be investigated and face justice for the crimes they committed," Commissioner Roa said. (Nicaragua News, Sept. 7, 10, 12)



Protesters attacked the Police, stole the truck, then burned it. Sunday, Sept. 8

National March for Justice and Life

President Daniel Ortega called for peace and respect among all Nicaraguans in remarks during the National March for Justice and Life held in Managua last Sept. 5. "We have to learn to live in peace and respect each other. In Nicaragua there is complete freedom to organize demonstrations and we have nothing against that, but it is important that this be done in a peaceful and civil manner, without destruction or burning of police vehicles," President Ortega said. (Nicaragua News, Sept. 7)

Ortega Interviewed on German TV

In an exclusive interview with the German Television Network DW, President Daniel Ortega said the interventionist policy of the United States has caused violence, death and destabilization in Nicaragua. "This coup attempt, encouraged and financed by the United States, resulted in 22 policemen murdered and 350 wounded by bullets. If the US government really wants to contribute to peace in Nicaragua and the region, they must respect us and put an end to the policy of constant conspiracy against legitimately elected governments," President Ortega said. (Nicaragua News, Sept. 10)

Ortega Pays Tribute to Officers Killed in Coup

In remarks during the celebration of the 39th anniversary of the founding of the Nicaragua Police, President Daniel Ortega paid a posthumous tribute to the 22 police officers murdered in the attempted coup. "The death of these policemen and the suffering of their mothers has been ignored by human rights organizations of the United Nations and the Organization of American States. Today we want to honor these mothers and the legacy of the officers who sacrificed their lives in the line of duty", President Ortega said. (Nicaragua News, Sept. 11)

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The impact of the attempted coup: a Fair Trade coffee producer's perspective

Nicaragua Solidarity Campaign, September 19, 2018

Junieth Maribel is a young Fair Trade coffee farmer and member of the SOPPEXCCA Cooperative Union, Jinotega, northern Nicaragua. SOPPEXCCA is made up of 650 small scale coffee and cocoa farmers organised into 15 co-operatives. Their coffee is sold through Fair Trade markets in Europe and the US. Junieth describes the political, social and psychological impact of the violence on the lives and livelihoods of members of the co-op.

The situation in the country at the moment has had an effect on us, especially our mental health. With the opposition roadblocks, [in June and July] and having had our freedom of movement for work suspended, we missed a lot of opportunities, we were frightened, distressed, worried, because in Jinotega, the people who were at the roadblocks, protesting against the government could detain any citizen, assault them, strip them or beat them, and all of that frightened us a lot.

After that, when the police began the operation to take back control of the city, it was a very tense night. There were shots all night, and it hurt me to find out that three young men that the leaders of the coup had encouraged and organized had been left in some neighbourhood to die.

What I think has happened is that leaders high up have put discontent with the government into the heads of the poor people, but it's clear to see as well that they use the poor, and whip up passions so that we take to the streets, and then these leaders with the money and high status leave the country quietly with their families, live well, and leave the country abandoned.

The damage that Nicaragua has suffered through this situation has been very negative for us, because now we have unemployment, and my organisation is finding it difficult to obtain credit because we're seen as unstable and unsafe, and without funding, production is at risk.

Another big problem is that investors are taking their money out of the country, leaving even more economic problems behind. I don't think they [the opposition] ever thought that by wanting to bring down the president or the government, they would be taking the bread out of the mouths of a lot of families, and the methods that they used, and continue to use, are damaging the economy - and that affects us all.

In Nicaragua, in my humble opinion, before April we had economic and social problems that were being overcome: we now have roads, electricity, health care, and education – even secondary education - in rural areas, and many families have received support to improve their homes. When I was a child we had none of these things.

But with all the disorder the opposition has caused, they have saddened my community and my city.

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NicaNotes September 23 and 24, 2018

Another Young Life Taken by Opposition March

On Sunday, September 23, the opposition held another not-so-peaceful march with guns and mortars and with a route that went through the neighborhoods of June 9, December 2, and Americas No. 3, firing on people and homes. Many families defended themselves. Around 11:25 am, in the crossfire, Abraham Lacayo and Max Andres Romero were wounded while defending their lives and their homes – Romero died later. There are very reliable videos of the armed protesters firing at different people. Last Saturday, these same groups, in a different so-called peaceful march, attacked the population and their homes in the neighborhoods of Ducuali, Venezuela and Rubenia. Roger Antonio Lopez was seriously wounded when he was beaten, tortured and then spray-painted blue and white. He was told he was being tortured because he was a Sandinista. In their attempt to create chaos, the demonstrators tore up the street and built a roadblock. Neighbors were able to stop them and replace the pavement pieces. <https://www.tn8.tv/managua/457821-grupos-violentos-derecha-golpista-atacan-familias-con-armas-fuego/> More photos: <https://www.facebook.com/203154310341352/photos/pcb.251874525469330/251874425469340/?type=3&theater> (Police Press Report and Radio La Primerisima, Canal 8, Sept. 23)

Felix Maradiaga Accused of Financing Terrorism

On September 24, the Public Ministry issued an arrest order for Felix Alejandro Maradiaga Blandon and two others for organized crime and financing terrorism. Maradiaga used the organization that he directs, Institute of Strategic Studies and Public Policy (IEEPP) to train groups of people who then participated, beginning April 18th, in actions to destabilize and create chaos around the country in order to strike fear and terror in the population. Part of the accusation states that Maradiaga developed, under the title of leadership courses, methods that induced people to participate in violence and extremism to cause chaos and terror. He also used the social networks to multiply their calls to violence.

He was one of promoters of the Leadership Institute of Civil Society that trained for destabilizing activities in hotels and universities in Managua. The students were taught how to make false internet profiles and send messages that would cause violence. One example was when hundreds of thousands of messages were sent out saying that the government killed a student on April 18, when no one was killed that day. However, this led to great violence during the following days. Thus began a series of violent events that shattered the public order across the nation. Groups also took over universities and created organized crime centers. There are videos of Maradiaga's April 22 meeting with armed men at the UPOLI University. Two other men at that meeting are accused of being among the people who led the UPOLI takeover. Part of the accusation against Maradiaga is related to that meeting where he allegedly agreed to get money and channel it to them for criminal acts. (Tu Nueva Radio Ya, Canal 2, Sept. 24)

Three Men on Trial for Burning Radio Station

On September 24th, Marlon Fonseca Roman, Kevin Espinoza and Hanssel Espinoza were

put on trial in Managua for arson in the burning of Tu Nueva Radio Ya on May 24th, as well as for murder, arms trafficking and other crimes. Twenty videos of the fire at the radio station were shown, and testimony of employees who were inside the radio station while it was burning was heard. The accused were captured on July 11 near a roadblock in Nindirí with AK47's and a large cache of munitions. (La Voz del Sandinismo, Sept. 24)

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Excerpts from interview with Dr. Javier Morazán of Nicaragua's Public Prosecutor's Office

By Stephen Sefton, Tortilla con Sal, September 26th 2018

<http://www.tortillaconsal.com/tortilla/node/4332>

Dr. Javier Morazán is the Director of the Special Unit against Organized Crime of Nicaragua's Public Prosecutor's Office

Nicaragua's Public Prosecutor's Office, represents society in general and the victims of crime in criminal trials. The Public Prosecutor's Office also gives legal guidance to criminal investigations and carries out criminal proceedings when the investigations produce enough proof to be able to achieve a conviction in court. The Public Prosecutor's Office is an institution of service and receives without discrimination or distinction everyone who comes here to the Public Prosecutor's Office to present accusations or seek other help.

We are working to exhaust all lines of investigation ... with professionalism and objectivity sticking strictly to legality which are the principles that govern the conduct of the Public Prosecutor's Office. Once the Public Prosecutor's Office has carried out an investigation and managed to clarify the facts via legal guidance and sufficient, concrete investigative action, the Public Prosecutor's Office proceeds to present a formal indictment against the people responsible for the events. ...In all the cases the Public Prosecutor's Office has investigated and made an accusation, it has presented abundant proof collected during the investigations consisting of witness testimony, expert analytical proof, physical evidence, documentary evidence, videos, audio recordings and scientific evidence that support the deeds the Public Prosecutor's Office has alleged. That is why these indictments have been accepted and sent to trial.

Every accusation by the Public Prosecutor's Office is supported by proof because we cannot make an indictment without the evidence to back it up, for every one of the persons accused and for every crime of which they are accused. And that is why the judges have made their review and confirmed the indictments and even the defense lawyers have accepted there is evidence to support the accusations.

The victims and the population in general that have seen the court hearings on the television news have accepted with satisfaction the work of the Public Prosecutor's Office and results of the trials. Any impartial observer can warrant that. The only people who do not are people paid to ignore the evidence since their business and way of making a living depends on criticizing the actions of the State.

For example, in the case of the journalist Angel Gahona in Bluefields, the expectations of Nicaraguan society and above all the people of Bluefields were satisfied on seeing how the Public Prosecutor's Office clarified and established the facts of that crime during the investigation with a large quantity of scientific evidence, testimony, documents, videos and physical evidence that supported with complete clarity that those who were responsible were the two people accused by the Public Prosecutor's Office

This is why the Public Prosecutor's Office has a high level of credibility in Nicaraguan society. The Public Prosecutor's Office has had that high level of satisfaction on the part of the population since before the events of April 18th. ...[W]e as the Public Prosecutor's Office

owe it to the victims of crime to represent society in general as well as the victim of the crime based on the principles of legality and objectivity.

Our justice system stands out for the access to justice, for being effective, for professional and objective investigations, for a high level of clarification of events, for having a transparent and expeditious criminal justice system in which there is hardly any delay in justice being done, which has been recognized internationally. Whereas on the other hand, we know of countries where impunity runs at 90%. Our investigations suggest that the authors of the events in the context of the months of April to June this year, calculated all aspects [of the events], including the deaths that needed to happen. These people were ... anxious for there to be deaths so as to use them as a figure, as a number, as a fact, as a destructive proof, as a form of grabbing attention and justifying the intervention of other interests.

The radical extremism of some people using the smokescreen of “criminalizing protest” seeks impunity for these crimes. They fear the progress of clarification of the events. Those who seek impunity are trying to turn upside down the deepest values that we all share in the global village. They want our society to accept as political prisoners people who have murdered, tortured, kidnapped, committed arson, terrorized and destroyed the country and the future of our children. These deeds are not political. They are serious crimes.

The crimes for which the Public Prosecutor's Office has presented indictments are common crimes, crimes that threaten life, physical integrity, security, public calm, people's freedom, or public and private property. They have to do with people who have murdered other people via arson, via asphyxiation or using firearms. These crimes of murder of victims have been accompanied by torture, by torture with physical bodily harm, psychological harm, people have been kidnapped, people have been burned, people whose houses have also been set on fire, or their businesses have been damaged and set on fire, people who have been victims of robbery with violence, robbery with intimidation. The people accused are charged with obstructing access to basic services like health care, like education and to food which are rights of the population. All these rights have been infringed and violated by the accused.

The actions of the State to obtain justice for the victims and for society are legitimate. No one can argue for the impunity of serious criminal acts in a social state based on Law. In practice only those who sympathize with such acts would dare to obstruct justice and truth by asking for the freedom of those who have murdered so many people using as a diversion or excuse the very same fundamental values of the Rule of Law, like liberty, democracy and human rights, values that have been abused by these criminal acts.

Here we don't have political prisoners nor have we accused anyone for their political opinions. One can review all the case files the Public Prosecutor's Office has presented and in not one of them have we accused anyone for their political opinions, nor for their religious opinion or belief, nor for organizing as part of a political party or not, nor for being in favor of or against some political party. Nor have we accused anyone for being for or against the government. We have people accused of committing serious crimes against other people like murder, injury, torture, kidnapping, and arson. And those accused of these crimes, through them, have induced fear and terror among the population.

Terrorism is one of the greatest scourges of our time, as much at a national level as at an international level. The profile of people who engage in radical extremist conduct with no respect for universal values or the rights of other people in order to secure their destructive objective or the imposition of their intolerant, fanatical ideas of hatred. They seek to procure their ends at any price and any means justifies the end, all means are valid. Some of them incite the commission of crimes from any platform and take part in the planning, direction, financing and execution of violence. They are being investigated and with the available evidence they are being brought to the justice they deserve for each dead person, for each person they wounded, for every person who was affected by their crimes.

The characteristics that best identify terrorism are its indiscriminate violence. It extends its effects to the totality of the population; it is unpredictable; it acts by surprise mixed with terror. Its immorality produces unnecessary suffering, striking the most vulnerable areas: its disruption of public order (for example, creating chaos, killing people, mass intimidation); its threats against people's lives or those of their families or of destroying where people live; the trails of death produced in the streets; the taking of hostages or kidnapping of people.

From the methodological point of view, a group can be considered terrorist that carries out kidnappings, attacks with bombs, murders, threats or systematic coercion. Technically these acts are designed to produce terror in the opposing population and there is no doubt in defining them as terrorist acts. Many of these circumstances have figured in the events where the Public Prosecutor's Office has made indictments.

When there are people promoting, financing or carrying out this behavior intended to cause serious bodily harm, intended to kill other people using weapons and with the purpose of instilling fear in the population, causing terror and intimidation and leaving the population intimidated, and taking matters to the extreme of maintaining sequestered and under their criminal control a whole community or city and trying to do the same with an entire country, that enters into the definition of the crime of terrorism as contemplated in the United Nations Convention against financing, precisely, terrorist activity.

In these kinds of events, the same people calling for violence subsequently seek impunity alleging criminalization of peaceful protest. But it's important to emphasize categorically that the Public

Prosecutor's Office has not accused anyone for participating in a peaceful march. The Public Prosecutor's Office has not indicted anyone for demonstrating peacefully. It has not accused anyone here for politics nor for having a political belief or for their political feelings nor for being for or against the government or for or against a given political party. The Public Prosecutor's Office has accused people who have committed serious crimes and who on top of that want to cover themselves by manipulating public opinion in favor of the people who committed those crimes. But the proof of their actions has been uncovered by our investigations, by the criminal justice process and in the community that they terrorized and destroyed.

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NicaNotes October 1 to December 11, 2018

Police Present Men Accused of Torture of Police in Jinotepe

The National Police presented on Oct. 1 several men arrested in the city of Jinotepe, who are linked to crimes against Nicaraguan society. The five individuals accused of committing different crimes such as kidnapping, torture and carrying illegal arms were Allan Enrique Alemán Castillo, Flavio Alexander Castillo Blanco and Jack Josué Castillo López. Police Commissioner Major Farle Roa said that they were charged with “kidnapping local people, transferring them and torturing them at the San José Catholic School. This same group is accused of looting and destruction of public and private institutions and selling stolen objects.”

Likewise, Dany Javier Chavez Salazar and Cristopher Javier Castrillo Ramirez were arrested for crimes committed while manning the roadblock near the Dulce Nombre community in Jinotepe. They are accused of committing organized crime, kidnapping, torture, assault, injuries and illegal possession of firearms. “They kidnapped, tortured and seriously injured policeman Carlos Alberto Jiménez Campos, transferring him to the San José School, a center of studies used by the vandals to murder, torture and rape,” the police chief continued. The subjects will be referred to the competent authorities for their judicial process, while the police continue looking for others involved in the case. The institution reaffirms its commitment to defend the right to peace, tranquility, work and security of Nicaraguan families. (Channel 8, Channel 2, 10/1/18)

Foreign Minister Denounces US Intervention in Nicaragua

On Oct. 1, Nicaragua’s Foreign Minister Denis Moncada spoke at the UN General Assembly. He stated, “Nicaragua has resisted the attempts of a coup d’état; our country has once again won peace, fraternal coexistence and the gradual return of normal daily life. The attempted coup that we have foiled in Nicaragua is the result of intervention and has left us with serious consequences, economic damage, death, destruction, terrorism. Terrorism disguised as peaceful protests, atrociously killing citizens and police, setting fire to public and private property, assault, extortion, rape, torture, cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment. In the [Central American] region Nicaragua is recognized for its stability, peace and regional security with important positive indicators in economic, political, and social development, in poverty reduction, gender equity and citizen security and it is a barrier against organized international crime, gangs, terrorism, and drug-activity – state policies that we continue to develop.”

Moncada said that the Nicaraguan government and people defend the principle of independence and sovereignty as established in the Charter of the United Nations and “therefore we demand the cessation of any interventionist policy that violates international law with interventionist actions in Nicaragua and against other Peoples of our America and the world.” Moncada said that the government and people of Nicaragua have worked in a sustained manner to meet the objectives of the [United Nations] 2030 Agenda. “Until the month of April of this year our country had experienced sustained economic growth of approximately 4.7% per year. Our projects and economic and social programs to eradicate general poverty at the national level managed to reduce it from 42.5% in 2009 to 24.9% in 2016. Extreme poverty decreased from 14.6% in 2009 to 6.9% in 2016,” he said.

Here is the entire speech in English:

<https://www.el19digital.com/app/webroot/tinymce/source/2018/00-Octubre/Del01al07Oct/Lunes1Oct/73AG%20Discurso%20Nicaragua%20Ingles%20Version.pdf> (Channel 4, 10/1/18)

A Song of Hope for Bismarck Martinez, Example of Love for Nicaragua

Bismarck Martinez was kidnapped at a roadblock in the city of Jinotepe on June 29 and videos of his torture appeared on cell phones of several people captured two weeks ago. He has not been found. In honor of his fifty-sixth birthday on October 1, his family, friends, and colleagues organized an evening of song and prayer held at the Cinemateca Nacional entitled “56 years of commitment, love and struggle for his country”. Among the participants were Nicaraguan artists and members of the Protestant community. His wife Myrlhem Méndez said, “We thank God because on a day like today 56 years ago, Bismarck was born. My husband has not yet appeared and, in spite of that, today we celebrated his birthday with the testimonial and revolutionary music that he liked so much. Wherever he finds himself, he will be satisfied to see that his people support us in the difficult situation we are facing.”

For photos: <http://www.lavozdelsandinismo.com/nicaragua/2018-10-02/un-canto-de-esperanza-para-bismarck-martinez-ejemplo-de-amor-a-nicaragua/> (Voz del Sandinismo, 10/2/18)

US Citizen Deported

Carl David Goette Luciak was taken from his home by police at midday on Monday, Oct. 1 directly to the Managua airport where he was questioned (according to a tweet by Nicaraguan journalist, Wilfredo Miranda), and then flown to El Salvador on Taca flight 397 and the next day to Washington DC. Luciak was a close associate of leaders of the Sandinista Renovation Movement (MRS) and wrote one-sided anti-government articles on the recent unrest that were published in The Guardian, Washington Post, and other publications.

Photos of Luciak with armed opposition terrorists began to circulate on social media in early September including a troubling video that had been taken on June 30 during an opposition march called “March of the Flowers.” In this video protesters are walking along torturing an old man whom they accused of being a Sandinista. Luciak was right there and shows up in the video at various points. In this article by Max Blumenthal you can watch the video and see his photos with armed men: <https://www.mintpressnews.com/how-an-american-anthropologist-tied-to-us-regime-change-proxies-became-the-msms-man-in-nicaragua/249868/>

Judge Affirms Proper Procedures by Judiciary

Judge Gerardo Rodriguez Olivas, president of the Managua Court of Appeals stated that the judiciary is acting in accordance with the law and not as a political arm to punish people who oppose the government. He said, “The first thing the hearing judge does is to explain to the accused what he is accused of and the right he has to a lawyer of his own. It is not true that we are on a witch hunt and that the judiciary is being used to punish the people,” explaining that convictions are based on the facts and the evidence presented by the Prosecutor’s Office. Roberto Larios, director general of communications of the Supreme Court, denounced “the gross campaign of slander, false news and baseless attacks against

the Judicial Branch by some media outlets engaged in anti-government opposition.” He referred particularly to the death of Denis Madriz Obando whose murder, despite the denials of his family, is being portrayed as a political murder authored by the government. (Informe Pastran, Oct. 9)

Radio Ya Arsonists Found Guilty

Three men accused of burning down the Radio Ya radio station while the staff was inside on May 28 during the height of the attempted coup, were found guilty by Judge Melvin Vargas in the Seventh Criminal Trial District on Oct. 2. The prison sentences for Hansell Vasquez Ruiz, Kevin Rodrigo Espinoza and Marlon Fonseca Roman have not yet been announced. (Informe Pastran, Oct. 9)

30 Arrested for Protesting without a Permit

Both the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR) and the UN Office of the High Commissioner on Human Rights (OHCHR) allege that peaceful protesters were repressed on October 14 when 30 were arrested for protesting without a permit. The organisms insisted that Nicaraguans have the right to demonstrate and that “they cannot be subject to prior authorization.” They argue, “The Nicaraguan Police want to establish a prior regulation to prevent or declare them illegal” and “this contradicts international law.” The UN stressed that citizens of Nicaragua should be able to protest freely and peacefully and reiterated its call for a political dialogue to end the crisis in the country. On Oct.13 the Police warned that they would not allow demonstrations that did not have the proper permission. On Oct. 14, 30 opposition activists were arrested and all 30 were released hours later. [*Note: In most countries in the world protests require police permits.*] (Informe Pastran 10/15/18)

Bismarck Martinez Program for a Dignified and Secure Home

A new affordable housing program named for Bismarck Martinez has already received almost one thousand applicants. Martinez was kidnapped and disappeared June 29 at a roadblock in Jinotepe. Last month the police found videos of his torture on phones of detained prisoners. (19 Digital 10/15/18)

Trial Continues of Cristián Josué Mendoza Fernández, Alias “Viper”

During the fifth and sixth sessions of the trial of Cristián Josué Mendoza Fernández, alias “Viper,” the prosecutor presented the judge with 25 witnesses, including police experts, security guards, family members of victims and forensic doctors. In addition to Mendoza, those being tried are Emmanuel Largaespada, alias “RT,” and Alejandro Pérez Arauz, aka “TT”. The murder of security guard Eric Williams Espinoza Mendoza was covered in the fifth session. He was killed at about 3:20 am on May 13. A video showed men arrive in a white truck who shot him in the eye without a word and stole his 38 revolver. That same morning nine security guards were robbed of their regulation weapons. The perpetrators were the same 14 criminals who were aboard the white truck. Luis Hernández Down, driver of the bus that covers Route 104, told the judge how on the night of May 7 he and his bus unit were kidnapped with approximately 40 passengers including men, women and children. They screamed in terror at the sight of hooded men all armed with pistols.

Hernandez Down identified “Viper” as the one who directed the operation and then ordered the bus to be taken to the UPOLI (Polytechnic University), where they had their

command post. (TN8, 10/11/18) In the sixth session, the prosecutor showed that Mendoza was following a script written by the now fugitive-from-justice Felix Maradiaga Blandon, who explicitly ordered him to recruit members of gangs to sow chaos among working class families in Nicaragua. According to their testimony, the three defendants received some of their weapons from Luciano García and Maradiaga. The Prosecutor's Office offered the testimony of Yener Berrios who, in tears, said that in mid-May his wife asked him to get her some food. He lives near the UPOLI north gate. He was intercepted on his motorcycle by two men armed with pistols, who were at a roadblock. After the men found his FSLN card, he was abducted to the third floor of the UPOLI where he was tortured by "Viper" and company. After beating him up they stripped him naked, they sprayed acid between his genitals, shouting "Orteguista" (Ortega lover) and then "damn police," while others said "Viper, kill him!". He was tortured until 2:00 o'clock the next day when he was left near the Multicentro Las Americas traffic lights. He was taken to a hospital where he stayed for several weeks. The Ninth District Judge scheduled the continuation of the trial for October 17. (Canal 2, 10/15/18)

Firm Rejection of Interference in Internal Affairs

The Nicaragua Government expressed its categorical rejection of the disrespectful and interventionist statements by Carlos Alvarado, President of Costa Rica, and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of that country regarding internal affairs of Nicaragua. "The Government of Nicaragua does not interfere in the internal affairs of any country and does not comment or pontificate on the problems of other nations or on sovereign decisions made by other States in dealing with their problems. The Government of Nicaragua fully embraces the call for fraternity and respect that we owe each other as Central American governments and peoples, inspired by the wisdom of the Great Benito Juárez who said, "Respect for the Rights of Others is peace," the Official declaration states. (Nicaragua News, 10/15/18)

Nicaraguan Officials and Spanish Deputy Reject Amnesty International Report

The release of a new Amnesty International Report was timed to come out immediately prior to the October 19 OAS meeting at which the United States and other members tried to get a majority to condemn Nicaragua. Amnesty International made accusations against the Police, saying that they use paramilitaries, snipers and even portable anti-tank rockets. The Nicaraguan Ambassador in France, Ruth Tapia, told AFP on 10/18 that the AI report is "unfounded," that it makes accusations "without any evidence" and "invents" the death toll. Lautaro Sandino, Nicaraguan Ambassador to Belgium and Head of the Nicaraguan Mission to the European Union, in an interview with Radio France International, said that in Nicaragua there was an attempted coup that failed. Lautaro Sandino stated that this coup "was executed by small opposition groups that were financed by foreign forces that are against the peace and progress that the country has reached." The diplomat said that the Nicaraguan people are currently experiencing a process of reconciliation and dialogue in the neighborhoods.

The Platform for Solidarity with Nicaragua criticized Amnesty International's report on Nicaragua for being based solely on accusations from opposition groups and the opposition media. The Platform organized simultaneous press conferences in Spain – in Madrid, Barcelona, and Seville -- to denounce what they consider "political instrumentalization" of Nicaraguan human rights by AI. One of the participants in the event in Madrid was the

Spanish Deputy for the United Left, Miguel Bustamante, who told EFE he is convinced that “the AI report does not agree with the reality of what has happened in Nicaragua.” He went on to say, “It is based on sources from the political opposition” and on information from major media “opposed to the government of Ortega.” The AI report “has errors,” said the Spanish legislator who calls for “an independent investigation” that looks at security forces and political leaders. The investigation should include the death “of more than twenty policemen” in the episodes of violence. “We reject the assertion that all the demonstrators have acted peacefully and that the government has murdered its own people,” insisted Bustamante. In his judgement, the United States financing of Nicaraguan opposition groups is evident, as has happened in Venezuela and Cuba. (Informe Pastran 10/18/18)

Cristian Josue Mendoza (Viper) Found Guilty, Prosecutor requests 69 years.

A Managua court found Cristian Josue Mendoza guilty, along with Alejandro Aráuz Cáceres and Emmanuel Largaespada, for the crimes of organized crime, murder, aggravated robbery, and kidnapping. The prosecutor requested 26 years for terrorism, 27 for aggravated murder of Keller Steven Pérez Duarte; six years for organized crime; five years for aggravated robbery, two years for kidnapping Jenner Lenin Berríos Díaz and three years for drug possession. [Although they are sentenced with a certain number of years, in Nicaragua there is no capital punishment and the longest sentence allowed is 30 years. When someone gets 30 years it is rare for them to serve more than 15]. During the proceedings Mendoza said Felix Maradiaga, director of the Institute of Strategic Studies and Public Policy (IEEPP) and Luciano García, director of Hagamos Democracia, were the leaders of the groups that took over the university, UPOLI, in April. Mendoza added that Maradiaga and Garcia came to UPOLI on several occasions to deliver money and weapons. They also gave those who took over the UPOLI a document about how to overthrow the government titled “Strategy to Save Democracy in Nicaragua.” Mendoza testified, “Félix Maradiaga and Luciano García delegated Pío Arellano the coordination of the groups in the UPOLI. He ordered gang members to burn public transportation units and state vehicles.” Mendoza’s public statement can be seen here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-k4SNaH3tzU>. (Tu Nueva Radio Ya, 10/19/18)

Accused Killer of Policewoman in Nagarote Arrested

Police Lieutenant Zaira Julissa López was murdered in Nagarote on June 25, 2018. Jerónimo Lampín López, 39, of Nagarote, was arrested and charged with her murder. Local Police Commissioner Farle Roa Traña explained that Lampín López is head of a criminal group that committed murders, kidnappings, assaults, rapes, arson and looting of public and private institutions. The ballistic and chemical tests were positive and there are 40 witness statements that identify Franklin as author of the crimes. (Tu Nueva Radio Ya, 10/19/18)

Accused Murderers of Sandinista Francisco Arauz Pineda Arrested

Erik Antonio Carazo Talavera, Cristofer Marlon Méndez, and Ulises Rubén Toval Ríos are accused of Francisco Arauz’ murder with a 12-gauge shotgun, a 38-caliber revolver and a handgun. The police said that they have ample evidence including fifty witness statements, videos and photos that clearly identify these men. Francisco Arauz, 55 years old, was murdered and his body burned in Managua, near the Ivan Montenegro Market, on the morning of June 16. He and other Sandinistas were removing a roadblock. Arauz is the son

of a famous Sandinista, Amada Pineda, who fought Somoza and was raped by the National Guard. (Radio La Primerisima, 10/22/18)

Tape Reveals Incriminating Statements by Bishop Baez

The St. Paul Apostle Christian Community of the Colonia 14 de Septiembre in Managua revealed an audio recording made at a meeting in which Managua Auxiliary Bishop Silvio Báez praises the recently dismantled roadblocks as “an extraordinary invention” and says that they should be put back up and makes other statements revealing the support of at least a part of the Catholic Church for the coup attempt. He asserts that the bishops can take credit for the formation of an anti-government alliance saying, “The alliance knows that we created it; if the alliance exists it is because we made it.” Referring to President Daniel Ortega, he says, “We have every desire to put him before a firing squad and shoot him.” He also states, “The Blue and White Union must include all those in opposition to the government, even if they are suspected of being opportunists, abortionists, homosexuals, drug traffickers... in order to achieve the final objective.” Rafael Valdez, a member of the St. Paul Apostle Christian Community, said that Baez was damaging for the Church. Other members of the community said that they looked to their bishops for words and actions of love and not of confrontation among citizens of the same country. (Radio La Primerisima, 10/23/18)

Kidnappers of Student Leader Leonel Morales Arrested

Five people accused of torturing and causing very serious injuries to the president of the Student Union for the UPOLI University (UNEN-UPOLI), Leonel Morales, have been arrested. On June 13, 2018 in Las Americas No. 1, which is near the University, the subjects, along with other armed offenders aboard motorcycles, abducted Leonel from inside his girlfriend’s home and tortured him at opposition roadblocks. Later, they shot him three times and left him for dead in a river bed, but against all odds he survived. (Tu Nueva Radio Ya, 10/24/18)

Right-wing Commentator Talks about MRS’s Violent Role

Jaime Arellano, an opposition member with a TV show on the biggest opposition TV station – 100% Noticias, revealed the conflicts and deep contradictions within the leadership of the “Civic Alliance,” the alliance behind the coup, where he says excessive desires for power stand out. For Arellano, within that political group there is a clear abuse of power. “They all abuse power and one organization has divided into 6 or 7 organizations so that each can be a boss.” The Civic Alliance for Democracy, “chose two delegates to represent it in the new Blue and White Unity [the new alliance with a different name where they try to distance themselves from their previous actions], but no one knows who chose them,” he said. Arellano said that in the last meeting Ana Quiroz asked for the floor, requesting that she be accredited from one group, the Dissenting Association of Lesbians. But he recalled that two weeks previously Quiroz had arrived with other groups, namely the Feminist Movement, the Sandinista Renovation Movement (MRS), and other Civil Society organizations that have taken over the new Blue and White Unity alliance. Arellano added, “There are some out there who have already forgotten that the MRS killed, murdered, blackmailed, and did everything for which we are now suffering. They were part of it, and now they act like they have the moral authority to tell everyone what to do.” (Audio of Jaime Arellano, 19 Digital, 10/25/18)

