



Agroecology, food sovereignty, and climate justice



US
destabilisation
intensifies

The human
rights of the
majority

Trade unions,
Sandinismo and
solidarity

Social economy
sustains
Nicaragua
through crises

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NICARAGUA NOW

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COVER PHOTOS Students from Central America and the Dominican Republic at the Latin American Institute of Agroecology Ixim Ulew in Nicaragua

Migdalia Cruz, IALA graduate, participating in a webinar organised by NSC and Friends of the ATC

DESIGN Tom Lynton

The Nicaragua Solidarity Campaign has taken all reasonable care to ensure that the information in this issue of Nicaragua Now is accurate at date of publication.

Resistance to Covid-19 and US interference

Nicaragua, the second most impoverished country in Latin America, has suffered not just one but three major blows in two years: the failed coup in 2018, the Covid pandemic and the intensification of US sanctions. What is it about Nicaragua that enables it to withstand such pressures?

In this issue we look at the continued commitment of Sandinismo to the human rights of the majority, Nicaragua's radical stance internationally on addressing climate change, agroecology as a tool for social and political transformation, and the role of the social economy in sustaining the country through crises.

These are stories that you won't find in the echo chambers of the mainstream media - especially social media - intent on projecting a simplistic view of Nicaragua as suffering from a repressive and unpopular dictatorship, a 'malign' influence in the 'backyard' of the US.

For the majority of people living in Nicaragua, after the failed coup, the economy slowly improved. People were greatly relieved that the opposition violence and roadblocks had ended and support for the government recovered.

However, the limited economic recovery was dealt another blow when Covid-19 struck. The government responded by starting preparations in February, training all 36,000 health workers, equipping 19 hospitals and mobilising health professionals and volunteers to undertake a door-to-door education and monitoring campaign.

The economy has been badly hit, but so far Nicaragua has had far fewer virus-related deaths than neighbouring countries with stringent lockdowns. This is crucial for the most marginalised, whose livelihoods depend on their daily earnings.

At the same time, the government has continued to invest in new hospitals, community health programmes, schools, renewable energy, rural roads, and electrification, housing, land titles, and other poverty reduction programmes.

None of this relative success surfaced in the mainstream media who jumped on distorted information circulated by opposition sources, based on unverifiable figures and rumours redefined as 'spontaneous public opinions.'

The US has responded by intensifying destabilisation tactics, pursuing with ever greater ferocity what they perceive as their God-given right to overthrow governments that refuse US-style 'democracy', particularly in Latin America, their 'neighbourhood'.

In November 2021 Nicaragua holds elections. The US will use the whole gamut of overt and covert destabilisation strategies to ensure that Nicaraguans voters don't make the 'wrong' choice.

Joe Biden's statements suggest little change in US policy on Latin America no matter who wins the US election.

NSC and NSCAG remain committed to working in solidarity with the Nicaraguan trade unions and social movements defending Nicaragua's right to national sovereignty and the right to determine its own future, free of outside interference.

The Nicaragua Solidarity Campaign (NSC) and NSCAG work with Nicaraguan organisations and social movements fighting for economic, social and economic justice by promoting and seeking support for their work in the UK. We carry this out through: * speaker tours of the UK by representatives of partner organisations * facilitating mutual solidarity between UK and Nicaraguan organisations * organising events to raise funds and awareness about Nicaragua and the work of our partners * publishing newsletters, briefings and online updates * providing support for towns and communities in the UK with twinning links and projects in Nicaragua.

GET IN TOUCH, GET INVOLVED

NSC, twin towns, and local projects

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Ending the myth of eternalism on a planet with finite resources

‘We need a change of mind-set, from one of transforming nature to one of transforming ourselves, a movement for sustaining life on earth in all its forms.’

Women bear the brunt of the consequences of climate change and Covid



Dr Paul Oquist is the Minister-Private Secretary for National Policy, Nicaragua’s representative to UN agencies on climate change, and former co-chair of the UN Green Climate Fund.

In his recent book *Equilibra: The Philosophy and Political Economy of Existence and Extinction*, Dr Oquist writes, ‘We live in a cosmic shooting gallery of meteors, comets, solar radiation, and electromagnetic pulses, on a molten volcanic bomb of a planet under attack by bacterial and rapidly mutating viral pathogens.’

However, the greatest threat is our inability to control the consequences of our own science and technology: nuclear weapons, climate change, and artificial intelligence.