United States Defends Catholic Church

Following leaked audio tapes of Managua Auxiliary Bishop Silvio Baez' astounding admissions of Catholic Church involvement in the violent coup attempt from April to July, US State Department Ambassador for Religious Freedom, Samuel D. Brownback, said that "the situation of the Catholic clergy in Nicaragua is not acceptable" and that the "Church should be protected, not targeted." Brownback made those statements in a press conference, in which he positioned himself on the situation of religion in Nicaragua, Cuba and Venezuela. Brownback stated, "That is not an acceptable situation for religious freedom. It seems that there are people, a number of individuals, shooting at churches, persecuting churches. We do not agree with that treatment, the Church should be protected, not targeted" he added. (Informe Pastran 10/26/18)

The IMF Applauds Nicaragua's Economic Efforts

The International Monetary Fund (IMF) stated that the Nicaragua government is taking the necessary steps to ensure financial and macroeconomic stability in the country. In a press release issued after its recent visit to the country, the IMF noted, "The efforts of the authorities to support financial liquidity in the commercial banking sector are commendable. Measures to contain the growth of public spending are also positive". (Informe Pastran, (11/01/18)

Archdiocese Asks Opposition Groups to Stop Using Cathedral for Political Acts

Father Luis Herrera, Rector of the Managua Cathedral, said during his Sunday sermon that the temple is for prayer, not protest. Later Cardinal Leopoldo Brenes said that churches are not political places nor places to do politics, adding, "I am the archbishop of all the Catholics of the Archdiocese." He continued, "Everyone is free to come into the Cathedral; we don't tell people that this mass is only for members of a certain political party." Despite these words a small group of the opposition had a protest in the atrium. (Radio La Primerisima 11/04/18)

273 Prisoners Related to the Coup in the Nicaragua Penitentiary System

Vice Minister of Government Luis Caña confirmed that the Penitentiary System holds 273 prisoners (256 men, 17 women) related to the attempted coup that began in April. Along with regular visits they can receive large packages every two weeks. María Amelia Coronel, Minister of Government, delivered a report to the Truth, Justice and Peace Commission on the prisoners involved in violent incidents. All 273 are charged with committing violent crimes. The majority of the prisoners were arrested after mid-July. They have received 3,815 "attentions" including 198 conjugal visits, 720 family visits, 551 medical consultations, 1,355 recreational times in the sun, and 604 reception of packages, aside from packages received during family visits. None of the women have cancer. This point was mentioned because the opposition media has been talking about a woman with terminal cancer. (Radio La Primerisima, 11/05/18)

Nicaragua Denounces US Interference in Internal Affairs

The Nicaraguan Delegation to the Organization of American States (OAS) denounced the continuous US interference in Nicaraguan and Venezuelan internal affairs during the meeting of the Inter-American Council for Integral Development. Ambassador Luis Alvarado said that Nicaragua bases its relationships with other countries on friendship and solidarity and reciprocity between states. Therefore, all types of political, military,

economic, cultural and religious aggression and intervention in the internal affairs of other States are prohibited and proscribed. He added that the Nicaraguan government delegation denounces the continued interference of the United States Government in the internal affairs of Nicaragua and Venezuela since it contravenes the provisions of the OAS Charter, the UN Charter and the principles of International Law. Alvarado said that any foreign interference in the internal affairs of Nicaragua or any attempt to undermine those rights, threatens the life of the people, so it is the duty of all Nicaraguans to preserve and defend these rights, according to the Nicaraguan Constitution. To read the entire speech in Spanish: <http://www.radiolaprimerisima.com/noticias/general/252956/nicaragua-denuncia-injerencia-de-estados-unidos-en-sus-asuntos-internos/> (Radio La Primerisima, 11/5/18)

Police Capture accused killer of Francisco Aráuz Pineda

The Police presented Steven José Espinoza Marín, who confessed to the murder, with an AK47, of Francisco Ramón Aráuz Pineda in Managua on June 16. He then desecrated, burned and danced around Arauz's body. Espinoza will be prosecuted for atrocious murder, desecration of a corpse, kidnapping, arson, assault and obstruction of public services to the detriment of the State and Nicaraguan society. Espinoza was part of a group that maintained a roadblock in the 8 de Marzo neighborhood in Managua. (Channel 8, 11/5/18)

Economic Damage from Roadblocks Still Being Felt

The recent three months of protests have had devastating effects on the economy that are still being felt, Ovidio Reyes, president of the Central Bank, said, "It hit this economy profoundly. That's why in the dialogue we insisted that the roadblocks had to be removed. We knew they were going to generate devastating effects and we anticipated that that would lower economic activity." He specified that the roadblocks had more dramatic consequences than the government anticipated: "I am surprised today to see all those who were on the other side of the negotiating table say they are worried about the situation when the solution was in their hands for months, to stop any activity that was in detriment to our people and economic activity and business." Reyes said the government is talking to all sectors to reactivate the economy and this is already having a positive effect on production, for example in sugar, peanut and fish production. The tobacco sector will reach the goal of \$230 million." He added, "We have made many significant advances in terms of salary incentives. The minimum wage is increased by at least 8% a year in the free trade zones. We can guarantee this for four more years. We have found in all studies that salaries have increased even more, apart from the minimum wage. It is expected that the number of Free Trade Zone workers will hold steady through the end of the year, but in 2019 there are companies programming to hire new workers. (Informe Pastran, 11/05/18)

Nicaragua Suffered a Bloody Coup Attempt

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs issued a communique to the international community on Monday which stated that, from April to July, the Nicaraguan people were submitted to a violent coup by political groups disguised as non-governmental organizations in association with organized crime and financed from abroad. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs stated that these groups committed kidnappings, torture, extortion, murders, looting, obstruction of public roads, as well as destruction and arson of public buildings. The Ministry communique stated that the terrorist actions and crimes committed resulted in

198 deaths, of which 22 were members of the National Police, 1,240 people injured, and of these 401 were police officers injured by firearms. The coup plotters caused damage to the country's infrastructure, with 252 buildings vandalized, damaged and/or burned, 209 kilometers of streets and roads destroyed, 278 pieces of heavy machinery damaged and burned, and 389 vehicles ruined. The statement also noted that the damage to the economy was at least US\$205.4 million of destruction in the public sector, US\$231 million in tourism losses and US\$525 million in transportation damage/losses, as well as 119,567 jobs lost. The government has complied with the laws in the investigation and legal processing of the planners of the crimes and the participants in those crimes. As of November 5, there were 273 people in prison accused of violent crimes. The government is carrying out a national consultation about how to promote a process of reconciliation and peace in the schools, communities and families to promote values and practices of respect, solidarity, dialogue and how to live together amicably. (Radio La Primerisima, 11/12/18)

Police Announce Special Security Plan for Purisima, Christmas and New Year's

The National Police announced security plans for the coming holidays of Purísima, Christmas and the New Year. The plan, called "Nicaragua in Peace, Harmony and Good Will," will strengthen security and guarantee the public order in municipalities around the nation. The plan will last for the rest of November and December. This will include preventive action, more watchfulness in neighborhoods, at bus stops, in markets and malls and at tourist spots. (Radio La Primerisima, 11/13/18)

Medardo Mairena Murder Trial Begins

On July 12, there was a very carefully planned attack on police and other personnel in the municipal building of the town of Morrito. The opposition organized a march of women and children and, when it was close to the building, the armed opposition came out firing, killing four policemen and a primary school teacher. They then kidnapped nine other wounded police officers who were released a few days later. Mairena, together with Pedro Mena, Luis Orlando Pineda and Silvio Pineda are accused of organizing, executing and providing orientation for the crimes of murder, kidnapping and other crimes in Morrito, Chontales and San Pedro de Lovago. It is estimated there will be 75 witnesses during five sessions already on the calendar. Those killed were primary school teacher Marvin Ugarte, and four policemen: Luis Emilio Bustos Lopez, Marlon Jose Lopez, Lenin Olivás Alinas and Faustino Tellez Vargas.

For more details: <http://www.tortillaconsal.com/tortilla/node/3672> .

Firm Rejection of Interventionist Policies

In remarks at the ceremony commemorating the 42th Anniversary of the death of Commander Carlos Fonseca, President Daniel Ortega reaffirmed his firm rejection of the interventionist policies of the United States and the European Union. "That same interventionist policy has destroyed peace and security in countries such as Libya, Egypt, Tunisia, Syria and Algeria. All these countries were destabilized and that has caused much violence, poverty and large migrations", President Ortega said. (Nicaragua News, 11/9/18)

Undercover Agent Says Medardo Mairena Ordered Morrito Killings

An undercover police officer who worked for almost three months at different roadblocks testified that Medardo Mairena, a leader of the coup attempt, ordered crimes including

assassinations, in order to try to force the government to yield to the demands of the coup group. The police officer identified as Code One, was incognito from April 25 to July 13, and witnessed many illegal acts committed at or near the roadblocks of Juigalpa, Lóvago, Acoyapa and Morrito. He revealed that Medardo Mairena was the leader in charge of the roadblocks; Pedro Joaquín Mena was the treasurer of the organization and Freddy Alberto Navas used his bank accounts to receive money from abroad to finance them. Among the actions ordered by Mairena were the kidnappings of government officials, including police.

“At the roadblocks they charged vehicles from 150 to 600 córdobas (US\$4.61-\$18.45) to pass.” “Medardo Mairena appeared on July 10 to meet with the heads of the roadblocks and directed them not to let ambulances pass in order to exert more pressure on the government since people were removing roadblocks in Managua and that could not happen in Lóvago,” said Code One. On July 10, Mairena, after meeting with roadblock chiefs went to the town of El Almendro dressed as a priest to call on the population to join the “fight against the government.” On July 12, the day that four police officers and a teacher were murdered, the undercover agent was at a roadblock near Morrito and heard that they were planning to attack the police station. “Medardo Mairena came to the roadblock and ordered the attack. He was responsible. I wanted to tell my Morrito collaborators but I was surrounded at the roadblock by members of the opposition and they would have killed me. I could not communicate until the moment of the attack on the police station.”

“Code One” testified that Medardo Mairena and Francisca Ramírez were the intellectual authors of the attack on the INSS delegation in Nueva Guinea on April 20 and were also responsible for sending a dead body in a truck of cheese headed for Managua. The undercover officer learned how Emmanuel Tiffer was murdered. Tiffer fled the UPOLI university in Managua, after fighting with Josué Mendoza, alias “Viper.” He fled to the San Pedro Lóvago roadblock. Tiffer was armed with an AK rifle. As the days passed he had differences with other criminal gangs called “Los Churros de Humo” and “Los Batuzos.” The material author of the murder of Tiffer is identified as “Chepito.” Emmanuel Tiffer’s body was placed in a truck loaded with cheese. The order given was to take him to Managua and throw his body out with the intention of blaming the police. [Note: By chance this truck was stopped and government authorities found Tiffer’s body with the cheese]. In the trial process, the first police agent who testified is one who was kidnapped on July 12 from the Morrito police station after four other police were killed. They were taken to San Pedro de Lóvago, where they were beaten, shot and tortured. The non-commissioned officer Yorleni Ávalos, gave a heartbreaking account of seeing his colleagues murdered that July afternoon, when the attackers commanded by Medardo Mairena came to kill them. (Radio La Primerisima, 11/20/18)

Christian Base Community Denounces Use of Churches to Manipulate

Through a written declaration, the St. Paul the Apostle Christian Base Community in the September 14 neighborhood of Managua denounced the Auxiliary Bishop of Managua Silvio Baez who continues to use his sermons and the church itself to manipulate people politically. “Baez continues to carry out political campaigns confirming his leadership in the coup group that wants to remove the president. On Sunday November 18 Baez gave a political homily to the new US ambassador and members of the opposition,” the statement said. This is one of the reasons the CBC wrote the declaration, where they call on the

Catholic hierarchy to support the demand by nearly a half million Catholics made to Pope Francis to remove Bishop Baez from Nicaragua. Among the demands made by the Community were: “That he [Baez] cease his threats against President Daniel Ortega; that he cease to incite the overthrow of the government through reinstating the so-called “death road blocks”, and that priests stop facilitating the use of churches for political ends. (19 Digital, 11/19/18)

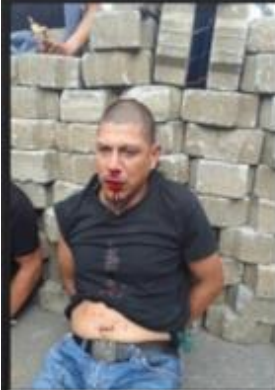
Nicaraguan Foreign Minister Reprimands Costa Rican President at Summit

At the Ibero-American Summit in Guatemala Nicaraguan Foreign Minister Denis Moncada said that Costa Rican president Carlos Alvarado had disrespected “the sovereignty, independence and self-determination of the Nicaraguan people” and that he acted as a “recording of the United States.” He also reminded everyone that Costa Rica is burning with protests and police repression. Moncada demanded that Alvarado be “corrected” so as not to “interrupt the peaceful work” of the Ibero-American forum. “He disrespects the principle of non-interference in the internal affairs of other States by transgressing the UN Charter and the principles of International Law. President Alvarado must focus on problems in his own internal affairs and not use Nicaragua and Venezuela as a pretext to evade his responsibilities as President of his country. We demand that the Costa Rican president, who insists on associating himself with the destabilizing agenda against our country, respect the people and government of Nicaragua.” (Informe Pastran, 11/19/18)

More Witnesses Describe Atrocities at Masaya Roadblocks

On Dec. 6, the trial continued of Cristian Fajardo, Santiago Adrián Fajardo Baldizón and María Adilia Peralta, accused of the crimes of terrorism, financing of terrorism, organized crime, obstruction of public services and kidnapping. These subjects were in charge of the roadblocks located in the city of Masaya, where along with extortion, the group directed by them carried out assaults, looting, destruction and burning of many private and public buildings in Masaya including the craft market and a large secondary school. They attacked the police station daily. Santiago Fajardo and his brother Cristian Fajardo were recognized as the operation chiefs. They were in charge of paying the delinquents in Masaya. At least nine witnesses are expected to give declarations including those who were beaten, tortured, bound, kidnapped and terrorized. The first witness was a Police agent who patrolled incognito in Masaya and did not carry identification, but a companion with whom he traveled by motorcycle did carry identification. At one of the roadblocks they were detained and tortured to find the document. The police agent who testified in this session recognized the Fajardo brothers. The Police agent said “They had a dispute with the terrorist leaders in Monimbó because they were fighting over who was best at capturing police or Sandinistas. So because of that they did not take us to Monimbó, but they took us to a place that they called ‘the station.’ They beat us, tied our hands and put us on a pulley; then the Fajardo brothers arrived and that’s where they said ‘open the way, there’s the boss – Chago (Santiago Fajardo)’. He grabbed a gun, fired it, then he made me play roulette”, the victim affirmed. So far, three of the nine witnesses have given testimony. (Canal 8, 12/6/18)

SECUESTRO Y TORTURA A TRABAJADORES DEL ESTADO Y MILITANTES SANDINISTAS



Roberto Castro, trabajador de la
Alcaldía de Diriamba secuestrado y
torturado en tranque



Javier Gonzalez, trabajador de la
Alcaldía de Jinotega secuestrado
por terroristas



Militantes sandinistas torturados



Jairo Pérez, trabajador de la
Alcaldía de Jinotega secuestrado
por terroristas

Sandinistas/Municipal Workers Kidnapped and Tortured, Photos by Torturers

Trial Begins of the Heads of the Criminal Roadblocks in Carazo

December 6 the trial of Tomás Maldonado and Carlos Brenes began, accused of the crimes of terrorism, organized crime, obstruction of public services and aggravated damage. Seven key witnesses were presented who claim that these two people were the main instigators of hate, and who directed the attacks and controlled the roadblocks in Carazo. The first witness was Senior Police Commissioner Pedro Rodríguez Argueta, who was assigned to the police delegation in the city of Jinotepe, where he says the accused were the main promoters of violence and those who armed others involved in roadblock-related violence. This commissioner was wounded with a .22 shot, which broke his left hand. He also received an AK rifle bullet in the left chest; thanks to his bulletproof vest and a rosary that was in his shirt pocket, he wasn't killed but he did lose consciousness. "Tomás Maldonado, Joao Maldonado and his son, Carlos Brenes, among others, were the ones who carried arms and coordinated all the movement in the area," the police chief said. "Tomás Maldonado is the one who ran this group together with Carlos Brenes, they prepared the conditions and planned the criminal acts, created and ran the roadblocks in Jinotepe, as well as attacks on public institutions, looting of commercial establishments to get money to buy arms and ammunition." They are also linked to the burning and destruction of the Jinotepe police station. The trial will continue in the coming days. (Canal 8 12/6/18)

Sao Paulo Forum Supports Nicaragua's Sovereignty

Delegates at the Sao Paulo Forum in Brazil passed a resolution demanding respect for national sovereignty as they offered solidarity and support to Nicaragua's Sandinista government. The resolution congratulated President Daniel Ortega and the people of Nicaragua for defeating the attempted coup "perpetrated by US imperialism through its

lackeys” and welcomed the efforts to consolidate peace. A statement from the forum expressed “solidarity with Nicaragua and its Sandinista revolution against the interventionist actions of the Donald Trump government in the internal affairs of that country,” which the group said included sanctions and threatening statements. The summit praised the government for its achievements in reducing social inequality and poverty through impressive economic growth, which was threatened by the instability created during the attempted coup period. “We stand in defense of the institutions, sovereignty and self-determination of the people. We demand respect for the legitimately elected government presided over by Commander Daniel Ortega Saavedra,” the statement said, going on to denounce two items of US legislation “which violate the sovereignty of the people, in order to impose the interests of the United States. “We insist on the need for peace and reconciliation for the development and solution of political problems,” the statement concluded. (Morning Star, 12/10/18)

Families and Victims of the Coup Denounce “Journalist” Miguel Mora

Relatives of those murdered and tortured during the attempted coup, denounced Miguel Mora, head of 100% News to the Public Prosecutor. They claim he incited violence and hatred that caused torture and death. Francisca Méndez, denounced Mora for encouraging torture and killing. She is the daughter of Guillermo Méndez Ortiz who was tortured and murdered at the roadblocks in Jinotepe, Carazo, on June 12, 2018. “I accuse the inciter, Miguel Mora, of hatred, he promoted and continues to promote the death-roadblocks, where they kidnapped and tortured my father. That is why I have come to file a complaint, so that justice is done and this does not go unpunished, so that they do not continue to kill innocent people and so that this gentleman does not continue to harm the country. Róger Escobar filed a complaint for terrorism, damage to his family, private property damage and robbery. He stated, “They terrorized my family because of the manipulation of Miguel Mora who said I was a paramilitary, they damaged my image and I received threats.” He had to spend 3 months outside his home because of threats to him on 100% Noticias and social media. Numerous other citizens denounced Mora for broadcasting hatred that resulted in damage to their relatives and property. (Canal 2, 19 Digital 12/6/18, 12/10/18)

US Regime-Change Funding Mechanisms

by Chuck Kaufman



*Nicaraguan students lobbying Senator Marco Rubio
for support for US sanctions and intervention to overthrow
Nicaragua's government. (Photo: Facebook)*

The US Regime-Change Funding Mechanisms

By Chuck Kaufman, National Co-Coordinator, Alliance for Global Justice

In 1990, the US government-funded National Endowment for Democracy (NED) overtly spent twice as much per Nicaraguan voter to defeat Sandinista President Daniel Ortega for re-election as George Bush and Michael Dukakis spent combined per US voter in the 1988 US presidential election. Ronald Reagan had set up the NED in 1983 to, as [Allen Weinstein](#), one of NED's architects, told the Washington Post in 1991, do overtly what was "done covertly 25 years ago by the CIA."

The US never stopped funding the anti-Sandinista opposition after that. And, as the mission of the US Agency for International Development (USAID) became less and less brick and mortar projects and more and more "democracy promotion," USAID became the largest regime change funder directly itself, and through providing most of NED's budget.

Nicaragua Network, which later became Alliance for Global Justice, has monitored US funding of the anti-Sandinista opposition since 1990. It used to be pretty straightforward as the two agencies were quite open about their work. That backfired on them in the aftermath of the 2002 failed coup against Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez as the US funding of the coup mongers was part of the public record and undeniable. After that it became increasingly difficult to follow the money.

USAID funds the NED and directly funds contractors such as Washington-based Freedom House, or national media, youth, and women's groups in targeted countries. NED makes grants itself with some of the money it receives and splits the rest up primarily through its four pillars: International Republican Institute (IRI), National Democratic Institute (NDI), American Center for International Labor Solidarity (aka Solidarity Center), and Center for International Private Enterprise (CIPE). The first two are controlled by the two major US political parties. The Solidarity Center is the AFL-CIO's foreign policy arm, and CIPE is under the purview of the US Chamber of Commerce. But all are funded with tax dollars. They all make grants in their own names, some of which are to contractors who split the money up even farther. It is easy to see how this quickly becomes an efficient money laundering operation to obscure the ultimate recipients of the "regime change" dollars.

In 2006, I led a pre-election delegation to Nicaragua and we met with the IRI. Their staff person told us, "We created the Movement for Nicaragua." Movement for Nicaragua presented itself as an independent civil society organization promoting democracy. It did not admit that it was created and funded by the United States government.

And so it goes. Nicaraguan civil society groups are inextricably intertwined with US funding sources ultimately connected to the US State Department and the Oval Office. This foreign funding distorts Nicaragua's political system, and in the case of the failed coup of April-June, 2018, trained the coup leadership and fueled the violence that ensued.

This chapter includes a reprint of a Truthdig article by journalist Max Blumenthal exposing the role of the US in "laying the groundwork for insurrection." It includes an excerpt of an article published by Popular Resistance and written by Kevin Zeese and Nils

McCune on the funding of civil society groups tied to the Sandinista Renovation Movement of formerly left dissident Sandinistas who have drifted to the right since the 1990s. And finally, we include from NED's own website, the list of 2017 grants. Some grants show the Nicaraguan recipient groups, but most do not. Their descriptions sound laudatory or innocuous, but in the wake of three months of violence and hundreds of deaths, it does not take much imagination to read between the lines and to see these grants as the preparation for a coup. Fortunately the Nicaraguan people, like the Venezuelan people in 2002, defeated the coup.

U.S. Government Meddling Machine Boasts of ‘Laying the Groundwork for Insurrection’ in Nicaragua

By Max Blumenthal, June 20, 2018

From *TruthDig* <https://www.truthdig.com/articles/u-s-government-meddling-machine-boasts-of-laying-the-groundwork-for-insurrection-in-nicaragua/>

While some corporate media outlets have portrayed the violent protest movement gripping Nicaragua as a progressive grassroots upswell, the country’s own student leaders have suggested otherwise.

In early June, Nicaragua’s leading young activists went on a junket to Washington, DC, on the dime of the US government-funded right-wing advocacy group Freedom House. The Nicaraguan student leaders were there to [beseech Donald Trump](#) and other right-wing US government officials to help them in their fight against Nicaraguan President Daniel Ortega.

On the excursion to the US capital, the young activists posed for photo-ops with some of the most notorious neoconservatives in the US Congress: Senators Ted Cruz and Marco Rubio and Rep. Ileana Ros-Lehtinen. The Nicaraguan student leaders were also shepherded to meetings with top officials from the State Department and the US government soft power organization USAID. There, they were reassured that they would have Washington’s full-throated support.

A month before the student protesters’ meetings with ultra-conservative lawmakers in Washington, a publication funded by the US government’s regime change arm, the National Endowment for Democracy (NED), bluntly asserted that organizations backed by the NED have spent years and millions of dollars “laying the groundwork for insurrection” in Nicaragua.

This article openly [boasting of US meddling](#) was published in the Latin America-focused news website [Global Americans](#), and was authored by US academic [Benjamin Waddell](#), the academic director of the School for International Training in Nicaragua. Following publication of this piece, *Global Americans* replaced the term “insurrection” with the more innocuous word “change.” The original headline can however still be seen in the article’s URL.

Despite the cosmetic alteration, Waddell’s article offers a remarkably candid assessment of the impact of the National Endowment for Democracy’s sustained investments in Nicaraguan civil society. The author’s conclusions inadvertently echoed those of Nicaraguan President Daniel Ortega and his supporters, who have framed the protests as a carefully staged plot backed to the hilt by Washington.

“International press has depicted the rapid escalation of civil unrest in Nicaragua as a spontaneous explosion of collective discontent, triggered by the government’s changes to its insolvent social security system and rooted in more than a decade of authoritarian rule by the Ortega-Murillo family,” Waddell wrote. “And while the underlying causes of the turmoil are rooted in government mismanagement and corruption, it’s becoming more and more clear that the U.S. support has helped play a role in nurturing the current uprisings.”

In another striking passage, Waddell concluded, “the NED’s current involvement in nurturing civil society groups in Nicaragua sheds light on the power of transnational funding to influence political outcomes in the 21st century.”

A history of meddling

The NED is a leading agent of US soft power that has meddled in other countries’ affairs since its founding at the height of the Cold War, in 1983. Its first success took place in Nicaragua, where it incubated anti-Sandinista media outfits like the La Prensa newspaper through a cut-out, PRODEMCA, that was also [covertly funded](#) by allies of Oliver North.

In 1990, the Sandinistas were defeated at the polls by the right-wing candidate Violeta Chamorro, whose family happened to own La Prensa. Chamorro’s victory represented the culmination of nearly \$16 million dollars in NED grants to anti-Sandinista political parties and media outlets.

“A lot of what we do today was done covertly 25 years ago by the CIA,” [Allen Weinstein](#), a founder of the NED, commented in 1991.

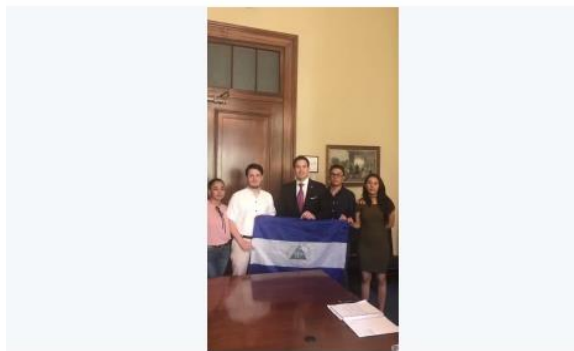
In the years that followed, the NED and its partners have helped swing elections for right-wing neoliberal candidates in [Russia](#) and [Mongolia](#) in 1996; fomented a coup that drove [Haiti](#)’s democratically elected president Jean Bertrand Aristide from power; and directed millions towards dismantling [Venezuela](#)’s socialist government, an ongoing effort complimented by crushing US sanctions.

The protests that have erupted in Nicaragua have brought the NED’s influence back into focus all over again. According to Waddell, the NED has spent \$4.1 million in the country since 2014, helping grow 54 groups into major players on the political scene and “laying the groundwork for insurrection.”

The US-backed network behind the protests

The unrest that has paralyzed Nicaragua was triggered by the announcement by President Daniel Ortega of reforms to the nearly bankrupt social security system. The International Monetary Fund and a local business umbrella group had insisted on changes that would have raised the retirement age and gradually privatized health clinics, threatening some of the most significant gains of the Sandinista revolution.

When Ortega countered with a proposal that would have demanded a greater contribution into the system from businesses and retirees, with business owners paying the lion’s share, a sector of the public exploded with outrage. The angry reaction to Ortega’s plan, reinforced with intensive coverage by



[Marco Rubio](#)

[@marcubio](#)

Me reuní con líderes de la Coalición Universitaria de Nicaragua y Migueliuth Sandoval, Viuda de Gahona, hablamos sobre las atrocidades cometidas por el régimen de #Ortega. Apoyo su lucha por la democracia y la libertad en #Nicaragua

1,006

1:01 PM - Jun 6, 2018

781 people are talking about this

opposition media sources, became the spark for rolling protests that have set the country on fire — literally, in many cases.

The most visible faces of the anti-Ortega movement have not been retirees impacted by the social security reforms, but urban, politically unaffiliated students seeking a total victory. They have forged an alliance with the traditional right-wing, pro-business opponents of Sandinismo, along with a marginal sector of former Sandinistas alienated by Ortega's rapid consolidation of power.

Meanwhile, masked men toting homemade mortars and firearms have formed the front line of the tranque road blocks that have already drained Nicaragua's economy of some \$250 million in revenue. To date, some 170 people have been killed in the chaos. As the death toll mounts on both sides, talk of a new civil war seems like a more than remote possibility.

Since the unrest began, the NED has taken measures to conceal the names of the groups it funds in Nicaragua on the grounds that they could face reprisals from the government. But the main recipients of backing from Washington were already well known in the country.

[Hagamos Democracia](#), or Let's Make Democracy, is the largest recipient of NED funding, reaping over \$525,000 in grants since 2014. The group's president, Luciano Garcia, who oversees a network of reporters and activists, has declared that Ortega has turned Nicaragua into a "failed state" and demanded his immediate resignation.

The Managua-based Institute for Strategic Studies and Public Policy ([IEEPP](#)) has received at least \$260,000 from the NED since 2014. The grants have been earmarked to support the IEEPP's work in training activists on "encouraging debate and generating information on security and violence." The funding has also covered efforts to monitor the "increased presence of Russia and China in the region," an obvious priority for Washington.

As soon as the violent protests against Ortega were ignited, IEEPP director [Felix Mariadiaga](#) brought his agenda out into the open. A former World Economic Forum Young Global Leader educated at Yale and Harvard, Mariadaga was hailed by La Prensa for having "sweated, bled and cried alongside the young students who have led the protests in Nicaragua that continue from April until the end of May."

Asked by La Prensa if there was any way out of the violence without regime change, Mariadaga was blunt: "I cannot imagine a way out at this moment that does not include a transition to democracy without Daniel Ortega."

"We have given ourselves a terrible image"

This June, Mariadaga led an opposition delegation to Washington to denounce Ortega's rule before the General Assembly of the Organization for American States. He was joined by Anibal Toruno, director of Radio Dario — another longtime recipient of support from NED ([PDF](#)), and one of the key hubs of anti-Ortega media in the Nicaraguan city of Leon.

While Mariadaga was in Washington, he was charged by the Nicaraguan police with overseeing an [organized criminal network](#) that has murdered several people during the violent unrest that has gripped the country. Mariadaga slammed the allegations as “[political persecution](#)” and a “ridiculous accusation,” but postponed his return to Nicaragua. The [US State Department](#) backed him up with a statement of vehement support.

At the same time, a group of Nicaraguan student leaders of the anti-Ortega protests were in Washington to lobby the Trump administration for help in bringing their country’s leader down.

Among the US officials to receive the students was USAID director Mark Green. “We need to stand with those who are standing up for things that we need to believe in,” Green said of the students, in an interview with [McClatchy](#).

Aside from NED, USAID has been the most active promoter of regime change against socialist-oriented governments in Latin America. In Nicaragua, [USAID’s budget](#) topped \$5.2 million in 2018, with most of the funding directed towards training civil society and media organizations.

The Nicaraguan students’ junket to Washington was paid for by [Freedom House](#), a US government-funded NED partner whose agenda typically aligns with the [neoconservative wing](#) of the American foreign policy establishment.