Despite the high level of social and economic destruction caused by Covid-19, its impact on humanity will be ‘small, transient and recoverable’ compared to the total, permanent, and irreversible damage of a nuclear exchange or the catastrophic destruction caused by climate extremes.

The formula humanity has used is based on transforming nature. We have become alienated from the natural environment by the capitalist myth of eternalism: ‘limitless, mindless growth

of production and consumption on a planet with finite, rapidly degrading resources,’ and economic and political structures largely based on short-term gain regardless of long-term consequences.

‘This hegemonic elite is based around the military, police, intelligence, financial and industrial complex or full spectrum dominance by the US. This domination is not only military, not only political, not only economic, not only social, but also with regard to control of the mass media, with regard to science, and with regard to technology and all the other spheres in which it wants to be dominant.’

These same neoliberal structures have also contributed to gross inequalities between and within countries. According to Oxfam, prior to Covid-19, ‘the world’s richest 1% have twice as much wealth as 6.9 billion people.’

Dr Oquist highlights the dismal failure of neoliberalism whose method of poverty reduction is ‘growth, more growth and crumbs’ for the marginalised. This has left those who are already most impoverished facing not only greater poverty but also consequences of the climate crisis, for which they are the least responsible.

These neoliberal free market structures

The UN Climate Change Conference (COP26) takes place in Glasgow 1-12 November 2021. This will be the biggest international summit the UK has ever hosted with 30,000 delegates including heads of state, climate experts and campaigners to agree co-ordinated action to tackle climate change.

Nicaragua has played a leading role internationally by denouncing the lack of political will and ambition by the largest polluters including the UK. NSC is a member organisation of The Climate Coalition (TCC), which has over 100 national and local member organisations with a combined membership of 22 million. This opens an opportunity to promote the perspectives of the Nicaraguan government and grass roots organisations such as the Rural Workers Association (ATC).



are environmentally and socially unsustainable and will lead inevitably to their own – and everyone else’s – destruction.

Building a social movement for survival

Dr Oquist believes that ‘we need to develop an understanding of the Universe and Mother Earth and how we are an integral part of evolution, collectively and individually, that renews our identity and values, and raises our awareness of our current situation and the vulnerabilities and risks that threaten our existence.’

Over the centuries social change has come about through people organising into movements across countries and sectors whether it was about abolishing slavery, anti-colonialism, employment rights or other goals. The main lesson is that struggles have continued for years, even centuries, then very suddenly a convergence of interests results in major change.

In short, Dr Oquist advocates that we need an ‘international movement for survival based on a change of mind-set, from one of transforming nature to one of transforming ourselves, a movement for sustaining life on earth in all its forms.’

Further information: www.equilibria.org

No to agribusiness, yes to agroecology

Nicaragua Now reports on alternatives to the unsustainable farming methods that are destructive for people and the planet.

The agro-industrial food system is dominated by a small number of transnational companies that control everything from seeds to supermarkets: they provide food for only 30% of the world's population but use 75 – 90% of land, water and fossil fuels related to agriculture.

Transnational food production is a major contributor to disease, climate change, environmental collapse and displacement of small scale farmers. For every dollar that consumers pay to the industrial food chain in products, society pays two dollars more for the health and environmental damage this chain causes.

In Latin America up to 80% of deforestation is caused by expansion of

Transnational agribusinesses have turned food production and consumption into one of the greatest health hazards for people and the planet.

ACTION GROUP ON EROSION, TECHNOLOGY AND CONCENTRATION (ETC GROUP)



viacampesina.org

the agricultural frontier; globally more than 70% of agricultural land is used for livestock feed.

In comparison, 70% of the world's population are peasants and indigenous peoples who have less than 25% of global land and water, but produce food on small scale farms, and from fishing, urban gardens, and hunting and gathering.

La Via Campesina (LVC), the global movement of millions of peasants and indigenous people, has argued for the past thirty years for a food system that respects human beings and the environment. LVC highlights the fact that Covid-19 and the climate crises have exposed 'the profound dangers this globalised food system and unsustainable capitalism pose to all life forms... We must learn from this crisis and invest in building local, resilient and diverse food systems.'

Agroecology. As well as denouncing agribusiness and the role of the World Trade Organisation, LVC is building an alternative model, one based on agroecology. This is a model that is not only about growing healthy local food to enable communities to live well but also about building a new political culture through promoting social transformation.