Freedom House crafted an itinerary for the students that culminated with a photo-op with some of the most hawkish Republicans in Washington: Senators Ted Cruz and Marco Rubio, and Rep. Ileana Ros-Lehtinen.

Back in Managua, another prominent student leader, [Harley Morales](#), reeled in disgust at his peers’ appearance on Capitol Hill. “It was terrible,” Morales told the newspaper El Faro. “They (Cruz, Rubio, and Ros-Lehtinen) are the extreme Republican right. We are very unhappy with this trip; they were paid for by the United States and an agenda was imposed on them. We have given ourselves a terrible image.”

Though he hoped for “an error correction plan,” Morales conceded that the grip of powerful outside interests on the student protesters was tightening. “All movements now have advisors,” he lamented. “Movers and shakers. Children of politicians, businessmen... They have a very clear political line.”



[Ileana Ros-Lehtinen](#)

[@RosLehtinen](#)

Muy inspirada en reunirme c Victor y Zayda, valientes líderes universitarios q anhelan una #Nicaragua #libre y #democrática. Estos estudiantes representan la voz de tantos jóvenes en protestar y denunciar la violencia del régimen de #Ortega #EEUU los escucha y los vamos a apoyar

853

1:01 PM - Jun 6, 2018

510 people are talking about this

Max Blumenthal is the editor of the GrayzoneProject.com and the co-host of the podcast [Moderate Rebels](#). He is an award-winning journalist and the author of books, including the best-selling "[Republican Gomorrah: Inside the Movement That Shattered the Party](#)," "[Goliath: Life and Loathing in Greater Israel](#)" and "[The Fifty One Day War: Ruin and Resistance in Gaza](#)." He also has produced numerous print articles for an array of publications, many video reports and several documentaries, including "[Je Ne Suis Pas Charlie](#)" and the forthcoming "[Killing Gaza](#)."

Correcting the Record: What Is Really Happening in Nicaragua?

By [Kevin Zeese](#) and [Nils McCune](#)

Global Research, July 11, 2018: <https://www.globalresearch.ca/correcting-the-record-what-is-really-happening-in-nicaragua/5647092>

Selected Excerpts

The Elephant in the Room

Which brings us to US government involvement in the violent coup.

As [Tom Ricker reported](#) early in this political crisis, several years ago the US government decided that rather than finance opposition political parties, which have lost enormous legitimacy in Nicaragua, it would finance the NGO civil society sector. National Endowment for Democracy (NED) [gave more than \\$700,000 to build the opposition](#) to the government in 2017, and has granted more than \$4.4 million since 2014. The overarching purpose of this funding was to “provide a coordinated strategy and media voice for opposition groups in Nicaragua.” Ricker continues:

“The result of this consistent building and funding of opposition resources has been to create an echo chamber that is amplified by commentators in the international media – most of whom have no presence in Nicaragua and rely on these secondary sources.”

NED founding father, [Allen Weinstein](#), [described NED as the overt CIA](#) saying, [“A lot of what we do today was done covertly 25 years ago by the CIA.”](#)

In Nicaragua, rather than the traditional right-wing, NED funds the MRS-affiliated organizations which pose left-sounding critiques of the Sandinista government. The regime change activists use Sandinista slogans, songs and symbols even as they burn historic monuments, paint over the red-and-black markers of fallen martyrs, and physically attack members of the Sandinista party.

Of the opposition groups in the National Dialogue, the feminist organization of Azalea Solis and the peasant organization of Medardo Mairena are financed through [NED grants](#), while the April 19th students stay in hotels and make trips paid for by [Freedom House](#), another regime change organ funded by NED and USAID. NED also finances *Confidencial*, the Chamorro media organization. Grants from NED finance the Institute of Strategic Studies and Public Policy (IEEPP), whose Executive Director, Felix Maradiaga, is another MRS cadre very close to the US Embassy. In June, Maradiaga was accused of leading a criminal network, [whose operational head is Cristian Mendoza aka] Viper which, from the occupied UPOLI campus, organized car-jackings, arsons and murders in order to create chaos and panic during the months of April and May.

Maradiaga grew up in the United States and became a fellow of the [Aspen Leadership Institute](#), before studying public policy at Harvard. He was a secretary in the Ministry of Defense for the last liberal president, [Enrique Bolaños](#). He is a [Young Global Leader at the World Economic Forum](#) and in 2015, the [Chicago Council on Global Affairs](#) gave him the Gus Hart Fellowship, past recipients of which include Cuban dissident [Yoani Sánchez](#) and [Henrique Capriles Radonski](#), the Venezuelan opposition leader who attacked the Cuban embassy during the coup attempt of 2002.



Nicaraguan students meet with right-wing Republicans, Sen. Marco Rubio and Rep. Ileana Ros Lehtinen in Washington, DC.

Source Twitter Truthdig.

Remarkably, Maradiaga is not the only leader of the coup attempt who is part of the [Aspen World Leadership Network](#). **Maria Nelly Rivas**, [director in Nicaragua of US corporate giant Cargill](#), is one of the main spokespersons for the opposition Civic Alliance. Rivas, who currently also heads the [US-Nicaragua Chamber of Commerce](#), is being groomed as a possible presidential candidate in the next elections. Beneath these US-groomed leaders, there is a network of over 2,000 young people who have [received trainings with NED funds](#) on topics such as social media skills for democracy defense. This battalion of social media warriors was able to immediately shape and control public opinion in Facebook in the five days from April 18th to 22nd, leading to spontaneous violent protests across the country.

...

Meanwhile, the April 19th Movement, made up of current or former university students in favor of regime change, sent a delegation to Washington and managed to alienate much of Nicaraguan society by [grinning into the camera with far-right interventionist members](#) of the US Congress, including **Rep. Ileana Ros Lehtinen**, **Sen. Marco Rubio** and **Sen. Ted Cruz**. M19 leaders also cheered **Vice-President Mike Pence's** bellicose warnings that Nicaragua is on the short list of countries that will soon know the Trump Administration's meaning of freedom, and met with the ARENA party of El Salvador, known for its links to the death squads that murdered liberation theologian Archbishop Oscar Romero. Within Nicaragua, the critical mass of students stopped demonstrating weeks ago, the large civic protests of April and May have dwindled, and the same-old familiar faces of Nicaraguan right wing politics are left holding the bill for massive material damage and loss of life.

This article was also published on [Popular Resistance](#).

Kevin Zeese is an attorney who co-directs the US-based [Popular Resistance](#).

Nils McCune is on the Technical team of IALA Mesoamerica (Agroecological Institute of Latin America in Nicaragua) and agroecological education of La Via Campesina.

The original source of this article is Global Research

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National Endowment for Democracy and USAID grants to Nicaraguan NGOs

Over the years, it has gotten harder and harder to follow the money from grantor to recipient group. This USAID link <https://explorer.usaid.gov/cd/NIC> provides impressive graphics and many numbers while conveying little to no useful information if one wants to learn how the government is spending US tax dollars in Nicaragua.

The NED is a somewhat better spending reporter, but it learned in 2002 when its own reporting was used to expose its role in the short-lived coup against Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez, that it needed to be a bit more discrete. And so, you will notice in its report of grants in 2017 that in many cases it is impossible to discern which NGOs actually received the money. 2017 is the most recent year for which details are accessible. The list of grants involving Nicaragua is included below without modification.

<https://www.ned.org/region/latin-america-and-caribbean/nicaragua-2017/>

LATIN AMERICA AND CARIBBEAN

NICARAGUA 2017

Nicaragua 2017

Democracy and Citizen Security in Nicaragua

Instituto de Estudios Estrategicos y Politicas Publicas

\$55,000

To raise awareness of citizen security in Nicaragua by encouraging debate and generating information on security and violence. Data will be collected and analysis produced on issues related to crime and violence in Nicaragua, with a focus on social conflicts and politically motivated violence in rural communities. Local activists will be trained to monitor conflicts and promote a culture of peace.

Fostering a New Generation of Democratic Youth Leaders

Civic Education

\$86,000

To promote democratic values and participation among youth in Nicaragua. Forums in schools and universities will educate students about democratic values and human rights. A network of youth leaders will foster a more active role of youth in defending democracy. Additionally, a magazine and social media will facilitate discussion on youth issues and democratic activism.

Promoting Access to Justice and Human Rights in Nicaragua

Comision Permanente de Derechos Humanos de Nicaragua

\$72,440

To promote and protect human rights in Nicaragua. The project will provide legal assistance to citizens facing challenges in accessing the justice system. Human rights conditions in prisons and detention facilities will be monitored and proposals for their improvement will be presented to relevant authorities. International mechanisms will be

used to monitor and report human rights violations and raise awareness about the country's international obligations to protect human rights.

Promoting Free and Fair Municipal Elections

Comision Permanente de Derechos Humanos de Nicaragua

Supplement: \$39,000

To promote free and fair elections in Nicaragua. In partnership with other organizations, local activists and volunteers will receive training to monitor and document any voting irregularities during the November 2017 municipal elections. A call center will receive reports of human rights violations during election day and inform the public about its findings.

Promoting Democratic Values and Organization among Civil Society Activists

Fundacion Iberoamericana de las Culturas

\$79,423

To promote democratic values and democratic governance at the local level in Nicaragua. Local chapters and members will be trained to advocate for democratic reforms in the country. Democracy forums and workshops on civic education will be carried out and 48 radio programs addressing issues related to democracy in Nicaragua will be produced and broadcast.

Promoting Freedom of Expression in Nicaragua

Freedom of Information

\$45,000

To strengthen independent media and citizen journalism in Nicaragua. A local media campaign will promote democratic values and support the networking activities and collaboration efforts of independent radio broadcasters.

Promoting Legislative Oversight and Free and Fair Elections

Asociacion Hagamos Democracia

\$80,000

To promote transparency and accountability of the Nicaraguan National Assembly. The organization will monitor sessions of the National Assembly and the use of a discretionary fund assigned to legislators. The grantee will publish its findings in a quarterly bulletin and raise awareness about the need for greater transparency in the legislative process.

Raising Awareness about Youth Preferences in Civic Participation

Fundacion Nicaraguense para el Desarrollo Economico y Social

\$40,000

To promote greater understanding about youth preferences in civic participation in Nicaragua. The organization will gather information on how young Nicaraguans communicate amongst themselves and with others to engage in social and political issues.

The organization will produce and disseminate a report containing the findings of the study and best practices for civil society organizations and political actors to promote youth civic participation.

Raising Awareness of Corruption's Effects on Citizens

International Republican Institute (IRI)

\$150,000

To strengthen anticorruption oversight efforts. The institute will provide civic actors with tools, techniques, and resources to conduct new and strengthen ongoing investigative analyses on the negative effects of corruption on citizens. Activities will increase awareness and enhance civic literacy to provide oversight and demand accountability from government, the institute will also help civic actors disseminate their findings through a grassroots awareness campaign.

Raising the Voice of Women Entrepreneurs

Center for International Private Enterprise (CIPE)

\$239,571

To enhance women entrepreneurs' ability to advocate for economic and social reform, and to amplify public and private sector support for policies that improve women's economic empowerment. The center and its partner network will advance an advocacy agenda to reduce gender disparities in the economic sphere by organizing a series of workshops to enhance women's advocacy capacity and leading specific advocacy efforts through social and traditional media, working groups, and meetings with public and private sector representatives.

Strengthening Online Independent Media

INVERMEDIA

\$75,000

To promote freedom of expression and independent media in Nicaragua. The organization will work to consolidate and expand the reach of an independent digital news platform. The grantee will produce a series of investigative reports on the most salient issues affecting Nicaraguans.

Strengthening the Role of Women in Defense of Nicaraguan Democracy

Rule of Law

\$74,794

To promote democratic values and human rights among women in Nicaragua. The capacity of women will be strengthened to defend their rights and Nicaraguan democracy. Reports on the human rights situation of women in Nicaragua will raise international and domestic awareness.

Strengthening the Strategic Capacity of Civil Society to Defend Democracy

Democratic Ideas and Values

\$100,000

To strengthen the capacity of Nicaraguan pro-democracy activists to forge a common civil society strategy to defend democracy. Periodic publications will cover the state of democracy and the situation of human rights in Nicaragua. A group of civil society organizations and social movements will convene a series of forums to discuss their content and identify advocacy opportunities.

Human Rights in Nicaragua: “In war, truth is the first casualty”

Edited with an introduction by Dan Kovalik



The body of police officer Gabriel de Jesus Vado, abducted by opposition activists who tortured him for three days before killing him, setting him on fire at a barricade in Masaya. (Photo: Facebook)

Human Rights in Nicaragua: “In war, truth is the first casualty.” (Aeschylus)

Edited with Introduction by Dan Kovalik

Introduction

“More than 2,500 years after it was written, this quote, attributed to the ancient Greek tragedian Aeschylus, is timely and relevant to the Nicaraguan crisis. What has been happening since April of last year is nothing shy of a war – military, economic, psychological, cultural, political – and the truth about the crisis was indeed the first casualty.” Camilo Mejia, former Amnesty International prisoner of conscience, Nicaraguan resident in the United States, imprisoned for refusing to serve in the Iraq war.

In this section we examine the history of the Nicaraguan army and police and how their approach is so different from those of other countries of the Northern Triangle; the reasons why the transnational gangs, the *maras* have not taken root in Nicaragua; the distorted and biased reporting of casualties of the violence and the way this has been manipulated to promote the regime change agenda of the opposition and the US administration; and the role of local and international human rights organizations in promoting a very political interpretation of human rights and whose rights should be respected.

Nicaragua’s approach to policing: rehabilitation rather than punishment

One of the first things to consider when thinking about the claims about state violence during the April – July crisis is the nature of the state forces involved.

First of all, the Nicaraguan Army, the most respected institution in Nicaragua, was not involved at all. Unlike many Latin American countries, the Army is not used in Nicaragua to police the population even in times of great unrest, and the April – July crisis was no exception. The Army was confined to its barracks throughout this period.

And so, the focus of the inquiry is the Nicaraguan National Police which the media would have us believe was engaged in a wholesale attack against its own, defenseless population, and particularly against peaceful student protestors. But does this square with what we know about these the Nicaraguan police? The clear answer is no.

Up until the time of the crisis, the National Police was the second most trusted institution in Nicaragua, and was known throughout the region as being exemplary in its use of pro-active community policing. Their focus was on rehabilitating, rather than punishing, particularly with adolescents and children engaged in criminal activity. The success of this approach is borne out by the fact that Nicaragua was one of the safest countries in Latin America.

As a number of commentators have noted that the US could learn a lot from the techniques used by their Nicaraguan counterparts. For example, in 2017, shortly before the April – July Crisis, J. Thomas Ratchford III explained in the peer-reviewed Emory International Law Review⁸⁵, “In the face of surging regional violence, processes and

85 Policing in Partnership: Nicaraguan Policies with Implications for U.S. Police Forces. J. Thomas Ratchford III, 32 *Emory Int’l L. Rev.* 173 (2017).

techniques developed by the Nicaraguan National Police yield the lowest violent crime rates in the region, in spite of Nicaragua's ranking as the poorest country in Central America.⁸⁶ Bucking the trend towards militarization in regional police forces, mirroring U.S. policy, Nicaragua has developed community-centered programs that prioritize restorative justice. . . . This concept is codified in legislation aimed at prioritizing citizen security through programs emphasizing constant reform of security apparatuses in partnership with the population."

Meanwhile, Nicaragua's neighbors, which have adopted a heavy-handed, militaristic approach to dealing with gang violence and youth crimes – an approach known as "*mano duro*" (literally, "strong hand") – have had much worse outcomes. As Ratchford explains, "Guatemala, El Salvador, and Honduras have seen spiking homicide rates that have oscillated between twenty-four and eighty homicides per 100,000 inhabitants over the last decade, with El Salvador's surging past one hundred homicides per 100,000 inhabitants in 2015." And this accounts for the large migration to the US from these three countries while Nicaragua has contributed nominally to this phenomenon.

Ratchford explains that the nature of the Nicaraguan National Police can only be understood in the context of the history of the Sandinista Revolution of 1979 against the US-backed dictatorship:

"The Nicaraguan National Police traces its origins to the 1979 *Fundamental Statute of the Republic* (FSLN), which created the first security institution distinct from the Army following the Sandinista transition from the Somoza dictatorship. Internal, as well as international political pressure following the end of hostilities between the Sandinistas and the contras, forced the National Police to move beyond its origins in the Sandinista revolution.⁸⁷ In order to break with this tradition rooted in the Sandinista party structure, the Organic Law of 1996 was implemented, which reformulated the institution and "guaranteed a non-partisan nature."⁸⁸ Following this rebranding, the National Police underwent a series of five-year plans, constantly reshaping and adapting its structure.

"Throughout this continuous transformation, Nicaragua's police force has gained a reputation for being, in the words of its former director, "the smallest police force in Central America, with the lowest salaries, but with the best results" There are a number of metrics that support this assertion. For example, the most recent numbers available place Nicaragua's homicide rates at eight per 100,000 inhabitants, the lowest such statistic in the region. Another indicator, which can be related more directly to youth gangs, is the astounding statistic that in a country of over six million inhabitants there were only seventy juveniles in custody."

⁸⁶ *Id.*, citing, Santiago Ramirez, Inter-American Development Bank [IDB], *Violence and Crime in Nicaragua: A Country Profile*, Discussion Paper, No. IDB-DP-306, 34 (June 2013) (measuring GDP per capita; in terms of real GDP Nicaragua ranks second poorest behind Belize).

⁸⁷ This is indicative of the underlying trend of constant reform. Rogers, *supra* at 34 (This pressure "to eliminate its historic links to the FSLN" was the catalyst that spurred the definition of the force's "institutional purpose.").

⁸⁸ *Id.* While the non-partisan nature of the police force is touted following the enactment of the 1996 law, former Director Granera was previously Chief of Staff for the Interior Ministry during the first Sandinista regime and credits her decision to participate in the new force as one made after deciding "not [to] hand[] my rifle over to someone who will use it against my people." *Id.* . . .

As Ratchford explains, in contrast to the militaristic approach to law enforcement of its neighbors as well as of the United States, “Nicaragua’s juvenile justice program . . . relies on: (1) political commitment to reform, (2) community involvement, (3) restorative justice through education and rehabilitation, and (4) public legitimacy.”

As Ratchford also explains, this program relies upon a National Police force which is, by law and by tradition since the 1979 Revolution, non-partisan and beholden to no political party in Nicaragua. The result of this has been an amazingly high level of trust among Nicaraguans in their police. Thus, as Ratchford, writing just before the crisis of April-July, related, Nicaragua’s fiercely independent Director of National Police, Aminta Granera – an avowed Sandinista and feminist -- ***“sat atop the list of twenty-six Nicaraguan public officials with an approval rating of eighty-seven percent.”*** (emphasis added).

Ratchford concludes that Nicaragua’s “holistic” and “rehabilitative” approach to policing resulted in the “public perception of ‘fairness of police behavior’ as opposed to ‘the fear of police force and the threat of punishment,’” and to an overall high level of “legitimacy.”

Again, this law review article, applauding Nicaragua’s “soft-handed” policing, was published in 2017. How can we believe that this police force, which has prided itself on trying to rehabilitate rather than punish Nicaraguan young people engaged in serious criminal activity, somehow snapped in April of 2018 and began firing on Nicaraguan students for merely peacefully protesting against minor social security reforms which were quickly retracted once the protests began?

Especially curious is the fact that the same police commander so positively described above, Aminta Granera, led the police up until her resignation on April 27, 2018 – that is, through the period in which the alleged student massacre took place. Again, somehow Granera -- a guerilla fighter against Somoza who was first appointed director of the National Police by Ortega’s predecessor, Enrique Bolaños, and who prided herself on being non-partisan – became Ortega’s violent enforcer against a peaceful student movement. The very popular Granera, who vowed not to hand her “rifle to someone who will use it against my people,” and who worked to increase the number of women in the police force, somehow snapped and became a killer overnight. This is what we are supposed to believe.

The facts simply do not support such a fantastic account of inexplicable police brutality. On the contrary, the police were horribly victimized during the crisis. Indeed, a police officer was the first person killed, allegedly by “peaceful” protestors. All in all, according to Nicaragua’s Truth, Justice and Peace Commission (CVJP), set up by the National Assembly to investigate the facts surrounding the violence during this period, 22 officers of the National Police were killed during the crisis. And, as photos and videos publicly displayed show, a number of these officers were horribly tortured and mutilated, dismembered and set on fire. These were not the acts of “peaceful” demonstrators.

As the chart below illustrates, the CVJP estimates that, in total, 253 individuals were killed as a consequence of crisis-related violence. Of these, 22 were police, 48 were Sandinista activists, 31 were opposition activists and 152 deaths lacked sufficient information. However, it is known that most of these 152 deaths occurred at the opposition

tranques [road blocks] and those responsible were largely people manning these *tranques*. In short, at least in so far as the CVJP can determine, the Sandinista and pro-government forces, including police, were at least as much victims of the violence, if not more so, than the opposition forces.



Similar conclusions were reached by independent Nicaraguan researcher Enrique Hendrix who did a detailed breakdown of the deaths related to the crisis. The following is an article by journalist Max Blumenthal who reviews Mr. Hendrix's findings to debunk mainstream media claims about the crisis violence.

How Washington and Soft Power NGOs Manipulated Nicaragua's Death Toll to Drive Regime Change and Sanctions

Did Nicaragua's Sandinista government really kill 300+ peaceful protesters? A forensic analysis of the death toll exposes the claim as a dangerous lie.

By Max Blumenthal, August 1, 2018

A detailed study of the death toll since the beginning of a violent campaign to remove President Daniel Ortega and his Sandinista government shows that at least as many Sandinista supporters were killed as opposition members. The study, "[Monopolizing Death](#)," demonstrates how partisan local NGOs conflated all deaths that occurred from April, including accidents and the murders of Sandinistas, with killings by government forces. Washington has seized on the bogus death count to drive the case for sanctions and intensify pressure for regime change.

The manipulated death toll was the centerpiece of a July 25 harangue by Republican Rep. Ileana Ros-Lehtinen on the floor of the US House of Representatives. While drumming up support for a bipartisan resolution condemning Nicaraguan President Daniel Ortega for supposedly ordering the massacre of demonstrators, Ros-Lehtinen [declared](#), "Mr. Speaker, four hundred and fifty! That is how many Nicaraguans have been killed by the Ortega regime and its thugs since April of this year."

The congresswoman's portrayal of a dictatorial regime gunning down peaceful protesters like helpless quails in a canned hunt was designed to generate pressure for an attack on the Nicaraguan economy in the form of sanctions packages like the Nica Act. Her narrative was reinforced by Vice President Mike Pence, who [condemned](#) Nicaragua's government for "350+ dead at the hands of the regime," and by Ken Roth, the long-serving executive director of Human Rights Watch, who also [suggested](#) that Ortega had personally ordered the killing of "300 demonstrators against his corrupt and repressive rule."

It was also clear that many Sandinistas had been killed since the chaos began. The opposition's victims include Gabriel de Jesus Vado, a police officer from Jinotepe, who was kidnapped, dragged from a moving car, and [burned alive](#) on video at the tranque in Monimbó this month [July, 2018], a neighborhood in Masaya that the opposition had violently occupied for weeks.

But according to the logic employed by Congress and the White House, which holds the government responsible for every single death that occurred between April and June, the killing of Vado and as many as twenty other members of Nicaragua's national police never took place — nor did the deaths of anyone killed by opposition paramilitaries. This is what you have to believe if you blame the Sandinista government for one hundred percent of the deaths.

The manipulation of the death toll by Congress and Western soft power NGOs is exposed in meticulous detail in "[Monopolizing Death](#)."

The author of this forensic study, independent Nicaraguan researcher Enrique Hendrix, describes his analysis as "evidence of a campaign that, in the absence of a just cause, uses the death of every citizen as a motive to manipulate the emotions of the population in order to counterpose 'the government' against 'the people.'"

Hendrix told me that he initiated his study, “Monopolizing Death,” two weeks after the anti-Sandinista protests began. “All the opposition media channels started claiming all these deaths were taking place [at the hands of government forces], and I was having a lot of uncertainties,” he said. “So I started researching the lists of the human rights organizations and really trying to figure out if these death counts consisted only of students, as opposition media was reporting.”

* * *

Partisan human rights NGOs as a regime change weapon

Hendrix’s study surveys the deaths recorded by the two Nicaraguan human rights organizations. They are the Nicaraguan Center for Human Rights (CENIDH), and the Nicaraguan Association for Human Rights (ANPDH).

These are the organizations that Congress, the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR), and international soft power organizations like Human Rights Watch have relied on for their understanding of the violence that has gripped Nicaragua.

While in Nicaragua, I learned how members of CENIDH and ANPDH actively participated in the campaign to remove the Sandinista government. For instance, I was told by three separate students of the public university UNAN that CENIDH legal advisor Gonzalo Carrion was present with opposition students and militants when they took over the campus and that Carrion was even a bystander to their violence.

Ramon Avellan, the police commissioner of Masaya, related to me how staffers of ANPDH repeatedly appeared at his police station alongside opposition activists to beseech him to surrender. This act that would have resulted in the total takeover of the city by the armed opposition, which according to Avellan, included strong representation from local criminal cartels.

ANPDH was founded in Miami, the true base of Nicaragua’s right-wing opposition, and was [funded](#) in the 1980’s by the US government’s National Endowment for Democracy to [paint the Contras](#) as victims of communist brutality. Today, the group remains a political weapon of choice against the Sandinista movement.

How anti-Sandinista “human rights” NGOs and Washington cooked the books

Hendrix found that the self-proclaimed human rights groups in Nicaragua had removed the contexts of the deaths they recorded in order to conflate every unnatural death that occurred across the country between April 19 and June 25 with killings by Nicaraguan pro-government forces.

He found that seven categories of deaths were included in the human rights reports. All categories except for one were totally unrelated to government violence.

They are as follows:

Duplicated names

Deaths unrelated to protests

People murdered by the opposition

Opposition activists, including those involved in the violent tranques

Innocent bystanders

Names without significant data to determine the cause of death

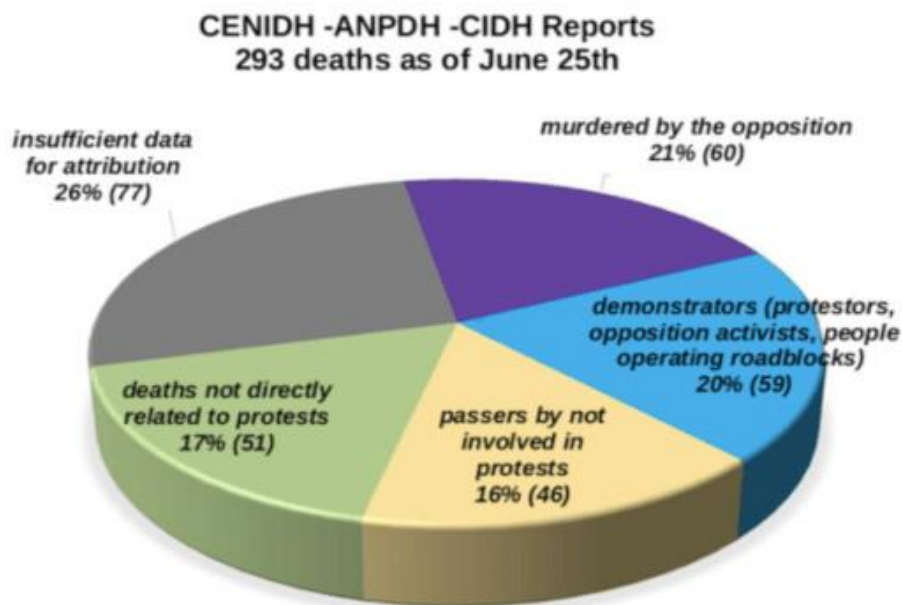
Deaths omitted from each list

According to Hendrix, reports by CENIDH and ANPDH were padded with the deaths of “victims of traffic accidents, altercations between gangs, murders by robbery, those killed by accidental firing of a firearm and even more absurdly, a suicide.”

This information was repeated in IACHR’s study includes nine duplicated names, while all three organizations larded their reports with 97 deaths that were unrelated to the protests. The causes of 77 deaths recorded in the three reports remain unknown.

While the Nicaraguan opposition has howled about genocide-level massacres of students, Hendrix found in his own research that out of the approximately 60 deaths among anti-Sandinista elements at the hands of government-aligned forces, only 16 or 17 were actual students.

Most shockingly, Hendrix’s forensic research demonstrated that the opposition killed at least the same number of Sandinista supporters and police officers as they lost at the hands of the government. This fact flies directly in the face of the US-centric narrative of a dictator mowing down peaceful protesters.



It would be easy for anyone familiar with the situation that unfolded on the ground over the past three months to see why so many had been killed on the Sandinista side.

In late April, Ortega ordered his police forces to stay in their stations as a condition of the national dialogue he initiated with the opposition. The order meant that for about 55 days, Sandinista supporters were left to fend off a national crusade of lethal blood vengeance. Countless citizens were beaten or faced property destruction at the hands of the opposition solely because they belonged to the Sandinista Front.

Among the killings of Sandinistas detailed in Hendrix's report was a 25 month old baby, the child of Gabriella Maria Aguirre, who died on June 13 in Masatepe of bronchoaspiration when her ambulance was held up at an opposition roadblock.

Meanwhile, in cities like Masaya and Jinotepe, police found themselves under virtual siege, cut off for weeks from regular food and medical supplies, and wound up waging a pitched battle with the opposition militants who had encircled them.

* * *

The deaths of those within opposition ranks who were killed by accident or as a result of fratricidal violence have also been decontextualized in these reports, and are therefore unacknowledged by Washington and international legal bodies. They include Guatemalan journalist [Eduardo Spiegler](#), who was crushed by a "tree of life" street decoration toppled by opposition protesters as he was covering their spree of vandalism.

* * *

As a result of the type of manipulation of the numbers which Max Blumenthal and Enrique Hendrix discuss, and/or just plain sloppiness, the mainstream media and even prominent human rights groups wrongly portrayed the crisis of April as a wholesale attack against the Nicaraguan population by their own government. The facts, however, are much more complex but few have been willing to grapple with such complexity. Two groups, the Alliance for Global Justice (US) and the Nicaraguan Solidarity Campaign Action Group (UK) have been amongst that few, and have been a critical counter-voice to the din of misinformation we have been hearing about Nicaragua. The following is an excerpt of a much longer and impressive joint report by these two groups which specifically refutes many of the claims made by Amnesty International about the Nicaraguan crisis.

Dismissing the Truth: Why Amnesty International is wrong about Nicaragua

An evaluation and response to the Amnesty International report 'Instilling Terror: from lethal force to persecution in Nicaragua'

Published February 2019 © Alliance for Global Justice (United States) and Nicaraguan Solidarity Campaign Action Group (United Kingdom); below are various extracts.

Introduction

During 2018 Amnesty International published two reports on the crisis in Nicaragua. The first, "[Shoot to kill: Nicaragua's strategy to repress protest](#)", was published in May. It was regarded as being highly partial and unbalanced by many of those who read it, including people in Nicaragua itself. It attracted strong criticism from a former Amnesty International 'prisoner of conscience', Camilo Mejia, a Nicaraguan resident of the United States who was imprisoned for refusing to serve in the Iraq war.

Mejia wrote [an open letter to Amnesty International](#) and received only a perfunctory reply. The latest Amnesty International report on Nicaragua, "[Instilling Terror](#)", is similarly unbalanced and fails completely to explain the context for or causes of the recent violence in Nicaragua. It argues that the Nicaraguan government, in response to protests that began in April, has instigated 'a strategy of indiscriminate repression with intent to kill not only in order to completely smash the protests, but also to punish those who participated in them.' This report challenges this conclusion.

The context: The truth about events in Nicaragua in 2018

In its two reports, Amnesty International paints a picture of the events in Nicaragua during the five months from mid-April to mid-September which is unrecognizable to most Nicaraguans. . . .

The reality was very different.

The AI report completely ignores the experiences of millions of Nicaraguans who suffered hugely as a result of the violence over that period. It claims to document 'human rights violations' but includes only those which it attributes to the government side, ignoring violations carried out by the opposition. At its worst, these involved opposition supporters engaging in kidnappings, torture and murder of ordinary people who happened to be Sandinista supporters or government workers, in addition to the killings of and injuries to the police.

Here are just a few examples taken only from days in mid-June that are supposedly covered by the second AI report, but which receive no mention at all:

- On June 13, an opposition group held captive and brutally tortured Leonel Morales, leader of the National Union of Students of Nicaragua and member of the national dialogue. They left him for dead in a ditch but he was [rescued](#) and survived after lengthy medical treatment.

- On June 15, Sandinista lawyer and activist Marlon Medina Tobal was [shot dead](#) while walking beside a roadblock in the city of León.
- On June 18, a burning tire was thrown inside the Managua home of Rosa Argentina Solís, a 60-year-old communal leader. The same day, the house of the mother of Sandinista MP José Ramón Sarria Morales was the subject of arson. Then nine members of his family were [held captive and tortured](#).
- On June 18, Sandinista activist Yosep Joel Mendoza Sequeira, a resident of Simón Bolívar neighbourhood in Matagalpa, was [held captive and savagely tortured](#). The same day, a video was relayed via social media, where a young woman accused of sympathy with the government is [humiliated and treated brutally](#) during an interrogation.
- On June 21, after being held by men manning roadblocks in Zaragoza and Subtiaba, León, young Sandinista youth activist Sander Bonilla was [tortured](#) under the impassive gaze of a priest.
- On June 22, an anti-Sandinista group fired at the house of the teacher Mayra Garmendia in Jinotega and [burned the building](#) where her family was, who managed to escape.

The violence and defiance of authority resulted in several cities effectively being closed down for many weeks or in some cases months. Furthermore, no one could travel on the main highways; buses, taxis and other forms of transport were largely paralyzed and people's freedom of movement was completely denied. The physical and economic damage and the disruption to normal life were immense. None of this is reflected in AI's assessment.

How the initial protests were manipulated to provoke violence

AI says (p.3) that the protests began on April 18 in opposition to a series of reforms to the social security system. Superficially this is correct, but it ignores the fact that students leading the protests were very quickly joined by those with a much wider agenda than the social security reforms, as was evident from:

- although the reforms were quickly withdrawn, the protests continued
- as soon as the government agreed to a 'national dialogue' with the opposition groups, their call was for the constitutionally elected government to resign immediately and this quickly became their main demand, ignoring social security issues.

AI acknowledges that protesters 'called for the resignation of the government' (p.8) but depicts this as a secondary aim when in fact it was primary.

Demands for regime change were fueled by an enormous social media campaign which began well before April 18, but intensified with the student protests, blaming the government for dozens of student deaths and disappearances which had not even occurred. False messages were sent from university buildings calling for help for students who were supposedly under fire. Paid advertisements appeared on Facebook denouncing government violence. A [video](#) gives testimony from families where the deaths or disappearances of sons and daughters were falsely reported, inflaming public opinion. Mainstream media such as [La Prensa](#) began to use the words 'student massacre' to describe these events, prompted by local 'human rights' organizations such as CENIDH.

In this [video](#) a student, Veronica Gutierrez, who is in hiding and initially supported the protests, explains how she quickly changed her mind as they became violent and demanded regime change. Nils McCune, who lives in Nicaragua, [has explained in detail](#) how the protests quickly developed in late April into a violent attempt to overthrow the government.

The reality of the roadblocks

A constant theme of the AI report is that people were legitimately ‘exercising their right to freedom of expression’ (p.48) and that roadblocks were set up as a ‘sign of protest, to defend themselves from attacks on the civilian population and to exert pressure on the authorities by restricting road traffic’ (p.3). They also served as ‘protection from attacks by the National Police and pro- government armed groups’ (p.8). AI quotes reports (p.8) that up to 125 roadblocks were erected across the country and about 20 of these blocked roads completely. This is a very incomplete and misleading aspect of the report.

AI fails to explain that the 125 roadblocks to which they refer were solely those on the main transport routes, and were aimed mainly at preventing traffic movement between cities, including the movement of ambulances, police vehicles, trucks delivering food, etc.

...

The opposition were clearly organizing and monitoring this system of roadblocks at national level, as shown by a map which was [published in the opposition media](#) on June 9 and was prepared by the team run by opposition leader Francisca Ramírez.

There is plentiful evidence of an organizational structure. For example, we have spoken to a businessman prevented from travelling into the city of Estelí, who tried to talk with one of the many masked men at the main roadblock, where what appeared to be ‘hundreds’ of trucks and buses full of people were being held up. The man pointed an AK-47 at him with the words, ‘Orders from above, nobody gets through in either direction.’ Such responses were commonplace.

Within cities there were many more roadblocks – the police have said as many as 1,300. In the Masaya department alone there were around 600, although the number there was exceptional. These city roadblocks also prevented most traffic movement for many weeks, apart from motor cycles and people on foot. Between the roadblocks on the main roads and those in cities, the country was paralyzed and economic activity largely brought to a halt. The official truth commission (CVJP) calculated that at least 150 deaths occurred at these roadblocks, the vast majority murders by armed members of the opposition.

* * *

Urban roadblocks were managed by a mixture of local people and outsiders – the latter often either brought in to lead the operation or to behave more aggressively to drivers and passers-by. There appeared to be a deliberate strategy of transferring roadblock operators between cities. In some cities, known ‘delinquents’ were recruited from local towns and villages and brought in each evening at nightfall: ‘wages’ were reported to be C\$500 per night in one city.

Main road barriers also required sophisticated organization. Both types were linked to wider opposition activity in the area, including violent attacks on the police.

In many cases, the patrols at roadblocks would be strengthened at night time. In the many places where there was a proper network 'running' the roadblocks, as in Masaya, Jinotepe, etc., there were also people specifically responsible for organizing supplies. These included bringing in money, food, medical supplies, alcohol or drugs, arms and munitions.

Where a large area was contained by roadblocks (e.g. Monimbó, Masaya), there were separate medical facilities, an HQ for those running the roadblocks, etc., often in a house or the local Catholic church.

...

One powerful purpose and result of the 'tranques' was clearly to frighten and intimidate the population generally (as noted by the Truth Commission . . .). The fact that people across the country were receiving videos of the torture and public humiliation of Sandinistas (often labelled as 'zapos' or 'toads' in social media) contributed to the terrorizing impact of the roadblocks.

Use of weapons

AI admits that 'the use of homemade mortars as a means of defense was common' (p.3). It goes on to say: 'In most of the attacks and clashes of which Amnesty International is aware, demonstrators on roadblocks generally used homemade mortars and Molotov cocktails against the National Police and its pro-government armed groups. In some cases, the organization received information that firearms were also used by a minority of demonstrators in a number of locations. . . . However, the information received suggests that these weapons were generally personal (registered) hunting weapons with limited ammunition. In general, the use of weapons by the protesters was limited in terms of quantity, caliber and available ammunition.'

This is misleading on three counts. First, it implies that 'homemade' weapons were relatively harmless, whereas they are capable of and did injure, disable and even kill people targeted from the roadblocks. This is apparent from reports by local 'human rights' group ANPDH, whose material is often cited by the IACHR, AI and local and international media.

In [their report of June 25](#), ANPDH cite mortars as the cause of death in two cases:

- The first is the death of Julia Amada López Cruz on June 11 (ANPDH case #167).
- The second is that of Jose David Oviedo (case #149), although there were [reports](#) that Oviedo was killed by rifle fire.

In addition, of course, mortars and other improvised weapons caused probably hundreds of injuries, often serious, including injuries to the opposition fighters themselves (for example, when there were battles between rival 'tranques'). Second, the use of the term 'homemade' suggests literally that these were made in people's backyards. However, it is obvious from the sheer volume of mortars and other makeshift weapons in use at roadblocks, the speed with which they became available and the plentiful supplies of gunpowder, that their production was on an industrial scale

Third, AI reports totally inaccurately that the use of more serious weapons was 'limited' (p.17, footnote). In fact, they were widespread, albeit not as common as makeshift ones. The existence of serious weapons is obvious from the fact that 23 police officers were killed and 401 injured by bullets up to the end of September, quite apart from deaths and injuries to civilians. The detailed case studies in our report give plentiful examples.

Wider damage

In addition to the violence against the public, the roadblocks and the 'no go' areas they created were the base for huge destructive attacks against public buildings, businesses and private homes. Some 252 buildings were burnt down or ransacked, including many private homes. Nearly 400 vehicles – in many cases police vehicles and ambulances – were destroyed. Some 278 heavy items of machinery were damaged or destroyed. The effects on Nicaragua's health service are described in [this video](#). The cost in damage to public sector property and vehicles alone is estimated at US\$ 231 million.

In wider damage, losses to the economy were estimated at \$961 million, nearly 120,000 people lost their jobs, schools in some cities were closed for up to three months and many people suffered and some even died as a result of not being able to reach hospitals. Hundreds of businesses were looted, in some cases involving the killing of security guards. Some have been unable to reopen.

Not measurable is the daily fear experienced by many people as a result of the control of the areas where they lived by armed opposition groups, protected by roadblocks, with police prevented from doing their normal jobs.

'Peaceful protest' quickly became armed insurrection

The truth is that the Nicaraguan government very quickly faced an armed insurrection, which began in the universities but quickly spread to all major cities as access to firearms escalated out of control. Indirectly, AI acknowledges that the protesters were armed, since its previous report agreed that on the first and second days of the protests (18 and 19 April) there were (respectively) no deaths and three deaths.

AI attributed the April 19 killings to 'the hands of state forces' (p.9) when in fact one was a policeman (Hilton Rafael Manzanares Alvarado), a second was a Sandinista supporter defending an office in Tipitapa being attacked by protesters (Richard Antonio Pavón Hernández) and the third was a passer-by uninvolved in the protests (Darwin Manuel Urbina). The policeman, Hilton Manzanares, was part of a patrol of twelve confronted by 300 armed protesters near to the Universidad Politécnica (UPOLI). None of the initial victims were students, and none were killed by 'state forces'. Clearly at least two of the three were victims of opposition violence at the very start of the demonstrations.

The fact that opposition supporters had serious weapons was evident the following day (20 April), when protesters wounded 16 municipal workers and 18 police officers during a pitched battle lasting five hours with firearms being used by opposition gunmen. That was the worst day of the protests, with 24 deaths in total, some being passers-by or victims of fires started by protesters. This was also the only day when a significant number of students died, but from the injuries to the police and others it is obvious that many of them must have been using conventional firearms. Once the roadblocks were removed, some elements of the opposition formed armed groups in the countryside

While these may not pose a serious threat to the government, they show the availability of weapons far beyond the 'limited' use indicated by AI.

Nicaragua since mid-July

AI gives a completely misleading impression of the country in the period from Mid-July up to the time when it compiled its report. For example, it says (p.3) that 'hundreds of

people in different places throughout the country have taken to the streets every day to demonstrate', strongly implying that these are anti-government protests when the most frequent and biggest marches were pro-government, demanding justice for the victims of opposition violence.

Since July and the removal of the remaining roadblocks, life has largely returned to normal, the streets are again safe and people can move around freely both within cities and across the country. The economy is beginning to recover from the enormous damage caused by the opposition violence, strikes and roadblocks. Tourists are beginning to return to the country and there is every prospect of full economic and social recovery during 2019.

Legitimate or illegitimate protests?

Amnesty International's previous report pointed out that 'Protest and peaceful demonstration are an accepted part of the right to freedom of expression and assembly'. This is of course true. It is also true that there have been peaceful marches by the opposition at various stages. However, several protests have ended in violence against police, bystanders or those believed to be government sympathizers.

AI says (p.17) that 'the fact that some groups or people use violence during a demonstration does not in itself make the whole protest violent'. It does however mean that the police may be justified in restricting demonstrations and demanding guarantees from organizers, as happens in the UK and many other countries. Furthermore, the erection of roadblocks and use of even makeshift weapons can in no way be described as 'protest and peaceful demonstration', especially in the case of the prolonged, armed occupation of hundreds of road blocks which took place in May and June.

These roadblocks and the actions of those manning them would be unlawful anywhere in the world. Arrests have taken place for real crimes committed; the arrests are not acts of 'arbitrary detention' as AI claims (p.37 and elsewhere).

* * *

State use of torture as a method of punishment and to fabricate evidence

Like the investigators for AI, the authors of this report have not had access to prisons.⁸⁹ We have however been able to interview various senior officials responsible for the police, forensic and judiciary systems, who deny the use of torture.

* * *

In response to denial of medical attention, etc. to prisoners, the government published a [detailed report](#) on the attention received by each of the 273 arrested and detained by early November.

⁸⁹ One of the authors of this Reader, Dan Kovalik, was able to visit La Modela prison in Tipitapa on January 29, 2019, where many of those accused of crimes related to the violence of the April crisis are being detained in a brand-new facility built just after the crisis. He was impressed with the fact that (1) guards who handle prisoners were unarmed, carrying neither firearms nor batons; (2) the facility housing those charged with crisis-related crimes was clean and appeared to be largely run by the prisoners themselves who are in charge of the cooking and cleaning therein; (3) the prisoners looked healthy and well-fed; (4) when he, two of his colleagues, and two guards (including a female guard) entered the facility, the prisoners appeared defiant and without fear, raising their fists and shouting and singing; (5) the facilities for family visits, which each prisoner is entitled to for 3 hours once a month, were brand new and appeared comfortable; (6) the private rooms for conjugal visits, which prisoners may have for 2 hours once a month, were very nice and included a bed, private bathroom and ceiling fan. Finally, the two prisoners he was able to interview privately and without guards stated that the conditions of their confinement were good and that they had regular access to medical treatment.

Nicaragua Truth Commission Coordinator Dr. Cairo Amador has announced that visits to the National Penitentiary System are being organized to ensure respect for human rights of the individuals charged with crimes during the failed coup attempt. Amador said that 'The Commission has verified that the Nicaraguan government is guaranteeing full respect for the human rights of prisoners, ensuring they receive medical attention as well as visits of relatives, spouses and friends.'

AI covers in detail an alleged case of torture which – as we show below in examining the circumstances of the death of policeman Faber López Vivas – has no basis in fact. All the other cases cited by AI are anonymous and so cannot be verified independently.

However, we should point out that many of the public claims of torture, such as by the student Valeska Sandoval who, well after her release from prison, claimed to have been tortured, have to be treated with extreme skepticism. She not only looked unharmed when recording her confession while still detained, but also on her release; and she had a previous record of deception e.g. her notorious play-acted video recording when 'under siege' at the roadblocks in the UNAN (university).

* * *

Did the government make arbitrary detentions?

AI claims that the government is detaining people arbitrarily and repeats unproven statistics from CENIDH that more than 1,900 people have been detailed and 400 remain in custody but uncharged.

As noted above, the government responded to such claims in early November by publishing a list of 273 people detained for various reasons linked to the protests, saying how far the process had reached in each case, what they were suspected of or charged with and giving details about family visits, medical attention and visits by lawyers that they had received. This evidence was not available at the time when AI prepared their report but at the same time they simply accepted the CENIDH accusations.

There is no appreciation expressed by AI of the immense task the police and judicial authorities have faced in dealing with the crimes committed over the period April-July, in part of course as a result of AI's refusal to accept that such crimes took place, or at least that they occurred on such a scale as to risk overwhelming the resources of the judicial system.

Did government action lead to people leaving the country as refugees?

AI reports correctly on the numbers of Nicaraguans who left the country for Costa Rica during and after the period of violence, many of whom sought asylum there. It attributes this entirely to 'the widespread persecution' by government forces (p.48 and elsewhere).

It ignores other explanations, such as:

- The longstanding tradition of migration to Costa Rica, whether short-term or long-term, for economic or family reasons, resulting in around 500,000 Nicaraguans being in Costa Rica at any one time. Thus in all likelihood the newcomers represent an increment of only about 5% of the pre-existing Nicaraguan migrant population in Costa Rica.

- Suggestions confirmed by informal interviews carried out for this report with Nicaraguans in Costa Rica, that many of those seeking asylum had emigrated before April, and took advantage of the situation to regularize their status.
- Reports from the same interviews that the overwhelming reason for recent migration has been economic problems, which themselves resulted from the opposition violence, the paralyzing of the country by roadblocks and the consequent unemployment.
- Some migrants leaving for Costa Rica because they had committed crimes during the period of violence, and were well aware they would have to account for them if they stayed.

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The relief of Masaya, July 13-17

The AI report makes several references to the city of Masaya, principally in the context of the 'clean up' actions in mid-July to regain control of the barrio of Monimbó (pp.18-21). AI's previous report Shoot to Kill covered the period in Masaya from mid-April until 12 May. The new report presumably covers the period from then until mid-September.

What it completely fails to do is record the extreme opposition violence that began on 12 May and continued until 17 July when the siege of Masaya was brought to an end. This section of our report shows how – by omitting any reference to the violence by protesters in Masaya – AI gives a completely unbalanced and misleading impression of events and of the action taken by government.

On 12 May itself the opposition burnt down the town hall and the mayor's brother's house, and ransacked or burnt several other private houses and many shops. Then and on following days they attacked the tourist market, the main secondary school, the prosecutor's office and other buildings and private homes. None of this is mentioned by AI.

From this point until mid-June the whole of Masaya was effectively under siege because of the sheer number of roadblocks, made by digging up the roads and using the paving stones ('adoquines'). In the centre of the city and in Monimbó these roadblocks were often at head height, with only a small gap for people to pass (if they were allowed to). Some were reinforced with deep ditches dug into the road itself. Far from being 'defensive', they were assembly points for attacks on people, houses, businesses and the police.

During the whole of the five-week period beginning on May 12, practically all banks, public buildings, schools and shops across the city were closed if they had not already been ransacked. Many businesses were closed and people were without work. Vehicle traffic was paralyzed and the only means of moving around was on foot, bike or motorbike. At the roadblocks, hooded and armed 'protesters' could demand to see identity papers, search bags and intimidate or threaten people or refuse them passage. Armed groups went from house to house at night time threatening occupants and stealing from them.

Many Sandinista supporters or government workers suffered during this period, none of them mentioned by AI. On May 20, despite a 'truce' established at national level as part of the 'dialogue' between government and opposition, [protesters attacked the Masaya police station](#). At this point, under the terms of the truce, the police were confined to the police station, under orders not to return fire. Protesters completely ignored the truce and took

advantage of this to surround the police station with roadblocks. The police could then neither escape nor receive supplies.

Nightly attacks on the police station began to take place, using rifles, contact bombs and other weapons as well as specially built, large, makeshift mortars. Two attempts were made to burn down the main Masaya secondary school which overlooks the police station, so as to get access to it. On June 1, in an attack on the head of the health service in Masaya, Dr Silvio Navarro, his official vehicle was burnt, his house surrounded and he and his family assaulted and threatened.

A [government video](#) explains the events of this period, including the attacks and the weapons used. Another [video](#) promoting the opposition viewpoint shows how at this stage the city was totally controlled by the roadblocks on the main roads and within the city itself. It also shows (at 9 minutes) how the opposition had stolen police uniforms for use, and were threatening to kill the police and leave their bodies in the streets.

On June 3, rifle fire hit Lieutenant Jose Abraham Martinez in the eye; a group of police were eventually able to leave the station and after prolonged attempts forced their way to the hospital, only by driving over sidewalks and pushing through about a dozen roadblocks, where they were met with gunfire. Even then, armed groups followed them to the hospital, where the lieutenant was pronounced dead, and made their return to the police station essentially a combat operation. Protesters even tried to steal the body from the hospital and doctors had to hide it.

In the same incident, rifle fire badly injured another officer, Marlon Gerardo García Gómez. During this period, several police officers, family members and ordinary citizens were kidnapped and tortured when they tried to pass the roadblocks in the course of normal business.

Among the worst incidents were these:

- On June 12, protesters destroyed the municipal depot and several vehicles used to collect the city's rubbish. They kidnapped ten workers and held them for several hours while they were badly beaten.
- On June 23, Carolina de los Ángeles Collado Delgadillo, a municipal worker in Masaya was killed by opposition gunfire while repairing roads on the north side of the city damaged by the building of roadblocks. As in many other cases, she was [presented in the right-wing media](#) as a victim of police – rather than opposition – violence.
- On July 12, police officer Rodrigo Alfredo Barrios Flores was [kidnapped and tortured](#). He managed to escape his captors three days later.
- On July 14-15, unarmed, off-duty police officer Gabriel de Jesús Vado Ruiz was kidnapped, tortured and, on the second day, killed. His kidnappers were roadblock operators who discovered his uniform in his backpack. His body was [burned](#) at one of the roadblocks; a Catholic priest, filmed in a leaked video, was accused of being complicit in the crime because he was aware of it and [was recorded](#) saying that photos and videos should not be published because of the bad image they would create.
- On June 18, armed protesters [declared](#) a five-member 'junta of national salvation' to administer Masaya and said they no longer recognised the Ortega government. But

the north side of Masaya was relieved on the following day, June 19, and access to the police station was restored (after more than a month's siege). However, the south side of the city, Monimbó, remained blockaded.

- On June 21, a Catholic delegation, including the Papal Nuncio, came to Masaya. As well as visiting the roadblocks in Monimbó, they met with senior police officers. While the meeting took place, an explosive landed in the police station itself, almost hitting the delegation, and one of their members had to make a phone call to ask the protesters to stop firing. Supposedly to achieve reconciliation, the main purpose of the delegation appeared to be to deter the police from entering Monimbó.

In addition to this meeting, various attempts were made to find a peaceful solution to the occupation of Masaya. For example, on July 1, various leaders of gangs which were operating at the Dismissing the Truth 23 roadblocks in Monimbó signed agreements with the police and the Masaya mayor. However, these agreements were [immediately denounced](#) as having no validity by opposition leaders in Masaya.

Eventually, as Amnesty reports, large numbers of armed police and volunteer police entered the south side of Masaya on July 17 and regained control of Monimbó and the rest of this side of the city. Given the extent of the roadblocks, the arms including automatic weapons held by those manning them, and the history of attacks on the police and the population in general, the police operation was highly restrained. It resulted in only six deaths (Amnesty says ten), one of whom was a police officer.

It was clear that, given that the army itself had not been deployed by the government at any stage, the police themselves would not have been able to conduct this operation successfully without massive support.

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The case of police officer Faber López Vivas

AI claims, without substantive evidence, that police officer Faber López Vivas was killed in the Department of Carazo on July 8 as the result of an 'extrajudicial execution' (pp.21). His death supposedly occurred because he had attempted to resign from the police force two days earlier and as a result was murdered by his colleagues. Contrary to AI's assertion, officer López was actually murdered by opposition sniper fire that also took the life of one other police officer and wounded two more. This death and the events surrounding it warrant detailed treatment in our report.

Context of events in Jinotepe

Before looking at what actually happened on July 8, it is important to set the wider context in which López's death occurred (which AI fails to do).

The whole of Carazo Department had been paralysed by road blocks for many weeks, with the police in Jinotepe having been confined to barracks (as in Masaya) by an armed siege that had lasted for more than 25 days. In addition, police stations in Dismissing the Truth 25 Diriamba and San Marcos had been destroyed by opposition mobs.

AI failed to report that in Jinotepe, where López was killed, the ongoing attacks consisted of sniper fire with automatic weapons, Molotov cocktails and other weapons, with many police officers having been injured. The road blocks in Jinotepe were considered

to be [the most dangerous in all of Nicaragua](#), as a US motorcyclist was advised in northern Nicaragua on June 14 while traveling south.

The following details some of the more egregious acts committed by the opposition in the urban area of Jinotepe from April 21 to July 8:

On April 21, anti-government mobs in Jinotepe [looted and burned](#) the FSLN departmental office and 'Casa del Obrero' to the ground, with many police officers injured during the riot.

- On May 28, an opposition gang entered the Manuel Hernandez School on the southeast outskirts of Jinotepe to prevent classes from being held; parents and local residents forced them out, but hooded gunmen in vehicles then fired mortars at the nearby home of an FSLN veteran combatant of the 1979 revolution; the attack [wounded two](#), including the combat veteran's son.
- From June 5 through July 8, the roadblock operators trapped over 400 large trucks within a 7km stretch of the Pan-American highway between Jinotepe (Petronic) and Diriamba (Las Palmeras) and refused passage; the truck drivers suffered from [a lack of food and clean clothes](#), their trucks were [attacked with firearms](#), and were subjected to [extortion demands](#) by hooded gunmen under the threat of their trucks being torched. The trucks were not released until after a July 3 denunciation by the [ambassadors of four Central American countries](#) and after the roadblocks were finally cleared by national police on July 8 to the [applause of local residents](#).
- On June 8, the opposition began a targeted criminal campaign against government facilities in Jinotepe with the complete sacking and looting of the Public Registry Building, followed by the Education Ministry building on June 11.

Conventional weapons in use by the opposition in Jinotepe

- The campaign intensified on June 12, as anti-government gangs launched [an armed siege](#) on the main Jinotepe police station that seriously injured three police officers and that would trap police inside for another 25 days. They [assassinated](#) FSLN combat veterans Marcus Gutierrez Acevedo and Guillermo Lucio Mendez Ortiz; [kidnapped](#) at least nine FSLN members or supporters, who were interrogated and abused before their release [two weeks later](#); destroyed a police substation by fire; completely or heavily looted the facilities of the [Transport Ministry](#), the District Criminal and Civil Courts, and a health centre (SILAIS); [attacked and attempted to seize](#) the regional hospital; vandalized and occupied the UNAN- FAREM campus; and looted the private homes of Jinotepe Mayor Mariano Madrigal and other citizens (police stations in Diriamba and Las Esquinas, San Marcos were also looted and destroyed on June 12).
- The orgy of violence continued on June 13 with the women's police station being [looted and destroyed](#) (video at 2:13); the continued or partial looting of SILAIS and water department buildings; and the hijacking of the Santa Teresa Health Centre [ambulance](#), which had been in Jinotepe transporting a woman about to give birth.
- June 15 saw a particularly strong armed assault on the main police station and yet more looting of the SILAIS facility; the [SILAIS ambulance](#) being stolen and six trucks and three motorcycles either being stolen or destroyed (along with the theft of three trucks and two motorcycles from other government agencies during this general

time period). In a similar vein, the El Rosario Health Centre ambulance was [hijacked](#) by hooded gunmen at the Dulce Nombre roadblock on June 26.

- On June 19, the insurrectionists hijacked [two fuel tankers](#) from the Puma gas station, parked them within 100 meters of the main police station, and attempted to set off a massive explosion by firing mortars and lobbing Molotov cocktails. The attempt failed, but if it had succeeded the blast would have destroyed the police station and had catastrophic results within an 800-metre radius. Dismissing the Truth 27
- On June 25, Cristhoper Roberto Castillo Rosales was [shot to death](#) at the entrance to his neighbourhood by hooded gunmen on a motorcycle; his father, FSLN member Robert José Castillo Cruz, [publicly denounced](#) his son's assassination, but was then himself stopped on July 5 by operators of the road block fronting the Hertylandia amusement park north of Jinotepe and [murdered](#); hooded gunmen disposed of his body [in a remote garbage dump](#) in his neighbourhood; Yadira Ramos, a companion who had been traveling with Castillo on his motorcycle, was herself kidnapped, tortured, and raped; Ferson Castillo, a second son of Roberto's and also an FSLN member, had previously been kidnapped by operators of the Colegio San José road block and held for a month before his release. In [this video](#) he explains how the 'terrorists' did so much damage to his family.
- On June 29, Bismarck de Jesús Martínez Sánchez, a popular Managua municipal official, was [kidnapped](#) at the Las Esquinas tranque while travelling to see family in Jinotepe; he was taken to the Jinotepe municipal stadium, adjacent to the roadblocks headquarters at Colegio San José, [tortured](#), and still remains missing.
- On July 2, the siege of the main police station continued with a particularly intense assault that left one police officer seriously injured and on July 3 a police officer and a veteran combatant water utility worker were [kidnapped](#) by operators of the Dulce Nombre roadblock.

... It should be noted that during this extended period of insurrectional violence prior to July 8, [not one single opposition death](#) was recorded in the Jinotepe municipality by the opposition-affiliated human rights organizations (the four prior deaths all having been members or supporters of the governing party, as specified in the chronology above; see also this opposition [report](#) for the July 2-July 7 period).

In short, the National Police of Nicaragua, who have been so vilified by the press and numerous human rights groups, did not transform overnight from a non-partisan community-based police force dedicated to reforming young criminals, instead of punishing them, into a violent arm of the State. Rather, they were confronted in the late spring and summer of 2018 with a well-orchestrated and violent uprising whose very first victim was a police officer. Certainly, the police were taken by surprise by this violent movement and were initially overwhelmed by it, and ultimately fell victim to it, with 22 police officers in total killed.

Moreover, through 55 days of the crisis, the police were relegated to their barracks a concession to the opposition, and in particular the Catholic Church, which demanded this. While some believe this prevented more blood-shed, it may be the case that the absence of the police allowed for a considerable portion of the violence which took place. In any case, the police, founded and dedicated to a softer hand in law enforcement, were put exactly

where the opposition and its US backers wanted – between a rock and a hard place where they were damned if they acted and damned if they did not.

And indeed, it was the nature of the Nicaraguan police as a restrained and peaceful force which the opposition and the US intentionally exploited, just as they exploited the benevolence of the Sandinistas after the 1979 Triumph. Thus, exploiting the Sandinistas' first act in suspending the death penalty, the US organized Somoza's brutal National Guard into the Contras – a force who would terrorize the Nicaraguan people, just as the opposition did in 2018 with its *tranques* – for almost a decade.

In such a situation, it is impossible for a rational observer to see the Nicaraguan police as an instrument of state repression or as the villains of this story.

Nicaragua's crisis: The Struggle for Balanced Media Coverage

by John Perry



These stills from a facebook video show two supposed students pretending to be under fire in the National Autonomous University in Managua. Around them their accomplices calmly film their act so as to report it as if the phony attack was real. This kind of “performance news” from opposition media outlets in Nicaragua has long been a permanent feature of their reporting.

(Photo: Facebook)

Nicaragua's crisis: the struggle for balanced media coverage⁹⁰

By John Perry

In a [video clip](#), a young boy stands at a makeshift roadblock, play-acting something that he must have seen for real on a smartphone or a TV. He holds a toy gun to the head of his friend, who has just been “kidnapped”. Off camera, an adult asks, “What are you going to do?” “We’ll kill him and burn him alive. We’ll leave him naked,” replies the boy. The adults laugh. This scene from Nicaragua, filmed in one of the dozens of towns paralyzed by roadblocks in 2018, epitomizes the violence that occurred then and the role that social media played in promoting it.