Food sovereignty is the right of peoples to healthy and culturally appropriate food produced through ecologically sound and sustainable methods, and their right to define their own food and agriculture systems. LVC declaration, 2007

Climate Justice: 'It is imperative to create harmony among the living beings of the planet and to cool Mother Earth. Food sovereignty links climate change and the collective rights of humanity, it guarantees the protection of the peasantry, and indigenous people and their role in food production.' La Via Campesina International Collective on the environment and climate justice, Managua, 27 August, 2018

The Rural Workers Association (ATC), representing Nicaraguan campesinxs

NSC's partner organisation in Nicaragua, the ATC, was a founder member of LVC when it was set up in 1993.

The organisation has a long history of struggle for peasants' rights going back to 1978 when rural labourers led an insecure, often nomadic life under a semi feudal system of land ownership.

The ATC formed part of a broad alliance that brought the Sandinista government to power in 1979. Agrarian reform was fundamental to building a new society based on social and economic justice.



Organic maize and beans

In the 1980s the ATC played a central role in improving the living and working conditions of campesinxs on state or private farms and farming co-operatives. However, as the US war on Nicaragua intensified, rural areas became the target of Contra attacks: many campesinxs lost their lives defending their families and communities.

After the electoral defeat of the Sandinistas in 1990, the ATC helped to facilitate a complex process of reconciliation between former Contra and Sandinista peasant families, essential to recognising common interests over



Agroecology students harvesting maize

Building a youth movement for agroecology in Latin America

The first Latin American Agroecological Institute (IALA) was set up in 2006 in Venezuela through an agreement between LVC and then Venezuelan president Hugo Chavez. Since then eight other IALAs have been established across the region to provide training for young people.

Each IALA has its own dynamic but all use LVC peasant to peasant popular education methodologies combining technical, political and ideological training.

The latest IALA was founded in 2018 by the ATC for young people from Central American and Caribbean organisations. The two year course provides a holistic training based on the values of co-operation, internationalism and the struggle against capitalism.

To deepen the experience of the students IALA Ixim Ulew, like the other IALAs, follows the methodology of alternating time spent on campus with practical application

‘The task we have is to recover the land and our identity as young campesinxs, to have our own land to grow food in a holistic, diversified way.’

IALA graduate Migdalia Cruz, ATC Jinotega



in the rural communities.

The first intake of 22 students between the ages of 18 – 30 began their course in February 2018 and graduated in November 2019.

In the context of the COVID crisis the second cohort of 40 students from Mexico, Central American and the Dominican Republic started their online course on 15 April this year. This means the challenges – and some advantages – of Moodle, Zoom, and Whatsapp.

political affiliation.

Under consecutive neoliberal governments from 1990–2006, the ATC organised to defend the gains of the Revolution including the right to retain land distributed through the agrarian reform programme.

Since 2007 the Sandinista government has implemented social programmes based on the restitution of rights such as free health care and education combined with infrastructure development with a particular focus on improving the quality of life in rural areas.

This includes programmes to strengthen the rural economy so that small scale farmers are able to feed their families and communities and contribute to building national food sovereignty. Granting land titles, technical training, credit programmes, and workshops that promote gender equality are some of the great diversity of integrated initiatives. Peasant farmers played a major role in sustaining the country’s food supplies through the 2018 crisis.

The ATC movement with 47,000 members has two main areas of work: defending the employment rights of agricultural workers in the banana, coffee, tobacco, and sugarcane industries; and strengthening struggles for political, economic, social and climate justice in rural areas.

Providing training and access to government programmes. This includes courses at five residential centres for community leaders in employment rights, agroecological farming, political and community organising, and food sovereignty.

Working directly with campesinx communities organised into co-operatives and associations. The focus is on building local, resilient and ecologically diverse food systems and promoting gender equality.

Promoting the interests of rural women and young people. National ATC movements include the Movement of Rural Women (MMC) and the National Youth Movement (MJC).



NSC activists at a national rally organised in London by the Landworkers Alliance, the UK affiliate of LVC

NSC, working in solidarity with the ATC

For the past year NSC has been working in solidarity with the ATC. For obvious reasons, we postponed a UK speaker tour by two ATC representatives, which had been due to take place in June. Covid-19 also meant the cancellation of sponsored events and conferences, which has had an impact on our income. However, we have taken full advantage of the opportunities that have opened up through virtual platforms to reach more people in far flung places who would otherwise have been unable to participate.