Even five years ago, so few Nicaraguans had access to the internet that it had little influence on them, but in last year’s violence it was crucial. Social media shaped opinions among young people and mobilised them. While television is still important, newspapers (except for their websites) have been in decline in Nicaragua as elsewhere, with the most prestigious title, *La Prensa*, in financial difficulty. International media, little read in Nicaragua itself, have also had their vital role in shaping foreign perception of events.

This chapter looks in turn at the roles played by social media, Nicaragua’s corporate media and the international press in the Nicaraguan crisis of 2018.

Social media foment the crisis

Nominally, the protests that began on April 18 were in opposition to a series of quite modest reforms to the social security system. A vigorous disinformation campaign fooled large numbers of students and others into joining the protests by misrepresenting the detail of the government’s proposals. But the students leading these protests were soon joined by those with a much wider agenda of attempting to bring down the Ortega government. Rather than arguing about changes in pension arrangements, social media were quickly promoting regime change. Although similar moves had begun on a smaller scale earlier in April when a fire in the Indio Maíz reserve got out of control, they now escalated as protesters faced police and gunfire was exchanged.

It was perhaps the first example of mass manipulation via social media in Nicaragua since smartphones became widely available a few years ago. According to [unofficial statistics](#), Nicaragua – like the neighbouring countries to its north – has relatively low internet usage. At the end of 2017, just 43% of the population had internet access. Nevertheless, by then some 2.5 million people were already Facebook users. [Other statistics show](#) that Facebook is by far Nicaragua’s most popular social media platform.

Facebook’s role in facilitating the 2018 protests has frequently been [acknowledged](#). Less recognised is how important it was not just in organising the logistics of the protests but in creating and spreading the false news stories which fomented violence, hatred and persecution. The strength and pace of the protests were fuelled by a stream of real and false

⁹⁰ This chapter draws on several sources: an article by Alex Anfruns in *Investig’action* (www.investigaction.net/en/nicaragua-terrorism-as-an-art-of-demonstrating/); a piece by Louise Richards in *Nicanotes* (<https://afgj.org/nicanotes-carlos-fernando-chamorro-and-confidential?eType=EmailBlastContent&eId=0f2a9633-c19b-4dd4-8181-43125f76bd7e>); an article by John Perry in *The Nation* (www.thenation.com/article/two-months-unrest-nicaragua-fateful-crossroad/) and articles from the website www.tortillaconsal.com. Other sources are referenced in the text.

news, principally via Facebook. Of course, manipulation of social media by government supporters also took place, but it was usually more obvious and less sophisticated. Thousands of Facebook posts appeared, including paid advertisements, many originating outside Nicaragua. The New York Times [reported on April 26](#) that young people “armed with cell phones and social media skills” were challenging the government after “dozens” of students had been killed.

What it did not say, of course, was where the students had acquired the skills not simply to make Facebook posts but to create and promote false news stories, building what was soon being called a “tsunami” of media posts. The campaign had all the signs of having been planned months or even years in advance. All it had required was an event which could be misrepresented as a huge government blunder or an attack on people’s rights. The Indio Maíz fire had failed to trigger a response on the scale required; the social security reforms were to prove more incendiary.

The private sector body COSEP, the Superior Business Council, whose position (ironically) had been that the social security reforms had not been tough enough, saw the chance to defeat the government and urged students from private universities to [take to the streets in protest](#). The immediate [social media campaign](#) described the government’s social security reforms as cutting benefits and increasing contributions, sparking more people to join the protests, with hashtags such as #OccupyINSS (INSS is the Nicaragua Institute of Social Security), #SOSINSS, and #Nicaraguaspring. COSEP’s more drastic alternative, which was to slash benefits, restrict their coverage and privatise health services, was conveniently forgotten.

The key messages quickly moved on from saying the government was suppressing democratic protest about cuts in services to falsely accusing it of causing dozens of student deaths and disappearances, many of which had not even occurred. After the first protest on April 18, there was a [false report](#) of a student protester killed by police which was shared [all over social media](#). After the second day of protests on April 19th, there was a second such report of a [student massacre](#) (three people were actually killed, but they were not together and one was a police officer, one was killed in cross fire while returning home from work, and the other was a member of the Sandinista Youth organization who was shot while trying to protect the Tipitapa town hall from “protesters” who were attempting to set it on fire).

The campaign included many more fake videos and false reports. Facebook posts [reported](#) that public hospitals were [refusing to treat](#) injured protesters. [Fake videos](#) appeared of “injured” students being [treated in universities](#) and at the [Catholic Cathedral of Managua](#). Any death was said to be that of a protester. Deaths which had occurred naturally were blamed on the police, e.g. that of William González Zúñiga who was [reportedly shot in the UPOLI](#) but had died at home, or that of Mario Alberto Medina who died [months before the protests began](#). Killings by the opposition were also [blamed on the police](#), as in the case of Roberto Carlos Garcia Paladino (also wrongly called a “student”). Marlon Josue Martinez was reported dead but was actually abroad; Karla Sotelo was the subject of a makeshift memorial while she was still alive; Marlon Jose Dávila, in Spain at the time, was also reported dead on Facebook. There were many similar cases. In this [video](#) people give testimony of false reporting of the deaths or disappearances of sons and daughters, used to

inflame public opinion. And in [this video](#) a student, Veronica Gutiérrez, who initially supported the protests, explains how she quickly changed her mind as the protests became violent and began to demand regime change.

Its huge number of users, many with internet access wherever they were (again, ironically, partly thanks to the government's free WiFi access in public spaces), gave Facebook the advantage of speed of dissemination. As we show below, while conventional media rely on journalists who are at least aware of normal professional standards, even if they often ignore them, Facebook users face no such limitations. False messages, accompanied by false images, were indistinguishable from true ones (e.g. "mass graves" of murdered students, later shown to be illustrated with photos from Mexico; staged scenes of students in universities [under attack](#), and people "confessing" to doing the government's dirty work).

If deaths could be falsified, then personal hatreds or disagreements could easily be turned into public ones. As the opposition became more desperate, social media took a turn for the worse, with instructions to track down and kill government sympathisers or officials who were labelled "toads" (*sapos*), leading to the victimising of government workers and supporters. Worse, there were many instances of kidnapping and torture, with the acts being [filmed and distributed on social media](#) to instil fear in communities. This was particularly effective in places where the opposition was strong, by forcing Sandinista supporters to hide or adopt a low profile.

Acts of violence or vandalism, such as burning down public buildings, could be blamed on Sandinista youths instead of the real perpetrators (who almost invariably had their faces covered anyway). Events were created or falsified for social media – not only the infamous cries for help from students "under fire", but youths who had donned Sandinista t-shirts to raid supermarkets, others who had been given new clothing to create smart images of those manning the roadblocks, and so on. Opposition supporters even donned Sandinista t-shirts [to disrupt their own demonstrations](#). A [video](#) promoting the opposition viewpoint in Masaya shows (at 9 minutes) how they had stolen police uniforms for their own use, and were threatening to kill the police and leave their bodies in the streets.

In some of the worst incidents, the first reports came via social media and they therefore framed the analysis of how the events occurred and who was responsible for them. Two stand out: a house fire in Managua on 16 June 2018, and the attack in Morrito on July 12.

On June 16, a group of hooded people set fire to a building in Managua using Molotov cocktails, causing six deaths, including a two-year-old child and a four-month-old baby. A mattress store occupied the ground floor of the building while the owner and his family lived on the first floor. Neighbours said they saw hoodlums throw their cocktails at the building, and said some shooters prevented the family from escaping.



Protesters set fire to public buildings in León (here), Granada, Masaya and other cities

The incident was immediately labelled a revenge attack by government sympathisers or the police, supposedly because the family had refused to co-operate in allowing the roof of the house to be used by snipers. This was backed up by a video quickly [posted on Facebook](#), which seemed to show the police arriving. That video was later shown to have been taken on April 21, however, weeks before the barrio where the house is located was filled with opposition roadblocks. Opposition members made a Facebook post from the scene of the crime later the same day, accusing the government of “state terrorism”, rather revealing that they did indeed control the barrio.

Some of the surviving members of the family also accused the government, but one who was filmed doing so later retracted his story, claiming he was under pressure from those around him to blame the police. The tweet has since been removed. Nevertheless, the instant interpretations of events via social media were those which shaped the coverage of the fire both by Nicaragua’s corporate media and mainstream international news channels such as the [BBC](#) and [The Guardian](#). Telesur, however, which has in general provided much more balanced coverage, uncovered [a social media threat](#) made against the murdered family from a few days before the fire.

The whole episode has since been reviewed in a [documentary](#) by Juventud Presidente, which focuses on the media manipulation which resulted from the event.

The second incident was in Morrito, a small town on the eastern shore of Lake Nicaragua, almost a month later. On July 12 a “peaceful” caravan of motor vehicles carrying protesters entered the town and attacked both the police station and the town hall. Four police officers were killed, along with a teacher who happened to be in the town hall. Around 200 armed protesters kidnapped the remaining police, took them away, beat them up and threatened to kill them, before later handing them over to the authorities in an exchange of prisoners. Its remote location meant that social media accounts of the events

were first to appear. One version had the police firing on protesters, with the [main newspapers](#) reproducing from social media a picture of a dead demonstrator. But it was a fake, taken at a completely different protest in *neighbouring Honduras*. No protesters died or were injured in Morrito. [Another version](#) was that the police had an argument, in which one group tried to desert their posts and were shot by their fellow officers. The same website (*Confidencial*) gave a third explanation, that it was people in the town hall who began to fire on the police, not the demonstrators. A play-acted video clip from Facebook corroborated this story.

The episode has again been reviewed in a [documentary](#) by Juventud Presidente, which also examines the media manipulation which resulted.

The irony in this is that one of the opposition's most virulent international supporters, lone journalist Tim Rogers, claimed that through social media Nicaragua had discovered [a vaccine for fake news](#). He seemed oblivious to the opposition's false news machine, or, more likely, wanted to create a smokescreen behind which it could operate. Eventually, however, the proliferation of lies became too obvious to Nicaraguans. Scepticism grew about the messages that people saw on their phones and they began to place more trust in their own experiences or in the reputation which the government had enjoyed before the crisis began (e.g. typical police behaviour before April 2018, which was never to resort quickly to the use of firearms – unlike some self-congratulatory “democracies”). So one result of the extreme use and abuse of social media last year may now be a greater degree of healthy scepticism about the messages it conveys. Official announcements on government-supporting media now give advice on how to identify false news stories. Nevertheless, social media remains a potent force which, overall, the government has found it difficult to counteract.

Nicaragua's corporate media are opposition mouthpieces

Nicaragua's corporate media have often been happy to base news items on social media reports, even though they well know how unreliable they can be. An important reason is that there is limited commitment to objectivity and professional standards. Contrary to what is often said internationally, the government has no monopoly over the media and indeed the two main newspapers, *La Prensa* and *El Nuevo Diario*, the weekly newspaper *Confidencial* and various TV channels (such as *Canal 10*) and many websites are owned by or favour the opposition, and give diametrically different accounts from those owned by or favouring the government. This often leads to a particular event being ignored by one side of the media because it favours the line being pushed by the other side, and vice versa, such is the limited commitment to objectivity.

John Lee Anderson, writing in [The New Yorker](#), sees *La Prensa* as the only newspaper opposing the government (ignoring the slightly less strident *El Nuevo Diario*). He also portrays *Confidencial* as a plucky, independent news source run by a small editorial team. These two, as he puts it, are “the leading voices of dissent and custodians of press freedom in Nicaragua.” Both these and some smaller media outlets are owned by the Chamorro family, and Anderson describes *Confidencial's* Carlos Fernando Chamorro as following in the footsteps of his father, who was notoriously assassinated during the Somoza dictatorship. “Once again,” Chamorro tells him in a discussion, “journalists are on the front lines.”

Chamorro is a self-appointed champion of investigative journalism, and indeed he is the only Nicaraguan member of the worldwide [International Consortium of Investigative Journalists](#) (ICIJ) who adhere to “the highest standards of fairness and accuracy.” He was the subject of a eulogising piece from a fellow member, [Sasha Chavkin](#), who also puts him at the head of the struggle for press freedom: “The media independence that exists now in Nicaragua was not a gift,” Chamorro tells him. “It was won by journalists and the people.” Chavkin’s account inevitably mirrors *Confidencial* in giving a completely distorted version of events in Nicaragua, in this case of the violence in Diriamba in July 2018. An offer by another Nicaraguan journalist, Jorge Capelan, to write a more balanced account of the same events was turned down by the ICIJ: Chavkin evidently trusts only Chamorro’s version. “We are now reaping the credibility we have sowed for 11 years,” is Chamorro’s modest summary of his own achievements.

But are Carlos Fernando Chamorro and *Confidencial* really “independent” or even “investigative”? As Tom Ricker has [pointed out](#), “...*Confidencial*’s framework of taking on Ortega with ‘uncommon valor’ is funded, at least in part, by the USA’s National Endowment for Democracy.” In 2014, for example, a group called INVERMEDIA received a \$60,000 grant in order to “foster independent digital media in Nicaragua” and they received an additional \$175,000 in subsequent years, to strengthen the organizational capacity of *Confidencial*. Funding to Chamorro by the US authorities dates back over a decade. Back in 2008, his non-profit organisation CINCO was funded by the military contractor Dyncorp via its subsidiary Casals and Associates, whom USAID subcontracted to run a programme called Camtransparencia, which was far from transparent. For Chamorro, “transparency” or “independent journalism” has nothing to do with balance or fairness, it is the freedom to build one’s image as an investigative, professional journalist while presenting a completely one-sided, anti-government view.

Here are three brief examples. In one of the regular interviews on his well-known programme *Esta Semana* (*This Week*, in September 2017), Chamorro was talking to World Bank representative Luis Constantino. He was trying to get him to agree that figures for poverty reduction in Nicaragua that the government had put out were not accurate; however, [Constantino insisted](#) that they were World Bank figures, and refused to back down. Eventually Chamorro had to change the subject. Then in May 2018 *Confidencial* published a lengthy [“analysis”](#) of the early stages of the crisis prepared by CINCO, running to over 5,000 words. The so-called “analysis” is written entirely from an opposition perspective. For example, there are numerous references to police “repression”, but none to killings or kidnappings of police officers, nor burning of police stations or police vehicles. Most recently, *Confidencial* gave space to a piece which depicts Ortega’s Nicaragua as in a similar category to Pol Pot’s Kampuchea or Hitler’s Third Reich, comparisons which are as absurd as they are disrespectful to real victims of state terror. As Louise Richards [points out](#), Chamorro’s “...non-stop, brazen propaganda accuses President Daniel Ortega of attacking democracy while Chamorro himself uses *Confidencial* to destroy meaningful democratic process by constantly and deliberately misleading its readers.”

Confidencial is just one of a panoply of opposition media. Like the Chamorro-owned *La Prensa* it cultivates an air of seriousness and being part of the establishment. At the other extreme is the sensationalist *100% Noticias*, which frequently promulgates outright lies. Its most vicious was on 29 May 2018, when its director Miguel Mora made the false claim that

its TV studio was under attack by government sympathisers. He appealed for opposition activists to respond by attacking the Sandinista station, Nuevo Radio Ya. They did, setting it on fire, holding over 20 radio staff under siege and then shooting at firefighters and police attempting to control the fire and rescue those inside. Only the bravery of the rescue services and the radio station staff prevented more severe injury and loss of life. The building was destroyed. That story has never been told in Western media except by probably the only two genuinely independent US writers to visit Nicaragua during the failed coup attempt, Max Blumenthal and Dan Kovalik, [who visited the scene of the crime](#) and interviewed journalists traumatised by it. Not long afterwards, on June 9, it was the turn of the independent Radio Nicaragua to be destroyed by fire. Such is the opposition's respect for the diversity of Nicaragua's media.

The TV channel *Canal 10*, also notoriously anti-Sandinista, persists with the kinds of fraudulent images that have been used by the opposition from the start. A small opposition protest in March 2019, stopped by the police because it did not have permission and in which there were acts of violence as soon as the small numbers began to congregate, was the scene for *Canal 10* reporters to depict themselves as "under fire". As can be seen [here](#) (in the first of the clips), while they are lying on the ground, supposedly avoiding bullets, other people in the background are calmly sitting on steps, in no apparent danger. Of course, it was the film of the reporters "taking cover" that was transmitted.

Early in 2019 Miguel Mora was arrested and the *100% Noticias* channel closed down. His "criminalisation" is now a cause for organisations such as [Reporters without Frontiers](#). Carlos Fernando Chamorro has been "forced" into exile and *Confidencial* now operates from Costa Rica. Acts of censorship have inevitably been decried by the international press, but with no references at all to the lies which such media promulgate and their deliberate provocation to violence.

International media adopts the "consensus narrative"

'The world's major media outlets have spoken, and the verdict is in: Daniel Ortega is on his way out. After years of cronyism, his dictatorial rule has met with mass popular resistance, a resistance Ortega's government responded to with unprecedented force. All of this signals that Ortega is isolated and clueless, and that "the people" have had enough. It is only a matter of time before he and his wife go the way of former dictators, like Nicolae and Elena Ceaușescu in Romania. No need to look further. The New York Times, The Guardian, The New Yorker and others, have lent their editorial pages to "investigative" reporters, who have accepted and reproduced a consensus analysis concerning the political conflict in Nicaragua.' (Quote from the article *Manufacturing Dissent* by [Tom Ricker](#).)

The opposition may have failed to gain popular support in Nicaragua but they are the dominating influence in international news coverage. They created what [The Guardian](#) calls "a widespread and growing consensus within the international community that Nicaragua's government is in fact largely responsible for the bloodshed." Before this article appeared last July, I had already suggested that [a consensus narrative](#) had been created about Nicaragua in the international press.

How was this done? One main reason is that the international press regularly rely on what is published in *La Prensa*, *Confidencial*, *100% Noticias* and the rest, citing them as

authoritative local sources (often while complaining, without apparent irony, that the government controls most of the Nicaraguan TV channels and news outlets). This of course helps ensure that the absence of any balance in local media is sustained in international coverage. Then they also report the body counts and other claims emitted by Nicaraguan “human rights” organisations. These bodies, aligned with the opposition, are notoriously biased, and have often received US funding. Their claims are nevertheless quoted and amplified internationally by supposedly responsible organisations such as the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch. Repeated also by the international press, they are then cited unquestioningly by politicians. Thus the international media both create and strengthen the consensus narrative.

One feature of this is their exaggeration of the numbers of crisis-related deaths (with the term “massacre” being used by [The New York Times](#) and others). Here they are following both social media and the local news sources just discussed, and repeating unquestioningly the exaggerated figures of deaths promulgated locally. For example, as early as the end of July, Bloomberg repeated the claim from local human rights groups that 448 people had been killed. Yet the National Assembly’s Truth Commission produced meticulously researched figures showing that the real total of crisis-related deaths *after nine months* was actually 253. The Truth Commission’s figures are rarely mentioned.

Nor do the liberal media challenge these exaggerated claims when they are used by the US to justify sanctions and other forms of intervention. Trump’s national security adviser, John Bolton, has labelled Nicaragua part of [a troika of tyranny](#) in Latin America, painting an extraordinary picture that bears no relation to reality. *The Guardian’s* Julian Borger, in [a piece on Bolton’s speech](#), repeats the claim that “hundreds of people have been killed in a brutal crackdown” by the Nicaraguan government, giving credence to the Trump official’s calumny.

Another common error is to portray all, or the vast majority, of deaths as being the result of government repression, making no distinction between fatalities among protesters and those among government supporters. This also reflects the line taken by both local and international “human rights” organisations, despite objective evidence to the contrary. For example, in a report challenging Amnesty International’s biased assessments, [Dismissing the Truth](#), a group including authors of this reader showed in detail how the crisis-related deaths in one part of Central Nicaragua were almost entirely caused by opposition violence at roadblocks. Violent attacks by the opposition are of course ignored or downplayed: the terrible incident in Morrito described above went entirely unmentioned in the international press. A Guardian reporter was even shown to have [deliberately ignored](#) opposition violence although he had photographed it, presumably because that would have complicated the simplistic picture being offered. (Perhaps include footnote mentioning cover photo?)

Another common feature of international reports is exaggeration of the numbers of students killed (the Truth Commission’s analysis shows that, of the total crisis-related deaths, just 15 were identifiably students). The refrain has been followed in hundreds of mainstream media reports. This reached a ridiculous pitch when even [a reporter covering a boxing match](#) squeezed in the comment that “thousands of students... have now been kidnapped, tortured and killed” in Nicaragua.

The allegations of huge numbers of student deaths have brought significant coverage for opposition student leaders such as Lester Aleman, Víctor Cuadra and Valeska Valle, who have featured in articles in [The Guardian](#), [El País](#) and [The New York Times](#). But students who witnessed the protests turning violent, such as [Veronica Gutierrez](#) and [Leonel Morales](#), have been ignored by the same media (the former was forced into hiding and the latter narrowly survived an assassination attempt by opposition thugs).

International media also [regularly repeat](#) opposition claims that theirs is “a totally peaceful struggle”. They ignore the destruction by the opposition of radio stations, public buildings, schools and clinics, ambulances and police vehicles, Sandinista offices and many private homes. They ignore the hundreds of businesses which were ransacked. Police and Sandinista officials were kidnapped and tortured, in addition to those killed or permanently injured, but they are rarely mentioned. Shops, businesses and schools in several cities were closed down for as long as three months. Few of these other aspects of the crisis have been reported, or have been twisted so as to blame them on government supporters. In the case of *The Guardian*, when its reporter visited Masaya in June he was offered information on opposition violence and the destruction of the town hall, the secondary school and private homes: [his article](#) ignored this completely. Challenged on this, he refused to respond.

BBC [coverage of Masaya](#) also faithfully follows the same narrative. Yet you look at the photos and observe (a) the road has been ripped up to make the barricades and (b) those manning them have lethal weapons. In what other country would this be regarded as exercising a constitutional right to protest (which is what the protesters claim)? In what other country would the police not arrive in force to remove the barricades and arrest those holding the weapons?

International press have also followed the line that government arrests of those responsible for opposition violence mean they are suppressing protest and free speech. For example, the day after the Morrito attack, two of its organisers, Medardo Mairena and Pedro Mena, were apprehended at Managua airport while trying to flee the country. They were well known as the leaders of the roadblocks in that region of Nicaragua. At their trial, conclusive evidence from their own phones and testimony from undercover police agents proved their role in coordinating the Morrito attack. Their lengthy sentences reflected a range of crimes including murder, kidnappings, extortion, and preventing the passage of ambulances through the roadblocks, resulting in several deaths. Yet the sentences were ridiculed. Reuters’ [report](#) on Mairena was headed “Nicaraguan farmer who protested Ortega gets 216-year prison sentence “.The headline for the UK’s [Daily Telegraph’s story](#) called the sentence “ridiculous”. [John Bolton](#) was quick to pick this up too, tweeting that “The Ortega regime has sentenced three farm leaders to 550 years in prison”.

These men, who in practice will serve a maximum of 30 years each for what in every country would be regarded as very serious crimes, are now included in a long list of what the opposition calls “political prisoners”, a description echoed by *The New York Times* and others. Government justifications for the sentences are dismissed as having no credibility, yet none of the mainstream media carry out their own investigation of the crimes to reach an impartial view. In the Morrito case, it took independent journalists [Dick and Miriam Emanuelsson](#) to make such an investigation, several months after the incident, explaining

clearly how the attack happened and how it was that the opposition used overwhelming force to surprise and overcome Morrito's small squad of police.

The biases, gaps and errors in media reports have been pointed out many times, [specifically in a sign-on letter to the Guardian](#) (that it refused to publish), and also by a small number of truly progressive media outlets (in a video by [Redfish](#), for example). The US organisation FAIR (Fairness and Accuracy in Reporting) [looked in detail](#) at the systematic bias in 45 bulletins issued by Reuters. While there are plentiful videos, interviews or commentaries featuring ordinary Nicaraguans who have suffered from the crisis, including [torture victims](#), women [describing](#) how they were threatened at the barricades, people [denouncing priests as coup-mongers](#) and individual [campesinos](#) (peasant farmers) describing how their country was being destroyed, these voices are largely ignored or dismissed.

Those defending the Sandinista government have found it difficult or impossible to get a proper hearing. The widely known, left-wing US news channel, *Democracy Now*, hosted [a debate on Nicaragua](#) in July 2018. It featured Camilo Mejia, an Amnesty International prisoner of conscience, originally from Nicaragua, son of world-renowned musician, Carlos Mejia Godoy, who drew attention to opposition violence, arguing that an attempted coup had taken place. But the programme used footage about protesters' deaths without balancing it with the contrary evidence that Mejia supplied beforehand. The presenters made it clear that they gave more credence to his opponent in the debate, Julio Martinez Ellsberg, who is an active supporter of the opposition. *Democracy Now* never responded to [an open letter](#) calling for more balanced coverage of Nicaragua. Perhaps to avoid further controversy, it has since never covered Nicaragua despite the obvious interest on the US left. Mejia later experienced the opposition's intolerance of anyone daring to challenge their propaganda, which has spread from Nicaragua to the US and Europe via the organisation SOSNicaragua. Its members followed him to meetings in early August in San Francisco and elsewhere, attempting to shout him down.

Others who have tried to tell these untold stories have also been attacked. When the situation in Nicaragua became risky and I started [to write under a pseudonym](#), I was deliberately outed by a website I sent an article to, and then "investigated" by a blogger called [Charles Davis](#) who seems to specialise in ad hominem attacks. Davis also accused the website [Tortilla con Sal](#) of being "a Nicaraguan government-financed news outlet": yet it is completely independent.

One set of incidents in particular stands out as showing the duplicity of the international media and the way that those who expose it are treated. On 7 September, the freelance writer Carl David Goette-Luciak published [an article in The Guardian](#), falsely claiming that the country had been brought to a virtual halt by a general strike called by the anti-government Civic Alliance. This was his third article on Nicaragua for the newspaper, and he had already written another for the [Washington Post](#). His co-author was Caroline Houck, a [staff correspondent](#) for the website Defense One, which leverages ad revenue from the arms industry to "provide news, analysis and ideas for national security leaders and stakeholders." Goette-Luciak's biased reports attracted the attention of Sandinista sympathisers on social media, who began to denounce his coverage as promoting the opposition line. He was immediately supported by the Committee to Protect

Journalists, who [called for](#) the “online harassment” to be investigated. Then, on September 26, the writer [Max Blumenthal](#) showed in detail that Goette-Luciak was a long-term affiliate of the opposition and an active proponent of regime change.

A few days later, Goette-Luciak was arrested in Managua and deported, for not having the correct accreditation to work as a journalist – a requirement for a foreign reporter to enter many countries, notably the United States. The Guardian [protested](#), blaming “the blogger” Max Blumenthal for his arrest. Both he and the website *The Canary* (who had republished the original story from Mintpress) were [labelled](#) by journalist Adam Barnett as a mouthpiece for Ortega, while [BuzzFeed](#) accused them of being part of an “online mob” (and later had to retract its accusations about Blumenthal).

But then a remarkable thing happened. A former friend of Goette-Luciak contacted Blumenthal and confirmed that he had been with him in Nicaragua, when both had been pursuing what was evidently a reckless and arrogant attempt by two outsiders to assist in bringing about the end of the Ortega government. The friend, Wyatt Reed, also wrote to *The Guardian*, but was ignored. Blumenthal published [a second story in The Canary](#), detailing Reed’s claims. Everything then went quiet – no reply from *The Guardian*, no further complaints about Blumenthal, and eventually Goette-Luciak’s name being dropped by *The Guardian* from its list of contributors, although his articles are still on its website.

As a result of all the opposition’s mistakes, and of the government’s concerted action to regain control, Nicaragua’s real situation has shifted markedly in the few weeks following mid-July 2018. But international commentators failed to keep up. *The New York Times*, *Huffington Post*, *Guardian* and other media continued to talk about the [tyranny](#), or [the mounting political violence](#), or (in the case of *Huffpost*) even [the rise of fascism](#) in Nicaragua. In *Open Democracy*, José Zepeda [claimed](#) that “the majority of the Nicaraguan people have turned their backs on [Ortega].” In Canada, the *Ottawa Citizen* still talked about Nicaragua [imploding](#). A television documentary in England, [Unreported World](#), stated in May 2019 that “Nicaragua may be a nation at war”. The same programme interviewed the Channel 10 reporter who took part in the incident described earlier (being “under fire” at an opposition demonstration), who this time falsely claimed her life was at daily risk from police or government supporters.

But most of these correspondents were not in the country. In practice the violence quickly slowed almost to a halt, Nicaraguan cities were cleared of barricades and normal life was resumed. The prevailing feeling was one of relief, and better-informed commentators aware of events on the ground began to conclude that [the attempted coup had failed](#).

Since mid-2018, the Ortega government has again been promoting and developing its social investment programmes, building on its achievements in the decade since it returned to power. The international media continue to ignore or denigrate Nicaragua’s revolutionary achievements, but this should come as no surprise. In the 1980s, when progressive opinion in the US and Europe endorsed the revolution’s social programmes and Oxfam was able to say that they represented “the threat of a good example” (to quote one of its publications at the time), historian Mark Curtis examined over 500 articles about Nicaragua in the UK’s newspapers. He found only one story that discussed the early

achievements of the revolution in reducing poverty, illiteracy, hunger and disease.⁹¹ Worse, [reports by FAIR](#) show how, during the same period in the 1980s, the US media were complicit in repeating the messages and lies put out by the US government attacking the Sandinistas and supporting the “Contra” war. Stephen Kinzer, then the NYT’s Managua correspondent, said that the media were encouraged to make favourable reports about the “pressure” being put on the Sandinistas, when “the reality of that pressure is babies with their arms blown off.”

Among the lies which Washington perpetrated was that Sandinistas would not submit to free elections and that they were heavily involved in drug trafficking. A topical reminder of the use of outright lies to support the US case for armed intervention comes from Venezuela, where [The Intercept](#) showed very recently how the media were complicit in repeating the US’s false news stories that its aid shipments were being destroyed at the border by Venezuelan troops. For once, the [NYT exposed the lie](#), although without mentioning that they were using [an original story from Max Blumenthal](#) who had reported the lie on the day it happened (the same Blumenthal castigated by mainstream media for exposing the lies of the Guardian’s Managua correspondent – see above). But this hasn’t stopped *The New York Times* from [endorsing](#) the US government’s attempted overthrow of the Venezuelan government. Doing so fits a pattern of NYT support for US government-led coups in Latin America that goes back [more than half a century](#).

None of those who have attempted more balanced coverage of the Nicaraguan crisis, or have criticised the mainstream media, are uncritical supporters of the Ortega government. We simply share the view that a balanced appraisal of the Nicaraguan crisis is essential, taking account of the views of all Nicaraguans, not just opposition supporters. In the wider Latin American context, our failure to draw proper lessons from events in Nicaragua is already playing into the hands of John Bolton and his ilk. Trump and his hangers-on are only too happy to accept what the media tells them if it suits their agenda of cleansing the continent of progressive politics. They can expect virulent support in social media and will be applauded by Nicaragua’s right wing news channels. But the implicit or even at times explicit support they receive from international liberal media, human rights organisations and “progressive” commentators is an insult to the majority of ordinary Nicaraguans, who only want to preserve and build on the gains of their revolution.

91 Cited in Edwards, D. and Cromwell, D. (2006) *Guardians of Power: The Myth of the Liberal Media*. London: Pluto Press.

The Popular Economy: Nicaragua's Anti-Shock Therapy

Edited with an introduction by Nils McCune



Women are the protagonists of Nicaragua's popular economy, which was fundamental in defending the general population against the opposition's ruthless anti-humanitarian economic blockade.

(Photo: Jairo Cajina)

The Popular Economy: Nicaragua's Anti-Shock Therapy

Edited with Introduction by Nils McCune

Introduction

The attempted removal of Nicaragua's government in 2018 was a highly scripted, meticulously constructed endeavor of political-situational programming by the United States government, years in the making, that was set into motion on April 18th. One could venture that for the coup planners, the first 72 hours went exactly as they had hoped, the first week was highly successful, at one month's time the plan was showing problems, and after two months, the regime change effort had clearly failed, although rightwing violence continued for another month or more.

What happened? How could such a well-funded, well-planned, perfectly-timed operation against a resource-poor government fizzle out so quickly? The script was good, but reality went off script. In this chapter, we explore the role of Nicaragua's popular economy in frustrating the regime change operation. The popular economy consists of all workers who are not bosses or salary earners, but who earn a living from their own work. This includes small and medium farmers, informal sector and self-employed workers, cooperatives, and associations.

In the following articles, interviews and excerpts, readers will see how transportation cooperatives, peasant farmers, self-employed workers at open-air markets, and other workers in the informal sectors – along with teachers, nurses, public workers and three generations of Sandinista party members – organized to deliver essential goods to Nicaraguans throughout the 90-day crisis, while at the same time projecting their desire to exercise their constitutional right to freely move about the country. But beyond playing a key role in preventing the business lobby's several one-day strikes and Catholic Church-supported roadblocks from impacting people's access to basic goods, the popular sectors also maintained a high degree of unity throughout the political crisis, as their organizations repeatedly called for an end to the violent roadblocks and a return to negotiations in order to save Nicaragua's public social security and health care system.

As Jorge Capelan convincingly argues, the popular sectors of Nicaragua are not mere observers or victims of history, but rather active subjects whose historical accumulation of experience has coincided with 50 years of continuous Sandinista struggle—approximately 30 years out of political power, and 20 years with a foot in government. The knowledge thus acquired—or popular wisdom, as it is known in Nicaragua—is a unique mix of ethical, empirical, military, administrative, and spiritual experience best understood as “historical memory.” It is the base of the high level of self-esteem and social consciousness that permeates the organized sectors of Nicaraguan society.

A major explanation for the success of the FSLN model since 2007 is that public policy has treated the people working in the informal sector not only as citizens with social rights, but as producers with economic might within the national economy. While the formal private sector – represented politically through the Supreme Counsel of Private Companies

(COSEP) – employs about 15% of Nicaragua workers, the informal, popular sector employs upwards of 60%. Yet, it is not only its weight as employer, but also its contribution to Nicaraguan economic wellbeing that makes the popular economy so important, as Orlando Núñez Soto so eloquently shows in his interview below.

The historic dispute between capitalism and socialism has some common characteristics everywhere. While socialist governments must navigate the contradiction between growing demands for shared material wellbeing by the population with the capacity of the state to administer the economy, the ruling class in capitalism has no such fetters: each capitalist, acting in his own self-interest, strengthens the standing of the ruling class as a whole. But as productive capital has ceded to speculative capital, the global capitalist system no longer produces, it merely extracts value from ecosystems and working people, channeling wealth into the financial sector while giving back pollution, junk food and chronic diseases. With the increased use of automation and artificial intelligence, big capital is no longer a major employer.

On the other hand, the popular economy is built upon pre-capitalist forms of cooperation and work, what Marx called the reproductive sphere and what in today's language is often referred to as the care economy. Although the activities of the popular economy are also motivated by self-interest, it has the inverse ends and means of the capitalist economy. The capitalist creates employment in order to maximize accumulation; the self-employed worker, family business or cooperative uses accumulation as a tool in order to provide employment. As such, labor is the key economic factor mobilized, rather than capital, and the results are starkly different. While capital must expand, self-managed labor is flexible: it can produce commodities or shift toward direct provision of use-value, in order to resist market pressures.

This flexibility allows the organized informal sector to be semi-autonomous, labor-driven, and self-managed, as self-employed workers, cooperatives, and family businesses balance factors in order to improve wellbeing. Unfortunately, the global picture is that most peasants are landless, and most workers have no productive means to produce their own employment. Nicaragua is different. A profound agrarian reform program in the 1980s, followed by worker occupations of state farms to prevent their privatization in the turbulent 1990s, led to a much more equitable access to land than in many neighboring countries. Additionally, the disarmament process after 1990 put most of the transportation sector (taxis, buses and lorries) in the hands of cooperatives of former fighters from both the Sandinista and the Contra side of the 1980s-era conflict. Access to land and productive resources, combined with public policy favoring small-scale producers, has led Nicaragua to produce between 80% and 90% of its own food. In 2017, it was the only country in Central America with a positive trade balance with the United States.

Small-scale peasant farmers, artisans who add value to local natural resources, and workers in open-air markets allow Nicaraguans to access the goods they need without having to go through the transnational capitalist sphere, epitomized in Nicaragua by the supermarket chains Pali and La Union, owned by Walmart. Because money spent in local markets is circulating in the domestic economy, rather than funneled into global value

chains, it is cheaper for Nicaraguans to live exclusively from informal markets. For producers, the last decade has represented a period of steady accumulation of strength on two fronts: first, with respect to capturing more of the value of their products from intermediaries, and second, with respect to capturing a greater share of public investment and credit. For the former, government programs such as Zero Usury provide low-interest credit for self-employed workers. For the latter, funds of about US\$400 million from the Latin American ALBA alliance were strategically injected into the popular economy as training programs, certification degrees, loans and grants administered by the Ministry of the Family, Community, Cooperative and Associative Economy.

The legacy of this commitment to self-employed workers and peasants is an economic structure that is difficult for conventional economists to comprehend. The popular economy keeps Nicaragua fed, clothed and housed, and it provides social, political and territorial structures for the participation of organized working people. These structures guaranteed that despite the attempts to violently shut down the Nicaraguan economy, basic needs were met for most Nicaraguans, although many experienced economic hardship as a result of lost jobs. Farmers got around the roadblocks through creative means and at great personal risk, rebuilding old trails, carrying goods on horseback, and accepting lower prices in order to keep goods moving. While Pali's shelves were empty by mid-June, informal markets continued to sell the rice, beans, fruit and vegetables that Nicaraguans depend on for feeding their families.

As the crisis showed the resilience of the popular economy, and the subservience of the big capitalist economy to US geopolitical interests, popular actors have demanded more of the Nicaraguan government. Rather than maintain a permanent dialogue and consensus model with labor unions and big business, the greater role of micro, small, and medium companies should be reflected in their inclusion in negotiations on economic policy. By September 2018 the Council of the Social Economy had been formed to bring together the various guilds, cooperative federations and small business unions into one body, to push for a more visible role of the popular economy in national policy.

In January, 2019, the Nicaraguan government announced two new economic proposals. One was a social security reform, essentially the same as the one that sparked business lobby protests in April 2018. Social security had remained a question mark since the initial reform was scrapped in order to create a positive environment for the national dialogue, and then the opposition refused to discuss social security in the dialogue. As with the previous reform, large employers will contribute 3.5% more to social security, from 19.5% to 23% of paychecks. However, companies with 50 workers or less will only increase their contribution by 2.5%, to 22%. Workers will continue to contribute 7% of their income, while the previous ceiling of contributory income, which amounted to a loophole for very high-income individuals, was eliminated.

The other was a tax reform that maintained the income tax at 1% for the over 100,000 micro and small enterprises of the popular economy, at 2% for enterprises considered as medium-scale, and for large taxpayers, which are just over 400 companies, the tax was raised to 3%. Taxes will also be raised on certain imported industrial goods, luxury goods,

alcohol, sugar and energy drinks, cigarettes and liquors, lottery, etc., all without affecting basic foodstuffs as well as services such as transport and energy, which are strongly subsidized.

Both measures point to a shift in shares of influence in Nicaragua, where the corporate sector has lost considerable strength and legitimacy. As the FSLN maintains a careful balance between macroeconomic policy that permits economic growth and poverty reduction in the context of global capitalism, it shows signs of deepening its commitment to the anti-shock qualities of the popular economy.

An interview with Maribel Baldizón

By the [Nicaragua Solidarity Campaign](#) (UK)

Original source: [Investigaction.net](#), January 29th, 2019



Maribel Baldizón (Photo: NSC)

They ran us off the sidewalks, they evicted us, they hired people to remove us, because for them we have always been the ones who make the city ugly, and they don't see the need that we have to bring sustenance to our families. They look at us as something that makes Nicaragua ugly. But no, we are generators of wealth."

What is your name and what do you do?

My name is Maribel Baldizón García, I am self-employed, I have a small business where I sell fruit, I sell jocotes, mangoes, papaya, fruit salad, everything that is seasonal fruit. This month I'm 40 years old, but even though I studied I have continued selling my fruit. I've always had a business since I was a little girl with my mom and now that I'm grown, I have my own business.

Here in the organization I am General Secretary of the Federation of Workers at Bus Stops and Traffic Lights. I have been selling at a bus stop here, at the Universidad Centroamericana (UCA) since the age of seven.

I began to organize based on the needs that we self-employed workers had, because we were not recognized, we have always been persecuted, we have been subject to persecution by the law, because we do not have any legal status in our work. We were evicted, displaced, marginalized, discriminated against and persecuted in the neoliberal era of other governments.

They ran us off the sidewalks, they evicted us, they hired people to remove us, because for them we have always been the ones who make the city ugly, and they don't see our need to sustain our families. They look at us as something that makes Nicaragua ugly. But no, we are generators of wealth. From this organization, I was trained and made to see that I was a generator of wealth, of our own employment, we contribute to the economy of this country.

How did events in 2018 affect you?

They came to destroy our economy. We were working peacefully, paying off our

debts. I sent my children to school, but with the crisis that these people generated with all the violence and terror, all the massacres that they did of our Nicaraguan brothers, I took my children out of school for fear that they would do something to me.

We couldn't walk around; we were held captive because we couldn't work; we couldn't be in our streets; we couldn't walk freely because we were worrying about those who might rape, kill or steal



Maribel selling at a bus stop (Photo: NSC)

To see so much violence and those roadblocks, where if they recognized you, they killed you for being of a political ideology. My fruit stand was partially burned. I sell here in the sector of the UCA, next to the university and they set my stand on fire, they left me without work for almost three months.

They left me almost begging. I had to invent, to buy food on a tab, I was left with big debts that are becoming unpayable. I had just received a loan and I lost it, I had taken it out to buy the little table where I work. They tore things apart, threw a Molotov bomb at it, which thankfully did not catch fire. They shot mortars where I sell, and they burned down [the Radio Ya] radio station across the street and I couldn't continue working until things calmed down.

We want to continue seeing peace as we do now. We are working calmly, it is true that our economy has taken a hit, but we are trying to lift ourselves up and we're not taking even one step backwards. This government gives us peace of mind, it has let us work, it has given us security.

How did the media deal with the 2018 crisis?

I want to tell you not to let yourselves be manipulated by the media who tell lies, who say that there are massacres, who say that here we are at war. No, here we are working, we are contributing to the economy and here our government is planning how to lift this economy, which the coup plotters disrupted. Because what they did was against the people,

it was not a struggle in which the people rose up, no, it was a struggle against the poor, against our economic interests, they killed us economically.

They left us to starve, they killed and raped our people, our brothers. There are people who have been disappeared, we have a comrade who worked in the mayor's office called Bismarck Martinez, he is missing and he hasn't been found, he was tortured in those roadblocks.

Everything they are saying is a lie! We want to work, we Nicaraguans want to work, we don't want that kind of people here doing harm to us, to our economy, to our government that is giving us job security. They (the government) are making roads. They are building houses and schools, they are giving shelter to the people, they are offering a productive stimulus, and via their programs they working with the peasant farmers, working for the poor, for the people.

Trade union leader on the media and the latest US-backed coup attempt in Latin America

Interview by Ed Sykes, August 10th, 2018

Source: The Canary www.thecanary.co/exclusive/2018/08/10/trade-union-leader-expose...



A trade union leader, José Antonio Zepeda, has spoken exclusively to The Canary about the latest US-backed coup attempt in Latin America. (Photo: NSC)

Why do trade unions back the current government?

The most important thing for us is that the government gives a space to different sectors. And that's why you find teachers, agricultural workers, health workers, and self-employed people in the national assembly. Unions, women, farmers, and cooperatives have all assumed the responsibility of working for their country's economic, social, and political development.

For us, this is our government. We defend it because we believe in free, public, quality education and healthcare for all. There's also a policy of rural development – financing and support, like with education and healthcare, to help to produce more food. As workers and sectors, we have determined that the government's policies have one key purpose – to end poverty.

In the government, we have representation. We see the politics we've been advocating for a long time. We have seen the opportunities that consensus, dialogue and alliances provide. And we believe fundamentally that the government has shown its willingness to listen. That's very important – so that the different sectors can all raise our voices and have them heard. Full union freedom is another important element.

We will continue to support the government and the revolution in order to keep building alternatives to escape the poverty that previous neoliberal policies forced upon us and in which workers had no alternatives. Today, we have options – we have alternatives – and we have the space to build them.

What do you think about media coverage of violence in Nicaragua?

Social media and national establishment media have been preparing conditions for a coup for a long time. The opposition created virtual realities, which didn't exist on the ground. And the national and international media – with their vested interests – reproduced these images. They created the image of an ungovernable country.

And it's not the first time. It's not just Nicaragua. Remember when the media reported that Iraq had WMDs and it had to be invaded, but no WMDs turned up? Then Israel murders Palestinian kids, and nothing happens. And they try to justify it.

Whose human rights are important?

Human rights are important. But the problem comes when people manipulate the term to cover up perverse actions against governments that are trying to bring progress. When we talk about rights, we should ask: 'which rights?' In Nicaragua, the product of this coup is that private businesses have fired more than 50,000 workers. So I ask you – are workers' rights not human rights? Who criticizes businesses for threatening to fire over 250,000 workers if the government doesn't do what they want?

And what about the coup plotters who have been using a strategy of terror, kidnapping, and murder against Sandinistas, police officers, and ordinary citizens who don't think the same way as them? The opposition killed three of our teachers. Who defends the families, the children, of those teachers – murdered by people who are supposedly "peaceful"? They also kidnapped 14 other teachers. Who defends the right to education, the right of peace for children, respect for life?

There's been a media campaign to say that all the deaths here have been at the hands of the government – including the ones the opposition murdered, burned, and humiliated. I think this is the hypocrisy of all these organizations committed only to private interests or those of the imperialist master.

How should we resolve Nicaragua's conflict?

I'm not trying to say "an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth." What I'm trying to say is that these organizations talking about human rights are speaking in a biased way. They're clearly not trying to deepen and promote respect. Instead, they take sides, they decide, they judge, they accuse, and they pass down sentences. That's why we find it difficult to see objectivity in their approach.

We have insisted on respect for institutions, laws, procedures, dialogue, consensus – they're the mechanism for resolving the conflict. There are always differences and problems in societies. We need to know how to understand each other to solve them. And we can only do that through dialogue and communication.

There's a sector of the business community and political community which is allied with and financed by sinister forces and politicians in the US, who have a view of us as their backyard. But we've lived through foreign intervention in the past. That's not the solution.

The solution is for us to understand each other, communicate, and make peace – a lasting peace based on development and justice.

Reconciliation isn't tolerance. It's about understanding that we're in the same country, that we can have different points of view, but that in the end we all have the common strategic aim of making Nicaragua grow. The people who still have resentment in their hearts will have to open up. They'll have to understand that Sandinistas and non-Sandinistas share this country, live together, and should build our homeland together. People are free to go elsewhere if they don't like it here, but that's not the answer. The fundamental thing is to understand that everyone plays an important role in this society.

We need to show solidarity and respect

We aspire to and dream of peace. We're going to make it possible for Nicaragua to get back on track. And we hope the international community learns to respect us. We may not be a big, developed country with a large economy or a powerful army, but there's no reason to humiliate us. We're the same as you – the small countries and the big countries. We have the right to be treated with respect – as equals. The international community should not be driven by powerful vested interests.

The important thing is solidarity. When you most need support is when the presence of friendship is most important. This can also make you reflect and question where you can improve – but in a supportive fashion. Because solidarity isn't about interfering in the affairs of a sovereign nation. It's about expressing support in both good and bad moments. And in recent weeks and months, friends have been asking for information, explanations and clarifications. That's very important. International solidarity has played a key role in fighting back against disinformation and the media war against us.

A creative, enterprising and victorious economy to defeat the coup

By Jorge Capelán, January 26th, 2019

The economy was obviously one of the priority objectives of the "soft coup" and reminds us of Richard Nixon's order to Henry Kissinger on how to deal with the Allende government of Chile in the 1970s: "Make the economy scream!" But despite the hard blows dealt to it, Nicaragua's economy has not been destabilized and has quickly taken the path to recovery, along with a necessary re-formulation of the broader social compact in the country.

Considering that the country suffered gross losses of around 10% of GDP over four months, and annual GDP fell by about 4%, while some 130,000 jobs disappeared and one out of four businesses closed, things have been surprisingly calm in Nicaragua in late 2018 and early 2019. Among other things, this reflects the resilience and soundness of the national economy.

There was no spike in inflation either during or after the attempted coup. Prices had their normal, controlled inflation of the Córdoba against the US dollar. There has been no crisis of payments to banks, and interest rates have remained steady despite the reluctance of private banks (many of which actively supported the coup) to lend money to producers due to alleged instability. International reserves had also avoided crisis at the end of the year, although they fell from US\$2.89 billion to US\$2.25 billion. This still covers an impressive 4.46 months of imports—well above the three months that the IMF considers critical to the stability of countries like Nicaragua.

In addition, much of the damage caused by the attempted coup has been repaired. Infrastructure projects continue to be built; spending on health and education continues to be a priority at 56% of the national budget; and 30% of government spending continues to support employment and salaries in the public sector and in the free trade zones.

The October growth data published by the Central Bank in January support forecasts that the impact of the attempted coup on 2018 economic growth will be somewhat less than predicted by the international organizations (WB, IMF, ECLAC); the latter had expected at least a 4% drop in 2018 GDP. While in October the economy had shrunk by 6% compared to the same month the previous year, compared to the months of the failed coup (April to July), it had made a 1.6% recovery and had an accrued variation of -2.3 percent during the January-October period.

Considering that the very busy Christmas season has yet to be tallied (November and December), with thousands of tourists visiting the country, an increase in remittances from abroad, and a recovery in trade—particularly in the country's bustling marketplaces—current expectations are for a straightforward recovery. This is supported by what has been seen in the streets the past few months.

Clearly, despite the devastation of the "soft coup," Nicaragua's economy is not in structural crisis, but recovering from a serious downturn. In the context of Latin America, talk of a crisis leads one to think of countries such as Argentina that experienced a 40%

drop in GDP last year, a 50% drop in salaries, a 54% rise in basic service rates, and a debt to GDP ratio of 99.5%. That is a crisis —one that is a direct consequence of neoliberal mismanagement of the economy.

To understand what is happening in Nicaragua today we must consider the country's history over the past 50 years. In 1979 a revolution succeeded in overthrowing a bloody and corrupt dictatorship that had controlled a large part of the economy. Then the popular sectors of the economy emerged. These were first political and social actors, which later became economic actors, thanks to a radical experiment in social justice that was drenched in blood but not annihilated by the "low intensity" warfare of the Reagan administration. Those sectors then withstood 16 years of neoliberal government and ultimately rose to challenge the hegemony of the traditional oligarchic financial elites that have ruled the country throughout its history.

There is no denying it: we speak of Nicaragua before and after July 19, 1979. Prior to the overthrow of the Somoza dictatorship, Nicaragua was a U.S. protectorate, headquarters of the Central American Defense Council (CONDECA), and a regional gendarmerie of U.S. interests defended by a specialized force tailored to fit U.S. interests: Somoza's National Guard.

Under the Somozas, Nicaragua had a system in which liberal and conservative elites maintained their privileges within a strict pecking order that gave pre-eminence to the interests of the Somoza family. The masses of the Nicaraguan people only had their first experience as being true political actors when General Sandino led an armed struggle in the 1920s and 1930s. This later continued with the formation of the Sandinista Front in the 1960s. The FSLN became a tool of the people with an historic program of social justice, a mixed economy, political democracy, and non-alignment in the international sphere.

In Somoza's Nicaragua up until July 1979, 54% of the population could neither read nor write and 80% of the land was in the hands of large landowners holding 1,235 acres or more. Today, illiteracy has been reduced to 4% and the big landowners control only 20% of the land. These figures show that a revolutionary change has indeed taken place in historical terms over the past 50 years, despite a costly war of liberation, a bloody low-intensity proxy war, and 16 years of neoliberal plunder from 1990 to 2006.

Here is a fact little-known outside of Nicaragua: Although the neoliberal administrations that held office from 1990-2006 reversed most of the gains made in the 1980s and re-privatized many of the assets that had been redistributed by the revolution (especially through agrarian and urban reforms), the grassroots struggles of peasants, urban land rights activists, and demobilized Nicaraguan army and contra soldiers continued, allowing them to preserve or exercise de facto control over a considerable amount of land in rural and urban areas.

Furthermore, the strong cooperative movement that emerged from the revolution of the 1980s was weakened but not wiped out by the liberal governments. This movement put up brave resistance that allowed it to control significant sectors of the economy, such as transport, which were not attractive enough for transnational capital. In addition, a large

credit union called the Caja Rural Nacional (CARUNA) was created, which would later be strengthened by partnering with ALBA programs.



In Nicaragua almost all public transport is operated by cooperatives. (Photo: El 19 Digital)

When the Sandinista Front returned to power in 2007, the general feeling among the population was that neoliberalism had been a failure. Nothing worked—not basic services, the state, or the economy and, according to the World Bank, 49.3% of the population was living in poverty. Since 2007, Nicaragua has been an admirable example of how a country immersed in poverty and subject to IMF conditions could gradually recover and

get itself some breathing room with the World Bank putting the poverty rate in 2016 at 24.9%. Lacking typical sources of capital accumulation —such as large mineral or energy reserves or a developed industrial infrastructure— the new administration had to set clear priorities. Fighting poverty came first, combined with a large dose of pragmatism and creativity to navigate the turbulent waters of global capitalism.

A social compact was established with sectors of the traditional bourgeoisie to give the country social and economic peace. This allowed the social movements that had resisted and survived the neoliberal wave of the 1990s time to develop as true economic actors.

The compact left many bourgeois privileges intact, such as very low or non-existent taxes and an obligation to keep government money in private banks. This was ensured by allowing the business chambers to have representation in all economic policy-making bodies.

In exchange for this, the business sector refrained from waging outright war against the government. It instead invested in the country, helping to increase the purchasing power of average Nicaraguans and to fund infrastructure projects promoted by the government in electrical connectivity, the country's highway network, telecommunications, and basic services. Additionally, a massive program to grant titles for agricultural and rural land (100,000 titles were issued between 2007 and 2018, with the goal of delivering another 100,000 by 2021), gave security and economic freedom to low-income Nicaraguan families.

The tools the State used to implement this policy were the wise use of international cooperation (particularly PETROCARIBE funds, which during certain periods amounted to almost 5% of annual GDP), loans from international organizations, and family remittances sent by Nicaraguans outside the country.

The latter is one of the country's largest sources of income, having reached US\$1.4 billion in 2017 and on track to match that level in 2018. These remittances are almost entirely used for consumption by the popular sectors, in what is known in Nicaragua as the "Mercado Oriental economy" named after Latin America's largest open-air market in Managua.

These conditions made it possible to increase the real wages of the population even though wage demands were contained so as not to affect domestic and foreign private investment. In order to address the social and trade union conflicts that had paralyzed the country on countless occasions during the neoliberal administrations, a tripartite economic model was promoted in which employers, trade unions, and the state are partners. For more than ten years this ensured the economic growth, poverty reduction, and social harmony that were the envy of the region.

There was also a change in the country's energy sector. Electricity coverage rose from 45% of the population in 2007 to over 95% today, due to a dramatic increase in energy generation from 700 to around 1500 megawatts. This is thanks in part to growth of the clean, renewable energy sector (geothermal, wind, and solar), which changed the energy matrix from 27% renewables in 2007 to 60% today.

Celebrated progress has been made in the construction of highways connecting the entire country for the first time in its history, especially linking the Pacific region with the Atlantic Coast. The newly built bridges and highways have been complemented by the construction of rural roads aimed at getting peasant agricultural production to market. This, together with a robust policy of promoting and supporting peasant farming, has made Nicaragua the only country in Latin America that produces 90% of the food it consumes.

There was an implicit expectation in this social compact that big business would increase its tax contributions, but that was not fulfilled. Tax revenue did go up as economic activity, real wages, and more efficient handling of government resources increased, but only modest progress was made in collecting taxes on big business earnings.

The push to get private companies to contribute a little more of their profits to fund the social security system was used as a pretext for the attempted "soft coup" against the Sandinista government. In fact, everything indicates that the top leaders of the employers' organizations, or at least most of them, secretly decided some time ago to drop their alliance with the government and support a coup. However, the issue of whether to pay their fair share into the social security system did raise a conflict of interests for the big business owners and threatened continuity of the tripartite model.

But when the attempted "soft coup" destroyed that model, big business did not succeed in "making the economy scream." It did, however, paralyze the country's main sources of income for a few months by calling three or four "national strikes" (actually, business lockouts) during the period. Their success was limited mainly because big national capital is no longer the largest segment of the economy. The state, foreign investors, and the popular sectors have become much more important.

The Sandinista government took advantage of 11 years of social peace to promote a series of policies that allowed the popular sector to come into its own. It had been empowered by the 1979 revolution and successfully resisted neoliberalism from 1990 and 2006. Since then, ordinary Nicaraguans became not only social and political actors, but also economic ones.

In Nicaragua today, 94.1% of economic and social entities are part of what is called the “people’s economy”: micro, small and medium-sized family businesses, cooperatives and associations in the countryside and the city. These are companies that seek to satisfy the needs of families and/or partners, rather than the dictates of shareholders, capital recovery, or other elements of capitalist logic.

These units employ almost 3 million people, accounting for 73.7% of national employment, 42.4% of GDP, 55.7% of revenue, and 61.8% of available expenditure in the economy. Peasant farming dominates food production and nearly 80% of the land is in the hands of small and medium-sized farmers. In addition, cooperatives, associations, and family businesses control most of the tourism in the country (currently the leading industry), as well as all of the transport sector.

This explains why the coup plotters attacked the headquarters of the CARUNA credit union and the Ministry of the Family, Cooperative, Community and Associative Economy (MEFCCA) on the same day. This is also the reason that market vendors organized to repel the attacks of the coup plotters who threatened to destroy (and in some cases succeeded in destroying) their sources of income. It also explains how, although major roads were blocked for weeks by so-called “peasants,” food prices did not rise during the coup attempt.

The damage caused by the attempted coup was considerable, with total losses estimated at about \$1.1 billion (about 10% of GDP). Foreign investment was cut in half to about \$700-800 million, and more than \$200 million in damage was inflicted on government assets. More than \$240 million in tax revenue was lost, and losses in the transport sector amounted to almost \$525 million. The tourism sector lost about \$420 million in revenue because only half of the expected two million visitors arrived, and government spending had to be cut by about \$130 million.

Despite all this, the coup plotters did not succeed in destabilizing the economy. Since 1979 structural changes in Nicaragua have transformed the economic correlation of forces between social classes. Also, the previous decade of Sandinista government had succeeded in reorienting policies in many key sectors of the economy, such as food production.

The Left has much to learn from the way the Sandinista government confronted the attempted coup last year. Valuable lessons can be gleaned for all of the world’s social movements committed to transformative change in countries that have modest sources of income and heavy exposure to the global economy.

In response to the banks' refusal to lend money, the government provided the resources to maintain cash flow in the economy. As of November, the net injection was 597 million Córdobas (US\$19 million). In the words of the president of the Central Bank, Ovidio

Reyes, in a local TV interview, "There was a monetary adjustment; we had to do all the financial and macroeconomic programming, otherwise it would have led to instability."

Reyes explained that with the monetary policy, "We supported with everything we had. Fortunately, ten years of continuous progress had allowed us to gain strength. We really insisted on generating savings, not spending it, because we said something could happen. ...We were thinking of other kinds of shocks—maybe a 10% drop in export prices or a sudden slowdown in foreign investment, but we did not expect a blow like this—a coup. Reyes went on to say:

"We had promoted savings and our country had very good international reserves. The financial system had good capital execution, it had good deposits abroad, ...many rules were put in place such that the financial system was prepared to face an unexpected shock ...we did not know what it could be, but there were already winds of change in the diplomatic sphere to revise trade policies. We were concerned that the economic dynamics could slow down. So we forced saving and we used those savings. And that helped us manage things, while in another country it could have produced a breakdown of the financial system."

These policies ensured that interest rates remained stable with portfolio recovery for the banks. Infrastructure projects have continued to be built and completed. Much of the damage caused by the coup forces has been repaired. Employment and wages in the public sector and the free trade zones have also been stable. The 2019 budget prioritizes social spending (health, education) with 56% and public investment with 30%.

However, structurally speaking, once the alliance with big capital was broken there was a realignment of the partnerships in the economic model. The sectors making up the people's economy acquired their due share of decision-making power over economic policy. By June the treasonous aims of the big business owners had become clear, so the government removed their representatives from all the economic decision-making bodies. In September the merchant vessel A.C. Sandino was finally repaired and ready to start sailing, giving the country its own merchant fleet for the first time in decades. And in October, a bill was submitted to the National Assembly to create the Nicaraguan Import-Export Company (ENIMEX), replacing the former ENIMPORT which imported goods for the country's large capitalist purchasers.

According to the Deputy Minister of the Family, Community and Cooperative Economy (MEFCCA), José Benito Aragón, his ministry worked hard for twelve months, training 77,201 families in the countryside to improve productivity in the production of basic grains and other crops, and training 14,228 small producers in cattle ranching. "It was a year of extraordinary work in which qualitative and quantitative progress was made," he explained. "We have been supporting 5,158 families in the formulation of business plans ... in the sectors of primary production, gastronomy, trade and services, with good results."

MEFCCA also worked with 5,612 legalized cooperatives. It helped to improve the productive infrastructure of 4,225 families in coffee and cocoa processing plants, reservoirs for storing water during the dry season, irrigation systems, etc. "It was a year in which we encouraged more small and medium-sized enterprises with workshops and support. We

proved that Nicaraguans have a very enterprising and creative spirit and are moving the economy," said the deputy minister. He reported that some 48,733 people had participated in various workshops and events to encourage entrepreneurship, such as regional fairs, national events, local food stands, farmer's markets, and theme houses. "Sales generated from all these events amounted to 137.2 million Córdoba [US\$4.172 million]—a resounding success! It was an increase of 36.5% compared to 2017," Aragon noted.

Aragón promised that the creative and enterprising economic model will be promoted even more this year. "We will provide technical and productive support to 147,015 people. We will help 111,891 small producers strengthen family farming and accompany 35,124 people as they launch new ventures and small businesses. We are going to increase the productivity, quality, and added value of supply chains with the participation of 69,360 people, including 22,766 families that produce food in their own gardens. We will help 35,926 families improve productivity in basic grains and fruits. We'll help 6,105 families add value by processing coffee, cacao, fruits, and vegetables. And 4,563 families will be supported with investment plans in agricultural products, agro-industry, and small farming and fishing businesses on the Caribbean Coast," he explained.