In collaboration with another solidarity organisation, Friends of the ATC, we have produced a short video and organised a

webinar entitled ‘Land, agroecology and peasant identity’ featuring the director and two recent graduates of the Latin American Institute of Agroecology (IALA) Ixim Ulew, the ATC’s school in agroecology and leadership. We have also published regular updates on the work of the ATC and IALA, organised a webinar with representatives from the ATC and Landworkers’ Alliance (the UK affiliate of La Via Campesina), and fundraised for our ATC solidarity work in the UK and for ATC projects in Nicaragua. In addition, we have circulated more regular newsletters to our members and supporters, organised very successful online Spanish classes, and developed a new website.

See page 2 for contact details

What does Sandinismo mean? Campesina Emerita Vega's story

I was born in 1948 in the rural community Marlon Alvarado in the department of Carazo. Our community has links with the ATC stretching back to the founding of the organisation in 1978.

My childhood was very sad. I grew up when Nicaragua was governed by the Somoza family dictatorship. I was raised in extreme poverty, the second of ten children. We had no [running] water, so

we had to go to fill buckets five kilometres away. We had no electricity either, so we used a bottle with a rag soaked in diesel [which we lit with a match] and used for a light. The roads were just trails where the horses could drown in the mud holes in the rainy season, and we all went barefoot.

We didn't have a school, so we were all illiterate. Later a school was provided to third grade, so I learned to read and write.

At twelve I had to go to work in the city to help my parents to raise my younger brothers and sisters. I worked as a maid, and in those days there were no laws to protect us. We had no days off, vacation time, or extra pay at Christmas. My father died when I was nineteen so I continued working to support my younger siblings.

It wasn't until July 19, 1979 with the Sandinista Revolution that we poor people saw a change in our lives. It was like waking up. Until then that we had any rights, such as the right to land. Through the agrarian reform we were given an area of land to plant; land that had always belonged to a rich landowner, where we were the badly paid labourers.

But that era was also very hard due to the Contra war that the US imposed on us. The Sandinista National Liberation Front (FSLN) lost the 1990 elections because people were tired of so much war, scarcity of basic items, and the loss of our loved ones. The neoliberal propaganda promised that if the US backed 15 party coalition won, the war would end.

With [the neoliberal governments of] Violeta Chamorro, Arnoldo Aleman and Enrique Bolaños, we went backwards. They wanted to rescind the [Constitutional requirement] that 6% of the budget is for university education, including scholarships for people who can't afford it.

Young people protested to claim



Rice, beans, plantains. Nicaragua has achieved 80% food sovereignty in staple crops

Marlon Alvarado community

Situated in southwest Nicaragua, the community is home to 127 people. Many families own a few acres of land as a result of the 1980s agrarian reform.

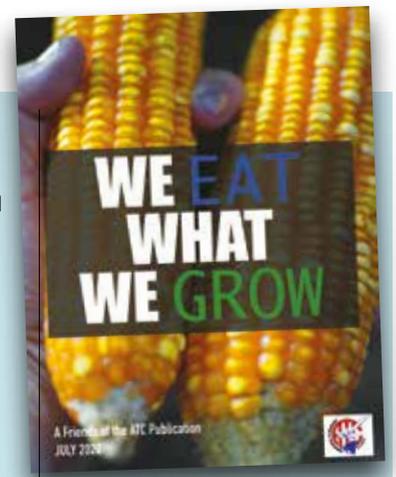
Most families have vegetable gardens and fruit trees around their houses. Nearly every family also has chickens and roosters; some also have pigs, horses, goats, dairy cows, sheep, and cattle.

In larger fields staple crops include maize, beans, rice, sugarcane, and sorghum for their own consumption, to share with neighbours and to sell in local markets.

The families have received support from the Ministry for Family, Community, Co-operative and Associative Economy (MEFCCA) and the Agricultural Technology Institute (INTA) to diversify their production and strengthen the household economy, especially for women. These government programmes

are complemented by ATC organisational, technical and political training. For example, the ATC organised training and exchanges on agroecology including nitrogen fixing cover crops, organic fertiliser, soil and water conservation, and alternative animal feeds.

Diversifying income sources is particularly important for women. The ATC organises trainings in business development and the production of piñatas, jams, hammocks, and other value-added products.



This is an edited version of testimonies entitled 'We eat what we grow', published by Friends of the ATC, July 2020
www.friendsatc.org



Emerita grows pineapples supported by the ATC as part of crop diversification programme

their rights, and some were killed and wounded. The roads weren't maintained so they became unpassable again. The infamous 'blackouts' meant that we had electricity for only six hours a day. In the hospitals and health centres there were no medicines. In the schools, we [even] had to pay to take tests. Everything went backwards and people got tired of it.