Local markets depend on family businesses which benefit from preferential credit and business training via the government's family economy ministry MEFCCA . (Photo: El 19 Digital)

Aragón said that MEFCCA's plans include promoting the creation, transfer, and adaptation of cattle-rearing technology for 16,118 producers; 294 families producing added-value dairy products; and the insemination of about 10,000 cows. "We are going to promote the development of 26,413 new businesses as follows: support 9,000 families in the development of business plans, and help 17,413 families with productive community investments to improve their livelihoods," he said. He also stressed that MEFCCA will strengthen and transform small and medium-sized industry. "We are going to train 35,124 small and medium-sized businesspeople, giving them the knowledge and skills needed to promote their products," Aragon said. This year MEFCCA will allocate 597,165,000 Córdoba [US\$18 million] in direct investment and 654,890,181 [US\$20 million] Córdoba to support production.

At the end of the year, the investment promotion agency ProNicaragua released a report Development Policies and Projects to Boost Investment 2019-2021, which contains policies and projects to ensure economic growth over the next two years. Its approximate value is over US\$11 million. This document covers all the projects in the national budget whose financing is already approved through 2021, and some that need to procure new funding. Of these funds, US\$8.575 billion should be financed through loans or by private or foreign investors.

Several sources are being explored to finance these projects over the next two years. Concessional financing will be sought to import capital goods; treasury resources from tax collections will be applied; sovereign debt securities will be placed on international markets; and different modalities will be used to establish private investment guarantee funds, including public-private partnerships.

Mention should be made here of the uncertainty brought by passage of the NICA Act in the United States, which instructs the U.S. to veto all loans to Nicaragua in international organizations such as the IMF and World Bank. This blunt tool can be labelled “terrorist” in the sense that it would affect the entire population indiscriminately. But we first note that much of the funding for the next two years is already approved and therefore not affected by the NICA Act. Second, the real capacity of the United States to put its embargo into practice is still unclear due to several factors: the continuous decline of US influence around the world, disagreements between the United States and the countries of the European Union, and the role of China and Russia on the international stage.

Additionally, during the past 11 years Nicaragua has diversified its economy more than ever before. It has expanded relations with several Asian countries such as Taiwan, South Korea and Japan, as well as with oil-producing countries in the Middle East. The country has remained engaged in the political and economic reactivation of the Bolivarian Alliance for the Peoples of Our America (ALBA). And many EU governments continue to support development projects in Nicaragua on a bilateral basis, despite the political rhetoric.

In addition to road infrastructure and electricity projects, the two-year plan includes projects to promote tourism, such as the opening of a terminal for cruise ships. The energy grid will continue to get cleaner, with the goal of achieving 90% renewable power generation by 2020 by developing hydroelectric and solar power plants in the Caribbean. And broadband projects are being planned with a Korean cooperation to improve technology capacity in the field of education, among others.

These investments are aimed at developing a new economic model for the historical stage the Sandinista people’s revolution has entered since the failed coup attempt of 2018. We are calling this model the “Creative, enterprising, and victorious economy.” It was developed to allow “micro, small, and medium-sized enterprises to promote their products, and to allow us to grow together as a country that produces top quality. We are also increasing our contacts and knowledge of world markets,” explains Nicaraguan government investment advisor Laureano Ortega.

In the words of Leonardo Torres, president of the National Council for Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (CONIMIPYME), the new economic model that emerged from the attempted coup, "...is a creative and enterprising one, with small and medium-sized businesses at the center of economic development." By heading this movement, Torres has come to supplant the heads of the employers' organizations in shaping Nicaraguan economic policy. "In order to have that creative economy, our economic model must also be enterprising, because no matter how creative we are, we need entrepreneurship to get things done. So we will have a creative economic model by reinventing ourselves, and demonstrating an entrepreneurial attitude of perseverance and hard work," said the CONIMIPYME president.

This new model not only entails repairing the damage caused by the coup and developing the market- and export-oriented side of the economy, but also promoting local culture in all its expressions, both to promote local production of goods and services and to strengthen the fabric of society as a whole.

These plans include a strong municipal government investment program on the order of 8 billion Córdobas (around US\$250 million) for 2019. This includes construction of affordable housing for low-income residents, refurbishment of markets throughout the country, repair and construction of streets and roads, repair and construction of parks and public spaces, and promotion of cultural, sports, religious and other activities—all to promote domestic and international tourism.

Important initiatives are also underway for workforce training, ranging from an increase in the supply of educational television programs to development of an online university for Nicaraguans inside and outside the country. There are also plans to increase technical course offerings and primary and secondary school alternatives aimed, for example, at rural residents.

Key to this effort is the empowerment of women in a country that, according to World Economic Forum, is on track to join France and Iceland as the first three in the world to achieve gender parity by 2050.

In short, the "creative, enterprising, and victorious" economy requires the mobilization of all resources of society for social investment projects, with ordinary Nicaraguans at the center of economic power. Health, education, and culture are not viewed as "expenses" or "burdens," but as essential components for unleashing the main productive force of Nicaraguan society: its empowered people.

Socialism from below: the popular economy

Nicaragua Now, Issue 8, Summer 2017

<http://nicaraguasc.org.uk/resources/Nicaragua%20Now%208%20.pdf>

Liz Light talks to Presidential Adviser on Social Affairs Orlando Núñez Soto about the importance of the popular economy.

Nicaragua's wealth is created by three economic blocks – foreign capital, national capital, and the popular economy, a sector which produces most of the country's food and generates 70% of the country's employment. Nicaragua's popular economy is the strongest in Latin America: it owns a higher percentage of the land, has most access to credit and is the most organized. Although the country is still impoverished this new type of economy is creating a slow, silent revolution by gradually taking economic control. For example, nearly 100% of sesame seed is produced, processed and exported by small producers, who because they are involved in the whole value chain are much better off.



*Orlando Núñez Soto
(Photo: Ruth Casa Editorial)*

Co-operatives are an important sector of the popular economy. During the 80s it proved very difficult for them to consolidate targets in the US-backed contra war. During the 80s because they were military governments, they almost disappeared because of lack of access to credit. But since the years of neo-liberal FSLN returned to power in 2007, co-ops are again being developed and there are now more than 5,000, particularly in agriculture, fishing, craft and transport.

Co-ops are provided with training in administration, co-operativism, economics, organic production, water harvesting etc. With robots and computerization big capital needs fewer workers, so the only way forward is for the poor to take charge of the economy. It is a transformation that implies a long, hard struggle; the results will not be seen in ten or 20 years as advances in this type of economy take between 50 to 100 years. Production by small and medium producers guarantees Nicaragua's food security, so government policies support them with credit and co-operative organization and by improving services such as access to electricity, water and roads.

Programs such as Zero Hunger provide capital, not food handouts, enabling farmers to produce food and compete in the market. Without farmers and fishermen we would have to import food and poverty would increase. The principal problem small producers face is market prices. There are always problems with credit and those related to poverty, but fundamentally the principal problem is price. Inflation hits them hard as the Cordoba devalues but costs stay the same. Other problems include access to capital to invest in adding value to their products, and competition from large foreign companies.

It's important that people, not big capital, own the land, the businesses, the credit market and transport. It's good news that the small producers are beginning to appropriate the economy. This is a different approach from the socialist culture where the state owns the economy, which we've seen didn't work from either an economic or a political viewpoint. This is what we call "socialism from below," the associative route to socialism, co-operativism.

The Catholic Church hierarchy and their role in Nicaragua's political crisis

by Coleen Littlejohn



Bishop Silvio Baez was one of the leaders of the failed coup attempt. Subsequently, the Vatican relieved him of his post, recalling him to Rome.

The Catholic Church Hierarchy and their Role in Nicaragua's Political Crisis

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Introduction

Roman Catholic bishops in Nicaragua, organized as the Catholic Bishops' Conference (CEN in Spanish), traditionally have been expected to lend their authority to important state occasions, including being called on to mediate between contending parties at moments of political crisis. Nicaraguan constitutions since 1939 have provided for a secular state and guaranteed freedom of religion, but the Roman Catholic Church has retained a special status in Nicaraguan society.

Recently-deceased Cardinal Miguel Obando y Bravo played a key role in supporting the political negotiations that brought an end to overt US military intervention via the Contras in 1989. Both Sandinista and Contra leaders have, over the years, expressed their appreciation for his role as peacemaker, a role supported by the then Auxiliary Bishop of Managua, Cardinal Leopoldo Brenes, head of the CEN today.



Cardinal Miguel Obando y Bravo

It was not unexpected, then, that the President of Nicaragua would solicit their services to try to restore peace to the country after the protests about moderate changes in the

social security system immediately evolved into a situation of extreme violence and upheaval in an attempt to overthrow the democratically elected government of Nicaragua.

The events from mid-April, 2018 to the present, however, have stained the legitimacy, whether deserved or not, that the CEN has enjoyed in the past, for two reasons. The first is that the Roman Catholic Church no longer represents most Nicaraguans, due to the growth of the evangelical churches in the last 40 years. Most of the population in Nicaragua consider themselves to be Christian, but no longer does the Roman Catholic Church have a monopoly on that word. In 1963, 96 percent of Nicaraguans considered themselves to be Roman Catholic. That number dropped to 72.9 percent in 1995 and to 58.5% in 2005, the last year sources such as the US Library of Congress Country Studies website reported this type of data. In 2005, 25.7 percent were Protestant /Evangelical and 15.7 professed no religion at all. Nevertheless, a poll released in the second week of April by the well-regarded M&R Consultants revealed that 44.3% of Nicaraguans considered themselves Catholic, 55.4 % not Catholic and 0.3 % atheists.

Those who do consider themselves Catholic also have distinct perspectives on the role of the Church. The 1970s and '80s were years of religious ferment in Nicaragua, often coupled with political conflict. A new generation of priests, nuns and lay activists tried to make the Catholic Church more democratic and more sensitive to issues of social justice and the widespread poverty of most Nicaraguans. They were motivated by the spirit of the "theology of liberation and preferential option for the poor" that was inspiring the base of the Church in Latin America, although not too many of the hierarchy. In the '70s, this new generation in Nicaragua, committed to social change, organized community development projects, education programs and Christian base communities. Many developed links with the FSLN, and participated in the insurrection that overthrew the Somoza regime.

The number of active Christian base communities decreased dramatically in the early 1980s in part because the Bishops' Conference had systematically restricted the church-based activities of liberation theology inspired by priests, nuns and laity. One of the few communities that has remained relatively active over the years is Saint John the Apostle in one of the eastern neighborhoods of Managua, even though the Archdiocese of Managua replaced the parish priest of the Church the community had constructed with someone much more conservative.

In the early '90s, though most Nicaraguans still considered themselves Roman Catholic, many had little contact with their church, and the Protestant minority began to expand rapidly. City dwellers, women and members of the upper and middle classes, even today, are most likely to be practicing Roman Catholics. (Again, according to US Library of Congress statistics.) The Protestant churches continued their rapid growth among the poor, challenging the Roman Catholic Church's traditional religious monopoly. With respect to today's view (as reported by the M&R survey mentioned above) less than 3% of all who profess a Christian faith believe that their church should be involved in politics.

The second reason that the CEN may have lost some of its legitimacy as "peacemaker" is that some of its members, and other clergy and religious at a parish level, were incapable of mediating and promoting peace, given that they were active members of the opposition themselves, as evidenced by their activities even before negotiations began in May. In addition to their attempt at "mediation", some Bishops and other clergy were also involved

in psychological intimidation, logistical support for the opposition and, in some cases, participation in or failure to intervene to pacify violent activities against Sandinista supporters and the general population held hostage by weeks of uncontrolled violence and pillaging. Some were involved, and continue to be involved in international false news campaigns. For that reason, many Catholics who are Sandinistas have decided that they can no longer attend services in which prayers for peace and reconciliation were and still are, substituted for the exact opposite.



Cardinal Leopoldo Brenes

One of those who feel that the clergy no longer represents her is a woman named Ligia Arana, whom I met in early June of last year. The following are excerpts of letters that Ligia, who for eight years was vice-rector of the National Autonomous University of Nicaragua (UNAN), and then, for twenty-seven years, a professor and later vice-rector of the Central American University (UCA) in Managua. The UCA was the first Jesuit university in the region, founded on July 23, 1960. The first rector was a cousin of the dictator ousted in 1979, Anastasio Somoza. After her husband died of cancer in 2016, she retired. One of her children is a well-known Sandinista journalist, as was her late husband.

On May 27 of last year, Ligia sent an email to her former colleague, Padre Jose Idiaquez, S.J., the rector of the UCA. In the message line to him she wrote: “You could make a difference to avoid a blood bath”. She continued: “Dear Father, I am so upset about what has been happening in our country over the past five weeks”. After lamenting the deaths of both Sandinistas and non-Sandinistas – noting that, as usual, the poor represented the majority of victims, she goes on to say that the culture of peace that had reigned in Nicaragua for

many years was now heading for extinction, and that the Church was not fulfilling its role as mediator, given their total partiality towards the opposition at the negotiation table. She also wrote that the lives of her children were being constantly threatened. "A cropped photo of my son has appeared in social media with a bullet in his head, all covered with blood, with our address on the bottom of the photo entitled: 'located'. On May 1, a car with dark windows parked in front of our house, and someone with a gun came out and used it to beat on our car - we turned on the lights and the person ran off."

Arana continued, "The words of Bishops Báez and Mata (Bishop of Estelí) are not prophetic- they are political, and they do not represent me as a Catholic." She then asked the rector about "what is happening with our priests," citing that, just the day before - May 26, the parish priest of Altagracia on the island of Ometepe was trying restore peace when protesters were trying to burn down the offices of the FSLN - but the protesters started throwing rocks at him - and then they finished burning the building. Ligia also cited a video of the parish priest in Nueva Guinea urging his parishioners to join the demonstrations.

She ends her message begging the rector to be an instrument of peace, and that he write her to say he received her message, since he has not responded to an article that she wrote on May 1 in which she first mentioned that her family had been repeatedly threatened. She is still waiting for a response. Ligia has not lost her faith- she is still a member of the Church- made up of the people and not just the hierarchy.

The Role of the Hierarchy in the Mediation Processes

Initially, it was hoped that Cardinal Brenes, the head of the Bishops Conference, could and would build on his peace-making role of the late 1980s. On the night of April 19, he sent a message to the Nicaragua people: "I want to invite all to always use dialogue as the best way to find solutions to our problems. Violence never solves problems; violence generates more problems." He was joined by the Bishop of Leon, Bosco Vivas Robelo, who, in a TV interview, called on the protesters in Leon, Managua, Granada and other municipalities to "protest peacefully and calm down," saying that, "when the heart is full of violence, when the mind is confused with the desire to get rid of an adversary, when there is hate, there are no adequate solutions to the problem at hand." Bishops Brenes and Bosco Vivas were joined by several evangelical leaders, such as Rev. Miguel Angel Casco, in insisting on peace and dialogue rather than violence.

On April 24th, the CEN accepted the government's request to mediate the National Dialogue, but they did not, despite the urgency of the situation, set a date for the talks to begin until 20 days later. On May 16, the government installed the first session of the "National Dialogue" with the mediation of the CEN. Unfortunately, evangelical leaders were not invited to participate either by the CEN or by the government. It was soon clear from the initial session of the Dialogue that, with few exceptions, most of the CEN openly or tacitly, supported the opposition, both at the negotiating table and in the protests, even before the Dialogue had started.

Days before the Dialogue began, at least three members of the CEN were giving interviews critical of the government on local and international media, and the opposition began to use church facilities for logistical support. For example, on April 21, protesters began to take "refuge" in the Cathedral of Managua, and use church installations to store supplies for other protesters at the Jesuit-run UCA, as well as those who had occupied the

installations of the National Engineering University (UNI - the public engineering university not far from the UCA). This use of church facilities to store provisions, medicine, and arms became common practice, especially after the Dialogue was suspended.



Catholic clergy participating in the national dialogue in 2018

Right before the suspension, government mediators and advisors, met privately, at the suggestion of the Bishop of Leon, and what was agreed in that session was that the use of violence from both sides would be halted. The opposition would concentrate on the removal of all roadblocks, where most of the violence was concentrated. In return, the Government would order the police to return to their barracks and stay there. Though there was an agreement at that session, the opposition refused to comply, and the Dialogue was suspended by Cardinal Brenes on May 23, citing a “lack of progress”. Thus, a chance to restore peace and avoid more violence and economic devastation was tragically lost. The CEN lost credibility with the government when, a few weeks later in June, Cardenal Brenes accompanied by a few of his colleagues, met with President Ortega and presented a letter demanding his resignation and the call for early elections.

A second round of mediations began in March 2019 and is supposed to end by June 18, 2019. The opposition has boycotted the majority of the sessions despite having reached some preliminary agreements in the first sessions. The CEN decided not to participate, either as mediators or witnesses, a decision that has been criticized by many, but the presence of the CEN, without substantial changes in their representation, would have guaranteed the same results as the earlier attempts.

One difference in the current attempts to communicate is the presence of the Papal Nuncio, together with a representative of the Organization of American States (OAS) who is a specialist in elections, and the participation of the International Red Cross. The Evangelical community was also invited, but their representatives were a little late getting to the table.

The three new additions to the peace-seeking negotiations have thus far played positive, neutral roles which, at times, has been disturbing to the opposition, who enjoyed their position of loaded dice at the table during the first round. Their manner of playing so disturbed the Papal Nuncio that he was quite critical of them during a recent televised interview. For that he received a barrage of hate mail and insulting caricatures in opposition media such as the daily newspaper, *La Prensa*, which eventually found itself pressured to apologize to him.

Psychological Pressure from the Pulpit

Some bishops (Managua, Matagalpa, Estelí for example) began to use, and, indeed, continue to use, their Sunday sermons to promote division and the continuation of conflict, while some parish priests have followed their example. At a community center in Managua, during the homily of a Mass that I attended a couple of months ago, the presiding priest ranted against the government and told those assisting that his life had been threatened; no proof given, except that a woman yelled at him. Most of the people did not react, but there were several friends and colleagues of mine, older nuns, who were terrified - as they had been since the beginning of the psychological warfare via social media that has been waged against the population since April 18. Ironically, during that same Mass, the children's choir was trying to sing parts of the *Misa Campesina* but were not too certain of the words, probably because of lack of practice. Those songs had been banned by the Bishops for years because of their relation to the years when liberation theology flourished. When the *Misa's* chief composer, Carlos Mejia Godoy, joined the opposition it seems that is it okay again to use the songs when they want to.

The behavior of some of the bishops and priests contrasted, and continues to contrast sharply with the messages heard from the remaining priests that still represent "theology of liberation and the preferential option for the poor", and the leaders of the evangelical churches. Those are the religious whose Sunday and other pronouncements call for continued prayers for peace and dialogue. Those, both Catholic and Evangelical, are the ones that seem to most represent the will of the Nicaraguan people and the will of Pope Francis, who has been closely following the situation in Nicaragua since April of 2018.

Participation in the Violence

The psychological damage to the population has been compounded by their witnessing horrific acts of violence, much of which has been transmitted via social media by the smartphones of their perpetrators. There have been several documented incidents where Catholic clergy have been involved, both as participants and/or as witnesses who could have stopped some acts which could easily be compared to the Inquisition of hundreds of years ago.

The following are some examples of violence in which clergy were involved. There exists an extensive collection of videos and personal testimonies documenting these

activities, although you will never see them in the files of Amnesty International or the local human rights NGOs.

In Masaya, a priest of the San Juan Bautista Parish directed the opposition gang that tortured and killed a policeman, Gabriel de Jesus Vado Ruiz. The priest's phone with messages to the terrorists are the proof, as can be seen in the following video where he is heard to be saying: "I advise you that I am Father Harvin in the San Juan Church. Keep the terrorists tied up however you can because it's good evidence for the international countries...look for how to hide these *##*# even in the bottom of a latrine...try to get them not to upload photos and videos to Facebook of the one that you are burning, so there won't be a problem...if you hear the church bells be alert." <https://www.el19digital.com/articulos/ver/titulo:79096-cura-es-complice-de-terroristas-que-asesinaron-a-sub-oficial> (July 17)



Sander Bonilla under torture overseen by clergy.

In Leon, Sander Francisco Bonilla Zapata, a Sandinista supporter, accused a Catholic priest and an evangelical pastor of participating in the acts of violence and torture against him. Bonilla, as he left the hospital several days later, testified that a Father Berrios and Pastor Carlos Figueroa were present, but did nothing to stop the torture – which was filmed by those who were carrying out the torture, including dousing him with gasoline. One of them can be heard saying: “Take the photo but don’t post it.” The two pastors later pressured Sander’s mother to say that none of this ever took place.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZNHyi8RaAUY&t=2s>

Multiple videos that circulated on social networks show the people of Diriamba [a small town about 40 kilometers south of Managua] angry at the thugs, kidnappers and torturers who held the town hostage for over a month, using the church for storing weapons and health supplies stolen from the local public health clinic. The citizens surrounded the San Sebastian Basilica demanding that the priests leave, and that the church be turned over to the population. A Catholic Church mission headed by Cardinal Brenes and the Papal Nuncio, Archbishop Waldemar Stanislaw Sommertag, went to Diriamba and Jinotepe, a neighboring town, on July 9, a day after the National Police removed a number of roadblocks with a lamentable number of people wounded and killed. In Diriamba, they were met by a large group of citizens who protested because the clergymen had not come to their aid when they were being held hostage in the city, subjected to all manner of outrages by those who maintained the roadblocks. See video of the Diriamba Population from El 19 Digital:

[https://www.el19digital.com/articulos/ver/titulo:78876-indignacion-de-las-familias-ante-complicidad-de-obispos-con-los-que-promueven-el-terrorismo-](https://www.el19digital.com/articulos/ver/titulo:78876-indignacion-de-las-familias-ante-complicidad-de-obispos-con-los-que-promueven-el-terrorismo)
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Seue3aQ8-hM>

Hierarchy Participation in the Planning the Coup

By November of 2018, there was evidence to confirm that high level participation in opposition planning by at least one member of the CEN was a shameful reality. The leading role of Bishop Silvio Báez, the auxiliary bishop of Managua, in the organizing and support of the opposition, became very evident after the leak of [an audio recording from last October 23](#) taken by a member of the St. John Paul the Apostle Christian base community who was present during a meeting of Báez with a group of small farmers, supporters of the anti-canal movement and active participants in the violence surrounding the roadblocks in the southern part of Nicaragua. Báez’s words, recorded during the meeting, clearly unveiled the opposition lies and the media’s narrative of a supposedly peaceful, spontaneous uprising against the “tyrant”, Daniel Ortega. Baez used harsh language to disparage everything related to the current government, and those who do not support the opposition Civic Alliance.

In the conversation he talked about pressuring the government by reinstating the so-called “tranques de la muerte” (roadblocks of death), saying, “We need to pressure the government again so that they ask the Bishops’ Conference to resume the dialogue. We have been thinking of putting up roadblocks again.” Báez also noted that the Blue and White National Unity (UNAB), a new group founded by the anti-FSLN group, the Sandinista Renovation Movement (MRS), “should include everyone opposed to the government, *even if*

they are suspected of being opportunists, abortionists, homosexuals, drug traffickers... so as to achieve the final objective”.

Baez also bragged about the hierarchy’s role in the creation of the Alliance with comments such as: “The Alliance knows that we bishops created it. If the Alliance exists, it is because we created it.” He bragged that “The roadblocks were a wonderful idea” and he later is heard discussing the possibility of a second “trancadera”, referring to the roadblocks—the sources of violence and destruction of the country’s economy—to force the president of Nicaragua to sit down at the dialogue. He again refers to President Ortega: “We have every desire to take him before a firing squad.”



Silvio Baez

Báez also referred to President Ortega as an “imbecile” and “stupid.” He called Foreign Minister Denis Moncada a “pea” referring to his height. He accused Daniel Ortega of being uneducated, and therefore unqualified to be President of Nicaragua. He commented that the presidents of Bolivia (Evo Morales), Venezuela (Nicolás Maduro), and Nicaragua (Daniel Ortega) “are three stupid guys.” He also referred disparagingly to Cardinal Brenes in that meeting. Ironically, it was Cardinal Brenes who implicitly confirmed the authenticity of the recording when he told Radio La Primerísima reporter Lisbeth Gonzalez, “Of course, I think it was something very private, and unfortunately someone recorded it.”

[A second, undated, recording](#) of a conversation Báez had with a group of supporters was released by church members on Oct. 24. It revealed Báez’s pride that the United States is supporting the plan to overthrow the constitutional government of President Ortega. Báez also announced that more measures are coming from the US government against Nicaragua, and that he hopes that these measures will also affect the Nicaraguan Army.

[Listen to the first recording in Spanish from 10/23/18](#)

[Listen to the second part of the recording 10/24/18](#)

After the release of the recordings, the St. Paul the Apostle Community again denounced Báez for continuing to use his sermons and the church itself to manipulate people politically. They publicly called on the CEN to support the petition signed by more than a half million Catholics asking Pope Francis to remove Bishop Báez from Nicaragua, demanding, "that he cease his threats against President Daniel Ortega; that he cease to incite the overthrow of the government through reinstating the so-called "death road blocks", which Báez called "extraordinary." They also continued to demand that the priests stop facilitating the use of the churches for political purposes.

Someone was obviously listening. On November 1, Father Luis Herrera, Administrator of the Managua Cathedral, said during his Sunday sermon that the temple is for prayer, not protest. Later Cardinal Brenes declared that churches are not political places, nor places to do politics. He stated that: "I am the archbishop of all the Catholics of the Archdiocese." "Everyone is free to come into the Cathedral; we don't tell people that this mass is only for members of a certain political party."

These remarks came after Cardinal Brenes and Bishop Rolando Alvarez, another of the "active" Bishops, were called to a private meeting with the Pope in the Vatican, setting off rumors that the Bishops were being scolded for their obvious involvement in the conflict they were officially supposed to be mediating.



Members of the Ecclesiastical Base Community Saint Paul the Apostle denounce the political role of Bishop Silvio Baez

Nevertheless, Báez remained active on Twitter, and continued to coordinate closely with the opposition Alliance. In early April, he tweeted his fans that he had been called to the Vatican to meet personally with Pope Francis at the Pontiff's request. Days later the Pope gave the order to transfer Baez to Rome; Baez maintains that his transfer was due to death threats against him—he was supposedly warned by none other than the US Ambassador. A couple of months later, the bishop of Matagalpa was also transferred to the Rio San Juan.

Disseminating False Information—The Role of the UCA

In Nicaragua, a large part of the education system, the private institutions that serve most upper and middle-class students, is controlled by Roman Catholic bodies. This includes the UCA, and many high schools, including the Jesuit Colegio Centro America. Scholarships for lower income students at the UCA did not exist until 1980. With the support of the first ruling body after the July 19 victory which ousted Somoza, the Junta de Gobierno de Reconstrucción Nacional (JGRN), the UCA began to receive government funding and started to work within the structure of the National Council of Universities (CNU). The UCA continues to receive their portion of the government's allocation of 6% of the national budget (excluding foreign loans and donations).

One of the best loved and respected rectors of the UCA was Father Cesar Jerez Garcia, S.J., who died in 1991, a year after he assumed the position after having been a professor there for 27 years. The following is a translation of part of his inaugural address of the UCA's 1990 academic year. "A horrific war has left us with many dead, it has left thousands of wounded, it has left hatred and thoughts of revenge. In this sad context, we are called to reconciliation, which is a demand for peace, for survival and, in many cases, this must be the fruit of Christian inspiration. Considering the leadership that has been demonstrated by President Daniel Ortega, the Board of the UCA is preparing to give President Ortega an honorary Ph.D. for his work as President, and for his contribution to peace and democracy. For a short time, he was a student of the UCA, and the university wants to recognize his merits, not because of his rise to power, but in the moment that he descends from that power [The FSLN lost the elections of 1990]."

Several months later, President Ortega received the honorary degree.

As was seen earlier in this article, the current rector of the UCA, Fr. Jose Alberto Idiaquez, never bothered to reply to the pleas of his former colleague, Ligia Arana, nor was there any reaction to the death threats to her family, nor to the violence perpetrated by the opposition during those terrible months from April to July, 2018.

Perhaps he really had no time to respond to real time problems given that Idiaquez has and continues to be involved even before August 18th in an intense campaign of false news and fundraising directed towards Jesuit universities in the US and around the world. As a graduate of a Jesuit university in the US, I began to receive notifications last year from my alma mater - one on June 4th, another on September 21st, and another on November 4th, the last being a request for donations for the UCA via the Association of Jesuit Universities (AJCU).

At the beginning, there was mention of Seattle University and the role it was playing in the dissemination of information about what was supposedly going on in Nicaragua last year by hosting student speakers and panels etc.

An interview on NPR with a niece of Idiaquez entitled “Pray for me - Nicaraguan Priest Threatened with Death Reaches out to Niece in the US,” was broadcast on April 24, 2019. The niece is a student at Seattle University. The Padre had been visiting his niece but as she states in the interview: “In the evening of **April 15th** he kept leaving the kitchen to take urgent calls.” He returned to tell her that he had to leave the next day and that the UCA was under attack. He later reported that upon his return, he found “his country unravelling”. This was three days before social media launched the false news of UCA being attacked and one or even two students killed. His niece described her uncle as a “prominent figure in the conflict when he was part of the Catholic Church’s mediation’s efforts” and that that put him in danger.

During the April 24 NPR interview, Uncle Idiaquez threw more coal into the fire by stating, “I want to express to the world that Nicaragua is a country in which people are killed and kidnapped every day. We have been living for many years under this kind of oppression--it's not fair.”

Padre Idiaquez’s center of operations for transmitting the unreality of what was happening has been Seattle University, a Jesuit university based in that city, which has maintained a close relationship with the UCA since 2014, through a program created by the University called the Central American Initiative. The webpage of the CAI has a section that highlights the student and faculty initiatives and concrete activities are reported for 2014 and 2015. Those sounded like something that I would have liked to promote between my alma mater and the UCA a few years ago, given that it was my Jesuit education that introduced me to the theology of liberation and the preferential option for the poor. Now it is only filled with misinformation from the frequent visits of Padre Idiaquez and his friends, including the President of Seattle University and students and faculty and gives the idea that the UCA is no longer the UCA of Padre Jerez, but rather that of its Somocista oligarchic founders.

In the interest of transparency, it would be interesting to see figures of how much the UCA has raised in the last year and continues to raise. Never was there a clear understanding of the 6% of the national budget that the government of Nicaragua gives both private and national universities. There were only attacks saying that the government had reduced their funding last July, without explaining that budgets were cut mid-year, thanks to the reduction of state income, which was a direct result of opposition activities damaging the national economy. The UCA continues to receive government funding but sons and daughters of friends of mine who study or studied in the UCA have been disappointed in the quality of their “emergency” programming, compared to other universities.

One year later, unfortunately, the role of much of the Catholic hierarchy continues to focus on supporting a very fragmented and unrepresentative opposition. Unfortunately, when it was needed (and when it still is needed), most of the hierarchy’s spokespeople have not been a voice for peace and reconciliation, which is the desire of most of the population in Nicaragua.