In 2007 the FSLN led by Daniel Ortega returned to power through the elections, and a new period began in which the government works with all sectors: private businesses, farmers, medium and small-sized businesses, and unions.

Now, thanks to the Revolution we work

this land for our own benefit, which has helped a lot to change how we live. We also have good roads all year round, electricity, and easy access to water.

I am one of many poor people in the rural areas who have benefited from government programmes such as Zero Hunger whereby we were given 'production packages' consisting of a pregnant cow, a pig, hens, rolls of barbed wire, bags of cement, and zinc roofing.

Health care and education is free. This has meant major changes for my family. For example, my brother Antonio Vega, is a farmer. He has four children who have graduated from the university:

one civil engineer, two doctors, and one psychologist. This would have been impossible if it weren't for the 6% law that provides accommodation as well as tuition for students from families who can't afford it.

The opposition parties know that through elections they won't return to power, since the majority of the people are content with this government. That's why the opposition have had to use tricks and lies to try to destabilise the country, using the internet to wage a media war.

They may be able to fool people in other countries, but they can't fool us because we can see what is really happening.

Untangling the property rights labyrinth

The period of the Somoza dictatorship was characterised by an extreme concentration of wealth – including property – in the hands of a powerful elite. Semi-feudal property ownership focused on export crops, left landless campesinos living in extreme poverty.

After the triumph of the Revolution, the family and

close associates of Somoza had their property confiscated. This land was taken over by the state and four million acres of farmland was redistributed to 80,000 families.

The 1990 electoral defeat of the Sandinistas opened the doors for former owners who had become US citizens to appeal for redress under US laws that prohibit US aid to any country that has confiscated property that formerly belonged to US citizens. Successive Nicaraguan governments paid

out \$US1.3bn compensation: continuing US aid depended on 'satisfactory progress' in resolving these claims.

In contrast, in 1986, the International Court of Justice (ICJ) found the US guilty of military and paramilitary aggression against Nicaragua, in violation of international law. Nicaragua submitted a claim for \$US17bn damages which the US has never paid claiming that the ICJ had no right of jurisdiction over the case.

In 2007 the Sandinista

government inherited 'an archipelago' of structures, property insecurity, and land conflicts. Faced with the mammoth task of unscrambling the chaos, with the support of the World Bank, the government has established effective systems for managing property rights. Urban and rural titles have been granted to 430,000 people, the majority women. On the Caribbean Coast 37,800 sq km has been demarcated and titled to indigenous communities.

Nicaraguan trade unions firmly committed to Sandinismo

‘We take on as our own the plan put forward by the government. It’s not an economic plan but a plan based on human development, a plan which focuses on people, a plan which provides people with the tools to create opportunities.’

JOSE ANTONIO ZEPEDA

Nicaraguan Teachers’ Union ANDEN and International Co-ordinator, National Workers’ Front, FNT

Nicaragua’s trade unions today play a pivotal role in the social, economic and political development of the country. But it hasn’t always been this way. Although they have been through tough times they have remained true to the ideals and philosophy of Sandinismo: human development and the economic and social wellbeing of the many rather than the few.

Prior to the Revolution in 1979, only a small percentage of Nicaraguan workers were organised and trade unionists suffered severe repression at the hands of the Somoza dictatorship which had ruled Nicaragua for 43 years.

This was especially true in the countryside where workers were condemned to a life of servitude. With over 90% of arable land owned by Somoza and his friends, any attempts made by the workers to organise were crushed unmercifully by Somoza’s National Guard and trade union organisers were subject to detentions and assassinations.

Those unions which were allowed to operate legally were controlled by the Somoza elite. The union movement had effectively been forced underground and only re-emerged with the insurrection against the dictatorship.

The triumph of the Sandinista Revolution in 1979 saw an explosion of trade union activity, with many unions able to operate freely. Pro-Sandinista trade unions came together under the umbrella of the CST (Sandinista Workers’ Confederation) with 100,000 members. This included public sector union UNE,

established in 1978 following a strike of bank employees in which a number of workers were killed. Given the links of many in the state sector to the old regime, the new union organisers tended to be young and from a background of involvement in the struggle to oust the dictatorship.

The health union FETSALUD, established in 1985 after a series of hunger strikes and protests, became closely involved in the Revolution in health care, not only in the change of approach from curative to preventative care through massive vaccination campaigns, but also making medical

services accessible for the first time to the majority of the population, a medical advance unprecedented in Latin America with the exception of Cuba.

The early years of the Revolution saw major advances in health, education and welfare, but hopes and dreams were cruelly dashed in 1981 when the US administration, under President Ronald Reagan, unleashed a vicious military, economic, political and psychological war against Nicaragua. The eight year war cost 30,000 lives and brought devastation to the Nicaraguan economy. For the trade unions, the overriding priority became one of survival against the odds. FESTALUD organised volunteer brigades to work in the military hospitals in the major war zones. Other unions assumed the role of explaining to workers the complexity of the economic situation, the need to boost production and to peg wage demands, whilst at the same time defending the interests of their members and ensuring they got the best possible remuneration for the sacrifices they were making. The slogan of the day was ‘Let us give everything’, with workers voluntarily putting in up to 16 hours a day, seven days a week, in order to improve production and achieve self-sufficiency in food.

With the exception of US-backed

The NEU, the UK’s largest education union, welcomes the important advances in education in Nicaragua since 2007 and congratulates the Nicaraguan people on the 40th anniversary of the world-renowned National Literacy Crusade.

**In solidarity,
Mary Bousted and Kevin Courtney
Joint general secretaries**



**NEU
International**



UNISON West Midlands

*In solidarity with
Nicaraguan workers*

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union CUS (Confederation of Trade Union Unity) which had been set up as a US internal front to provoke civil discontent, Nicaragua's trade unions remained steadfast in their defence of the Revolution and the principles of Sandinismo.

1990 brought about new challenges for trade unions. Exhausted by the consequences of war and economic

attack from a right-wing government determined to eliminate the legacy of the Sandinista revolution. In 1990, the FNT (National Workers' Front) was set up in order to co-ordinate the work of the different Sandinista unions in defending the gains made for workers under the revolutionary government of 1979-1990.

The election of the FSLN under

**Solidarity between
UNISON and the
Nicaraguan Public
Service Union (UNE)
goes back more
than 30 years. Ruby
Cox (UNISON) and
Domino Perez (UNE)**



collapse, many Nicaraguans were effectively coerced by the US into reluctantly accepting that the Contra war and US embargo would continue if they voted for the FSLN to remain in power. The result was election victory for the US-backed UNO Coalition and the ushering in of sixteen years of neoliberal governments.

One of the hallmarks of the Sandinista revolution was the establishment of rights, enshrined in the Constitution, to free health and education. Yet the new government moved swiftly to privatise both. A period of 'structural adjustment' slashed social spending and placed the market economy and private initiative at the forefront of the government's priorities. Public services were decimated and two thirds of public sector workers lost their jobs. Trade union membership plummeted and workers' rights came under heavy

President Daniel Ortega in 2007 marked a new beginning. One of the first acts of the new government was the reversal of the privatisation of health and education and the restoration of trade union rights. Trade unions now operate freely, with the right to organise, the right to strike and the right to collective bargaining enshrined in the Constitution. Trade unions have seen significant increases in membership, particularly among women and young people.

In addition to focussing on workplace issues, unions have developed a 'socio-political' model which means that they are also concerned with social, environmental, economic and political problems such as housing, health and access to education and social security. Unions are also represented at all levels of government – in local councils, parliamentary commissions and in the National Assembly, where



NSCAG activities

Normal activities would have included organising trade union delegations to Nicaragua and UK speaker tours by Nicaraguan trade unionists, but these activities have been temporarily suspended. We have successfully adapted to the new situation by organising a series of webinars and continuing to produce regular updates and briefings on issues such as US sanctions. Webinar topics have included 'COVID-19 and US imperialism' and 'Trade Unions: the Nicaraguan Example.' We have also continued to respond to misinformation spread by corporate media and organisations including Amnesty International and to campaign against US intervention and in defence of Nicaragua's sovereignty. We also publish articles on developments in Nicaragua on a regular basis.

We rely very much on trade union support to carry out our work, so if your trade union region or branch is not already affiliated to us, please join us by going to <http://www.nscag.org/join-us/>

Further information:

✉ www.nscag.org
or email Louise Richards at
✉ nscag@nicaraguasc.org.uk

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32 of the 91 members of the FSLN come from the trade union movement. Yet the unions' newly won gains are once again under threat from a United States determined to control what it still regards as its 'backyard.'

In 2018, the US instigated and funded an attempted coup in an effort to oust Nicaragua's democratically elected government. The coup failed, but since then, US efforts to bring about 'regime change' have intensified. Funding of right-wing opposition groups has been accompanied by a raft of economic sanctions and further plans to overthrow the government.