Conclusion

by Dan Kovalik

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By Dan Kovalik

Imagine that the Wright brothers' first experiments with flying machines all failed because the automobile interests sabotaged each and every test flight. And then the good and god-fearing folk of the world looked upon this, took notice of the consequences, nodded their collective heads wisely, and intoned solemnly: "Humans shall never fly."

Fact: Virtually every socialist experiment of any significance in the twentieth century has been either overthrown, invaded, or bombed ... corrupted, perverted, or subverted ... sanctioned, embargoed, or destabilized ... or otherwise had life made impossible for it, by the United States. Not one of these socialist governments or movements – from the Russian Revolution to Fidel Castro in Cuba, from Communist China to the Sandinistas in Nicaragua – not one was permitted to rise or fall solely on its own merits; not one was left secure enough to drop its guard against the all-powerful enemy abroad and freely and fully relax control at home.

-- William Blum⁹²

1. Introduction

We shall never know what more the Nicaraguan people could have achieved had the US not intervened so many times over the past 150 years to destroy every attempt they have made to develop and to create a democratic and more socially progressive nation. Indeed, the proper question about Nicaragua and the Sandinista Revolution is not, as some on the left have posited, "why haven't they been able to build a more revolutionary and socialist country?" Rather, the question which the Sandinista Revolution begs is, "How was this poor, tiny country able to overthrow the shackles of US-backed dictatorship, weather 10 years of brutal counter-revolutionary war coupled with an unrelenting economic war to become such a stable, democratic and prosperous nation?" For all their faults and shortcomings, the Sandinistas have done what few in the developing world have ever been able to do -- to take on both the US Goliath and the world economic system and not only survive, but thrive.

Harold Pinter, in his 2005 Nobel Prize speech entitled, "Art, Truth & Politics"⁹³, explained all of this in the way only a person of letters could. Pinter, as a spokesperson for Nicaragua in opposing Congressional aid to the Contras in the 1980s, opined:

"The United States supported the brutal Somoza dictatorship in Nicaragua for over 40 years. The Nicaraguan people, led by the Sandinistas, overthrew this regime in 1979, a breathtaking popular revolution.

The Sandinistas weren't perfect. They possessed their fair share of arrogance, and their political philosophy contained a number of contradictory elements. But they were intelligent, rational and civilized. They set out to establish a stable, decent, pluralistic society. The death penalty was abolished. Hundreds of thousands of poverty-stricken peasants were brought

⁹² <https://williamblum.org/essays/read/will-humans-ever-fly-smashing-socialism-in-the-20th-century>

⁹³ <https://www.nobelprize.org/prizes/literature/2005/pinter/25621-harold-pinter-nobel-lecture-2005/>

back from the dead. Over 100,000 families were given title to land. Two thousand schools were built. A quite remarkable literacy campaign reduced illiteracy in the country to less than one seventh. Free education was established and a free health service. Infant mortality was reduced by a third. Polio was eradicated.

The United States denounced these achievements as Marxist/Leninist subversion. In the view of the US government, a dangerous example was being set. If Nicaragua was allowed to establish basic norms of social and economic justice, if it was allowed to raise the standards of health care and education and achieve social unity and national self-respect, neighboring countries would ask the same questions and do the same things. . . .

The United States finally brought down the Sandinista government. It took some years and considerable resistance but relentless economic persecution and 30,000 dead finally undermined the spirit of the Nicaraguan people. They were exhausted and poverty stricken once again. The casinos moved back into the country. Free health and free education were over. Big business returned with a vengeance. "Democracy" had prevailed."

Unlike some on the "left" today, Pinter was able to accept the Sandinistas' imperfections -- and aren't we all imperfect after all? -- without overlooking their incredible achievements.

2. The pro "regime change" Left

This is the crucial issue as highlighted by Harold Pinter: in the struggle of small nations against imperialist aggression and oppression, as Nicaragua against the US-led and US-financed Contra war of attrition, which side are you on, especially when considering that social progress and democratic empowerment of the people were the determinant features of the Revolution underway? There has not been, nor is there a perfect Left anywhere in the planet, so the lack of perfection in the FSLN to not support the Revolution is at best fallacious and at worst a serious dereliction of political duty. The worst aspect of their stance is to (un)wittingly confirm right wing views regarding the nature of the democratically elected governments of Nicaragua who they depict as "undemocratic," "dictatorial," "repressive," "corrupt," and the whole catalogue of imperialist propaganda.

The next great achievement of the Sandinistas and their leader, Daniel Ortega, was his reelection in 2006 in the face of continued US meddling. And, once back in power, Ortega and the Sandinistas moved swiftly to re-start improving the lives of the Nicaraguan people (interrupted by 17 years of US-led neoliberalism) in ways unseen elsewhere even in richer countries.

As just one example, in 2018 Nicaragua was ranked number 5 in the world for gender equality by the World Economic Forum (WEF).⁹⁴ The only four countries ranked higher were the usual suspects -- Iceland, Norway, Sweden and Finland. Meanwhile, Nicaragua ranked above every other nation in the Americas, including the United States. Not too shabby. As one article summarized the WEF report⁹⁵,

"The WEF annual reports, this year based on information from 149 countries, are a benchmark for capturing the magnitude of gender-based disparities and tracking their

⁹⁴ <https://www.weforum.org/reports/the-global-gender-gap-report-2018>

⁹⁵ <http://www.nicaraguasc.org.uk/news/article/332/nicaragua.-5th-place-in-the-world-in-gender-equality>

progress. Countries are ranked according to economic participation and opportunity; educational attainment; health and survival; and political empowerment.

“. . . Particularly noteworthy is Nicaragua’s second position on political empowerment, and first position in terms of the ratio of women in ministerial positions. This is a result of a 50-50 law that mandates gender equality in party candidate lists for elections.

“Nicaragua is ranked first on the criteria of health and survival, a testimony to the success of government health care programs.”

This ranking is at great variance with the derisive claims of some in the US left and the human rights community that Nicaragua is being led by a sexist “caudillo” in the person of Daniel Ortega, but few will acknowledge this glaring contradiction.

Meanwhile, even the harshest critics of Ortega have acknowledged that he has also done what other Central American countries still reeling from the US-backed wars of the 1980s have not been able to do -- create a largely peaceful, stable country which is not sending migrants to the US border *en masse*. Indeed, even for fiscal year 2018 (the year of the recent crisis) the number of Nicaraguan migrants apprehended by US border authorities was so miniscule that the US Customs and Border Authority -- while tallying the thousands of migrants picked up at the border from El Salvador, Honduras, Guatemala and Mexico -- did not even bother to list the number coming from Nicaragua.⁹⁶

Again, as the blog “Lima Charlie” explains in an article which is largely critical of Ortega, “he has succeeded in maintaining a delicate balancing act, both domestically and internationally, maintaining relations with former socialist and communist nations, while courting U.S. and Western interests, as well as the Catholic Church.”⁹⁷ Part of Ortega’s impressive juggling act has included making peace with the former Contras and with the business community as well. And, this same blog acknowledges that if this “delicate balancing act” cannot be maintained and Ortega is toppled, Nicaragua could very well go the way of its sister Central American republics:

Concerns have also arisen that an Ortega exit could create instability, which could in turn create a possible spillover of instability from the neighboring “Northern Triangle” region consisting of Honduras, Guatemala and El Salvador. These countries continue to suffer from poverty, skyrocketing crime and gang-related violence emerging after decades of civil war, exacerbated by U.S.-Soviet rivalries.

According to a CNBC interview, “If Ortega goes, the center will not likely hold.” . . .

Migrants from these countries cite violence, forced gang recruitment, extortion by organized crime groups, poverty and lack of opportunity, as their primary reasons for leaving.

And, it cannot be stressed enough what great odds the Sandinistas have overcome in creating a more stable and equitable society. Thus, nothing could be farther from the truth

96 <https://www.cbp.gov/newsroom/stats/usbp-sw-border-apprehensions>

97 <https://limacharlieneews.com/politics-society/us-immigration-crisis-could-worsen-nicaragua/>

than claims that the US has been just fine with the Ortega Administration since it was voted back into power in 2006.

For example, as aggressively anti-Sandinista journalist Tim Rogers has explained, the US began cutting vital aid off to Nicaragua almost immediately after Ortega's 2006 election. As Rogers related in a 2012 article entitled, "Union cuts aid to its poor old foe," the US cut off \$3 million in USAID aid to the Nicaraguan government in 2012.⁹⁸ Moreover, as Rogers explained, "The US, meanwhile, has been trimming economic assistance to Nicaragua for years. In June 2009, Washington slashed \$64 million in Millennium Challenge funding..." -- that is, funding to alleviate poverty. Rogers also explained that, by 2012, "US aid for Nicaragua has been whittled to about \$30 million," with nearly all of that (\$27 million) going to "Nicaraguan civil society groups" who stand in opposition to the Nicaraguan government.

Miraculously, despite starving the Nicaraguan government of such aid while simultaneously funding the opposition to the government, Nicaragua was one of the first countries to meet nearly all of its Millennium Challenge goals by the target year of 2015 -- that is, eradicating extreme poverty, hunger and malnutrition; achieving universal primary education; promoting gender equality and empowering women; reducing child mortality; improving maternal health and developing a global partnership for development.⁹⁹

Again, that some on the Left cannot see the good that Ortega and the FSLN have done not only for Nicaragua but also for the entire region, is truly frustrating. Instead, they view all of the faults and warts of the Sandinistas through a microscope while ignoring all the positive. What they have not learned is the lesson taught to me by a friend years ago -- that the good is not the enemy of the great. And failing to absorb this lesson, they seem willing to risk the ouster of the Sandinistas and the almost certain instability, violence and destruction which would follow in its wake.

This recalls the words of Michael Parenti in his wonderful article, "Left Anticommunism: The Unkindest Cut":

The pure socialists regularly blame the Left itself for every defeat it suffers. Their second-guessing is endless. So we hear that revolutionary struggles fail because their leaders wait too long or act too soon, are too timid or too impulsive, too stubborn or too easily swayed. We hear that revolutionary leaders are compromising or adventuristic, bureaucratic or opportunistic, rigidly organized or insufficiently organized, undemocratic or failing to provide strong leadership. But always the leaders fail because they do not put their trust in the "direct actions" of the workers, who apparently would withstand and overcome every adversity if only given the kind of leadership available from the left critic's own groupuscule. Unfortunately, the critics seem unable to apply their own leadership genius to producing a successful revolutionary movement in their own country

To be sure, the pure socialists are not entirely without specific agendas for building the revolution. After the Sandinistas overthrew the Somoza dictatorship in Nicaragua, an ultra-left group in that country called for direct worker ownership of the factories. The

⁹⁸ <https://www.pri.org/stories/2012-06-21/us-cuts-aid-its-poor-old-foe>

⁹⁹ <http://www.mdgtrack.org/index.php?tab=c&c=NIC>

*armed workers would take control of production without benefit of managers, state planners, bureaucrats, or a formal military. While undeniably appealing, this worker syndicalism denies the necessities of state power. Under such an arrangement, the Nicaraguan revolution would not have lasted two months against the U.S.-sponsored counterrevolution that savaged the country. It would have been unable to mobilize enough resources to field an army, take security measures, or build and coordinate economic programs and human services on a national scale.*¹⁰⁰

The Sandinista Revolution is now undoubtedly at a crossroads. That is, it is at but another crossroads, for the US is always there to make sure that its path is never a clear and straight one. The question for some in the North American and European left is what should we do to help it along during this fraught time?

And the answer is, we would submit, as it always has been -- to do everything in our power to ensure that the Revolution's road to development is as unimpeded as possible by the constant, and quite illegal, interference by our own governments.

This is all the revolutionary movements of the developing world have ever asked of us, but some have been unable to truly hear this plea in recent years because it is drowned out by a quite powerful ideology which has taken hold of the Western, liberal/left mind -- humanitarian interventionism.

"Humanitarian interventionism" became an ideological force in the 1990s with the collapse of the Soviet Union and the Eastern Bloc. Without the Soviet counterweight to prevent the worst excesses of the Western imperial powers, the US in particular seized upon this doctrine to permit it to intervene anywhere and everywhere in the world to destroy progressive movements and advance its own interests, but all in the name of human rights. This is, of course, nothing but imperialism by another name, but few on this kind of left have recognized it as such.

One left intellectual who has recognized this, however, is Jean Bricmont in his wonderful book, *Humanitarian Imperialism* (Monthly Review Press 2006). Throughout this book, Bricmont explains how kind-hearted liberals and humanitarians have been hoodwinked by this new human rights ideology to support Western intervention against "upstart" revolutionary governments while largely remaining silent about threatened or ongoing Western interventions which are so clearly undermining human rights.

One example Bricmont gives of this is the strange phenomenon of liberal intellectuals, such as Bernard-Henri Levy, who lobbied for aid to the Contras in the name of human rights and of fighting what they viewed to be "a totalitarian party" in the Sandinistas. Bricmont points out the obvious -- that it was the Sandinistas who overthrew a US-backed dictatorship to begin with and who then peacefully stepped down from power in 1990 after losing an election. "Hardly a model 'totalitarian party,'" he quips.

Meanwhile, Bricmont explains that these same self-described "human rights defenders" simply ignored the brutal tactics of the Contras -- tactics taught to them by the CIA in its infamous "Psychological Operations" manual. Such tactics, which can only be described as terrorism, included kidnapping and "neutralizing" (meaning, "killing") key Sandinista judges, police and other officials, preferably in the presence of a mob; hiring professional

¹⁰⁰ <https://www.greenvillepost.com/2018/10/06/left-anticommunism-the-unkindest-cut/>

criminals to carry out dirty deeds as required; and sabotaging key civilian infrastructure, such as roads, power generators and food supplies. It is worthy to note, by the way, that the very same CIA-developed tactics were used on a large scale during the recent crisis in Nicaragua by the opposition forces so romanticized by some in the Western left.

That such conduct could somehow be considered “humanitarian” is incredible, and so the pro-Contra intellectuals simply ignored it then and ignore it still. At the same time, much greater humanitarian crises are being ignored in the region as self-described ‘human rights defenders’ obsess about Nicaragua.

Fortunately, that kind of Left is not hegemonic in the West. The Party of the European Left (which coordinates over 40 political parties in West and Eastern Europe that command over 300 MPs in national parliaments) have made clear that they reject all attempts to break Nicaragua’s constitutional continuity through violence, and that they advocate instead a peaceful resolution of the internal conflict. They specifically reject “the interference of the United States, which, as always, adds fuel to the fire in countries whose governments do not follow its guidelines, using the tactics of a ‘soft coup’ that we have already seen in other countries of the continent.”¹⁰¹

For its part, the Sao Paulo Forum (which organizes mass political parties of the Latin America Left such as Brazil’s Workers Party and Mexico’s Lopez Obrador’s Morena [National Regeneration Movement]) issued a statement on July 20th 2018, in which it stated that it “strongly reject[s] the interventionist policy of the United States in the internal affairs of the Sandinista Nicaragua, a country where the US is implementing the same formula used by US imperialism in countries that do not respond to its hegemonic interests, causing violence, destruction, and death through the manipulation and destabilizing action of terrorist, Right-wing *golpista* groups, which boycott the pursuit for dialogue that constitutes the best way to overcome the current crisis and achieve peace, which is essential for the continuation of the process of social transformations promoted by the FSLN of the government headed by Commander Daniel Ortega, which has significantly reduced poverty and social inequality in this fellow country.”

Still, some on the left (particularly in North America and Europe) continue to be misled into asking precisely the wrong question about what we should be doing to support liberation movements in the Developing World. That is, they ask how we can successfully lobby our own governments and militaries to intervene in other, poorer countries -- and it is only such interventions that take place, never the reverse -- in order to advance human rights, democracy and freedom. Instead of organizing and agitating to oppose imperialist intervention abroad, a section of the Western left has now largely decided that its role is to promote such intervention. And that is exactly what many on the left have been doing with regard to Nicaragua in recent years -- aligning with and supporting groups in Nicaragua (and other countries too, like Libya, Venezuela and Syria) who are lobbying Western governments to intervene in their country.

In the case of Nicaragua specifically, some historically well-intentioned individuals, organizations and press outlets (e.g., NACLA, DSA, *Jacobin Magazine*, *The Nation*,¹⁰²

101 <https://www.european-left.org/nicaragua-needs-peace/>

102 While *The Nation* printed one excellent piece on the recent crisis in Nicaragua (see, <https://www.thenation.com/article/two-months-unrest-nicaragua-fateful-crossroad/>), the remainder of its articles on this subject were invariably pro-opposition.

Democracy Now! and *The Guardian*) have been openly siding with, and giving platforms to, individuals and groups from Nicaragua who have been lobbying the US government, even before the crisis of April-July 2018, to impose deadly sanctions upon Nicaragua to destabilize the government. Not surprisingly, many of these individuals and groups have themselves been receiving significant monies from US regime-changing organizations such as the NED (US National Endowment for Democracy).

3. “Humanitarian intervention”: imperialism’s Trojan horse.

Of course, such sanctions, which have now been put into full force with the recent passage of the NICA Act (Nicaraguan Investment Conditionality Act), are aimed specifically at putting pressure on the poorest sectors of Nicaraguan society to undermine the Sandinista government’s most solid base of support.

These sanctions exert such pressure by making already-poor Nicaraguans suffer further by undermining the ability of the Nicaraguan government to obtain the international financing which allows it to provide the life-saving social benefits with which it has undeniably been providing them these past 12-plus years. To put a finer point on it, these sanctions, which many in the US left have played a key role in helping to bring about, are designed to cause the poor of Nicaragua to rise up against the Nicaraguan government in order to avoid starving and dying. This, incredibly, is what passes for “humanitarian intervention” these days.

But of course, such sanctions are neither humanitarian nor legal. Indeed, Iran just won a case against the United States before the International Court of Justice (ICJ) in which it challenged the legality of the US’s recent imposition of unilateral economic sanctions.¹⁰³ The response of the US -- the country so many self-proclaimed human rights defenders ironically call upon to enforce international law -- was to announce that it would simply no longer recognize the jurisdiction of the ICJ, just as it did in 1986 when Nicaragua won its case against the US in the ICJ.

As former UN Special Rapporteur, Dr. Alfred de Zayas, has explained:

Not only unilateral coercive measures, but quite often also multilateral ones violate the spirit and letter of the UN Charter, in particular its preamble and Articles 1 and 2. The organization rests on the principle of equality of all its member states. Unilateral sanctions and embargoes break numerous international treaties as well as “general principles of law of the various nations” (Statute of the International Court of Justice, Art. 38(1)(c)).

... These are principles of legality and legitimacy recognized by peoples and nations over the centuries, and building blocks of treaties and other agreements. Such principles constitute the ‘spirit of the law’ (Montesquieu) and include good faith, ex injuria non oritur jus [law (or right) does not arise from injustice] (estoppel), and non-arbitrariness – all of which underpin the protection of state sovereignty, the prohibition of interference in the internal matters of other states, the freedom of international trade and the freedom of navigation, among other rights. Moreover, sanctions and embargoes violate the cardinal international judicial norm of pacta sunt servanda [treaties shall be complied with], since

103 <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/oct/03/international-court-of-justice-orders-us-to-lift-new-iran-sanctions>

*they hinder the compliance with valid treaties agreed upon according to international law. **The extra-territorial application of national laws constitutes a new variant of colonialism, resulting in usurpation of sovereign competencies, bordering on annexation by means of over-extension of jurisdictional exercise of power. . . .***

Several resolutions of the UN General Assembly are violated, for instance Resolution 2625 regarding friendly relations between states (24 October 1970), in the preamble of which the states agree “not to interfere with internal matters of another state”. This is “a crucial condition for the peaceful co-existence of nations”. Moreover they agree “to abstain from any military, political, economic or other coercion directed against political independence or territorial integrity of another state in their international relations ...

The General assembly emphasizes: “No State and no group of states has the right to intervene, directly or indirectly, for any reason whatever, in the internal or external affairs of any other State. Consequently, armed intervention and all other forms of interference or attempted threats against the personality of the State or against its political, economic and cultural elements, are condemned. No State may use or encourage the use of economic, political or any other type of measures to coerce another State in order to obtain from it the subordination of the exercise of its sovereign rights or to secure from it advantages of any kind.

. . . Unilateral coercive measures have been condemned by a majority of states on a regular basis in a variety of international fora including the UN General Assembly, for instance in the 23 resolutions of the General Assembly condemning the US embargo against Cuba (see Resolution 69/5 of 28 October 2014). Endorsing this resolution, a majority of states – 188 states voted for, two (USA and Israel) against it and three abstained – referred to the embargo in plain words as “illegal”.¹⁰⁴

. . . The right to live (Article 6 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights), the right to security of person (Art. 7 ICCPR), the right to due process (Art. 14 ICCPR). The sanctions against Iraq, Iran, Cuba, Sudan, Venezuela and Zimbabwe etc. have all caused deteriorations in the food supply situation in those countries and many people have died as a direct result of sanctions, lack of food, clean water, medicines and access to medical care. Moreover, the ability to practice economic and social rights as they are laid down in the International Covenant on Economic Social and Cultural Rights is hampered. Sanctions may also be in conflict with the Geneva Conventions and other treaties on international humanitarian law.¹⁰⁵

(emphasis added).

It is quite telling indeed that opposition groups in Nicaragua have openly lobbied in the face of international law prohibitions for this “new variant of colonialism,” as de Zayas refers to sanctions. It is also quite disappointing that sections of the Western left and human rights community have openly sided with such opposition groups.

104 In October 2018, the UN General Assembly passed yet another resolution condemning the US blockade against Cuba for the 27th consecutive time (189 against 2 votes).

105 “Unilateral Sanctions Violate International Treaties, *Interview with Prof Dr Alfred de Zayas, Geneva*,” Current Concerns, April 16, 2015. <https://www.zeit-fragen.ch/en/numbers/2015/no-910-16-april-2015/unilateral-sanctions-violate-international-treaties.html>

At the same time one should not be too surprised, for support, both overt and tacit, of such colonial measures has been an endemic problem amongst those drunk on the tonic of human rights ideology.

This phenomenon has been described in detail by well-respected human rights professor and former board member of Amnesty International (AI), Francis A. Boyle. Professor Boyle relates, for example, how AI itself aided and abetted the deadly military and economic campaign against Iraq waged by the United States:

“In January of 1991 the United States Senate voted in favor of war against Iraq by only five or six votes. Several Senators publicly stated that the AI/AIUSA Dead Babies Report and Campaign [in which AI untruthfully claimed that Iraqi troops had killed Kuwaiti babies by taking them out of maternity ward incubators and throwing them onto the floor] had influenced their votes in favor of war against Iraq. That genocidal war waged by the United States, the United Kingdom and France, inter alia, during the months of January and February 1991, killed at a minimum 200,000 Iraqis, half of whom were civilians. Amnesty International shall always have the blood of the Iraqi People on its hands!”¹⁰⁶

Recall that the chief human rights organizations such as AI also played a treacherous role in spreading the lies about the Gaddafi government which helped pave the way for his brutal ousting in 2011, and the consequent destruction of Libya in the process.¹⁰⁷ It is also worthy to recall that it was Daniel Ortega who was one of the few world leaders who opposed the NATO destruction of Libya, and who offered former Nicaraguan Foreign Minister Miguel D’Escoto to serve as Libya’s Ambassador to the UN in Gaddafi’s final days.

Even when human rights groups like AI, and Human Rights Watch (HRW), are not openly cheerleading Western imperial crusades in developing countries, these groups have made it clear that it is not within their purview to oppose military and other interventions in other countries. Rather, as Jean Bricmont emphasizes in “Humanitarian Imperialism,” they view their job as waiting until a conflict breaks out at which point they tell both sides of the conflict (including the one being decimated by overwhelming Western military fire power) to play nice. This, despite the fact that the UN Charter makes it clear in Article 2 that countries are not to engage in the use or even the threat of force against other nations except in very limited circumstances involving an armed attack, and despite the fact that it is inevitable that, once a conflict breaks out, human rights and humanitarian law violations will always result.

This is certainly relevant today as countries like Nicaragua are now being targeted, not only for illegal economic sanctions, but also for possible military intervention. Thus, US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo (a former director of the CIA), has been touring Latin America, meeting with staunch right-wing leaders such as Colombia’s Ivan Duque and Brazil’s Jair Bolsonaro to coordinate efforts at regime change in what US National Security Adviser John Bolton has termed the “Troika of Tyranny” -- Cuba, Venezuela and

¹⁰⁶ Prof. Francis A. Boyle, “Amnesty International: Imperialist Tool,” *Counter Currents*, Oct. 23, 2012, <https://www.countercurrents.org/boyle231012.htm>

¹⁰⁷ https://www.huffingtonpost.com/dan-kovalik/human-rights-libya_b_2001880.html

Nicaragua.¹⁰⁸ There is strong evidence that plans are already under way to use military force against one or more of these countries to effectuate such regime change.¹⁰⁹

Meanwhile, the Secretary-General of the OAS, Luis Almagro, has now invoked “a section of the organization’s charter that could lead to its Permanent Council taking diplomatic measures to restore democracy.”¹¹⁰ Of course, what this really means is that Almagro, who is openly supporting US efforts in Latin America to undermine left-wing governments, is attempting to use the OAS to unseat the democratically-elected government in Nicaragua.

4. The Left’s principled stance: defense of small nations’ national sovereignty.

Remember that old-fashioned US-backed regime change in Latin America is hardly a thing of the past, with the US having played a key role in supporting the short-lived coup against Venezuela’s Hugo Chavez in 2002; in organizing the coup against Haiti’s Jean Bertrand Aristide in 2004; and in backing the coup against democratically-elected president of Honduras, Manuel Zelaya, in 2009. The current moves against Cuba, Venezuela and Nicaragua are simply a continuation of the mop-up operation to destroy the last progressive governments in the region.

Of course, the irony of Bolton’s “Troika of Tyranny” proclamation is that Colombia and Brazil -- where social leaders and indigenous communities are under constant, vicious attack -- are much more tyrannical than any of the three countries so designated, but this irony, as per usual, is lost upon those who are calling for humanitarian intervention in countries like Nicaragua. Instead of backing intervention in Nicaragua and sister states, what the whole of the Western left should be doing is opposing US support for the retrograde governments in Colombia, Brazil and Honduras. At the same time, the whole of the Western left should be opposing the immoral and illegal sanctions against Nicaragua and the illegal threats to topple Nicaragua’s democratically-elected government. They must organize and mobilize in the unconditional defense of Nicaragua’s national sovereignty and right to self-determination. Such principle applies to all nations in Latin America that face or may face US pressure for “regime change”.

It is only this anti-interventionist focus which is consistent with international law and with the left’s role in resisting imperialism and war. And this is precisely the function of this READER: to provide as much factual information about both the overall context as well as about specifics dimensions of the US-led attempted coup against the democratically elected government of Nicaragua. In it you found factual and rigorously backed up counteracting evidence and argument against the overwhelming media-led demonizing narrative (and blatant lies) justifying, calling for and openly supporting “regime change” in this small but proud Central American nation.

108 https://www.huffingtonpost.com/dan-kovalik/human-rights-libya_b_2001880.html

109 <https://www.mintpressnews.com/goodbye-middle-east-the-coming-destruction-of-latin-america/253795/>

110 https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/oas-invokes-inter-american-democratic-charter-on-nicaragua/2019/01/11/42e76974-15d9-11e9-ab79-30cd4f7926f2_story.html?noredirect=on&utm_term=.cc0c99c137c0

Resources

Resources

[Enrique Hendrix Study and Data](#) on the deaths that occurred during the US supported opposition's failed coup attempt in Nicaragua in 2018

Nicaraguan Enrique Hendrix, a lawyer and social researcher, has conducted a comprehensive study, revealed in easily readable chart form, of all Nicaraguan deaths that occurred during the coup period, April 19 through September 23, 2018. For each death he identifies the sources for his information, including the IACHR (formed as an autonomous organ of the OAS in 1959, sometimes referred to in Spanish as the CIDH/Comision Interamericana de los Derechos Humanos); the ANPDH (in English known as the Nicaraguan Association for Human Rights, formed by US Contra supporters in Miami in 1986 but still functioning); and CENIDH (the Nicaragua Center for Human Rights, founded in 1990 by Vilma Nunez). He identifies, as known from the available sourced data, the name, age, and occupational or student status of the deceased, including policemen and policewomen; the specific location in Nicaragua where each death occurred; the type and location of the bodily wound (usually bullets) or cause of death for each deceased; and the context for each death (bystander, targeted assassination or murder, killed or murdered at a roadblock, traffic accident, illness or suicide, etc.); and further explanatory notes. His data reveals dramatically different conclusions from that of the three "human rights" organizations listed above who consistently supported the opposition's narrative, especially of who killed whom: whether by identifiable oppositional forces, or by Sandinista authorities operating in the line of duty protecting Nicaraguan citizens from identifiable criminals and thugs, or by crimes or accidents unrelated to the coup. And for a number of deceased there is insufficient information to determine status or identity of those responsible. Thus, his conclusions are significantly distinguished from oppositional sources who lumped all deaths as caused by Sandinista government officials.

[Click here for a spreadsheet with the data for this study updated to September 23rd 2018...](#)

[Click here for a slide presentation of this study \(Spanish\)](#)

[English translation in PDF format \(1.4Mb\)](#)

Dismissing the Truth - report demonstrating the falsity of Amnesty International's reporting on Nicaragua

Amnesty International produced two highly biased and misleading reports about Nicaragua in 2018. A group of people, including several contributors to *Live from Nicaragua*, responded to the second of these reports, providing evidence that AI omitted and

challenging AI's factual errors. Their report, *Dismissing the Truth*, is available here.

[Executive Summary: Dismissing the Truth](#)
[Dismissing the Truth : Complete report](#)

[Collected articles between May 2018 and March 2019](#)

VIDEOS

[Various clips of human rights abuses by Nicaragua's Civic Alliance for Democracy and Justice posted by their own activists](#)

In English :

Fire at Carlos Marx

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cz6kJ-tRNJI>

Searching Through the Ashes

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=myr9yYMpsbM>

Angel Gahona's Murder

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SfBiqo0oCxU>

Mafias Exposed: The Murder of Sixto Henry Vera

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ONw1Y4UZ6Ek>

In Spanish:

Documentary by Marcio Vargas Engano Reincidente

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AyxheO-l57U>

180 Grados: Claves de la Verdad | Capítulo III - Mafias al Descubierto _ El asesinato de Henry Sixto Vera

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dfLcAZ8cjz0>

180 Grados: Claves de la Verdad | Capítulo VI: 30 de Mayo - ¿Un plan para sumar?
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3eN7AbYu_n0

180 Grados: Claves de la Verdad | Capítulo VII - Matar y Mentir - El Masacre en Morrito
<https://youtu.be/oCCHq5eSdGc>

Buscando Entre las Cenizas: Crimen contra el Estudiante Cristian Emilio Cadena
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=N8_wvFEyvfY

El Caso del Barrio Carlos Marx
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HARdq3DSPoY>

Asesinato del Periodista Angel Gahona
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FJr2f4pGeow>

Habian Franco Tiradores el 30 de Mayo en el Estadio Nacional?
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=J0i1e_yH9og

Justicia para Dariel Steven (matado en la Trinidad el 30 de Mayo, 2018)
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3DwJgjDS-GI>

Documental Crimenes de Odio
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-PvKRG11K5w&t=2s>