Nicaraguan trade unions are now a force to be reckoned with and will fight once more to maintain the gains and advances of the revolutionary model, a model which has changed the lives of workers and their families and provided hope for a better future.

Who produces the wealth of Nicaragua?

Nicaragua Now reports on the way in which the social economy has not only generated wealth but sustained Nicaragua through crises.

Nicaragua's wealth comes from foreign and national capital and the social economy. The social economy generates the largest percentage of the wealth of any country in Latin America representing 65% of the country's wealth and 70% of the workforce.

This sector is made up of small and medium businesses and farms, co-operatives, associations, and self-employed workers and encompasses agriculture, trade, services, tourism, transport, savings and credit, fishing, and housing.

Many people in this sector, whose livelihoods depend on their daily earnings, have been badly affected by the social and economic consequences of Covid and the 2018 failed coup. But it is also this sector that has played a key role in sustaining the country's economy, social fabric and food supplies through such crises.

'At first we could not understand the

violence but then we realised that we were witnessing an attempted coup, not just against the government, but our co-operatives. Our response was to continue working, to fight for the wellbeing, food supply and economic development of Nicaragua.' Santiago Dolmus, Co-operative Union CECOCAFEN

In 2018 a Council for the Social Economy was set up to act as a voice for this sector, raising awareness, lobbying the government, and feeding into national debates and legislation.

'Our aim is not just to raise the personal living standards of families with few resources but to create and support co-operatives, associations, and small and medium businesses that join together with the social objective of seeking improvements for everyone.' Ariel Bucardo, National Council of Co-operatives (CONACOOOP)

The major focus of the government's

national development plan has been poverty reduction particularly among women in rural areas. Programmes such as free health care and education, rural electrification, and road improvements have all had a major impact.

The Ministry for Family, Community, Co-operative and Associative Economy (MEFCCA) and technical institutes maintain a network of street and market facilities, provide technical and business management training, promote small scale peasant production linked with family marketing networks, and provide loans and other support for women.

The objective has been to create an economy that binds communities together through relationships of mutual support and solidarity, while recognising the contribution the sector makes towards generating wealth.

Compared with other Latin American countries Nicaragua still has vibrant rural communities and towns, with networks of small businesses, markets, schools, health facilities, rather than countryside devoid of people because small farmers have been forced off the land by industrialised agribusiness.

Recognising the unpaid work of women

According to CONACOOOP there are over 5,000 co-operatives in Nicaragua in agriculture, transport, fishing, housing, and savings and credit with an estimated membership of 300,000 families. One of these is the Juan Francisco Paz Silva (CJFPS) rural co-operative in Achuapa, Leon with 280 members who grow fruit, vegetables and cattle for local consumption, and sesame for export. Among its many initiatives are a shop, microfinance bank, model farm, clean water projects for outlying communities and a technical school. The CJFPS has a commercial agreement with the Ethical Trading Company (Etico) to supply sesame oil to the Body Shop (L'Oreal). This agreement includes a major innovation, a premium to take into account unpaid work traditionally done by women. The women co-op members then decide how this premium should be invested. Seventy per cent of Nicaragua's sesame exports are from co-operatives of small scale producers.



Twin towns and local project news

Despite the cancellation of sponsored events in Bristol, Oxford, and London and the challenges of the pandemic, groups have continued providing practical and moral solidarity to partner organisations.

Long-time Nicaragua solidarity activists recognised by Nicaraguan Embassy

CLAIRE PLUMB, former development worker of the Leicester Masaya Link Group, for her key role in developing and strengthening bonds between the people of both cities.

TOM HORE, chair of the Bristol charity Friends of Morazan, recognising his 25-year commitment to creating bridges of friendship and solidarity between Bristol and Puerto Morazan and the Nicaraguan people in general.

RUBY COX, a member of the Executive Committee of the Nicaragua Solidarity Campaign Action Group (NSCAG). For two decades Ruby has played a variety of roles within the UK – Nicaragua solidarity movement.

RALPH GAYTON, founder and secretary of the Norwich – El Viejo Link. As well as his involvement in the Link, Ralph also has three decades of building and sustaining solidarity between UNISON and Nicaraguan public sector union UNE.

Islington – Managua Friendship Association (IMFA)

Since 1990 IMFA has raised £150,000 to support the Los Pollitos school in Managua. Since March three zoom quizzes have raised £1,400 to help pay the wages of the seven teachers as well as vital PPE. In response to the pandemic Los Pollitos has organised lessons outdoors when possible, social distancing, handwashing, and face coverings.

Further information: www.imfa.org

Celebrating International Day of Peace at the Casita de la Paz pre-school funded by BLINC and Friends of Morazan



Bristol Link with Nicaragua (BLINC)

Key areas of work have included liaising closely with friends and colleagues in BLINC's twin town of Puerto Morazan and funding PPE equipment to schools and pre-schools; keeping in touch with the Co-operative Union SOPPEXCCA over information on the impact of COVID-19 on the Fairtrade co-operatives and their mitigation strategies; and providing a donation of \$US500 to the Futbol Sin

Fronteras project for girls and young women. [#fsfgranada](#)

Following the tragic death of a woman in Puerto Morazán at the hands of her partner, BLINC worked with a local artist to produce a mural in her honour and to highlight the urgency of tackling violence against women and children.

Further information: [#bristolnicaragua](#)
bristolnicaragua.wordpress.com

Nicaragua Education, Cultural and Arts Trust (NECAT) & Oxford Leon Link (OLAT)

Since the onset of COVID-19, NECAT has been supporting more than fifty children who attend the NECAT Centre in Barrio Guadalupe, Leon as well as their families. This also includes sanitation kits for families and learning materials for children unable to attend the Centre.

In addition NECAT has provided funds for PPE equipment for the Maria Perla

Norori and Subtiava health centres.

Funds have been raised through the Oxford Rotary and two enjoyable and financially successful OLAT quizzes bringing together old and new friends all over the UK and Nicaragua. The £1,228 raised was split between NECAT and a rural NGO Nuevas Esperanzas to repair clean water pipelines serving remote communities.

Further information: www.necat.org.uk

Santa Rosa Fund (SRF) Tavistock announces closure after 31 years

At the beginning of 2021 SRF will deliver its final tranche of funds to partner organisations and then formally close. See website below for further information on reasons for the closure

and testimonies to the extraordinary bonds of solidarity between SRF and partner organisations over more three decades.

Further information:
www.santarosafund.org

No to US 'regime change' in Nicaragua and Latin America

Ruby Cox is a trade unionist, Labour Party councillor in Hastings Borough Council, and member of the NSCAG Executive Committee who has visited Nicaragua four times on delegations since 2002.

A leaked report from the US Embassy in Nicaragua entitled 'Responsive Assistance in Nicaragua' (RAIN) revealed that one of the US administration's top 'mission goals' for Nicaragua is to force a 'transition to a rules-based market economy' based on the 'protection of private property rights.'

My four visits to Nicaragua have given me the chance to compare life for ordinary people under both a neoliberal and a Sandinista government.

I first visited in 2002 when there was a right-wing government in power, and a great deal of suffering for ordinary people, including trade unions. Staggering levels of poverty, virtually no healthcare, unless you could pay for it, and the same with education, no employment rights, people living in appalling housing conditions and even tiny children being forced to work at the roadside selling whatever to help make

ends meet. This was the reality of life under a neoliberal government that put the 'protection of private property rights' and a 'market economy' ahead of anything else.

When I returned in 2009, two years after the Sandinistas had regained power, the differences were very clear.

The realignment of the economy to provide the basics for ordinary people was plain to see, which may explain why trade unions, co-operatives and other organisations in Nicaragua continue to widely support the Sandinistas.

I travelled along the Rio Coco in one of the remotest parts of the country to observe the literacy programme, setting up [of] generators and TV sets that had been donated by Cuba as part of their 'Yo Si Puedo' campaign. This would never have happened under the previous government, which was more interested



Buy our 'No intervention' mug from the NSC shop

in conceding to the dictates of US foreign policy than meeting people's basic needs.

Trade unions were flourishing and working with the government to give people proper conditions of employment and training the workforce in subjects such as equalities and leadership.

However, the biggest surprise when I went back in 2019 was the further progress that had been made in terms of improving people's lives, one example being the proliferation of new hospitals, due in no small part to the high proportion of the national budget spent on health and education.

This trip followed the Sandinista candidate Daniel Ortega being re-elected in 2016 with 72% of the vote. The result of this election reflected the significant improvements in health, education, housing and poverty reduction.

Bearing in mind the history of Nicaragua and the devastation wrought by the US-backed contras in the eighties, it is vital that we oppose another onslaught by the US and their 'regime change' agenda, which cannot allow countries in their 'neighbourhood' to follow a different course to neoliberalism and subservience to their foreign policy.

We must unite against sanctions, external aggression and the idea of a US-led return to a 'free-market' economy. Nicaragua deserves our support.

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